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GRAY'S INN
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COMPLAINTS POLICY AND
PROCEDURE

Revised May 2008

Complaints Policy 2008 Revision

1. INTRODUCTION

We aim to provide our clients with a first class and timely response and to deliver the best service possible to all our clients. However, there will be occasions when a client could be dissatisfied with some aspects of our service and wish to complain about mistakes, errors or any other misunderstandings.

We take this very seriously and seek to ensure that our clients are aware of our policy on open discussion of any form of complaint and that we investigate them. Where any action can be taken to improve the quality of service to all, we will action it.

The Bar Standards Board issued revised Guidance on Complaints Handling in March 2008. Chambers has a policy of complying, as a minimum, with any such Guidance and has decided to use the Model Form of Complaints Procedure contained within the revised Guidance as its starting point. The Complaints Procedure, with amendments to reflect our internal procedures and ensure all complaints are handled efficiently and effectively, has been adopted and has been published on Chambers' website. All necessary revisions to our standard form of acceptance of instructions have also been adopted.

All members and staff have been informed of the revised Complaints Procedure and administrative processes for acceptance of new instructions.

2. DESIGNATED INDIVIDUALS UNDER THE PROCEDURE

To ensure there is a consistent approach to all complaints, Chambers has designated people to deal with the process of complaints. There are two main elements to the procedure. Clients have the option of telephoning Chambers direct to make a complaint or, either if they are not satisfied with any resolution proposed in the telephone conversation or because the complaint deals with allegations of serious poor service or incompetence or any other matters of an equivalent level of seriousness, in writing.

2.1 Telephone complaints

The Chambers' Director is the designated point of first contact for all telephone complaints. The Senior Clerk will deal with such calls in her absence. Should the complaint relate to either of these individuals, the complaint will be passed to the other, or the Head of Chambers as appropriate.

2.2 Written complaints

These should be addressed to the Head of Chambers c/o Chambers' Director and there is an e-mail address set up should clients wish to adopt this approach.

Once a written complaint has been received, the Head of Chambers shall convene a Panel, at his discretion, to review the complaint. This panel will consist of the Head of Chambers, the two most senior members of the Management Board who are available and a senior member of staff. The duly constituted panel will appoint one of its members to investigate the complaint. At the close of the investigation, a report and recommendation for actions shall be brought back to the full panel for review and endorsement. This review can be conducted by e-mail or telephone, as appropriate to meet the time limits in the procedure.

The client will only be informed of the outcome of the investigation once it has been endorsed by the full panel.

3. PROCEDURES

The Chambers' Director will have responsibility for managing a file of documentation on all complaints received, unless they relate to her in which case the Head of Chambers shall maintain a file. All documentation is to be retained for six years after the investigation, and any subsequent potential complaint to the Bar Standards Board has been resolved.

All issues of confidentiality under the procedure will be strictly adhered to.

A report will be made to the Management Board annually: it will be on an anonymous basis but will outline any trends which might be discerned from the complaints. This annual report shall not preclude actions being taken promptly to remedy any agreed issues with service levels. The Board will be apprised of any such actions as they are taken; again, on an anonymous basis.

Complaints Procedure

1. Our aim is to give you a good service at all times. However if you have a complaint you are invited to let us know as soon as possible. It is not necessary to involve solicitors in order to make your complaint but you are free to do so should you wish.
2. Please note that Chambers will only consider complaints that are raised within six months of the act or omission complained of.

Complaints Made by Telephone

3. You may wish to make a complaint in writing, or by e-mail, and, if so, please follow the procedure in paragraph 5 below. However, if you would rather speak on the telephone about your complaint then please telephone our Chambers' Director, Lynne Orsborn, on 020 7421 1819, or in her absence, our Senior Clerk, Martin Hart, on 020 7421 1803. They are the individuals designated under this Complaints Procedure to deal with telephone complaints. If the complaint is about either of these two individuals, please contact the other one. The person you contact will make a note of the details of your complaint and what you would like done about it. She or he will discuss your concerns with you and aim to resolve them. If the matter is resolved she or he will record the outcome, check that you are satisfied with the outcome and record that you are satisfied. You may also wish to record the outcome of the telephone discussion in writing.
4. If your complaint is not resolved on the telephone you will be invited to write to us about it within the next 14 days so it can be investigated formally. We would normally assume such complaints involved an allegation about serious poor service and/or incompetence.

Complaints made in Writing

5. Please give the following details:

- Your name and address;
- Which member(s) of Chambers or our staff you are complaining about;

- The detail of the complaint; and
- What you would like done about it.

Please address your letter to Mark Lowe QC, C/o Lynne Orsborn, 2-3 Gray's Inn Square, London, WC1R 5JH. We will, where possible, acknowledge receipt of your complaint within two days and provide you with details of how your complaint will be dealt with.

6. Our Chambers has a panel headed by the Head of Chambers and made up of two other experienced members of Chambers and a senior member of staff, which considers any written complaint. Within 14 days of your letter being received the head of the panel or his deputy in his absence will appoint a member of the panel to investigate it. If your complaint is against the head of the panel, the next most senior member of the panel will investigate it. In any case, the person appointed will be someone other than the person you are complaining about.
7. The person appointed to investigate will write to you as soon as possible to let you know he has been appointed and that he will reply to your complaint within 14 days. If he finds later that he is not going to be able to reply within 14 days he will set a new date for his reply and inform you. His reply will set out:
 - The nature and scope of his investigation;
 - His conclusion on each complaint and the basis for his conclusion; and
 - If he finds that you are justified in your complaint, his proposals for resolving the complaint which will have been approved by the panel.

Confidentiality

8. All conversations and documents relating to the complaint will be treated as confidential and will be disclosed only to the extent that is necessary. Disclosure will be to the Head of Chambers, members of our Management Board and to anyone involved in the complaint and its investigation. Such people will include the barrister member or staff who you have complained about, the head or relevant senior member of the panel and the person who investigates the complaint. The Bar Standards Board is entitled to inspect the documents and seek information about the complaint when discharging its auditing and monitoring functions.

Our Policy

9. As part of our commitment to client care we make a written record of any complaint and retain all documents and correspondence generated by the complaint for a period of six years. Our Management Board inspects an anonymised record regularly with a view to improving services.

Complaints to the Bar Standards Board (the regulatory arm of the Bar Council, the professional body for barristers)

10. We hope that you will use our procedure. However, if you would rather not do so or are unhappy with the outcome you may take up your complaint with the Bar Standards Board at any time. Please note that the Bar Standards Board has a six month time limit from the date of the act or omission about which you are complaining within which to make your complaint. However, should you raise your complaint with Chambers first, there is a three month time limit from the conclusion of the investigation by Chambers in which to raise your complaint with the Board. You can write to them at:

Complaints Department
Bar Standards Board
289-293 High Holborn
London WC1V 7HZ

Tel: 020 7611 1444
Fax: 020 7831 9217
E-mail: complaints@barstandardsboard.org.uk
See also www.barstandardsboard.org.uk

Complaints Policy Revision – April 2008.