

CLC Conference

23rd January 2019

Janet Paraskeva – Opening remarks

Good morning. I am very glad indeed to welcome you all here today.

As I was reviewing the programme for today and the topics we will be looking at it really brought home to me, once again what a wide waterfront property lawyers cover.

You may well be specialist lawyers but that certainly doesn't mean that you are narrowly focused.

We're lucky to have some excellent speakers with us today.

With them we will be exploring issues that will change the way you practice and change your businesses in the medium term.

We will also be sharing useful and practical information that we hope you can take back into your businesses right away.

But before we get into the substance of the day, I want to look very briefly at what has been happening since we last met and what the coming years may bring.

The environment we are all in is certainly unsettled.

And as your responses to our Annual Regulatory Return found there are concerns about the impact of Brexit on the property market.

But that survey also showed a profession in good shape.

With a degree of optimism about the future and confidence that your specialisation creates opportunities and advantages.

In 2018 we were delighted to welcome into CLC regulation the first firms who have come across from SRA regulation.

Whether it is coming across as a whole or hiving off their conveyancing practice we welcome these new firms who are committed to long-term success and developing prosperous businesses for the benefit of the consumer.

I believe we have some attendees here from other firms who are considering this move and I welcome you today.

I know that many of you have been looking at how best to implement the requirements to empower consumers through better information to guide their choice of lawyer.

I am pleased that there has been such a positive response to the new rules we have introduced and thank you for engaging with us on this.

We try to be very open with you the regulated community about our approach, ideas and concerns.

And we really do rely on you being open with us.

We aim to support practices to achieve compliance wherever possible before we resort to enforcement action.

I know from what you tell me that you value the relationship you have with your Regulatory Supervision Managers.

And I believe this approach is one of the core things which sets us apart as a Regulator and ensures that, as a result, we continue to offer the highest standards of consumer protection.

At this conference last year, I announced our new five-year strategy.

One year into that strategy, I and the Council believe the CLC is making good progress.

The second year of our strategy will continue our focus on the future of conveyancing and probate to ensure that regulation positively supports innovation and the development of thriving businesses.

We might be very well-positioned, but we cannot be complacent.

The results of the annual regulatory return identified areas where as a profession we need to see change.

Our monitoring of the individuals working under CLC regulation reveals a persistent challenge in relation to career progression for women and participation overall by black and minority ethnic people.

We need to see what we can do as a regulator to have more impact and better promote diversity and inclusion.

We need to see how we can improve the support we can offer to firms so you can develop inclusive recruitment and progression policies and procedures.

To do this we need to gain a fuller picture of where we are now.

So we have commissioned an independent research organisation to examine where we are.

To do this they will be issuing a survey which will include the governing Council and committees of the CLC, CLC Staff, all the individuals we regulate and all employees in CLC-regulated practices.

This will come you at the beginning of February and it is essential that you complete the survey fully yourselves.

Please also do all that you can to ensure that staff in your businesses do likewise.

Results will be totally anonymised, and all data will be handled by the agency, but the results will help us prepare for a review of our Equality and Diversity Code and provide better support to you as individuals and as managers of teams and firms.

As some of you may know, the CLC developed a Client Charter some years ago.

With the passage of time, and considering the Informed Choice requirements, we believe can do more to make this a useful document that summarises for consumers what they can expect from CLC licensed property lawyers.

We want to provide an easily digestible overview to give customers confidence and help differentiate you from other lawyers.

And we want you to have an opportunity to have a say in its development.

So today we are launching a consultation on a draft revised charter and we need your input.

We want your feedback on the content and any ideas you may have for improving it. Once it is agreed we will look to launch it later in the spring.

Do get involved, this is your opportunity to have your say.

So, what about today?

As I have said, one of the defining strands of the CLC's approach is that we want you to succeed as businesses.

We know that you are all different, with different business models and different approaches.

And our regulation is designed to facilitate that difference.

But of course, there are challenges, issues, potential changes in the broader environment that you all need to be aware of.

We have a full agenda today and we've tried to make sure that we cover a wide range of different topics.

I am delighted that we will shortly be hearing from the Housing Minister, Heather Wheeler, MP, from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

I am grateful to her for making time to get our discussions started.

Then our first plenary discussion will continue the theme of improving homebuying and selling.

I look forward to hearing how our panel will respond to the Minister.

We must recognise that not everything we deal with is quite so uplifting though.

So as the Government's Economic Crime Strategic Board has just met for the first time, we will be exploring what changes may be happening in the world of Anti Money Laundering

and how you can best protect yourself and stop giving criminals a cloak of legitimacy for their illicit cash.

During the coffee and lunch breaks I have suggested that the Council members make themselves available to speak to you in a more informal setting. You will find them dotted around the main refreshment area, and I would recommend you take advantage of this opportunity meet them, ask them questions and let them have your thoughts on the industry we regulate.

After our first break we move into our breakout sessions that will each be repeated three times. You have a coloured dot on your name badge which identifies the order in which you're due to attend the sessions. We'll put a slide up later to help you be in the right place at the right time.

The last of the three breakout sessions takes place after lunch, from 12.35 -1.35.

After that we'll be back into plenary session here to look at some of the new and emerging routes to becoming a CLC Lawyer and how we can make sure we have a good pipeline of qualified practitioners joining the profession.

After our second coffee break, we turn to something new and different. The world of housebuilding is changing as new techniques begin to deliver modular offsite manufactured homes. We'll look at what these modern methods of construction and what will they mean for property lawyers in the future.

This should be a fascinating way to end the day.

I encourage you again not to be shy. Put your questions to any of our speakers and do speak to the CLC Council Members and staff who are here today.

Before I invite the Minister to the stage, I have one final announcement.

Later this year it will be four years since I first had the privilege of taking the Chair of the CLC.

I have accepted the Council's invitation to take on a second and final four-year term as their Chair.

I am delighted that I will continue to work with the Council and staff of the CLC, forging ahead with our five-year strategy and continuing to drive progress on the CLC's goals. I hope this will be a successful period for the CLC and the firms that we regulate.

Now I'd like to invite Heather Wheeler MP to the stage.