



## **Divorce Costs Likely To Soar as Government Plans Increase In Court Fees**

While the cost of getting divorced, financially and emotionally, has never been an easy or cheap option, the actual cost of divorcing is likely to rise by approximately one third as the government has announced plans, currently in consultation, to increase court fees from the autumn of this year.

In the near future married couples who are ending their union will probably have to pay £550 for a civil court hearing in England and Wales, which would represent a rise of £140, or an increase of over 33%.

The Ministry of Justice said the fee increases, while likely to be unpopular, were necessary and would ensure the rich, not the vulnerable, paid more. The measures were outlined in a letter to Chairman of the Justice Select Committee Robert Neill from courts minister Shailesh Vara.

Amy Chesterfield, a Family Law specialist solicitor from award winning leading regional law firm Pictons says "This isn't the first time the government has planned to increase court fees in divorce cases. For a long time the court fee was £385 and it was then increased to £410. In 2013 the Ministry of Justice announced plans to increase divorce fees from £410 to £750 which would have been an increase of more than 80%! There was an uproar about this and after "carefully considering" concerns raised in a consultation, that increase was reduced to a third.

"If the proposed increases go ahead there will still be the opportunity for people on low incomes to apply for an exemption or reduction in the fee. In the context of family law, it is clear that the courts are struggling to cope with the volume of work and so the increase in fees may be a sign of the times. As a law firm we keep our fees extremely competitive and spread the costs for clients making it more manageable for them to pay for representation."

Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) cost £1bn a year more to run than it received in income. Last week the Ministry of Justice announced dozens of courts were facing closure as Justice Secretary Michael Gove presses ahead with a shake-up of the system.