

CONFERENCE

THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE OF ENGLAND AND WALES  
(The Right Honourable Baroness Carr of Walton-on-the-Hill)

on

Tuesday, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2026

In

THE LIBRARY, ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE

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**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Just before you start, I just wanted to say something. I don't know whether you all know, but it is in the news, but one of our county court bailiffs, Jeff Blair, was tragically killed last week in a terrible incident whilst doing his job up in County Durham, and I just wanted formally to send on behalf of the judiciary our deepest condolences to him, his family and his colleagues. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thanks everyone for coming here today. Welcome to the library. I don't think we've been here before. Great to see you all again. Just a few ground rules to remind you, the Lady Chief Justice will be able to answer all of your questions in good time. There are a couple of reminders of areas to stray away from, which is anything that's government policy and anything that's case related. You'd be wasting your question if you went there. As always, there'll be a transcript available afterwards, which will be published on the judicial website and sent to you all later, so you can check against your shorthand. When we get to questions, if you raise your hand and then also just say your name briefly, and your outlet, so that we are all reminded where you're coming from. But at the moment we're going to have an opening address. Over to the Chief.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Opening address sounds very grand. Are you all right with that, Lisa?

**CHAIR:** Yes of course.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Well, good morning, everybody. Thank you for joining me today in this truly magnificent library. It's the library of the Royal Courts of Justice. It's been here since 1882 and actually, when it was first used, as you can see from the amazing plaque up there, it was the Library of the Bar and the barristers, rather than going back to chambers, would come here to do their work so that there was minimal delay in case progression. But it became a judicial library in 2004 and is now used as such. For those of you who are film buffs, you may recognise it from *The Bletchley Circle*. So, it pops up now and again in the odd film, and it's just a magnificent setting.

It's part of a theme for me, which is to try and make better use of some of the spaces that we've got in this amazing building. So, we're starting these brilliant exhibitions in the Great Hall. You may have noticed we had the quilt exhibition; we had a Law Commission exhibition. We've currently got Fine Cell. We've got a life-size replica of a two-person cell from HMP Bullingdon made up from tapestry in the Great Hall for you to see. We've got lots of exciting ideas coming down the line, including a Monumental Welsh Women exhibition, which is going to go up there. So, I hope you're all enjoying the space. It seemed to me to be a particularly apt place for us to meet this morning, because it is also the National Year of Reading and I thought, in a room full of wordsmiths, what could be better than gathering here? So, I don't know where we'll be next year, but this year ere we are.

So, turning to a few words, if I may. All good things come in threes, and this is my third annual press conference. It's been another year of very hard work for the courts and tribunals. We've been dealing in pressurised environments with increasingly complex and high-profile cases. Today, I think it happens to be, coincidentally, a very good example of that. We've got the Associated litigation, which is still going on. We've got Adams, farmers, MP complaints, and bin strikes for good measure. So, a good example of the sort of level and volume of work that we have been doing.

It has also been a time of change, hasn't it? We've had a new Lord Chancellor. We've had three reviews: Gauke, Leveson Part 1, Leveson Part 2. The Sentencing Act comes into force on Sunday. We've had the Renters Reform Act and we've had the Employment Rights Act. In this context, I have really welcomed the focus on justice as a whole and the broader conversations that have been going on around the importance of our judicial system in all jurisdictions and, of course, the rule of law. So, these changes have had that knock-on effect, I think.

It seemed to me now, coming up to something like three years in office, it was the right time just to pause and see how far we have come since starting out. You may remember my three priority areas: recognising and promoting our strengths, fostering judicial unity and a more inclusive judicial culture, and then tackling backlogs whilst maintaining quality, and I wanted to pick out a very few brief pointers under each of those headings.

So, firstly, open justice. That of course lies at the heart of increasing public understanding of our work. Last year, 2025, saw the highest number of broadcasting of sentencing remarks, 59 broadcasts that year alone, and our total now is, I think, something near 160. There's one area of increasing transparency, however, that you may not know about, and that is I am very keen to lift the veil on the work of the Judicial College, and so we are increasing transparency about the type and extent of training that we deliver to judges in the courts and tribunals. The College trains, I think, 24,000 judicial and other legal office holders. Last year, 1,700 training events, 31,000 attendees. The quality of the training is, I believe, second to none. It ranges from judge craft to new legislation, to security, the Equal Treatment Bench Book, and I think people should know more about it. Obviously, there's a lot of focus at the moment on violence against women and girls, domestic abuse, and that sort of thing, and I've been inviting ministers and, in fact, the Victims Commissioner and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to come and see the work that we're doing, to see the experts we bring in, to see the trauma-informed approach that we take, and to look at the work of the College across the board.

The College also has an international training programme, which is pretty extraordinary. We've had a long-standing partnership, for example, with the Malaysian judiciary, but we have trained both online and in-person judges in Albania, Ukraine, Uganda, Nigeria, Asia, North America and, of course, we have heavy involvement with the European judicial networks. So, year of the College for me, I want to showcase its work. I'm hoping to have an event in June to do just that.

The second broad heading, judicial unity, and of course, now we have got really promising forward momentum here with the laying of the bill, the Courts and Victims Bill, which will bring tribunals and courts together under one judiciary. It's more than just rearranging the desks, the chairs, it's really recognising the unity of the work between courts and tribunals, getting more judges to sit across different jurisdictions, but focusing on best practice and an inclusive culture.

We are, in that vein, continuing to work on diversity. I'm delighted that we were able for the first time to publish our data on judges with a disability for the first time. Last year has seen the launch of the UK Association of Black Judges and also this year Judicial Office Holders with Disabilities. I think these associations are going to be really important, unifying organisations with a primary voice for those that they represent to help us shape our work in diversity in these important areas.

The third area, which is backlogs. Well, you all know all too well that the backlogs in the Crown Court and the Magistrates' Courts are at an all-time high. I strongly welcome the Government's decision to allow the Crown Courts to sit uncapped when it comes to sitting days and for magistrates to sit to capacity. This development, this outcome, is the product of constructive negotiations with the judiciary, and we are absolutely now ready, willing, and able to use this new flexibility to maximum effect. There's obviously an enormous amount of work going on with magistrates. There's a review of governance, there's a recruitment drive being run by the Ministry of Justice, and I just wanted to take a moment to pay tribute to their resilience and willingness to engage. They are volunteers, that's so easy to forget, and they are truly dedicated and play a pivotal role in the criminal justice system and also the family justice system.

In the context of productivity, backlogs, maintaining quality, you will, I hope, all have heard about the Criminal Courts Improvement Group. We had a huge conference a week or two ago with cross-agency, cross-jurisdictional agencies all coming together. Modernisation of the criminal courts under the auspices of the group continues at pace. We are looking at a new national listing

framework. HMCTS is looking at developing a new AI-based listing tool, but lots of work that actually is picked up on in the Leveson Part 2 review, work on looking for efficiencies on pre-sentencing reports and the like. So, a lot of work going on to dig into the backlogs in that space. Obviously, all jurisdictions are modernising, including digitisation in the civil courts. Happy to talk more about that if you're interested.

So, what I really wanted to emphasise is that there has been a lot of work going on in all of these three priority areas that I identified back in 2023-24. Lots of work is up and running, but there is still a lot of work to do. We have launched in the last few months several new five-year plans. That includes a plan on diversity and inclusion, but also a new strategy on international. You know that the last year for me had a real focus on international work. That's been a real highlight for me. We had a big event last May celebrating our contribution to the rule of law around the world. This international presence that we have – on a tiny budget, by the way – enhances our global reputation, shines a light on the value of English law, its certainty, its flexibility, and its widespread international adoption, and I've spoken at length over the last year and beyond about the enormous value that this all brings into the UK economy.

We have had lots of outgoing visits. I was in Johannesburg for J20 last summer, Commonwealth events in Malta, for example, opening of the legal year in France, and lots of incoming visits. I think we had 40 incoming visits between January '24 and May '25: Japan, Nepal, Tanzania, Australia, Ghana, Turkmenistan, Albania, France, Moldova, Malaysia. The list goes on, and, of course, we welcomed the German First Lady in the context of the state visit this year. That was a really personal pleasure to me, I'm half German, and it was great to have her here in the Royal Courts of Justice and have a special event with her moving through Court 4, moving through the building, into a private event where I had a room full of female judges talking to her about her own experience as a very distinguished public law judge. So that was a meeting of mine and a very happy occasion.

So, drawing things together, a few reflections over the last year, but now going forward. I spoke at the beginning about change. It has been a year of change. It's going to be a year of change going forwards, and I think it's that word that I would choose to describe how I feel going forward in 2026. It's a year that does mark a moment of real transition with the retirements of the Master of the Rolls, the President of the Family Division, and the President of the King's Bench Division. We are losing giants of the judiciary. We owe them each a great and enormous debt of gratitude.

Change inevitably brings reflection, but I am really confident in the depth of talent within the judiciary. In October, a new leadership team will be in place, and we are ready for the next chapter, and I am really still enjoying it all. So, those were the points I really wanted to make in opening. As Lisa has said, I'm very happy to take questions. So, fire away.

**CHAIR:** Lizzie.

**LIZZIE DEARDEN:** With the increasing burden that's going to come on Magistrates' Courts and also the increasing powers they have, do you think it will be sustainable for them to continue to be volunteers in the way that they have been for so many centuries, and would you say anything to concerns among some in the legal community about a potential gap in quality and consistency between magistrates and Crown Court judges who now perform the functions that magistrates may be taking on?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes. So, taking the second point first, I've got every confidence in the magistrates and the Crown Court judges to step up to challenges they'll be facing. I mean, one of my main roles in the context of criminal justice reform is to support the judges and make the case for adequate resources, which I've been making ever since the Leveson reviews were coming out, in particular when it comes to training, legal advisors, and the like for magistrates. So, I don't harbour any real concerns about that. The recruitment drive that's being run by the Ministry of

Justice, which of course we're engaging with as appropriate, is showing positive signs. I mean, the numbers that are needed to recruit on current modelling are very, very large. But there are steps being taken, for example, to speed up the recruitment process, which has been very clunky historically.

So, lots of work to go on, going on to recruit the magistrates and ensure that quality. As I've said, and one of the reasons I touched on the Judicial College, Lizzie, is because I used to be director of magistrates training actually, way back when, before it was brought into the auspices of the Judicial College. But the quality of training and the availability of resources to provide the training is going to be absolutely fundamental for magistrates and Crown Court judges.

Going to your first point, which is sustainability, I think that magistrates are fiercely proud actually of their status as volunteering, and there is a real benefit in that because it emphasizes, amongst other things, their enormous sense of public duty and the public-spirited nature of what they do. But I absolutely do think that there is a case to be made for making sure that we look after them properly when they do serve. So, they need to have proper IT, they need to have proper working computers, they need to have proper resources and support at home if they have to work at home away from court.

There's a lot of work going on in what's called an uplift programme at the moment, which is looking at not only encouraging employers to release their brightest and their best. So, for example, in Surrey, there's a fantastic scheme called I think the Employers' Awards Scheme, where employers who release their employees to sit as magistrates are getting recognition. But also, to do more to recognise magistrates, I provide, it may sound like a small thing, but actually, I think it's quite important. I provide certificates for magistrates who serve 10, 20, 30, 40 years, better ways of recognising the service that they have provided, acknowledging their contribution, speaking about them publicly in the way that we are and I have been throughout the year and then, also, as I said, making sure that the conditions in which they work are adequate and that they are properly looked after.

I've also been doing quite a lot of work, Lizzie, in the context of One Judiciary, of bringing the magistrates and Crown Court judges together more. Sometimes, when they're in the same building, that should be quite easy. Sometimes they're in separate buildings in a particular area, and it makes it more difficult. But I think interaction between magistrates and Crown Court judges is really important. I know I'm giving a long answer, but in the Salisbury courts, which are going to open next year, of course, magistrates' courts will be sitting alongside the Crown Courts and the Civil Courts.

**CHAIR:** I'm wondering if we should go to Joshua now.

**JOSHUA ROZENBERG:** *[Via remote link]* Yes, good morning, thank you very much for agreeing to let me attend remotely. I know you don't talk about politics, but I do also know that you mentioned the Sentencing Act coming into effect next week, more suspended sentences, and of course we have got the Courts and Tribunals Bill reducing the availability of jury trial. On the Courts and Tribunals Bill, do the judges get involved in helping the Government to make sure that the legislation works properly, and on the Sentencing Act, are you concerned about Section 20 Sentencing Council which gives the justice secretary a veto and gives you a veto too and are you worried that perhaps giving a minister direct control over sentencing for individual offences is going to politicise the system?

**JONATHAN AMES:** For those of us in the back also could you summarise?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** So can I say what I heard? So, I heard, I can't comment on policy, but what am I doing to help the Government with the detail of bringing in the Sentencing Act and

the Courts and Tribunals Bill? Have I got that right, Joshua? And the second one was I think the Clause 17 18 Sentencing Council legislation that isn't currently in force that came in under the old Act, does that risk politicising the Sentencing Council? Is that a fair summary, Joshua?

**JOSHUA:** Yes.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Great. So, absolutely. My role in the criminal justice reform space has been purely operational. So, as you say, I have not engaged in policy matters. But, what I can do is explain what will be needed to implement, and there is a huge amount of detail. I mean, one of the things in my head at the moment is the sheer volume of change. I mentioned Renters Reform Act, I mentioned Employment Rights Reform Act. The amount of change, both in terms of training but also operationally, is huge and what I have been asking for, and I think this is a matter of record, is for there to be a blueprint, a clear plan, that sequences the introduction of the changes. So, obviously, we don't know what Parliament's finally going to decide, but as soon as we know what is happening, what I need to see is a sort of, cradle-to-grave is the wrong thing. I like to look at it as a building: the foundations, the cement that goes over the foundations. Then you put the electrics in, you put the plumbing in, then you do some decoration, you do some interior design, and then you, you know, you give the key to the front door.

Everything is connected from prisons to probation to what goes on in the courts, and the Magistrates' Court, the legal advisors, Prisoner Escort and Custody Services, deliveries, sentencing, prisons. So, it's all joined up, and I think we've got to have a coherent implementation plan that makes sure that we make the changes that reflect Parliament's will are introduced as effectively as possible. So, there is an enormous amount going on, and as you would expect, you know, we know our business very well, we know how the courts operate. You very kindly go into the courts yourselves sometimes to see how it operates, and you can see how many bits of the jigsaw puzzle there are to put together.

So far as the Sentencing Council is concerned, I haven't mentioned, but I will mention the passing of Lord Justice William Davis, who I know was known to many of you. He was an icon, and I miss him enormously, Joshua, in the criminal justice space, we all do. Lady Justice May is now the new chair, and the Council is now up to full complement in terms of its membership. We are now beginning to see the first guidelines coming through the new consultation process.

At the moment, Joshua, I see no political jeopardy to the running of the Sentencing Council. I think everything will depend on how the clauses are operated. If they are operated in a constitutionally acceptable way, I do not see a real threat to the independence of the Council. There is the potential for it if things are not operated in the right way, but at the moment, I am not troubled by it. I'm on record as saying I regret being in the position we're in with the new legislation, but that's a different point because we are now where we are, and I think we're all determined to make it work.

I don't need to remind anybody in this room the incredibly important role that these guidelines play. I don't think anybody suggests anything other than the work output of the council is absolutely first rate. Improvements in consistency, it's part of the furniture of any Magistrates Court, of any Crown Court, any judge sitting in those jurisdictions starts with the sentencing guidelines.

The sentencing guidelines also were intended to make it a lot easier for barristers and solicitors to advise their clients on likely outcomes. So, when it comes to, for example, looking to increase efficiencies and get into the backlogs with more early guilty pleas when there should be a guilty plea, the Sentencing Council guidelines enable an advisor to say, "Look, it's going to be a category two offence, 2A offence, that's the range you're looking at." So, there are all sorts of benefits from the guidelines, and it's full steam ahead at the moment, Joshua.

**CHAIR:** Jonathan.

**JONATHAN AMES:** You said earlier that you are taking a purely operational approach to the potential of the Government's plans for jury trials. On that point then, have you any concerns that whereas jurors would be anonymous and their verdicts would have, may indeed have irritated defendants and their families, judges will not be anonymous and will have to make their route to decision—

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, you are spot on. So, this is a point I've made loud and clear.

**JONATHAN AMES:** Are you concerned about judicial safety and also I understand, and maybe you can confirm this, that you have on this point written to Crown Court judges telling them not to comment on these proposals? Is there, I mean the standard position is that judges would need senior judicial authority to comment perhaps on any of that, but did you feel that this needed a special reminder?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, so I think it was the SPJ, senior presiding judge, who wrote to all the judges. They don't really need telling because they all know jolly well that no serving judge is going to comment on policy matters, but I couldn't be prouder of the way the judges have reacted to the current space, if I can put it that way. They have complied punctiliously with the convention of not speaking out. That is difficult because, look, they've got opinions, and you might say we know our business better than anybody else, but they have stood by the convention. I commend them for that, and I'm very proud of it. It's not, as I say, always been easy, but they have done it.

On security, you're absolutely right. I see it not only as appropriate, but my responsibility to make it plain as I can that I have grave security concerns if there are going to be judge-alone trials. As you say, it's a very different environment to be working in, and judges usually sit in one main centre, so they're going in and out of one centre on a daily basis rather than, for example, High Court judges who will be sitting all around the country in England and Wales. So, I've made the case very, very strongly that this needs to be considered and resourced properly and catered for properly.

**JONATHAN AMES:** Are you satisfied that the Government is listening to that?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** I have been assured that that has all been heard and understood, and that the resources will be made available.

**HAROON SIDDIQUE:** You mentioned, obviously, about current judges not speaking. There was a letter from a retired circuit judge in *The Guardian* yesterday about the dearth of black circuit judges, and in the context of the reforms, which we see more people, well, people being judged by a single judge rather than a jury of their peers, which might be more diverse, in that context, is judicial diversity going fast enough? Is it improving fast enough?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** No, we'd all like to see it improve faster. It's something to which the Lord Chancellor and I are heavily committed, and we would both like to see more progress faster. That said, and I want to come back to some statistics for you in a moment, I'm not going to make a long list of all the things that we are doing. I often say, "What am I not doing that I should be doing? What am I doing that I shouldn't be doing?" And nobody can tell me. So, we are trying, you know, it's embedded in everything I do at every level and at the top leadership level that we are focused on diversity and inclusivity in all its forms.

I think you probably know, Siddique, that we've got black judges as one of our two main focuses for this year, as it was last year. I think we've got to do more listening. I want to work with the UK Association of Black Judges to hear their views on what we should be doing. I'm not going to talk about pipeline professions, but you know, we are a pipeline profession and we need to look at the

available pool, you know, how many black people apply for the jobs where we are not seeing the right numbers?

But if we look at ethnicity or diversity in the magistracy, for example, in the latest round of recruitments, 58% were women, 23% were from an ethnic minority, 41% were under 50 years old. So, we are making real progress. I mean, the profile used to be that it was only... and I don't want to be disrespectful, but sort of older people who were able to find the time to sit as magistrates, and that's why I mentioned in my opening remarks the importance for me of getting young magistrates, working magistrates, mums, parents, into the magistracy so it is as representative as possible.

I mean, the judiciary overall, well, you know the statistics, we aren't making the progress we want. I do remain optimistic and positive. We've got so many good schemes out there. The judicial mentoring scheme has just been relaunched; we've got 70 matched pairs. Targeted outreach figures through the JAC schemes are really promising. We had a Section 9(4), that's the Deputy High Court Judge. We had an outreach session. We had, you know, 80-90 people there with really good diversity.

So there's work to be done, and I think both the Lord Chancellor and I are very committed to that. But, as I say, we've got to keep... I'm not giving up.

**CHAIR:** Dominic?

**DOMINIC CASCIANI:** You've previously expressed a concern about the misrepresentation of the law in cases by politicians. There is a particular incident at PMQ which comes to mind about a year or so ago. I'm just wondering what your feelings are about that presently, and about whether or not politicians have been taking on that message, whether you have spoken to any senior figures across the parties about that? Do you still have those concerns? I know that the Home Secretary recently had fairly robust remarks following the outcome of the Palestine Action trial—

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, yes. So, I actually wanted to thank you all. You know, the work that you're doing, the scrutiny that you're bringing to all of our work is genuinely welcomed and valued. You know, I haven't got as far as I want with the publication of first-tier tribunal judgments. You know, that's on my list of things to achieve. I'm pushing hard on that. There's a lot of detail involved.

The thing that is really concerning me, Dom, still is the social media abuse, which has taken a nasty turn when it comes to judges now. It's increasingly racist, misogynistic social media abuse that is so difficult to control. But we've got a Lord Chancellor who speaks out and defends the rule of law, as always, and I feel that the messages that I've had to convey have been delivered and heard.

We've had, by the way, really good take-up. Do you remember, did I mention this last year about MPs' visits to courts? We've had sort of 75, 80, 90 visits, and all of that is great.

**CHAIR:** Charles?

**CHARLES HYMAS:** The forecasts for the impact of the reforms are that it is going to get worse before it gets better. At the moment, we have already got cases being put back until 2030. How bad is it going to get, and what would be your message to victims who potentially, increasingly, in greater numbers, may decide that it is just not worth the candle?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes. Victims, but also defendants on remand.

**CHARLES HYMAS:** Yes, and defendants on remand.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** You know, we've got 17,700 defendants on remand at the moment awaiting trial. That's an all-time high, and the concerns about attrition rates for victims, complainants, because of delays, and that is incredibly worrying. It's why I've met with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, I've met with the Victims Commissioner. These are really important conversations. How much worse is it going to get? Well, you've seen the projections. It is going to get worse before it gets better. I go back to the uncapped sitting days. We have to be allowed to sit to capacity. We have to be allowed to book in the Recorders as well as the Crown Court judges to just work as hard as we can.

We're actually disposing in the Crown Courts of more cases a day than we have for a very, very long time. The problem is that receipts are going up exponentially at the same time, so we are running up the down escalator, working really hard. That's why I don't like talking about crises, because "crisis" sort of makes it sound as if people aren't doing their everyday job. They are, and more, but we have a very, very big problem with backlogs and delays, and victim attrition is a front and centre casualty of those problems.

**MICHAEL HOLDEN:** Michael Holden, Reuters. It's just a slight follow-up, actually, on Dom's question.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes. That always makes me nervous. *[Laughs]*

**MICHAEL HOLDEN:** A lot of commentary this year just on social media from politicians and the like about two-tier justice. Are you worried that that messaging, which is now becoming quite commonplace, is undermining public confidence in the judiciary as a whole?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** So I get, you know, is there still public confidence in the judiciary? Well, if you have an inquiry, you know, who do you call? You call a judge. When it really comes to it, I think, and you know, all the surveys suggest that trust and public confidence in the judiciary is not significantly waning. But we do have a comms challenge, by which... a communications challenge. It's part of the transparency work, part of the communication work that we are carrying out, the outreach work, for example. But we apply the law, the judges are doing an incredible job. I don't recognise the phrase "two-tier justice" as such in action, and I think we just try and maintain the high quality of the work that we do.

**BIANCA CASTRO:** You mentioned diversity, and wanting to be improved. And it has been said that there is a more diverse pool of candidates in solicitors and CILEX trained individuals. But criticism has been thrown in terms of the recruitment process being more complementary to those at the Bar. What is the judiciary doing in terms of improving that recruitment process so that the pool is increased?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, so we engage... I mean I engage, I have meetings with Magic Circle firms. You know, I do everything I can to encourage solicitors to apply. A solicitor member of the Court of Appeal, Lady Justice Falk, led the new work on the Judicial Skills and Abilities Framework, which the JAC has adopted, which is reflected in our job profiles, which is designed to make it all more user-friendly. Solicitors have, and CILEX, you know, all sorts of other legal professionals have all sorts of transferable skills that are eminently well suited to a job in the judiciary.

We are in the process of recruiting a new CILEX Commissioner on the JAC. When I say "we", the JAC, is in the process of recruiting a new CILEX Commissioner. So it's a really major... it's a really important issue. You know, one has to be careful. If you look, for example, at the District Bench, you've got more solicitors than barristers on the Bench. If you look at the Chancery Division in the High Court now, I think we've got more than 20% are solicitors. So it depends where you look. But

I guess the sort of message from me would be I am absolutely committed to making it a level-playing field where everybody with the right skills on a merit-based approach can get into the judiciary.

**CHAIR:** Alistair.

**ALISTAIR GRAY:** The security concerns mentioned earlier arising from the judge only trials, clearly by definition we're talking about much more serious cases than magistrates.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Correct, correct.

**ALISTAIR GRAY:** What specifically is the concern? Is it, for example, intimidation before the verdict, or is it more anger afterwards?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Not worried about intimidation, actually. I know the judges well enough for that, and I don't want to go into too much detail as to where my concerns lie. I think, in the broadest of sense, I would say they centre at the moment on judges going to the same building every day.

**JONATHAN AMES:** Is there anything you particular you'd like to see done on that?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** So, well in advance of these reforms, as you know, I set up a Judicial Security Task Force in January 2025 with Lady Justice Yip, and it's a whole separate press conference for me to tell you how far we've come. We've not only seen HMCTS really improve the physical condition of security arrangements, we have got just much better engagement with the police. We've got better response rates, we've got better understandings around England and Wales about the importance of judicial security. We have individual measures that are being taken for individual judges when appropriate. We have got great buy-in with the Met. Looking across the pond, Lady Justice Yip's been to Canada. I've spoken about Canada before. They have a gold standard Judicial Security Unit where, for example, you can also monitor, the unit also monitors social media abuse, which is something I've already mentioned. So it is a huge issue, Alistair, and if you were going to ask me low lights of the last year, security events and occasions would be one of them. So it's an issue that has really come to the fore, and the proposed reforms will continue to keep the pressure on this.

I mean, something else that I probably should mention is we've also come up with a completely new package of judicial training. So there's stuff that judges can do to look after themselves, both in and out of court. I think it's a change of culture almost as to how judges' approach. We don't really think about our own security, historically. We haven't thought about our own security an awful lot, and that is changing, it has had to change.

**CHAIR:** Joanne?

**JOANNE FAULKNER:** Hi, Joanne, Law360. My question stems from a judgment laid down last week which got quite a lot of coverage in which it emerged that the claimant in the case was wearing smart glasses, while giving evidence and was being coached. So I just wonder what conversations you're having with the judiciary around new technology, in the courtrooms and how it can jeopardise or ...?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, yes, thank you. I can't talk about individual cases, but in the grand scheme of things, I think you'd be surprised at how tech savvy many of our judges are. Many of them come with science degrees. I mean, I'm not going to talk about the Master of the Rolls, he's a sort of an absolute beacon of brilliance when it comes to AI and tech. But actually, we've got loads of judges who are really good at tech. Many judges take on a leadership role in their local

court centre for supporting other judges who may not be so tech-savvy and in fact, looking ahead, Joanna, you know, the judges of the future won't know what a piece of paper looks like. You know, they're all on tablets from the age of four at school, exams online, universities online. So the future in that sense is bright.

We have got some really, really good AI training and guidance. I'm updating it, I mean I've updated it, I think, three times in the last year, that's how fast we're moving. But we are certainly training judges on how to spot the use of AI and to be increasingly aware of the threats as well as the benefits that technology can bring when it comes to the administration and delivery of justice.

**CHAIR:** Tristan?

**TRISTAN KIRK:** The reforms are going to put huge pressure on Magistrates Courts. Ministers have called it a vote of confidence, but we are going to need to trust and have faith in the decisions that the courts are making, perhaps more than ever. With that in mind, the single justice procedure is still operating in private and cannot be looked at, scrutiny is very tough. How can we trust a system that we can't look at, and isn't showing any sign of reform? And specifically, is it okay for magistrates, as they keep doing, to convict people with advanced dementia for not paying their household bills? Can you explain that one?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** No, well, I can't—

**TRISTAN KIRK:** Secondly, in terms of trust in Magistrates' Courts, the magistrates sit each week to approve utility warrants for agents to break into people's homes for potentially legitimate purposes. They sit to approve those utility warrants in private, and we don't know anything about the work that they're doing. How is that system appropriate, and how does this foster a sense of trust in the decisions that magistrates are doing?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** So I can't talk about individual cases. This is an important issue, Tristan and last time we had this, or the year before, I said that I would look at it, and we have looked at it in terms of operational matters. So the Senior Presiding Judge has conducted what I would call a nuts and bolts audit as to how magistrates are operating the system, supported by one of our lead magistrates, actually, and that audit has been carried out.

The bigger question, I'm afraid, is a policy question. You know the single justice procedure is a creature of policy introduced by the Government. The judges are applying the law as it applies, and we spoke last time about the transparency aspects of single justice procedure and the access that you can have to it. As for utility warrants, I know that you've been, I think, in correspondence with the chief magistrate, and I wouldn't repeat anything that he has said to you. The utility—

**TRISTAN KIRK:** He has not said anything yet.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Has he not?

**TRISTAN KIRK:** No.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Oh, right. Well, I've seen what he might say. When he says it, I agree with him. *[Laughter in room]* Like any good Court of Appeal judge. No, I think... look, I'm not an expert on it. This is something that is administered by the magistrates, but I'm assured that no one's, as it were, the magistrates are applying the law as it exists. I think the law goes back to 1954, and I will make sure he responds to your letter. When did you write?

**TRISTAN KIRK:** December.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Right, okay.

**TRISTAN KIRK:** I think what I'm asking is how can we trust a system that we can't see?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, well, I don't agree that you can't see the system. You do know how it operates, you do have access to the lists, and there are all the safeguards inbuilt. As you know, automatic right of appeal, all this sort of thing. So, that will be my answer.

**CHAIR:** Jess?

**JESS GLASS:** Jess Glass from the Press Association with a, I promise you, unplanned follow up to Tristan's question. Going back to the issue or the questions around the trust and the magistrates, particularly in light of the incoming reform. Are you going to need... and by "you" I mean collectively, the judiciary collectively. Are you going to need to put more capacity into the Crown Court in its appellate function, given the potential rise in appeals from the Magistrates with the coming reforms? 00:43:21]?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** So good question. The number of appeals at the moment, I haven't got the stats to hand, the number of appeals from Magistrates to the Crown Court are actually quite low. So the volume is quite low. Under the new proposals, if it's appeal only on a point of law with leave, is that right? I think that's the proposal. I think one of the capacity questions operationally that I have is who is going to carry out the leave process? Is that going to be a great deal more box work, for example, or in-court work? So if there is a leave filter, somebody has got to exercise the filter, so there is a capacity issue there, and then there may be a capacity issue in the Crown Court. It depends on what Parliament introduces. Is it appeal on a point of law only? Is there a filter system if leave is refused? Do you have a right to renew, an automatic right to renew as you do from the Crown Court to the Court of Appeal Criminal Division? As you probably know, in the Criminal Division, from the Crown Court, you have a filter, an on-paper filter, but if leave to appeal is refused, you can renew that application to the full court.

**JESS GLASS:** A slightly related follow up to that, there has been talk in the last year of Judicial Review reforms as well. In changing how the permission stage works, to kind of remove the on-paper application for permission to bring Judicial Review. Would removing that stage not increase the administrative courts burden by removing that filter?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, very significantly. There will be definitely...there will be, I would hope I'd be fully consulted on that, because there will be real operational consequences and, Jess, I just want to say you do know that the broadcasting in the admin courts is about to happen? That is about to roll out. Do we have a time frame for that?

**CHAIR:** Progressing.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Oh, progressing? Right. Okay. But that is really exciting. It's been an area where I've often thought that there are such important judgments being handed down, and it will be great for them to be broadcast.

**CHAIR:** We are approaching time, so we'll try and get a question for everybody.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** See, the one thing that's wrong with the library is the clock, if you want to look behind you. It says 25 to 7. Yes, sorry.

**DAVID BARRETT:** Last September, the graffiti artist Banksy vandalised the outside of this great and wonderful building. And claimed responsibility for it in his usual manner on social media. More than six months later, there has been no action against him. Should people who commit criminal

damage be treated differently by the criminal justice system if they happen to be extremely wealthy like him?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** No, everybody should be treated the same. Whether or not there are charges laid in relation to that is obviously not a matter for the judiciary. That will be a matter for the police and then the DPP and so on and so forth. But the big point, David, is nobody should be treated differently because of their background, let alone their wealth.

**DAVID BARRETT:** He has been.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** I don't know. I can't comment.

**CHAIR:** Catherine?

**CATHERINE BAKSI:** Thank you, Catherine Baksi, freelance. Last year, as you will know, Harriet Harman did a review for the Bar Council, which showed a serious problem of judicial bullying, so judges bullying barristers, and the judiciary's own Judicial Attitude Survey last year seemed to show a problem with judges bullying other judges. I think there were even 14 members of the Court of Appeal who said they have been bullied.

How concerned are you about that and what are you doing to address it? Is there any training that has been introduced since Harriet Harman's report. Have you, or are there plans to do any survey of judges' own experience?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, thank you. So, we run our Judicial Attitude Survey every year. So we'll be launching our Judicial Attitude Survey this summer in the same way, and that will have the same or similar questions about internal matters. Any instance of bullying is an instance too much, so the numbers do worry me. I don't mean, therefore, to diminish that sentiment by saying the numbers, actually, when you put the percentages down, are quite small.

But, look, the Harman Report was really valuable, I really welcomed that. Obviously, we engaged with Baroness Harman and we're engaging with the Bar Council. Actually, I'm seeing Kirsty, the chair, this afternoon. I've met Dame Maria Miller, who is the new Commissioner for Conduct. I had an extremely good meeting with her, and she met with Lady Justice Whipple to assure her she would be welcome in any court to make sure there are no obstacles in her way, from our perspective, to coming into court and watching proceedings.

I think, beyond that, we are...well, I am very keen in embedding and making more prominent the informal route for complaints that has always existed. I think many, many members of the Bar and solicitors' profession would value assurances as to how to make a complaint informally overnight, sometimes to nip things in the bud. We are working very hard on a change in judicial culture, trying to get judges to almost welcome a bit more transparency, welcome concerns being raised, provided they're raised in a constructive manner, because it's all part of a healthy functioning system.

The question you had, Catherine, on training is that there is mandatory training for all judges on inclusivity. That actually was before the Harman report was up and running, but it's being rolled out across the board.

**CATHERINE BAKSI:** Is that being changed or beefed up in the light of Harriet Harman's findings?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Well, it's always being modernised. Whether I can say it's being updated directly in response to particular instances...I mean, one of the things, and this is not to criticise the report, but concrete examples are of the most value to me and, quite understandably, there weren't that many concrete examples in Baroness Harman's report in some areas. So,

Catherine, it's a really important area of activity. Lady Justice Whipple, Philippa, is leading on it, and there is a lot of work going on. A lot of work going on. Just talking about it, actually, Catherine, is a step forward, isn't it?

**CHAIR:** Julia?

**JULIA ATHERLEY:** Hi, yes, Julia Atherley from *The Sun*. You've spoken a bit about the reforms making their way through Parliament. I know you cannot comment on policy, but I just wondered if you could give your view on how important juries are still for the system and the policies that we're seeing go through? There will be fewer jury trials taking place, so how important are they?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, well, I think a fair justice system is incredibly important. Juries are part of that system. They will remain part of that system. I can't really say more than that.

**CHAIR:** That is everyone. One extra from Catherine?

**CATHERINE BAKSI:** Thank you. On immigration tribunals. What work is being done by the judiciary to prepare for the Government's new special adjudicator thing? Because even though there is a lot of talk about this coming in, last time I looked the JAC were still running their recruitment campaign for immigration tribunal judges?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, well we are. I mean, you know, we are working flat out. Last quarter, I think, there was an increase of 123% in receipts in the First-Tier Tribunal Immigration and Asylum Chamber. So, the work demand is at an all-time high, and we are recruiting new judges.

In terms of what we're doing to prepare, I think the first thing we need to do is be told what the plan is, what the timeline is, and what the proposals are, and then and only then can we start to deal both with the human and the professional aspects of the consequences for the judges.

**CATHERINE BAKSI:** Okay, thank you.

**DOMINIC CASCIANI:** Can I, just very briefly, a question which is always on the mind of many journalists: where are we going on access digitally to documents in the Admin Court? I mean you seem to be just years—

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Do you mean the Commercial Court?

**DOMINIC CASCIANI:** No, the Admin. I mean, it's a huge part of our work covering JRs and the public interest, things like that. It's very often the hardest part of the system for us to get documents from in good time.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, and I know it's the area you're very interested in. Can I take that away? I don't know where we are. We're running the Commercial Court pilot. And I know one of the issues, has anybody been engaged with the Commercial Court pilot? Alistair, have you? One of the problems I know is fees, and that's an HMCTS issue. Lisa may be ahead of me on the Admin Court document thing, but I mean, you do know my position is that access to justice doesn't just mean being able to go into court or watch the proceedings live. You know, I had a group of school kids who came into Court 4 last week, I was doing a big bribery act case, and I just paused the proceedings and gave them a five-minute introduction to where we were in the proceedings, what the issues were, and then on we go.

I mean, I have the luxury of being able to do that. I only had one case that day, and I wasn't time pressurised. But you know, there's no... you know, you need to be able to understand and access the arguments in order to have access to justice, so—

**DOMINIC CASCIANI:** That's essential.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** I totally agree.

**DOMINIC CASCIANI:** Just by way of comparison, there's a bit of colour for you to take away and consider with colleagues. Yesterday morning, BBC filed its motion to dismiss the Trump case in Florida. To try and get it thrown out before it gets to full trial. That was available publicly within 90 minutes of it being filed by the BBC. Literally, the ink was barely dry on the signature of my boss' deposition before we could actually get hold of it and we all got the alerts, and it arrives in our inboxes, which means we can do our job reporting. And we're just light years away from—

**CHAIR:** This is the case [inaudible 00:53:14].

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** And going back to when I see you stressed on the pavement, Dom, *[laughter in room]* and I do, I sort of wave at you, but you can't see me... I know it's because you're thinking, "Crikey, I've got to write this up. I haven't got the sort of core documents to help me do it," and you want to get it right. And I do get it.

**DOMINIC CASCIANI:** The press summaries, I think most of us will agree have been an excellent way forward. They really, really do help us in that manner.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** And you have helped us because, Dominic, was it you who came to the Business and Property Courts conference?

**DOMINIC CASCIANI:** No, I didn't. I went to the—

**CHAIR:** To the High Court one.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** The High Court judges one, and for Dom to stand up and actually say what it meant to you to get a proper press summary made my job so much easier. Because when I'm on their case saying, "Please do a press summary," they really get it, because you made it real for them. And I think that that is a good news story. I mean, writing a press summary isn't always as easy as you think, actually. I've told you sometimes I try and write my press summary before the judgment, because if I can't write a good press summary, then maybe my logic isn't as clear as it should be.

**DOMINIC CASCIANI:** There's ChatGPT.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, no, don't even go there. *[Laughter in room]*

**CHAIR:** Admin Court documents is well within the scope of the Transparency and Open Justice Board, and if you see the key overriding objectives documents, it's I think Point 2. So, it's within scope and it's being looked through.

**DOMINIC CASCIANI:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Yes, I think that takes us over time. Charles is trying to sneak in one more question. Do you want to do one more question, one more question?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Yes, I'm having a good time. *[Laughter]*

**CHARLES HYMAS:** We came to a briefing about... it must have been about 18 months ago to talk about rape cases and trying to reduce those that have been waiting a long time to under a year. Do you know what progress has been made on that?

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** We did quite well, and then our sitting days got capped. But I am very interested, as you know, in targeted listing. There's a lot of work going on here, sort of in the domestic abuse space, cross jurisdictionally, family and crime, to look at making things better for those particular types of cases. So watch out for some targeted listing. I'm keen on that, and I do think that having uncapped sitting days will make a big difference here. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you all. We will have a transcript, I will try and get it to you this afternoon.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Thank you. And can I just say thank you to the team. You know, moving the chairs around and doing the coffee, that's a big effort. I'm very grateful to you, and I don't know if there's a librarian around who knows more about those beautiful relic books than I do, for anybody who's interested.

**CHAIR:** Do stop and have a look around.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** Do stop and have a look.

**CHAIR:** There's some rare books behind you.

**THE LADY CHIEF JUSTICE:** And can I just sort of end by saying thank you. I know you're incredibly busy and today is incredibly busy. I really enjoy seeing you, and I value this relationship very much. So thank you all very much indeed. Thank you, thanks.

**[Ends]**