



COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

We are committed to providing a high quality legal service to our clients in accordance with the Solicitors' Code of Conduct 2011. We aim to deal with all clients fairly and professionally. However, if at any point you are unhappy or concerned about the service we have provided you with then you should inform us immediately. This will help us to sort out any mistakes or misunderstandings, and to improve our standards.

If you have a complaint, please raise the problem with the solicitor responsible for your matter, or if you prefer, our complaints partner, Cosma Vento. Rest assured that all complaints will be treated in confidence.

Complaints may be made in the following ways:

- in writing, addressed to our office marked for the attention of the Complaints Partner, Cosma Vento;
- via email to Cosma.Vento@vs-lex.com; or
- by telephone on 0207 936 1999

In some circumstances it may be appropriate for another Partner in the firm to investigate and respond to your complaint.

Complaints may be made about any aspect of the service we have provided, for example our bill, any mistakes, unreasonable delay or unprofessional behaviour.

To help us understand your complaint, please tell us:

- your full name and contact details;
- what you think we have got wrong;
- what you hope to achieve as a result of your complaint; and
- your file reference number (if you know it).

After investigation you will be given written confirmation, with reasons, of all decisions made under this policy.

Below is our process for dealing with complaints:

Stage 1: a response is provided by the person who has been dealing with the matter. We aim to resolve most complaints at this stage;

Stage 2: a response is provided by the Complaints Partner, where there has been a serious breakdown of trust and confidence between you and the solicitor involved; and

Stage 3: where eligible, a complaint may be referred to the Legal Ombudsman, PO Box 6806, Wolverhampton WV1 9WJ, telephone number 0300 555 0333 or enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk who can provide independent oversight of the way that we are carrying out our complaints handling function and provide a final independent response for those complaints that we cannot resolve internally. The Legal Ombudsman complaints form can be downloaded from www.legalombudsman.org.uk/consumer

Complaints about a bill

You may make a complaint using this procedure if you are not happy with any charges on any bill we prepare in connection with our services to you. Where you are eligible, you may also make a complaint to the Legal Ombudsman (as described in Stage 3 above).

You also have the right under Part III of the Solicitors Act 1974 to apply to the court for an assessment of the bill in issue. Where any bill is submitted for assessment, it is not possible to ask the Legal Ombudsman to also review the bill. If all or any part of a bill issued by V&S Solicitors LLP remains unpaid after 14 days, we may be entitled to charge interest on the outstanding amount of the bill.

What will happen next?

We will acknowledge your complaint and advise you how the complaint will be dealt with and by whom. We aim to resolve most complaints on our first attempt and in any event within 8 weeks of being notified of a complaint (see Stages 1 and 2 below). We may also need to ask you for further information or documents. If so, we will ask you to provide the information within a specific period of time.

Stage 1: Our approach in dealing with complaints at this stage will be fair and flexible. Some complaints are better dealt with via a phone call from the solicitor who has been dealing with your matter. However, other complaints may require a review of your file prior to providing you with an appropriate response.

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint in writing within five working days of receiving it. After this, we will endeavour to give you a full response within 10 working days from the date of our initial acknowledgment informing you of the outcome of your complaint. If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can have your complaint reviewed by the Complaints Partner (Stage 2). If you would like to progress to Stage 2, then you must request this within 10 working days from the date that the outcome is sent to you.

Stage 2: The Complaints Partner will review complaints that we have not been able to resolve at Stage 1 and will investigate the complaints which we have decided are not suitable for a Stage 1 response.

If a complaint is referred for a response from the Complaints Partner, we will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days and aim to provide a full response within 10 working days from the date of the acknowledgment. We will write to you to confirm the outcome, advising you that you may be eligible to submit your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman to be considered at Stage 3 if you are not satisfied with the outcome at this stage.

If we are not able to respond within these timescales, we will advise you why and let you know when we will be in a position to respond fully.

Under the Legal Ombudsman's rules we normally have 8 weeks in which to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction. If after 8 weeks from making your complaint, whether or not it has not been fully dealt with, or earlier either if you have received our final response but you are dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 or where certain other circumstances apply (see the Legal Ombudsman's website <http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/consumer/index.html>), you may be eligible to submit your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman, as detailed in Stage 3 below.

Stage 3 – Legal Ombudsman: We expect that only a minority of complaints will be referred for a full independent review. These are the complaints that we have not been able to resolve internally and which the Legal Ombudsman decides are appropriate for review. The Legal Ombudsman will only accept complaints from individuals, micro enterprises (being enterprises which employ fewer than 10 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 million), charities or clubs with annual incomes of less than £1million or trustees of trusts with assets of less than £1million.

A complaint may be made to the Legal Ombudsman by telephone or by submitting a completed complaints form by post or email to the addresses set out above.

If you are not satisfied with our final response then you usually have 6 months to contact the Legal Ombudsman. This 6 month period runs from the earlier of the expiry of our 8 week period to resolve your complaint or the date of our final response to you.

The Legal Ombudsman expects complaints to be made to them within one year of the date of the act or omission about which you are concerned or within one year from when you should reasonably have known that there was a cause for complaint. You must also refer your concerns to the Legal Ombudsman within six months of our final response to you. The Legal Ombudsman has a detailed timetable for dealing with complaints accepted by it and overall aims to deal with all complaints it accepts within 90 days of acceptance. Further details are available on the Legal Ombudsman's website.

The **Solicitors Regulation Authority** can help if you are concerned about our behaviour. This could be for things like dishonesty, concerns about ethics or integrity, taking or losing your money or treating you unfairly because of your age, a disability or other characteristic. In this case, you have the right they have the right to notify our regulator, the Solicitors Regulation Authority. There are no time limits for making a report but there are limits on what the SRA will consider. Please note that the SRA is not able to deal with issues of poor service (complaints of this nature should instead be referred to the Legal Ombudsman). For further information about the SRA's role, please contact the SRA or visit: <https://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/problems/report-solicitor.page#report>