



Northampton Chambers

COMPLAINTS POLICY

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Policy Owner	Head of Chambers
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1 Client facing policy

- 1.1 At Northampton Chambers we are committed to providing a high-quality legal service to all our clients. When something goes wrong, we need you to tell us about it. This will help us to improve our standards. If you have a complaint, please send a letter or email to us detailing your concerns.
- 1.2 This policy is established using the guidelines set out in the Bar Standards Board Handbook.

What will happen next?

- 1.3 The Head of Chambers will deal with your complaint in the first instance and will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days of receiving it. Enclosed in the response will be a copy of this policy and you will be asked to confirm or explain the details.
- 1.4 On receipt of the details, the Head of Chambers will then investigate your complaint by reviewing your matter file and speaking to any other members of Chambers or staff who acted in this matter for you. Within 10 working days of sending you the acknowledgment letter, Chambers will invite you to a meeting to discuss and hopefully resolve the matter. Within five working days of the meeting, the Head of Chambers will write to you to confirm what took place and any solutions that have been agreed with you.
- 1.5 If you do not want a meeting or if it is not possible, the Head of Chambers will send you a detailed written reply to your complaint, including suggestions for resolving the matter, within 10 working days of sending you the acknowledgement letter.
- 1.6 If the nature of the complaint raises a conflict of interest for the Head of Chambers, your complaint be dealt with by a senior member of Chambers.
- 1.7 At this stage, if you are still not satisfied, you should write to us again. The Head of Chambers will then ask another senior member of Chambers to review this initial decision in the light of your on-going concerns. Chambers will let you know how long this review will take and will let you know the result within 5 working days of the end of the process. At this time, the Head of Chambers will write to you confirming Chambers' final position on your complaint and explaining our reasons.
- 1.8 You have the right to contact The Legal Ombudsman (LeO) (PO Box 6806, Wolverhampton WV1 9WJ, Tel: 0300 555033, Web: www.legalombudsman.org.uk).

"Once you have made a complaint to your service provider, they have up to eight weeks to respond. If you aren't happy with their final response, or they haven't responded within the eight weeks, you can then ask us to look at it.

Ordinarily, you can ask us to look at your complaint if it meets ALL three of the steps below:

- *The problem or when you found out about it, happened after 5 October 2010; and*
- *You are referring your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman within either of the following: Six years of the problem happening or three years from when you found out about it; and*

¹ Extract from Legal Ombudsman Website

- *You are referring your complaint to us within six months of your service provider's final response."*

2 Internal management of complaints

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 As a Chambers, we are committed to providing a high-quality legal service and to dealing with all our clients fairly. However sometimes we may not get it right so if something has gone wrong, including in relation to the bill, we ask that clients tell us.
- 2.1.2 The following describes how we handle complaints and ensure that we meet our regulatory obligations and outlined in the Bar Standards Board Handbook.
- 2.1.3 Fundamentally, it is vital that we handle complaints promptly, fairly, openly and effectively. Where issues arise, we must learn from them.

2.2 Information to clients

- 2.2.1 We will inform public access clients in writing at the outset of a matter of:
 - their right to complain (including about a bill);
 - how complaints can be made;
 - their right to complain to the Legal Ombudsmen (LeO), the time frame for doing so and full details of how to contact the LeO; and
 - the circumstances in which they may be liable to pay interest on an unpaid bill.
- 2.2.2 Where we are providing public access work using an intermediary then we will inform the intermediary as well.
- 2.2.3 If we are doing referral work, we will also make the lay client aware that may complain directly without going through their solicitors.
- 2.2.4 This should be covered within the acceptance of instructions and terms of business.
- 2.2.5 A copy of our client care information will also be available on our website.

2.3 Recording complaints

- 2.3.1 Complaints are normally handled by the Head of Chambers. The details of the complaint will be entered into the complaints register. However, if the Head of Chambers perceives a conflict of interest in dealing with the complaint, she will ask another senior member of Chambers to handle the matter.
- 2.3.2 Throughout the internal review process of the complaint the Head of Chambers will also document:
 - any investigative steps taken;
 - minutes of any meetings internally and/or with the complainant; and
 - references to any documents relied on for resolving the complaint (e.g. letters, attendance notes, etc.)

2.3.3 These documents will be kept confidential and will only be disclosed if a requirement for internal review processes or for complying with requests for the BSB.

2.4 Acknowledging complaints

2.4.1 The Head of Chambers will acknowledge complaints in writing to the complainant within five working days, enclosing a copy of our complaints policy.

2.4.2 Our acknowledgement letter will contain:

- a statement of our understanding of the complaint;
- if appropriate, a request for further information that we need in order to consider the complaint, and a time frame for providing that information;
- contact details for the Head of Chambers; and
- information on when we will next be in contact with the complainant.

2.4.3 The client will also be invited to attend a meeting should they so wish, where they will be able to outline their concerns face to face.

2.5 Preliminary assessment

2.5.1 The Head of Chambers will consider each complaint objectively.

2.5.2 This stage involves three steps:

- a) Itemising the issues in order to understand the complaint fully.
- b) Considering the complexity and seriousness of the complaint.
- c) Identifying any remedies sought by the complainant and considering the remedies available and/or appropriate.

2.6 Taking action

2.6.1 Any action will depend on the conclusions drawn from the preliminary assessment.

2.6.2 In the first instance, the Head of Chambers will:

- investigate the complaint;
- obtain feedback from relevant people;
- liaise with the Member of Chambers involved; and
- provide a response to the complainant

2.6.3 The level and extent of the investigations will be proportionate to the seriousness of the complaint.

2.6.4 Both clients and others involved in the complaint will be given the opportunity to provide their account of the situation and respond to points raised.

2.6.5 The Head of Chambers will respond to the complainant promptly with any decision or proposed action. We will aim to do this within 10 working days of receiving the full details of the complaint from the client. If there is a delay, she will write to the complainant to explain the reasons.

2.6.6 The Head of Chambers response will:

- re-state the details of the complaint;
- outline the investigations undertaken;
- state our findings resulting from the investigations;
- offer a remedy or explain why we do not think it is appropriate to do so;
- explain how to accept the proposed remedy; and
- inform the client of their right to complain to the LeO if they remain unsatisfied, the time frame for doing so and full details of how to contact the LeO.

2.6.7 The complainant's decision will be recorded.

2.7 Request for a review

2.7.1 The client will be informed of their right to ask for a review if they are not happy with the outcome of our initial review.

2.7.2 In this case, the matter will be passed to another senior member of Chambers to carry out this review. They will follow a similar process to that outlined in 2.6 above. They will also consider any additional information that may be provided by the client or by those dealing with the matter originally.

2.7.3 The senior member of Chambers will respond to the client with the outcomes of the review within 15 working days of the completion review. The client will again be reminded of their right to refer the matter to the LeO should they so wish.

2.8 Confidentiality

2.8.1 As with all client matters, we will treat complaints, and any information received during the course of dealing with complaints, with utmost confidentiality.

2.9 Vulnerable clients

2.9.1 Our complaints handling procedure is sensitive to individual differences and needs of our clients.