Eddie Stobart law service is a wrong turn says Bar chief amid concerns legal advice given to public will suffer

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PUBLISHED: 01:29, 10 November 2012 | UPDATED: 01:29, 10 November 2012

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The quality of legal advice given to the public will suffer because of the opening up of the legal market to firms run by non-lawyers, a leading barrister warns today.

The haulage company Eddie Stobart, the Co-op and BT are among the unlikely names offering legal services.

Firms such as the AA, Saga and Direct Line are thought to be planning similar moves.

Developing: The company Eddie Stobart will now not only offer a lorry service, but also a legal service

But in a speech today, Michael Turner QC, chairman of the Criminal Bar Association, will warn that traditional high street solicitors are under threat as a result.

He will say: ‘We have already seen many small and extremely dedicated solicitors disappear or be swallowed up by what this government is ultimately seeking to achieve: huge legal service providers who care nothing about quality but everything about profit...’

The Legal Services Act, which came into force in October last year, opens up the legal market to firms run by non-lawyers.

Ministers say the changes will make legal services more accessible, more efficient and more competitive for customers.

Stobart Barristers provides a link between the public and barristers – lawyers who usually act as court advocates.

The firm says it cuts out the need for solicitors and instead puts the public directly in touch with a specialist lawyer to act for them in court.

Solicitors under threat: Firms run by non-lawyers are now offering a legal service to the general public

Critics have described the changes as 'Tesco Law', and warned they could put traditional high street solicitors out of business.

Ministers say the changes will make legal services more accessible, more efficient and more competitive for customers.

They offer advice in criminal law, employment law, health and safety law, tax and personal injury cases.

When the business launched in May a spokesman said its services would be up to 50 per cent cheaper than traditional legal providers.

Trevor Howarth, Stobart Barristers’ managing director, said at the time:

'This is a new market for the group and one where we see significant potential to grow by offering the public the chance to benefit from a model we have successfully honed for our own business over the past few years.'

‘The legal services industry continues to undergo significant changes that are allowing new entrants to the market with innovative business models to provide faster and less expensive services than those offered under traditional models.

'Our model cuts out waste and opens up access to a national panel of barristers that are selected for their ability to meet our clients’ needs.'

The firm claim their model cuts out the need for solicitors and instead puts the public directly in touch with a specialist lawyer who can act for them in court.

Research carried out by the firm found just 14 per cent of the public were aware they could get direct access to barristers.

In his speech, to members of the criminal bar, Mr Turner accuses ministers of trying to 'devastate one of the best legal systems in the world'.

He claims cuts to legal aid payments to barristers has left the criminal bar ‘on the brink of extinction’, and left some barristers ‘ear

Read more: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2230751/Eddie-Stobart-law-service-wrong-turn-says-Bar-chief-amid-concerns-legal-advice-given-public-suffer.html#ixzz2Buafi5GZ

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