

## Letter from the President of West London Law Society to the President of The Law Society

12<sup>th</sup> July 2019

Dear Mr President

On behalf of the West London Law Society I wish to congratulate you on your election and wish you a pleasant and peaceful term of Office.

I wonder whether I can raise one particular issue which has been raised in our committee recently; the problems surrounding the Criminal Justice System and legal aid.

Whilst everyone accepts that the Treasury has not got a bottomless pocket, we are very concerned that the financial position in the criminal justice system, especially insofar as it affects the criminal defence community, is in serious danger of collapse within the foreseeable future.

For example, the 'heat map' shows that the age profile for duty solicitors is extremely high and may well rise as older solicitors retire or cease practising. Indeed, a number of senior solicitors say that they are trying to work out their exit strategies.

The number of new (young/junior) solicitors entering this vital area of law appears to be falling. In reality, it is not an attractive proposition to work at remuneration rates below those set in 1998, with additional responsibilities imposed by the Criminal Procedure Rules and the need to examine unused evidence for which little, if any, payment may be made.

The work-life balance for new and aspiring criminal defence solicitors is also unattractive.

Add to the above, the falling number of cases, police releasing suspects under investigation with no date for charging decisions, fewer Courts and greater travel distances [which together with waiting times are unpaid] and we feel that disaster is facing part of the profession.

It was Ian Kelsey who said, "Justice on the cheap, cheapens justice" and my view is that "You cannot sacrifice justice, access to justice and respect for the Courts and the rule of law on the altars of cost, speed and expediency".

I would hope, Mr President, that you and your team can persuade the Moj and LAA that changes are needed sooner rather than later. Might I also suggest that like military personnel, the Judiciary, NHS and emergency workers, civil and public servants and ... MPs, our remuneration should be set by a commission which is totally independent of the civil service/executive?

I would be happy to discuss these and similar issues with you if you so wish.

Yours sincerely

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