

Complaint Handling Policy

As an overriding principle we believe in treating our clients and their customers fairly.

Optima Legal is committed to providing a high quality legal service to our clients and their customers. When someone is dissatisfied we want to know about it. We take any problems that do arise very seriously and aim to ensure that any complaints our clients or their customers may have are identified quickly and dealt with thoroughly in accordance with this policy.

Every client has the benefit of a Principal Lawyer and a designated Team Manager, who will make every effort to ensure that the standard of services provided by the firm meets the client's expectations.

As an organisation we monitor customer satisfaction in various ways and use feedback to review our processes and improve our service.

For the purpose of this policy, we define a complaint as:

"Any expression of dissatisfaction by a customer or client whether justified or not."

This can relate to any aspect of our service including our bill.

1. How do you complain?

You can register your complaint over the telephone or in writing by email, letter or via our portals.

2. How do we investigate your complaint?

Where appropriate we will attempt to deal with any concerns informally by contacting you by telephone to discuss the matter.

If we have not been able to satisfactorily deal with your concerns or we feel it is not appropriate to deal with your concerns by telephone we will send you an acknowledgment letter within 5 working days of receipt of your complaint.

The acknowledgment letter will detail the person who will be dealing with the complaint (the Complaint Investigator) and enclose a copy of this policy.

A review of your file with the person handling the matter will be conducted by the Complaint Investigator from the relevant department. He/she may contact you to ensure the issues you have raised have been properly understood and will make any wider enquiries that may be necessary.

3. Our Response

Our aim is to respond in full within 14 working days of the date of our acknowledgment letter, which we are able to achieve in most cases. If this is not possible for any reason, then we will write to you explaining why more time is required and when you can expect our response.

Our response will usually be in writing unless otherwise requested. We will tell you our views on your complaint following our investigation and the steps we propose to resolve it, hopefully to your satisfaction.

4. Escalation

If you are not satisfied with our response, your complaint may be escalated to a Senior Manager. They will acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days and, make further investigations as necessary.

They will write to you to inform you of our conclusions within 14 working days from the date of acknowledgment. If this is not possible for any reason, then we will write to you explaining why more time is required and when you can expect our response.

If we have been unable to offer a final response within an 8-week period, you may refer your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman.

5. Legal Ombudsman

Please note that the Legal Ombudsman may not have the jurisdiction to deal with your complaint and may request evidence which confirms that Optima Legal has provided you with a service.

Before the Legal Ombudsman will consider a complaint in relation to our service or our bill, they generally require that the firm's internal Complaints Procedure has been exhausted. If the Legal Ombudsman is satisfied that the firm's proposals for resolving a complaint are reasonable, it may decline to investigate further. Referrals to the Legal Ombudsman should be made:

- Within 6 years of the date of the act or omission; or
- 3 years from when the complainant should reasonably have known there was cause for complaint (if the act or omission took place more than 6 years ago); and
- Within 6 months of the date of our final response.

You may contact the Legal Ombudsman:

- By phone on: 0300 555 0333
- By email at enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk or
- By post at PO Box 6806, Wolverhampton, WV1 9WJ

If your complaint is about your bill, you may have the right to apply to the court for an assessment of the bill under Part III of the Solicitors Act 1974. If you wish to take advantage of this procedure you should be aware that strict time limits apply and the Legal Ombudsman may not consider a complaint about a bill if you have applied to the court for an assessment.

For further information on making a complaint, please refer to the Legal Ombudsman website at www.legalombudsman.org.uk.