

## The Public Access Scheme and Family Law

The way in which the legal sector delivers its services has evolved in recent years to meet the changing needs of the modern world. The high street firm of solicitors no longer wholly rely on traditional methods of securing new clients. Solicitors are competing on a national level through online social media, strategically placed advertisements, sophisticated websites, video blogs and public relation campaigns.

These changes are not exclusive to firms of solicitors. Barristers have adapted to become much more client facing. In times gone by it would be the norm for clients to seek legal services from a solicitor's firm in the first instance. The solicitor involved would often instruct a barrister to compliment and strengthen the legal team. The process of collecting the evidence and managing the client would be the responsibility of the solicitor. The barrister took on the role of advocate and advisor.

Over recent years there have been many changes to the way in which barristers offer their services to clients. Non more so than the introduction of the **public access scheme** which allows members of the public to make contact with a barrister directly through his or her chambers. It has been clear to us that this services works particularly well in **family law**. This has been a popular alternative because of the removal of Legal Aid in many aspects of family law.

At St Pauls Chambers we have a team of thirteen **family barristers** including two QCs (also known as Silks). We have conducted many family cases under the **public access scheme** such as parental responsibility, contact disputes, **child abduction/jurisdiction cases** and **care and adoption matters**. We have had great client feedback from these cases that has enabled us to strengthen our service even further. We are working with **organisations across the country** to assist mothers and fathers with their legal requirements. Many of our members attend meetings facilitated by **professional organisations**. The barristers provide **seminars and discussion workshops** to assist individuals and families requiring support and guidance through the legal process.

We have adapted our business model to ensure we are listening to our clients' and delivering a service that suits the way our clients are seeking legal advice.

We appreciate the process of making the first move to obtain advice from a **family barrister** can appear quite daunting but here at St Pauls Chambers the client will be met with a welcoming, professional **member of the team** to take details of the initial enquiry and direct the client to the most suitably experienced barrister. A step-by-step guide will be provided to the client with details of how the **public access scheme** works and what is to be expected. When the client and the barrister have been introduced there will often be a direct communication between them. If the barrister is unavailable to speak to because he or she is at court, the client will have access

to one of the team who will be available to **contact** during office hours from Monday to Friday. The client's needs are a priority to us and we understand that the legal arena is not a familiar place for most people. We aim to make it as efficient, cost effective and painless as we can for our clients.

We also understand there can be some concern over how the client's bills are generated when paying for legal services. **The fee structures** we adopt at St Pauls are straight forward and without hidden costs. When instructed on a piece of work it is usual we will charge an hourly rate. The client will be informed of how much it will cost before we engage in the work. Equally, if we are to attend court on the client's behalf we will scope the case and provide the client with an estimate of global costs and a breakdown of the cost per day with the preparation costs incurred to the point of hearing.

**The team** will guide you through the process and assist you with the options you have available to you.