



News Release

4 February 2013

Legal aid for divorcing couples axed in April, warns solicitors Forshaws Davies Ridgway

It will be no April Fool's joke but on 1st April separating and divorcing couples will lose the right to claim legal aid, warns Warrington-based QualitySolicitors Forshaws Davies Ridgway (FDR).

This leaves less than two months for anyone on a low income to seek professional subsidised advice and representation on family law issues such as divorce, child contact, maintenance and financial issues.

After 1st April, only people who have suffered proven domestic violence or forced marriage will be able to apply for legal aid. Everyone else will have to fund their own legal work or represent themselves in court.

Audrey Venables, the firm's head of family law, believes the Government's decision is going to have dire consequences for many vulnerable people and low income families.

She said: "Since the previous Government first proposed this cut in 2009, the legal profession has been campaigning against the decision. We are very concerned it will leave the most vulnerable people in our society without the ability to access legal advice and representation.

"For example, a mother and father who cannot agree on the arrangements for their children will now have to represent themselves in court if they cannot afford a lawyer. As well as those on benefits, stay-at-home parents will also be disadvantaged because they may be forced to represent themselves against their more affluent partner who is able to hire a professional advocate.

“These cuts will cause huge inequalities and an imbalance of power for parents who have chosen to stay at home with their children. People will be tempted to cut corners and not get professional advice, potentially signing up to damaging arrangements which could badly affect them the rest of their lives.

“The loss of legal aid is also bound to have an adverse effect on court waiting times, as cases will inevitably take longer to be heard. The change is going to impact on everyone, not just those who lose the right to free representation,” she added.

To ease the pain for those who will lose access to free help, family lawyers at QualitySolicitors Forshaws Davies Ridgway have come up with a package of easy payment measures which will help spread the load. This includes a fixed fee menu of prices or a pay-as-you-go system, enabling clients to select help when they need it most.

Anyone who may be eligible to continue to seek legal aid due to domestic violence is encouraged to seek help from the police or their GP.

For more information or to make an appointment, please contact Lesley Butler on 01925 230000 or consult the website www.qualitysolicitors.com/fdr. Follow us on Twitter: @QSFDR

EDITOR’S NOTES:

About QualitySolicitors Forshaws Davies Ridgway

- FDR is a full service legal practice with offices in Warrington, Stockton Heath and Frodsham, divided into Quality Solicitors Forshaws Davies Ridgway and a separate FDR Commercial Department at 21 Bold Street, Warrington.
- 18 Partners
- Over 120 staff
- Top 15 practice in NW
- Top 200 practice in England & Wales
- Mortgage Strategy Awards 2009 & 2010 ‘Best Conveyancer’ Runner Up
- Services include: Commercial Law, Conveyancing, Criminal, Family, Litigation, Wills & Probate.

About QualitySolicitors:

- Launched in 2010, QualitySolicitors is a group of law firms across the country working as part of the QualitySolicitors brand. Only one firm per local area is selected to become a QS partner. Customer feedback forms an integral part of the selection process.
- QualitySolicitors' national network of lawyers consists of over 400 branches across England and Wales, including 150 Legal Access Points in WHSmith stores.
- QualitySolicitors lawyers are experts in their fields dealing with both consumer and SME legal matters. QualitySolicitors offer a personal, local service but with the assurance of a recognised national brand.
- In 2011 QS secured equity investment from Palamon Capital Partners, a private equity house with a £700m fund.
- QualitySolicitors has recently announced an exclusive partnership with US firm LegalZoom. QS firms will operate as panel members for all consumer and business LegalZoom work following their launch in the UK.
- QualitySolicitors launched a multi-million pound, national campaign in 2012, designed to shake up the legal world and help make solicitors' services more accessible to everyone. The campaign is the largest in the history of the legal profession. Running across multiple outlets it includes peak terrestrial television adverts, posters and billboards, press advertising, a social media campaign, and live stunts around the country to showcase the local expertise of each QualitySolicitors firm. In addition, QualitySolicitors is encouraging all local solicitors, whether they are part of the group or not, to rally together against 'supermarket law' with a call to arms of, 'Be vocal. Keep solicitors local'.

Issued by

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On behalf of Quality Solicitors Forshaws Davies Ridgway