



PRESIDENT OF THE  
FAMILY DIVISION



HM Courts &  
Tribunals Service

To: Designated Family Judges  
District Judges  
All Staff

08 May 2018

Dear Judges and Staff

### **Apply for a divorce: Online service goes public**

Over the weekend, we publicly announced that the online divorce application has moved from private to public beta. This means that, while still being tested and improved, the new online divorce application is publicly available to individuals across England and Wales through GOV.UK

As part of our £1bn reform programme to modernise the courts and tribunals service, we have been developing a simplified and intuitive online application process for divorce, which can be used by anyone without legal representation wishing to apply for a divorce across England and Wales, making the process easier to understand for separating couples.

### **Progress so far**

We have been testing the online divorce application with unrepresented individuals over the last year, starting as a small pilot in the East Midlands before expanding to a restricted national pilot. Support and administration has been delivered by specialist HMCTS teams at four sites at Liverpool, Nottingham, Southampton and Stoke. Applicants were invited to fill in the divorce application form online and provide feedback, which enabled us to continuously improve the form and the experience of people using it.

Throughout the last year additional features have been added, most recently in January 2018 when changes were made to allow applicants to upload their documents, pay and submit their divorce application online. This improvement increased digital take-up by 130% compared to the initial version of the online application form. Since January, we have received over 1,100 digital divorce petitions through the new and improved online channel.

Our commitment to improving the service during testing has seen the previous high level of applications which contained errors (and could therefore not be issued) drop from 40% on paper to seven percent with the first version of the online system to a current level of less than one percent. This includes built in validation which will address the issues that have caused recent comment in relation to errors made in a small number of cases.

Improvements like these - and the ability to complete the application more easily - are already saving both applicants and court staff significant amounts of time. This will continue to increase as the service is expanded.

The online service captures user satisfaction through a survey after their petition is complete. More than nine out of ten of users said they were happy with the service provided.

### **Putting divorce applicants first**

We worked closely with the people and organisations who use and advise those going through a divorce in order to understand what areas of the process could be improved. Those going through a divorce are at the centre of the design of the new service and we've regularly tested the design of the online application to make sure that it is as helpful and intuitive as it can be.

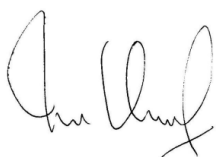
### **Future development**

Our project team will continue to develop other parts of the divorce process in a phased approach: Acknowledgement of Service; Decree Nisi; and Decree Absolute. We will test these in private beta (with a small number of selected applicants), before we finally join up the constituent parts to provide a fully transformed end-to-end digital service for divorce.

We are also currently working with legal professionals to develop an online application for them to use which will allow them to submit a petition on behalf of a client online. We hope to start testing this with a small group of professional users in Summer 2018.

### **Further information**

If you would like further information about the divorce project, please do not hesitate to email [Divorce@Justice.gov.uk](mailto:Divorce@Justice.gov.uk)



Sir James Munby

President of the Family Division  
and Head of Family Justice



Susan Acland-Hood

Chief Executive,  
HM Courts & Tribunals Service