



Association of Professional  
Declutterers & Organisers

# Policy on Handling Complaints

*This policy details the procedures **APDO** will follow in the event of a complaint being made to **APDO** about an **APDO** member.*

## Introduction

At **APDO** we take complaints seriously and our policy is to deal promptly with any complaints received in a way which is fair, proportionate, transparent and effective.

We will be outcome-focused in resolving any complaints and endeavour to resolve all complaints sensitively and to the satisfaction of all parties. Our aim is to have a complaints procedure which is clear, straightforward and easy to follow, and we would welcome any feedback or suggestions on how we could improve our policy.

We have carefully considered the Six Principles of Good Complaints Handling, which were identified by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman following a consultation in the summer of 2008, when devising our complaints handling policy.

We promise to keep you informed about the progress of your complaint and to let you know if there is likely to be a delay for any reason in your complaint being investigated and resolved.

## What you can expect from our Handling of Complaints

In line with our stated aims as detailed above, you can expect that we will deal with your complaint fairly, sensitively, transparently and promptly.

We will treat you with dignity and respect, and without discrimination.

We will keep the details of any complaints we receive confidential, and details will only be disclosed to other members of the **APDO** Board, if required, in line with step 5 below.

You can expect us to deal with complaints consistently, whilst retaining sufficient flexibility to allow us to take account of the circumstances of your own individual case, including the seriousness of the complaint and its effects on you, and how your complaint has so far been dealt with by the **APDO** member concerned.

Any investigation carried out by **APDO** will only involve members of the Board who are not party to your complaint and so can investigate objectively and without prior judgment.

We will always act fairly towards our **APDO** members and will treat them in the same way that we treat you; fairly, sensitively and without discrimination or prior judgment.

## Complaints Procedure

### Step 1 – Before you make a complaint

Before taking the step of making a complaint to us, it is important to be clear about what exactly it is that you are complaining about, and what outcome you would like to achieve. This will not only help you in terms of pursuing your complaint but will also help the other party and those investigating to understand your position clearly.

It would be helpful if you could identify:

- The exact circumstances e.g. who, what, where, when
- What happened e.g. what was said or done, and by whom
- What you think should have happened instead, or what you were expecting
- What you would like to happen now e.g. what outcome would you like to achieve
- Please also identify and collate any relevant documents or other information that might be useful in helping us to investigate your complaint

### Step 2 - Contact the APDO member directly

In the first instance, please direct your complaint in writing to the **APDO** member whose services you engaged. In order to deal with your complaint, they will need the information detailed above in step 1. **APDO** will not be prepared to investigate any complaint unless this action is taken – unless there are exceptional circumstances for not contacting the **APDO** member in the first instance (Please contact us for advice if you feel your complaint falls within this exception).

We would expect our members to respond to any complaint lodged with them promptly. Good practise dictates that you should expect an acknowledgment of your complaint within 72 hours, although there may be occasions when this is not possible (e.g. holidays, illness). Please allow the **APDO** member a reasonable amount of time to consider and deal with your complaint. Depending on the circumstances, we would expect you to have received an acknowledgment of your complaint within 7 days and a substantive response within 7 days thereafter e.g. within 14 days of lodging your complaint.

In most cases, we envisage that the **APDO** member concerned will be able to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction and agree a mutually acceptable outcome with you. In cases where your complaint is not resolved, please proceed to step 3.



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### Step 3 – Contact the APDO Board

Where your complaint has not been resolved by following step 2, please contact **APDO** directly via the contact page on our website <https://www.apdo.co.uk> and submit all details regarding your complaint in writing. Please provide as much detail as you can about your complaint, which will then be passed to the **APDO** Board Representative for investigation. The Board Representative will acknowledge your complaint, in writing, as soon as possible after it is received and in any event within 72 hours of receipt – unless this is not possible (e.g. holidays, illness) in which case acknowledgment will be made as soon as practically possible.

The Board Representative will treat all parties (including the person you are complaining about) fairly, sensitively and without discrimination or prior judgment and will take into account all written documentation and any other evidence when investigating your complaint.

### Step 4 – Completion of Investigation

Once the investigation is complete, the **APDO** Board Representative will notify both you and the APDO member of the Initial Findings and Preliminary Decision, in writing. You should normally expect to receive this notification within 7 days of acknowledgment of your complaint.

Both you and the **APDO** member will then have an opportunity to comment in writing on the Initial Findings and Preliminary Decision, and we would usually expect to receive any such comments within 7 days, although we can and will agree to a longer period of time if necessary, fair to all parties and appropriate.

Once those comments are received, the **APDO** Board Representative will review their Initial Findings and Preliminary Decision in light of such comments, and then make a Final Decision. Both parties will be notified of the **APDO** Board Representative's Final Decision in writing within 7 days of the Review taking place.

The Final Decision will contain details of whether the original complaint is upheld, and if so, what steps we require the **APDO** member to take regarding resolving your complaint. We will allow the **APDO** member a reasonable period of time within which to take such action as is required (usually within 7 days of notification of the Final Decision), and that period of time will be detailed in the Final Decision document.

Where the **APDO** member fails to carry out such actions within the timescale required, and has not lodged an Appeal pursuant to step 5, their membership may be terminated by the **APDO** Board.

Where the original complaint is not upheld, we will explain the reasons in the Final Decision document.



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## Step 5 – Right of Appeal

Where you have followed steps 1 – 4 of the **APDO** complaints procedure and have received a Final Decision that you do not find satisfactory, you have a Final Right of Appeal within **APDO**. The **APDO** member against whom the complaint was lodged has the same Right of Appeal, if they are dissatisfied with the Final Decision of the **APDO** Board Representative.

If you wish to exercise this right, you must within 7 days of receiving notification of the final decision, notify **APDO** in writing of your wish to Appeal to the Board for a Review of the Final Decision.

In this instance, the requirement for the **APDO** member to undertake any actions or remedies as detailed in the Final Decision document will be suspended, pending the outcome of the Appeal.

## Step 6 – Appeal to the Board

Where the Right of Appeal is exercised in line with step 5, the full details of the complaint including any and all representations made and evidence gathered, will be submitted to three independent members of the Board – all of whom will have had no prior knowledge of or involvement in the investigation of your complaint.

Each of the three Board members will review the information, then decide whether to uphold the Final Decision of the Board Representative. The decision will be taken by majority vote.

Where the Final Decision is upheld, that decision and the remedies required pursuant to it, will stand and be binding on both parties. There is no further right of appeal.

Where the Board members do not uphold the Final Decision of the Board Representative, they will substitute their own Final Decision on Appeal, which will then be binding on both parties. There is no further right of appeal.



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## Failure to Comply with APDO decision

In the event that an **APDO** member fails to comply with a binding decision made as a result of the **APDO** complaints procedure, whether by the **APDO** Board Representative or the Board members on appeal, **APDO** would take such failure very seriously and would ultimately withdraw membership in the event of non-compliance.

## Statutory and other Rights

Nothing in the **APDO** policy on handling complaints affects any of your statutory rights as a consumer or any other statutory rights of yourself or the **APDO** member who is the subject of this complaint.

In the event that you have exhausted your rights under the **APDO** complaints procedure, you may still be entitled to take independent action through the judicial system. In such a case, we will advise you to seek independent legal advice, although we recommend that you follow the **APDO** complaints procedure in the first instance as this may resolve your complaint to your satisfaction.

## Remedies

Where a complaint is upheld, there are various remedies that **APDO** might require of the **APDO** member, taking into account the individual circumstances of the complaint, your own wishes and any representations made by the **APDO** member.

Remedies can include a formal apology by the **APDO** member (or in certain circumstances by **APDO**) and an explanation about what has happened, and such remedies may bring a satisfactory conclusion for you.

In other circumstances, appropriate remedial action may be required which would be designed to place you, as far as possible, in the position you would have been in had the circumstances for complaint not arisen.

**APDO** also has the right to require the **APDO** member to financially reimburse you, depending on the circumstances of your individual complaint. Any such financial reimbursement would be proportionate to your complaint, and fair to both parties.

In every complaint received, **APDO** accepts full responsibility for seeking to resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of both parties.



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## Learning from Complaints

It is important for **APDO** that we learn, progress and develop to help support our growing industry of professional declutterers and organisers in the UK.

To this end, we promise to learn any lessons from complaints made against our members, and to implement any policy changes to reflect such learning. We will let you know if we implement any policy changes as a result of your specific complaint.

The reputation, credibility and integrity of our profession are of paramount importance to **APDO** and, whatever the circumstances of your complaint, thank you for bringing this to our attention and allowing us the opportunity of finding a resolution.

Please note – any reference in this document to a notification, comment or other representation being given or received ‘in writing’ includes postal, electronic or any other appropriate form of written communication.

**APDO Board**