



BAR COUNCIL LAUNCHES JUDICIAL REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT'S CONSULTATIONS ON CRIMINAL LEGAL AID

In accordance with the Pre-Action Protocol for Judicial Review Claims, solicitors acting for the Bar Council have today written to the Legal Aid Minister, Lord Bach and to the Chairman of the Legal Services Commission, Sir Bill Callaghan in order to advance proceedings for judicial review of the Government's consultations on criminal legal aid.

The consultations concern the Advocates' Graduated Fee Scheme and Very High Cost Cases (VHCCs) scheme which have been initiated by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Legal Services Commission (LSC) respectively.

The Bar Council's action follows the rejection by the MoJ and the LSC of the Bar's request that the Government should combine the deadlines for responses to these consultations and to join them to the timetable for the response to the proposed consultation on a single graduated fee for Crown Court cases. A full pre-action letter will be sent shortly.

Bar Chairman Nick Green QC said:

'The Bar Council asked the MoJ and the LSC to adopt a co-ordinated and fair approach to their decision-making on the very important matters which are the subject of these consultations. The Government has rejected our request to co-ordinate the consultation timetables and refused to supply us with the information for which we asked to enable the Bar to respond to the two current consultations. These are inextricably linked to an, as yet, unpublished third consultation. The principal basis of our claim will be that the consultation exercise is unfair and, in our view, unlawful.'

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. For more information please contact the Bar Council Press Office on 020 7222 2525.

2. The General Council of the Bar is the Approved Regulator of the Bar of England and Wales. It discharges its regulatory functions through the independent Bar Standards Board. It represents the Bar by:
 - Promoting the specialist advocacy and advisory services of barristers;
 - Ensuring access to justice on terms that are fair both to the public and practitioners;
 - Promoting the high quality training and professional development of all barristers to ensure the highest standards of practice and ethical behaviour;
 - Working for the efficient and cost-effective administration of justice;
 - Encouraging access to, and diversity within, the profession so that it is open to all people of ability whatever their background; and
 - Strengthening and developing the work and the values of the Bar at home and abroad.

3. The Criminal Bar Association exists to represent the views of the practising members of the criminal bar in England and Wales. It has over 3,800 members and is the largest of the specialist bar associations in the country.