



Family Law and the Spring Budget 2024

In his budget on 6 March, the Chancellor pledged funding for non-court dispute resolution (NCDR). The investment for family courts is to amount to £55million to *'offer online targeted guidance and earlier legal advice, shortened waiting times and supporting families through non-court dispute resolution'*.

It is not yet known how this figure will be broken down, or through what processes or means that families will be supported through NCDR, notably but not exclusively mediation.

But, shortening family court waiting times will in itself be a challenge, given the underinvestment in the court system in regard to Judges, staff and infrastructure over a considerable period of time. Law Society President Nick Emmerson has said that the government has *"failed to address the crisis facing our judicial system"* and the Bar Chair, Sam Townend KC described it as a *"drop in the ocean in terms of what the justice sector really needs to get it back to working order.."*

Early legal advice for court litigants in person, or potential litigants, is welcome but may be better targeted to fund legal advice before a dispute goes anywhere near a court. Similarly, extension of the family mediation voucher scheme, to provide initial or ongoing funding for mediation in the private sector, may head off potential litigation at the pass, and provide earlier and more appropriate resolution for separated families.

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