

The criminal practitioners at 9 St John Street welcome the fact that the Government are finally showing the first signs of recognising the damage that further cuts to Legal Aid will do. We applaud the work of the Criminal Bar Association and welcome the opportunity for the membership of the criminal bar to vote on the Ministry's proposals. In the short time available for discussion before the proposal was published these chambers indicated their resistance to the detail of it. This approach was widely echoed across this Circuit. We believe any concession, current or future, will be as a result of unity.

We continue to oppose all the damaging restrictions that are intended in the area of Legal Aid and continue to support our solicitor colleagues in our joint fight. Individual members of these chambers will continue to act with the solicitor profession to defeat the cuts imposed on the provision of publicly funded work. It is impossible to predict what action will be required but members of these chambers will take individual decisions of what can be done to assist and will not be restricted in what they do by the Ministry of Justice. We will continue to do what is right for the Bar, for our solicitor colleagues and for the preservation of a criminal justice system with quality representation for all at its very core.

Whilst the profession reflect on the proposal by the Ministry of Justice and whilst the matter has yet to be decided by the membership it is the intention of members of these chambers to continue with the policy of "no returns". We gave a commitment to that policy to the rest of the legal profession and will see that through. We also restate that members of these chambers will not accept VHCC instructions. The rates have been cut below the irreducible minimum and we would not wish to abandon the many practitioners who have already refused to work at such rates.

We welcome the continued efforts of all solicitors to oppose the unnecessary and unfair cuts they currently face. We invite any solicitor who wishes to do so to contact any member of our team to discuss the way ahead. We are grateful to all of our instructing solicitors for their assistance and understanding thus far. We undertake that this will always be reciprocated.

It has always been the way of 9 St John Street to see strength in unity. That has never been more relevant than it is now for the whole legal profession.