

## **VIEW FROM THE PRESIDENT'S CHAMBERS (11)**

### **The process of reform: on the cusp of history**

#### **Sir James Munby, President of the Family Division**

We stand on the cusp of history. 22 April 2014 marks the largest reform of the family justice system any of us have seen or will see in our professional lifetimes. On 22 April 2014 almost all the relevant provisions of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 and the Children and Families Act 2014 come into force. On 22 April 2014 the Family Court comes into existence and the Family Proceedings Court passes into history. On 22 April 2014 we see the implementation of the final version of the revised PLO in public law cases (PLO 2014) and the implementation in private law cases of the Child Arrangements Programme (CAP 2014).

Taken as a whole, these reforms amount to a revolution. Central to this revolution has been – has had to be – a fundamental change in the cultures of the family courts. This is truly a cultural revolution.

There are many whose contribution to this revolution needs to be recognised and marked. Pride of place must go to David Norgrove, the mastermind of the Family Justice Review. Only those who have worked closely with him will know just how inspired and inspirational his work has been – and continues to be. His achievement has been colossal. It is little over four years ago that the Family Justice Review was set up. In that short time it has reported, it has seen its recommendations accepted first by Government and then by Parliament and then implemented under the collaborative leadership of the judiciary and the Family Justice Board, also chaired by Norgrove. Has any comparable body of reform ever been introduced so quickly, so smoothly and so effectively?

Inspired choices were made by my predecessors in identifying the judges best suited to bring this process to such a successful conclusion. Sir Andrew McFarlane and Sir Ernest Ryder are both immensely gifted but their greatest skills lie in rather different

directions. Sir Mark Potter P had the insight to recognise that Andrew was the ideal judge to take part in the Family Justice Review. Sir Nicholas Wall P had equal insight in recognising that Ernest was the ideal judge to be appointed Judge in Charge of Modernisation. It is gratifying that each has since been elevated to the Court of Appeal which has played – and will continue to play – a vital role in ensuring that the process of reform is kept on its proper track.

I recently finished my self-imposed task of visiting every care centre. I have found these visits exhilarating and uplifting. They have been both very enjoyable and very useful. But they have brought home to me just how enthusiastically and with such determination and commitment everybody in the family justice system – and I mean *everybody*; local authorities, CAFCASS, court staff, judges (in whom, of course, I include the magistrates), justices clerks and the legal professions – has embraced the process of reform.

It is always invidious to single some out for particular praise but there are two groups who require special recognition.

The first are the Designated Family Judges. They are a remarkable body of dedicated men and women to whom we should all be grateful. They are the crucial hinge on which the entire family justice system turns. Their local leadership, drive and initiative are vital if the system is to work as it must. They have proved tireless in driving the process of reform forward throughout the areas for which they are responsible. They deserve our gratitude for their cheerful willingness to undertake a task that is both thankless and onerous.

Finally, and not least, a particular word of thanks is due to the members of the Family Procedure Rules Committee for all their hard work in making the enormous mass of amendments required to the Rules of Court and Practice Directions in order to deliver the reforms, and to the many officials from the Ministry of Justice without whose great technical knowledge and consummate drafting skills none of the work of the Committee would have been possible.