

External Complaints Handling Procedure for Clients

November 2018

Introduction

BLM are committed to the delivery of a high quality legal service and to dealing with all our clients fairly. We acknowledge that we may not always get it right so if something has gone wrong, including in relation to the bill, we welcome your feedback. This provides us with an opportunity to monitor and improve the quality of service we provide.

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1. How do I make a complaint?

- 1.1 We ask that you raise any concerns by speaking with the person with day to day conduct of your matter in the first instance. You can also contact us in writing (by letter or email) if you prefer.
- 1.2 To help us to understand your complaint, and in order that we do not miss anything, please tell us:
 - 1.2.1 your full name and contact details
 - 1.2.2 what you think we have got wrong
 - 1.2.3 what you hope to achieve as a result of your complaint, and
 - 1.2.4 your file reference number (if you have it)
- 1.3 If you require any help in making your complaint we will try to help you.
- 1.4 We take an expression of dissatisfaction seriously and our aim is to put things right as quickly as possible. We will listen to your concerns and try to resolve any issues with you. We hope to do this in an informal way wherever possible. Where your concerns cannot be resolved informally by the person with day to day conduct of your matter or, where you wish to escalate matters to a supervisor or partner we will invoke our formal procedure as below.

2. How will you deal with my complaint?

- 2.1 We will record your complaint.
- 2.2 We will write to you within 3 working days acknowledging your complaint, advising who will be investigating.
- 2.3 Our investigation will involve:
 - 2.3.1 reviewing your complaint
 - 2.3.2 reviewing your file(s) and any other relevant documents, and
 - 2.3.3 speaking with the person who dealt with your matter
- 2.4 We may also need to ask you for further information or documents. If so, we will ask you to provide the information within a specific period of time.
- 2.5 We will update you on the progress of your complaint.
- 2.6 We may also, if appropriate, seek a meeting with you to discuss your complaint or, discuss the matter with you on the telephone.
- 2.7 We will write to you at the end of our investigation to inform you what we have done and what we propose to do to resolve your complaint. We have 8 weeks to deal with your complaint however where possible, we will aim to respond to you fully within 35 days of the date of our letter of acknowledgement.
- 2.8 If you are unhappy with the response to your complaint we may decide to escalate your complaint for review to a more senior person.

3. What if I am not satisfied with the outcome?

3.1 England & Wales:

- 3.1.1 If we are unable to resolve your complaint internally then you may be able to have the complaint independently looked at by the Legal Ombudsman. The Legal Ombudsman investigates complaints about service issues with lawyers. To use the Legal Ombudsman service a complainant must be one of the following:
- a) An individual
 - b) A business or enterprise that was a micro-enterprise when it referred the complaint to us
 - c) A charity that had an annual income net of tax of less than £1 million when it referred the complaint to us
 - d) A club/association/organisation, the affairs of which are managed by its members/a committee/a committee of its members, that had an annual income net of tax of less than £1 million when it referred the complaint to us
 - e) A trustee of a trust that had an asset value of less than £1million when it referred the complaint to us
 - f) A personal representative or beneficiary of the estate of a person who, before he/she died, had not referred the complaint to the Legal Ombudsman
- 3.1.2 You can contact the Legal Ombudsman by the following methods:
- a) by post at PO Box 6806, Wolverhampton, WV1 9WJ, or
 - b) by telephone: 0300 555 0333, or
 - c) by email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk
- 3.1.3 The Legal Ombudsman can investigate complaints up to six years from the date of the problem happening or within three years of when you found out about the problem. If you wish to refer your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman this should be done within 6 months of our final written response to your complaint. Further details are available on the website: www.legalombudsman.org.uk

3.2 Scotland

- 3.2.1 If you are not satisfied with our consideration of your complaint you can ask the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission to consider the complaint.
- 3.2.2 You can contact the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission by the following methods:
- a) by post at The Stamp Office, 10-14 Waterloo Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3EG, or
 - b) by website: www.scottishlegalcomplaints.org.uk, or
 - c) by telephone: 0131 201 2130, or
 - d) by email: enquiries@scottishlegalcomplaints.org.uk
- 3.2.3 The Scottish Legal Complaints Commission operates strict time limits. In relation to complaints of inadequate service you are required to lodge any complaint with the Scottish Legal Complaints Commission within one year of the service coming to an end.

3.3 Northern Ireland

- 3.3.1 Any complaint made to us must be within six months of completion of your case or transaction or within six months of discovering a cause for concern, whichever is later.
- 3.3.2 If we have not been able to resolve your complaint with our internal procedure then you can refer your complaint to The Law Society of Northern Ireland, you must do this within 6 months of our final response.
- 3.3.3 All complaints should be submitted to the Law Society using their Complaints Form which can be obtained at www.lawsoc-ni.org/3--submitting-a-complaint
- 3.3.4 You can also request an information pack by telephoning or writing to:
 - a) by post at The Law Society of Northern Ireland, 96 Victoria Street, Belfast, BT1 3GN, or
 - b) by telephone: 028 9023 1614

3.4 Republic of Ireland

- 3.4.1 If we have not been able to resolve your complaint internally the Law Society of Ireland may be able to investigate your complaint. For more details as to what types of complaints the Law Society can investigate please visit www.lawsociety.ie/Public/Complaints-against-solicitors/Steps-to-take/
- 3.4.2 If the Law Society can investigate your complaint you will have to complete their complaint form and send it to:
 - a) by post at Complaints and Client Relations Section, George's Court, George's Lane, Dublin 7
- 3.4.3 The Law Society cannot open a complaint file until they have a signed complaint and postal address.

4. What will it cost?

- 4.1 We will not charge you for addressing your complaint.
- 4.2 Please note that if we have issued a bill for work done on the matter, and all or some of the bill is not paid, we may be entitled to charge interest on the amount outstanding.
- 4.3 The Legal Ombudsman, Scottish Legal Complaints Commission, Law Society of Northern Ireland and Law Society of Ireland services are free of charge.