

## Getting the best from your solicitor

It helps to know how your solicitor works and how to get the best out of him or her.

Most solicitors, particularly the better ones, are very busy. They will usually have two or three dozen cases happening at any time. Each one of those may involve the solicitor in time being spent in court or in meetings. Court appearances and meetings may well take half a day or a day out of the office. Larger firms tend to have more people specialising in the same area of law. There may be somebody else to talk to. You may have more than one solicitor working on your case, so there is a better chance of getting through to somebody.

If you have problems speaking to your solicitor, fix up a time in his or her diary. This can be done through your solicitor's secretary.

### **What do you want to ask?**

When the time comes and you talk to your solicitor, it is often difficult to remember all the points you want to raise.

It helps to make a list of these before your meeting or telephone discussion. Your solicitor will be used to this approach.

If you want to have your solicitor think about a topic beforehand – and this may be helpful if it is complex – then write or e-mail beforehand with the topic you want to discuss.

### **Organising the paperwork**

In most cases, there is a staggering amount of paperwork involved. It is as important for you to keep this under control as it is for your solicitor.

Have files prepared so that all the correspondence is kept in date order. Keep financial documents separate and prepare an index of them.

Flag up letters of advice. You will need to read these more than once so that you can digest all the points raised.

### **Preparing for the first meeting**

Before you see your solicitor for the first time, it helps to set out basic information about you and your family.

Prepare a schedule with the following information and send it to your solicitor beforehand if possible (if not, bring it with you):

- full names and dates of birth for you, your spouse and the children;
- full addresses of the home and any other properties, including postcodes;
- details of your occupation and your spouse's occupation, with full details of employers;
- date of marriage;
- date when you started to live together, if it was before you married;
- date when you separated (if you have);
- details, if you know them, of your savings, pensions and debts; and
- a list of your bank accounts.

If you have time, it can also help to know what the history and background of the marriage is. Do not go into too much detail. It will help though to know what property each of you brought into the marriage. Did you separately own houses or flats? What other assets did you bring into the marriage, or have you inherited assets or cash from your original families?

## General tips

- Work with your solicitor, not against him or her. It should feel like teamwork.
- If you do not understand what your solicitor is doing, ask for a full explanation – that is what your solicitor is there for.
- Respond quickly to requests for information or for instructions. This helps your solicitor to keep up the momentum and keeps costs down.
- Try to anticipate when to set time aside for completing major tasks, like putting together financial disclosure. Your solicitor will be able to help you with this.