**Merseyside Law Centre (MLC)**

## COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

**Policy Statement**

We aim to provide services that are of a standard that is acceptable to everyone. If we fail to do this we want to know about it. This will help us not only to deal with the specific problem, but also avoid it from happening again. We aim to deal with any complaints promptly, fairly, openly and effectively.

Our complaints procedure sets out how to take up anything that you think is unsatisfactory about the service you have received from us.

**Definition of a complaint**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction however it is initially expressed, where that dissatisfaction is directly related to the service provided by or the behaviour of MLC staff, volunteers, student placement workers or a member of the Board.

A complaint may involve:

* + Dissatisfaction with the handling of a case;
	+ Disappointment with an alleged lack of communication;
	+ Frustration with an alleged lack of case progress;
	+ An allegation of discrimination
	+ Dissatisfaction with the outcome of the case.

However, issues of a very minor nature, for example, not returning a non-urgent telephone call until the following day are not recorded as a complaint.

Responsibility for dealing with complaints lies with the Operations Director. If they are the subject of the complaint or absent the complaint will be dealt with by the Director, another member of the senior management team or a member of the Board.

**Complaints Procedure**

This procedure sets out the steps we will follow when we receive a complaint from users of our service, an organisation or member of the public. This procedure is meant to provide a means to resolve a dispute between MLC and any complainant.

In the first instance it may be helpful to contact the person who is working on your case to discuss your concerns and we will do our best to resolve any issues at this stage. If you would like to make a formal complaint please refer to this procedure.

Clients are informed in writing at the outset of their matter of their right to complain and how complaints can be made.

We also inform clients in writing at the outset of their matter of their right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman, the time frame for doing so and full details of how to contact the Legal Ombudsman.

When we are acting in an immigration matter we inform clients of their right to complain to OISC.

When a client, approved supplier or other third party makes a complaint, within two working days we send them our standard letter that sets out Merseyside Law Centre’s complaints handling procedure, outlining the relevant stages and timescales.

We report and record centrally, every complaint made.

Where a complaint lapses because of a failure to respond to MLC contact or a meeting is missed without an explanation being given, MLC is entitled to consider the complaint to be at an end. The complaint will be recorded as ‘unresolved’ in the complaint file.

All complaints are treated confidentially - only staff who need to know will be party to information about a complaint.

 MLC may be required to collect personal data during its complaints process. Any personal information obtained for these purposes will not be passed to any third party, except where strictly necessary, and will only be used for the purposes for which it was obtained.

**How a Complaint will be Handled**

Step One:

You can register a complaint by letter, telephone call, email or in the course of a face to face conversation.

Please let us know the full nature of the problem, if you have not already done so. You can do this by emailing karen.woodside@merseysidelawcentre.co.uk or writing to Merseyside Law Centre, Kuumba Imani Millenium Centre, 4 Princes Road, Liverpool, L8 1TH. If you would have any problem in putting your complaint in writing, please telephone on 0151 433 7577 or arrange an appointment. Any appointment may take place remotely.

Step Two:

We will investigate the matter, for example by reviewing the file and speaking to the member of staff concerned within 7 working days of acknowledging receipt of your complaint. If, for some reason, the matter cannot be investigated in this timeframe, we will write to you notifying you of this together with the reason why and giving a revised timescale. Once the investigation has been completed, we will invite you to a meeting to discuss the issue(s) you have raised and hopefully resolve the complaint. This meeting will take place within 14 working days of sending you the acknowledgement letter. This meeting may have to take place remotely rather than face to face.

Following the meeting, we will write to you within 3 working days of the meeting to confirm our discussion and the solution agreed upon.

Alternatively we will send you a detailed, written response, including our proposed solution, within 14 working days of sending you the letter acknowledging receipt of your complaint.

Step Three:

If you are satisfied with the response, that will be the end of the matter. However, if you are not satisfied, you should contact us again and we will arrange for the Director or someone who is unconnected with the matter to review the decision. He/She will write to you within 14 working days of receiving your request with confirmation of our final position in relation to your complaint, outlining the reasons and any final redress that is offered.

Timetable:

We have eight weeks to consider your complaint.

If for any reason we are unable to resolve the problem within that timeframe, then you may ask the Legal Ombudsman to consider the complaint.

The Legal Ombudsman can help you if we are unable to resolve your complaint ourselves. They will look at your complaint independently and it will not affect how we handle your case. Before accepting a complaint for investigation, the Legal Ombudsman will check that you have tried to resolve your complaint with us first. If you have, then you must take your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman:

• Within six months of receiving a final response to your complaint and

• No more than one year from the date of act/omission; or

• No more than one year from when you should reasonably have known there was cause for complaint.

However, the Legal Ombudsman will not accept complaints where the act or date of awareness was before 6 October 2010

If you would like more information about the Legal Ombudsman, please contact them.

Contact details: Visit: www.legalombudsman.org.uk

Call: 0300 555 0333 between 9.00 – 17.00.

Email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk

Legal Ombudsman PO Box 6806, Wolverhampton, WV1 9WJ

For immigration work only

We are regulated by the Office for the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) in relation to immigration work. You can write directly to the OISC to complain. You can send it to the OISC by email at complaints@oisc.gov.uk. If you are unable to send the complaint by email, you may send it by post to:

The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner

Complaints Team

5th Floor

21 Bloomsbury Street

London

WC1B 3HF

*Date reviewed: December 2023*