



Siobhan Baillie MP
Member of Parliament for Stroud
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Alex Chalk KC MP
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
Ministry of Justice
102 Petty France
London
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27th September 2023

Dear Lord Chancellor,

I would be grateful to understand the government's up to date position regarding the Law Commission's proposals for wedding law reform.

You will be aware that the Law Commission's report was published in July 2022. I was at the Parliamentary launch event and noted the extensive work involved. I found the report to be a comprehensive look at this important area of law and a thorough consideration of options.

I understood the government would provide an interim response to the Law Commission as soon as possible – but not later than six months after publication. A final response would also be provided 'as soon as possible' and within a year of the report being published.

I follow your work closely so I know how busy you are and Lord Bellamy is doing an incredible job with this complex brief too. I wondered however whether we can hope for the substantive response to the report shortly? Or at least the interim position from the government.

My interest in wedding law was reinforced during the pandemic as you will recall that I did a lot of work with the wedding industry. The government made a number of changes to the rules surrounding when and how couples could get married, thus demonstrating the ability of the State and communities to adapt where necessary.

I have also long believed that helping more couples to get married if they wish will be beneficial for the families involved, society and the country. Marriage is an incredibly important institution that remains popular even if the ways that people are deciding to get married have changed over the years and families gloriously now come in all shapes, sizes, backgrounds, religions and beliefs.

Therefore, while I will wait to see the government's response, my first blush position on this matter is to encourage thoughtful changes to the law to assist more couples to wed. Any changes that remove complexity and bureaucracy will be hugely welcomed by thousands of families each year too.

More recently, I have had a number of conversations with independent celebrants who are anxious to be heard in this debate as so many couples are now actively choosing them to officiate their ceremony.

Independent celebrants in my Stroud constituency and in many other constituencies around the country are clear that any reform should involve the regulation of both independent celebrants and humanist celebrants. To ignore one without the other will be seen as failing to reflect evidence of current behaviours or provide true choice to families.



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The Law Commission proposed an 'officiant based scheme' which was designed to easily allow for the inclusion of independent celebrants and humanist celebrants if government permits. I am led to believe that independent celebrants would be extremely willing to be included in regulation, training and monitoring – something the Law Commission suggested could be done by the General Register office.

Stroud's independent celebrants are already proud of their professionalism and the service they offer couples. They feel that the above approach would be an additional endorsement of the work they do on the most important day of a couple's life.

It is also worth noting that much of our current wedding laws date back to 1836. Piecemeal amendments since then have created unsatisfactory confusion and concerns that the law is not representative. The Law Commission's changes would bring our wedding laws more in line with several other common law jurisdictions such as the Channel Islands, Australia, America and Canada.

Please let me know whether you or Lord Bellamy would like to discuss this matter further. I will keep you informed of likely interest and support from MPs in the meantime too.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Siobhan' followed by a stylized 'L'.

Siobhan Baillie MP

cc. Lord Bellamy KC
cc. Laura Farris MP

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