



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

HIS HONOUR JUDGE MARTIN DANCEY
DESIGNATED FAMILY JUDGE
JUDGE OF THE COURT OF PROTECTION

27 November 2019

Dear All

Support Through Court

I am sending this letter to all Dorset solicitors and local chambers whose members practice regularly in the Bournemouth civil and family courts.

You may have heard of the decision to withdraw Support Through Court (until recently the Personal Support Unit) from Bournemouth by the end of March 2020. This coincides with a message from the President of the Family Division encouraging the roll out of STC across all 52 Designated Family Judge court centres. In that message the President referred to the significant qualitative difference in the service offered to litigants in person in those courts where STC is offered and those where it is not.

STC has been extremely successful in Bournemouth. The 24 committed core volunteers deal with about 200 contacts from litigants in person each month. The volunteers and their excellent manager would wish to carry on providing a service.

The judges and court staff at Bournemouth endorse the success of STC here. The loss of it would leave litigants in person without an important source of emotional support and information in and out of court. That would impact not only on the litigants in person themselves, but also on the court, you and your clients.

Julie Ridgley (Dorset Ops Manager) and I have had lengthy constructive conversations with STC's CEO, Eileen Pereira. She is hugely regretful at the decision to close Bournemouth. It comes as a result of a funding gap and the relative numbers of contacts here compared to bigger court centres. On a pro rata basis I suspect Bournemouth volumes compare favourably with those bigger centres, but the decision is based on economies of scale.

STC would be very keen to keep support going in Bournemouth if possible. They would be prepared to assist with recruitment and training. They are considering the possibility of a franchise arrangement. If there were a sufficient inflow of sustainable local funding immediately they may be in a position to review the decision to close altogether. If STC is able to address its funding gap they would also hope to be able to reopen Bournemouth in the next few years.

In his speech the PFD said it would not be unreasonable to invite local solicitors' firms and chambers to contribute to enable the roll out of STC. The immediate question is whether we can guarantee sufficient sustainable income to save STC Bournemouth.

I am waiting for a costs breakdown for STC locally. For the purpose of this letter an appropriate ballpark figure would be c£40,000 a year.

We know how committed the local professions are. And so I am very much hoping that with your goodwill and financial support we can raise a sufficient sustainable income to keep STC going.

The crisis is an immediate one. The 31 March 2020 is a backstop deadline. We could lose STC before then unless we act now.

So I am asking your firm or chambers to help now. Would you please email me at HHJ.Martin.Dancey@ejudiciary.net and let me know whether you can help and to what extent?

The PFD has seen a draft of this letter. He has asked me to say that he saw our local STC in action when he visited in the summer and is particularly keen to encourage local family law professionals and others to offer financial support so that the STC unit at Bournemouth can continue its important work.

With thanks in advance for your support in this urgent and important cause.

Yours

MARTIN DANCEY