



COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

We are committed to providing a high-quality service to our clients. We take the concerns of our clients very seriously. If you have any cause for concern, or indeed a complaint, we assure you that your complaint will be dealt with free of charge and as quickly as possible.

1. If you have indicated to us that you have cause for concern about any aspect of our service, you will be provided with a copy of this procedure, and we will seek to discuss your concerns informally in the first instance.
2. If we are unable to resolve your concerns via Step 1 of this procedure, then the matter will be referred to our Complaints Manager, Julie Mathieson. She can be contacted by email at clientrelations@dma-law.co.uk, by telephone on 01325 482299, or in writing to 56 Duke Street, Darlington, DL3 7AN. In the event that your complaint concerns Julie Mathieson please direct your complaint instead to Neil Bennett, Director, who can be contacted using the above details or by email to neil.bennett@dma-law.co.uk.
3. Your formal complaint will be acknowledged in writing/via email within 2 working days of receipt. A separate file will be opened in which we will store any correspondence and other documents relating to your complaint.
4. We will then investigate your complaint, which may involve seeking further information from you and from those involved in handling your case. Once we have all the details we need, we will contact you in writing/via email to provide a preliminary written response to your complaint. We aim to contact you in this way within 15 working days of sending you the acknowledgment, but investigations can sometimes take longer, in which case we will keep you informed of progress.
5. You will be provided with the opportunity to reply to the preliminary written response via telephone/video conference, in-person meeting or in writing, after which a final written response will be issued.
6. We will send this final written response within a maximum of 8 weeks of you making your formal complaint.
7. If you are still not satisfied, you can then contact the Legal Ombudsman about your complaint (contact details below) provided you do so within six months of the end of our Internal Complaints Handling Procedure and that you adhere to additional time limits and eligibility criteria, details of which are set out in the Appendix to this document. Please read these carefully.

Legal Ombudsman Contact Details:

Address: PO Box 6167, Slough SL1 0EH

Telephone: 0300 555 0333

Email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.legalombudsman.org.uk

Complaining to the Solicitors Regulation Authority

The Solicitors Regulation Authority can help you if you are concerned about our behaviour. This could be for things like dishonesty, taking or losing your money or treating you unfairly because of your age, a disability or other characteristic.

Address: Solicitors Regulation Authority, The Cube 199 Wharfside Street, Birmingham B1 1RN

Telephone: 0370 606 2555

Email: report@sra.org.uk

Website: www.sra.org.uk

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Where we are not able to settle your complaint using our internal complaints process, there are alternative complaints bodies (such as the Ombudsman Services www.ombudsman-services.org) which are competent to deal with complaints about legal services should both you and our firm wish to use such a scheme.

Please let us know if you would like to consider using an alternative complaints body to resolve your complaint.

APPENDIX

Time Limits for Taking a Complaint to the Legal Ombudsman

- Within six months of receiving a final response to your complaint, and
- No more than one year from the date of act/omission; or
- No more than one year from when you should reasonably have known there was cause for complaint.

Ordinarily, you cannot use the Legal Ombudsman unless you have first attempted to resolve your complaint using our internal Complaints Handling procedure, but you will be able to contact the Legal Ombudsman if:

- The complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction within eight weeks of first making the complaint to us; or
- The Legal Ombudsman determines fair and reasonable circumstances why the Legal Ombudsman should consider your complaint sooner, or without you having to use our internal Complaints Handling Procedure first; or
- The Legal Ombudsman considers that your complaint cannot be resolved using our internal Complaints Handling Procedure because the relationship between you and us has broken down irretrievably.

Eligibility Criteria for Making a Complaint to the Legal Ombudsman

- You must be an individual or;
- A micro-enterprise as defined in European Recommendation 2003/361/EC of 6 May 2003 (broadly, an enterprise with fewer than 10 staff and a turnover or balance sheet value not exceeding €2 million);
- A charity with an annual income less than £1 million;
- A club, association or society with an annual income less than £1 million;
- A trustee of a trust with a net asset value less than £1 million; or
- A personal representative or the residuary beneficiaries of an estate where a person with a complaint died before referring it to the Legal Ombudsman.

If you are not, you should be aware that you can only obtain redress by using our Complaints Handling Procedure or by mediation or arbitration, or by taking action through the Courts.