



The Bar Council

Kirsty Brimelow KC, Chair of the Bar

Speech for the swearing in of the new President of the Family Division,

Lord Justice Cobb

Thursday 14 May 2026

My Ladyships and My Lordships, the Bar is always delighted to join you in welcoming those who have been elevated as a Head of Division.

It is indeed a true privilege for me, on behalf of the Bar, to adopt what your Ladyship has said and to wish Lord Justice Cobb well as he embarks on his new responsibilities.

I wondered if I might now sit down?

No, there is too much to say about Lord Justice Cobb's career. A key part, of course, was when he chaired a Working Group for the Bar Council. He was then Chairman of the Family Law Bar Association.

It was on legal aid and required him to get to grips with the tortured maze of rules and regulations across all jurisdictions. And so, immersed and equipped with all facts and thoughts around public funding, Sir Stephen presented the Bar's response to the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) proposals to government. It was Valentine's Day 2011.

The Lord Justice, as he was to become, was quickly parachuted onto the Today programme and placed in a chair opposite John Humphrys. That Valentine's Day morning, all that was on his mind was legal aid. He then was sprung into the media all day, working for the Bar Council and the profession, discussing LASPO.

Undoubtedly, it was a romantic day to remember for Lady Cobb. Less roses and dinner, more satellite links and soundbites.

And I am sorry to say that Lord Justice Cobb's Working Group contribution no longer features on the Bar Council website. We must remedy that immediately – perhaps with a rose on the opening page.

However, it definitely was worth it as – marriage intact – Stephen Cobb QC, as he then was, strode forth onto the Justice Select Committee giving evidence and then onto formative panels in Family law and legal aid over his next couple of years at the Bar.

Those reports are still hosted by the Bar Council and, looking over them, I lingered where he said that without access to justice, by which he meant effective access – for broken families and children – wider society would pay a high price.

Undoubtedly buoyed by his work for the Bar Council, Lord Justice Cobb went to the High Court Bench and from High Court to Court of Appeal, with distinguished judicial and ministerial appointments in between – Family Presiding Judge for the North Eastern Circuit, judicial Member of the Ministry of Justice's Harm Panel and a cross-jurisdictional leadership role to support the implementation of the digital transformation of the justice system.

Some notable judicial observations from Lord Justice Cobb's judgments and panels include: (i) consideration of the voice of a child: "children should be seen and heard" – a theme that is strongly associated with his work on reform of private law children proceedings and family justice practice, (ii) the impact of delay on children cases: "delay is inimical to child welfare", and (iii) on domestic abuse and child contact: "the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration" reaffirming the statutory principle under the Children Act 1989 in judgments and guidance concerning Practice Direction 12J.

Lord Justice Cobb has long been regarded as one of the defining judicial voices in modern family justice in England and Wales, combining intellectual rigour with deep humanity and unwavering focus on the welfare of children.

Lord Justice Cobb has never lost sight of the human realities behind the case papers. The appointment to President of the Family Division is warmly welcomed by the Bar, not only because of his legal distinction but because of the values he represents. The Family Division could not be in safer or more thoughtful hands.

Kirsty Brimelow KC

Chair of the Bar Council of England and Wales