

COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Client feedback and complaints

We are committed to providing a high-quality legal service to all our clients. We value feedback from clients greatly because it helps us to continually improve our service. If you do not feel that you are receiving excellent client service, or that something could be improved, please do tell us about it. If we have fallen short of the high standards we have set for ourselves then we would like the opportunity to put things right.

How to give feedback or make a complaint

Wherever possible it would be helpful if you could discuss any feedback or concerns with the lawyer dealing with your matter informally first, as they may be able to resolve your concerns without the need for a formal complaint.

However, if the lawyer dealing cannot resolve your concern informally, or if the issue is of such a serious or sensitive nature that you do not feel comfortable raising it with them, please feel welcome to raise your concerns with your Engagement Partner who is named in your engagement letter, or our Complaints Partner, Georgina Rayment, as a formal complaint under this Policy.

How to make a formal complaint under this policy

To enable us to investigate and provide a thorough response to your concerns, we will need to form a good understanding of the issues. We would welcome hearing from you by email or by post with a more detailed explanation of:

- Why you feel dissatisfied with the service you have received.
- How you would prefer to be contacted about your complaint going forward.
- If there is anything in particular that you would like us to do to resolve your complaint.

Please address your concerns to: Georgina Rayment – grayment@prettys.co.uk

If you would prefer not to send written details of your complaint in this way then please call Georgina on 01473 298344.

Our formal complaints procedure

What happens after I have made a complaint under this policy

1. When a complaint is received by the firm, it initially will be handled by the partner in charge of the department/engagement partner involved. The partner in charge will send you a letter acknowledging receipt of your complaint within three days of us receiving the complaint, enclosing a copy of this procedure.
2. The partner in charge will then investigate your complaint, and if appropriate propose a resolution.
3. If they cannot resolve it to your satisfaction then you may contact our Complaints Partner, Georgina Rayment, who will acknowledge receipt within two working days.
4. She will then review your file and speak to the member of staff who is your primary contact. Georgina will send you a written reply to your complaint, including her suggestions for resolving the matter, within 21 days of sending you the acknowledgement letter.
5. If this does not resolve the matter to your satisfaction, Georgina Rayment may, if appropriate, invite you to a meeting to discuss and hopefully resolve your complaint. She will do this within 14 days of receiving your response to her written review.
6. Within three days of the meeting, Georgina Rayment will write to you to confirm what took place and any solutions she has agreed with you.
7. At this stage, if you are still not satisfied, you should contact us again and we will arrange for another partner to review the decision.
8. We will write to you within 14 days of receiving your request for a further review, confirming our final position on your complaint and explaining our reasons. If it is not possible to deal with your complaint in this timeframe we will inform you of the delay and the reasons. However, we will do our best to resolve the matter as soon as practicable.

Charges

Please be assured that there are no charges for dealing with your complaint. Your complaint will be investigated and handled independently of your legal matter. This means that if your legal matter is ongoing it will continue to progress as normal and will not be affected by the complaints procedure, assuming no conflict of interests has arisen and that you continue to comply with the terms of our engagement as set out in our engagement letter and terms of business.

Do I have to pay my bill if I am complaining?

Our terms of business provide that our invoices remain payable immediately on issue, unless otherwise agreed, regardless of the investigation of any complaint.

However, please be assured that if the outcome of any complaint investigation concludes that any adjustment or reduction in costs should be made, any reimbursement will be paid promptly at that time.

How long will it take?

We will aim to conclude our investigation and provide our Final Response as quickly as possible. Although we will always aim for sooner, the process may take up to eight weeks from receipt of your complaint.

In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to extend these timescales. If this occurs, we will let you know in writing and will try to agree any variations with you first.

What might the outcome of my complaint be?

We regret any dissatisfaction which our clients experience and, if our investigation concludes that our service has fallen below our usual high standards, we will not hesitate to apologise. We may also make any proposals that we consider appropriate to resolve or improve your situation and will take steps internally to ensure that any problems that you have experienced will not reoccur. We will ask you to let us know whether we have succeeded in resolving your concerns, or if you remain dissatisfied.

What if I remain dissatisfied?

If you remain dissatisfied after receiving our Final Response, or in the unlikely event that you have not received a Final Response within eight weeks of receiving your complaint, you may be entitled to complain to the Legal Ombudsman about our service. The Legal Ombudsman will normally expect you to have exhausted this complaints procedure before referring to them.

The Legal Ombudsman investigates complaints independently and accessing the service will not affect how we handle your case (if ongoing).

Most private individuals and smaller organisational or business clients will be able to make use of the Legal Ombudsman scheme. However, there are restrictions for larger organisational and business clients. These are set out in the Scheme Rules, which can be accessed on the Legal Ombudsman website, details of which are given below.

Time limits apply to the service, so if you do wish to refer your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman

you should not delay once our own complaints process has concluded. In certain circumstances the Legal Ombudsman may exercise discretion to consider a complaint out of time.

The general rule is that you must take your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman within six months of receiving a final response to your complaint from us and either:

- Within one year of the date of the act or omission being complained about; or
- Within one year of you realising that you had concerns.

Contacting the Legal Ombudsman

You can contact the Legal Ombudsman or find further information about who can use their service and when, via the details set out below.

www.legalombudsman.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 555 0333 between 9.00 am to 5.00 pm

Email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk

Post: Legal Ombudsman PO Box 6167, Slough, SL1 0EH

Complaints about your bill

If you are complaining about our bill, in addition to referring your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman, you may be entitled to ask the court to assess your costs under Part III of the Solicitors Act 1974. However, be aware that if you have done so, the Legal Ombudsman may not be able to consider a complaint about the same issues.

Concerns about professional misconduct

The Legal Ombudsman service considers complaints about the quality of legal services that clients' receive. In the unlikely event that you have more serious concerns that a solicitor or the firm have been involved in professional misconduct then it may be appropriate for you to refer this to the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

We do not anticipate any such problems arising and would ask that you notify the matter supervisor straight away if you have any such concerns. You can find out more about the Solicitors Regulation Authority, including their contact details and the Standards and Regulations that govern the conduct of solicitors and law firms, on their website: www.sra.org.uk.

Alternative dispute resolution (ADR)

Other ADR services providers exist that are competent to deal with complaints in the legal sector, including ProMediate. However, Prettys Solicitors LLP believes that the Legal Ombudsman offers our clients the most appropriate forum to seek resolution of their concerns. Therefore we have not

adopted an alternative ADR procedure and do not agree to use another ADR organisation.

Retention of File

The file relating to your complaint will be retained by us for 7 years from the date of the last correspondence or settlement of the matter, after which it will be destroyed.