

24 December 2022

Sad days for justice

A Legal Adviser who has worked for HMCTS for over 40 years blogs about the issues with Common Platform and why she is taking strike action.

I started work for HMCTS when I was 17. I worked in admin and then was lucky enough to qualify as a solicitor within the service in my early 30s. I've worked as a Legal Adviser in a Magistrates' court since then.

I'm now 61 and recently partially retired. My kids are grown up and I feel that now is my time - or it should be. Change has been plentiful. Common Platform is not a change for the better. I honestly don't know how people manage it five days a week. Even working part time is stressful.

Problems and stress

I've been expected to train myself on e-learning. The support is non-existent. The change team is overworked so work checking that court outcomes have been input and retained correctly by Common Platform backs up. The format has the wrong colours on the wrong backgrounds. It hurts my eyes, makes me tired and I've gone from being totally organised and in control of my Court and list to barely having a clue what I have and what is going on. If you don't know what is going on, you can't give proactive advice to lay magistrates, you can't assist those who are not legally represented to present their case and you can't ensure everyone who comes before the court has a fair hearing. These responsibilities are a key part of my role and why lay magistrates have a lawyer. I'm not performing them because the ways of working that HMCTS has imposed prevent me. Day in day out my colleagues and I are not performing these responsibilities. Those days are sad days for justice.

I'm owed so many hours flexi because of working late which I can't get back (we are short staffed because we are carrying so much sickness because of stress, predominantly caused by these working conditions). HMCTS won't accept all the anomalies and problems with Common Platform despite overwhelming evidence.

Why do I stay? Because for personal reasons I can't afford to leave unless I get another job. HMCTS seems to think that because I am single and no longer have

any caring responsibilities I can come in early, stay late and work Saturdays. It's shocking and makes me really sad.

It's not all right to be dealing with court work in an isolated environment on your own, to be arriving home at 7pm regularly, to be trying to support deeply distressed colleagues and friends crying on their way home after a day of Common Platform.

What is the answer?

HMCTS must start listening. This is why I am striking. It's not about money. It's about life, friends, sanity, health and defending justice.

What can you do?

- If you are not a member [join PCS](#)
- If you are entitled to strike, take strike action
- Stand in solidarity with Legal Advisers and Court Associates
- Recognise when HMCTS are gaslighting you and trying to pit worker against worker. Don't fall for it.
- Contribute to the hardship fund: PCS Fighting Fund Levy Account, sort code: 60-83-01, account no. 20331490.