

Complaints Procedure

This complaints procedure is exclusively for the use of our clients. If you are not a client of the firm and are unhappy with our conduct please see the separate Non-Client Complaints Procedure below.

We strive for excellence and providing a clear and accurate legal service in a timely manner. We also pride ourselves in being friendly, approachable and helpful. Client satisfaction is a priority for us, and we want the service you receive to reflect these principles. That is why we welcome hearing from you if you ever believe that our service has fallen short of these objectives.

What do we treat as a complaint?

We define a complaint as 'any expression of dissatisfaction, whether oral or written, which alleges that the person making it has suffered or may suffer more than trivial financial loss, distress, inconvenience or other detriment'.

What happens next?

We know it can sometimes be daunting to raise a complaint, but we will never be offended if you do so. Your case or transaction will not be prejudiced by you raising your concerns and we do not charge for considering and responding to complaints. We hope you will not have any reason to complain, but in case you do, you should follow the procedure below.

The time limits for bringing a complaint to our attention are set out in our Terms and Conditions of Business, namely within six months of the end of the matter on which you instructed us, or within three months of you becoming aware of the circumstances giving rise to your complaint, whichever is the later. If you wish to complain about our service after the expiry of these time limits you may still be able to make a complaint directly to the Legal Ombudsman, but we will not be obliged in those circumstances to consider your complaint under this procedure and you should contact the Legal Ombudsman to establish whether your complaint falls within the scope and time limits of the Ombudsman's scheme. Ordinarily, the time limit for making a complaint to the Legal Ombudsman is one year from the act or omission complained of, or one year from when you should reasonably have known there was cause for complaint.

First stage

- In the first instance, please raise your concerns directly with the person dealing with your case or transaction by email, post or over the phone.
- If you feel that it is too delicate for you to raise this directly with them, or they have not addressed all your concerns to your satisfaction, you should raise your concerns with their manager. Their manager's name will be mentioned in our engagement letter to you, sent at the beginning of your case or transaction. Alternatively, you may simply ask your lawyer for their manager's name or just ring us to request that information.
- If neither your lawyer nor their manager can resolve your concerns to your satisfaction, your complaint will reach the second stage.

Second stage

- You may progress your complaint to our firm's Managing Partner, who will either personally investigate your complaint or may at his discretion refer it to another senior partner within our firm, for example to a compliance officer or to a partner specialising in the area of law which is the subject of complaint.

- When you do so, please set out as much detail as possible regarding your complaint. You may find the template letter on the Legal Ombudsman's website useful (<http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/>). We prefer to receive your complaint by post or email as we can then make sure we reply to all the points you raise:

Gaby Hardwicke Solicitors (Ref Managing Partner)
33 The Avenue
Eastbourne
BN21 3YD
Email: complaints@gabyhardwicke.co.uk
Telephone: 01323 435900

- We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days.
- We will tell you how long it will take us to investigate your complaint and the name of the person who will conduct the investigation. This is normally around three or four weeks but it could be less or more (either due to the circumstances of your complaint, illness or holidays). In any event it should never be more than eight weeks after acknowledging receipt of your complaint.
- We will review your file and if necessary talk to the person dealing with your case, their manager, or a partner in the firm who specialises in the relevant area of law.
- We will send you the result of our investigation by email or post, depending on how you contacted us in the first place or any preference you may have. We may also offer to meet with you to discuss your complaint and resolve it.
- If we agree with you and we find the service you received was not as we would have like it to be, we will work with you to try to find a way to resolve your complaint.
- If we find that your complaint does not support a finding of poor service, we will let you know the reasons why. We will let you know what to do if you are unhappy with our decision: we will tell you whether we agree to using Alternative Dispute Resolution, or whether your complaint can proceed to Stage 3.

Third Stage

- If you remain unhappy, you have the right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman, an independent and impartial body, but you must do so within 6 months of our final letter to you, which we will always make clear when sending our final letter. The Ombudsman's contact details are:

Legal Ombudsman
PO Box 6167,
Slough,
SL1 0EH
Telephone: 0300 555 0333
Email address: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk
Website: www.legalombudsman.org.uk

Stage one	
You raise a complaint with your lawyer or their manager	Within 6 months of the end of your matter, or within 3 months of you becoming aware of the circumstances giving rise to your complaint
	
Stage two	
You progress your complaint to the firm's Managing Partner	After stage 1
We acknowledge receipt of your complaint	Within 5 working days
We investigate your complaint, write to you with our finding and try to resolve your complaint if appropriate	Within 8 weeks maximum
	
Stage three	
You may raise your complaint with the Legal Ombudsman	Within 6 months of our final letter to you

Gaby Hardwicke Solicitors is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority, The Cube, 199 Wharfside Street, Birmingham, B1 1RN (the SRA). This means that we are governed by a Code of Conduct and other professional rules, which you can access on the SRA's website (www.sra.org.uk) or by calling 0370 606 2555. Our SRA registration number is 173901. If you believe that we have behaved dishonestly, illegally or in breach of the SRA's principles, you can complain to the SRA using the details provided above.

Accommodating Your Needs

If you prefer not to complain or deal with us as outlined above (for example, you may prefer not to deal with your complaint in writing) then please let us know and please say what your preferences are. Within reason, we will do what we can to accommodate your needs.

Non-Client Complaints Procedure

If you believe that we have behaved dishonestly, illegally, in breach of the SRA's principles, or for some other reason you are dissatisfied with our conduct and you are not a client of this firm, you should raise the subject of your complaint with the person with whom you are dealing, or against whom the complaint is made, and if your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction at that level you should email complaints@gabyhardwicke.co.uk or write to us with details of your complaint as follows:

The Managing Partner
Gaby Hardwicke Solicitors
33 The Avenue
Eastbourne
BN21 3YD

The time limits for bringing a complaint to our attention are within six months of the event giving rise to your complaint, or within three months of you becoming aware of the circumstances giving rise to it, whichever is the later. If you wish to complain about our service after the expiry of these time limits you may still be able to make a complaint directly to the Legal Ombudsman, but we will not be obliged in those circumstances to consider your complaint under this procedure and you should contact the Legal Ombudsman to establish whether your complaint falls within the time limits of the Ombudsman's scheme. Ordinarily, the time limit for making a complaint to the Legal Ombudsman is one year from the act or omission complained of, or one year from when you should reasonably have known there was cause for complaint.

We will let you know within 14 days of receipt of your complaint in writing how and in what timescale we propose to deal with your complaint depending on its nature, and in most circumstances we would expect that timescale not to exceed 28 days. Depending on the nature of the complaint and against whom it is made, it may be considered by a Team Manager, a compliance officer, a partner in the firm or the Managing Partner, who in each case will not be the same person as the subject of the complaint. At any stage if you are unhappy with the way in which we deal with your complaint you may ask the Legal Ombudsman and/or the SRA whether they will investigate your complaint. Both addresses are contained in the Client Complaints Procedure above. If you are legally represented in the matter giving rise to your complaint, please note that we will only correspond with your solicitor.