

Complaints

1. Stour Chambers aims to provide 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 the Legal Ombudsman, the independent complaints body for service complaints about lawyers, has time limits in which a complaint must be raised with them. Details can be found in section 4 of the Ombudsman's Rules at

<http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/downloads/documents/publications/Scheme-Rules.pdf> but in summary the following requirements must ordinarily be satisfied:

Time Limit from Final Response

- (1) the act or omission, or when you should reasonably have known there was cause for complaint, must have been after 5 October 2010.
- (2) You must refer the complaint to the Ombudsman no later than:
 - a) Six years from the act or omission; or
 - b) Three years from when you should reasonably have known there was cause for complaint.

3. The Ombudsman can extend the time limit in exceptional circumstances. Chambers must therefore have regard to that timeframe when deciding whether they are able to investigate your complaint. Chambers will not therefore usually deal with complaints that fall outside of the Legal Ombudsman's time limits.

4. The Ombudsman will also only deal with complaints from consumers. This means that only complaints from the barrister's client are within their jurisdiction. Non-clients who are not satisfied with the outcome of Stour's investigation should contact the Bar Standards Board rather than the Legal Ombudsman.

5. It should be noted that it may not always be possible to investigate a complaint brought by a non-client. This is because our ability of Chambers to satisfactorily investigate and resolve such matters is limited and complaints of this nature are often better suited to the disciplinary processes maintained by the Bar Standards Board. Therefore, Chambers will make an initial assessment of the complaint and if we feel that the issues raised cannot be satisfactorily resolved through our complaints process, we will refer you to the Bar Standards Board.

Complaints Made by Telephone

6. You may wish to make a complaint in writing and, if so, please follow the procedure in paragraph 8 and 9 below. However, if you would rather speak on the telephone about your complaint then please telephone the individual nominated under our Complaints Procedure to deal with complaints, Mr M Goddard (Senior Clerk), or if the complaint is about a Mr M Goddard, telephone Mr S Johnson (Head of Chambers). The person you contact will make a note of the details of your complaint and what you would like done about it. That person will discuss your concerns with you and aim to resolve them. If the matter is resolved, that person 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.

7. If your complaint is not resolved on the telephone you will be invited to write to us about it so it within the next 14 days so it can be investigated formally.

Complaints made in Writing

8. Please give the following details:

- Your name and address;
- Which barrister(s) you are complaining about;
- The detail of the complaint; and
- What you would like done about it.

Please address your letter to the appropriate individual nominated under paragraph 6 above, at Stour Chambers, 17a Stour Street, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2NR. 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.

9. Chambers has a panel headed by Mr S Johnson and made up of 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.

10. 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.

Confidentiality

11. 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 committee and to anyone involved in the complaint and its investigation. Such people will include the barrister or 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

12. 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 committee inspects an anonymised record regularly with a view to improving services.

Complaints to the Legal Ombudsman

13. If you are unhappy with the outcome of our investigation and you fall within his jurisdiction you may take up your complaint with the Legal Ombudsman, the independent complaints body for complaints about lawyers, at the conclusion of our consideration of your complaint. The Ombudsman is not able to consider your complaint until it has first been investigated by Chambers. Please note the timeframe for referral of complaints to the Ombudsman as set out at paragraph 2 above.

You can write to them at:

Legal Ombudsman
PO Box 6806,
Wolverhampton
WV1 9WJ
Telephone number: 0300 555 0333
Email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk

14. If you are not the barrister's client and are unhappy with the outcome of our investigation then please contact the Bar Standards Board at:

Bar Standards Board
Professional Conduct Department
289-293 High Holborn
London
WC1V 7JZ
Telephone number: 020 7611 1444
Website: www.barstandsboard.org.uk