



EGLAC  
EAST GREENWICH LEGAL ADVICE CLINIC

## Compliments and Complaints Policy

### Our Aim

EGLAC is committed to providing a quality service and working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect. One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of our clients and stakeholders, by responding positively to complaints, and by putting mistakes right.

Therefore, we aim to ensure that:

- making a compliment or complaint is as easy as possible;
- we welcome compliments, feedback and suggestions;
- we treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for an immediate response;
- we deal with it promptly, politely and, when appropriate, confidentially;
- we respond in the right way – for example, with an explanation, or an apology where we have got things wrong, or information on any action taken etc.; and
- we learn from complaints, use them to improve our service, and review our Compliments and Complaints Policy annually.

We recognise that many concerns will be raised informally and dealt with quickly.

Our aims are to:

- resolve informal concerns quickly;
- keep matters low-key; and
- enable mediation between the complainant and the individual to whom the complaint has been referred.

This policy ensures that we welcome compliments and provide guidelines for dealing with complaints from members of the public about our services, staff and volunteers.

### Definitions

A compliment is an expression of satisfaction about the standard of service we provide.

A complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction, however it is expressed. This would include complaints expressed face-to-face, via a phone call, in writing, via email or any other method. All volunteers and staff should have sufficient knowledge to be able to identify an 'expression of dissatisfaction' even when the word "complain" or "complaint" is not used.

## **Purpose**

We are always glad to hear from people who are satisfied with the services we offer, and we send out a request for feedback after all appointments. All compliments are recorded and acknowledged, and the Clinic Director provides feedback to the volunteer adviser.

## **Complaints**

The formal complaints procedure is intended to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and, wherever possible, resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

## **Responsibilities**

EGLAC's responsibility will be to:

- acknowledge the formal complaint in writing;
- respond within a stated period of time;
- deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint; and
- take action where appropriate.

A complainant's responsibility is to:

- bring their complaint, in writing, to EGLAC's attention normally within eight weeks of the issue arising;
- raise concerns promptly and directly with a volunteer or member of staff;
- explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date;
- allow EGLAC a reasonable time to deal with the matter; and
- recognise that some circumstances may be beyond EGLAC's control.

## **Confidentiality**

Except in exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that both the complainant and EGLAC maintain confidentiality. However, the circumstances giving rise to the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality (with each complaint judged on its own facts). Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the complainant.

## **Complaints Procedure**

Written records must be made by EGLAC at each stage of the procedure.

### *Stage 1*

In the first instance, a volunteer or staff member must establish the seriousness of the complaint. An informal approach is appropriate when it can be achieved. But if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

### *Stage 2*

If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the member of the public should be advised that a formal complaint may be made, and the following procedure should be explained to them. It may sometimes be appropriate for a different volunteer or member of staff, preferably a member of the Management Team, to make this explanation.

- a) A formal complaint can be made either verbally or in writing. If verbally, a statement should be taken by a member of the Management Team.
- b) In all cases, the complaint must be passed on to the Clinic Director. In the event of a complaint about the Clinic Director, the complaint should be passed to Tim Cave, and if the complaint is about Tim Cave this should be passed on to Sue Hall.
- c) Either the Clinic Director, Tim Cave or Sue Hall (depending on the nature of the complaint) must acknowledge the complaint in writing (by email) within one week of receiving it.
- d) One of the above will investigate the complaint. Any conclusions reached should be discussed with the volunteer or staff member involved.
- e) The person making the complaint will receive a response based on the investigation by email within four weeks of the complaint being received. If this is not possible then an email must be sent explaining why.

### *Stage 3*

- a) If the complainant is not satisfied with the above decision, then a meeting of the Management Team will be convened.
- b) The Management Team will examine the complaint and may wish to carry out further interviews, examine files / notes. They will respond within four weeks by email. Their decision will be final.

## Stage 4

If the complainant is not satisfied internally, EGLAC will inform the client by email:

- a) that they cannot settle the complaint with the client; and
- b) of the client's right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman.

The Law Society has produced the following draft wording that clinics can use:

*We have been unable to settle your complaint using our internal complaints process. You have a right to complain to the Legal Ombudsman, an independent complaints body, established under the Legal Services Act 2007, which deals with legal services complaints. You have six months from the date of this (our final) letter in which to complain to the Legal Ombudsman.*

*Legal Ombudsman  
PO Box 6806  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 9WJ  
Telephone: 0300 555 0333  
Email address: [enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk)  
Website: [www.legalombudsman.org.uk](http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk)*

*Alternative complaints bodies exist which are competent to deal with complaints about legal services should both you and our firm wish to use such a scheme.*

For information concerning the details of ADR approved bodies please visit the Law Society's website.

## Data Protection

We need your consent to use your personal information. Our use of that information is subject to the General Data Protection Regulation 2016. EGLAC has a Client Privacy Policy which is available on the website. If you think that we have used or got your information wrong, please tell us so that we can put it right. If you have any concerns about the way we handle your information, you can also tell the Information Commissioner <https://ico.org.uk/concerns/handling/>.

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