

payee to achieve independence had been impossible to achieve and, if so, why.

- x) On an application to discharge a joint lives order an examination should be made of the original assumption that it was just too difficult to predict eventual independence.
- xi) If the choice between an extendable and a non-extendable term is finely balanced the decision should normally be in favour of the economically weaker party.

## Conclusion

The very helpful guidance set out by Mostyn J in *SS v NS* [2014] EWHC 4143 is undoubtedly being followed by practitioners and the judiciary alike. It remains to be seen what will happen if there is an appeal to the Supreme Court over the approach towards term maintenance, compensation and sharing since their Lordships' decision in *Miller and McFarlane*.

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# Introducing Advicenow

**Mary Marvel** *Head of Policy and Communications, Law for Life*

*Law for Life has resources that can help LiPs, users of unbundled services, and ultimately lawyers too*



Law for Life aims to ensure that everyone has the knowledge, confidence and practical skills they need to secure access to justice. We work to achieve this through community-based education and training, research and policy, and through Advicenow ([www.advicenow.org.uk](http://www.advicenow.org.uk)). That's our award-winning website, best known for its user-friendly guides that provide practical help on how to manage and resolve life's legal problems. It also provides a hand-picked and checked information service that draws together the best information about the law available on the internet.

Law for Life is a partner in the Litigants in Person Support Strategy, funded by the MoJ, and Advicenow's "Going to court" section is the support strategy's central resource for all LiPs.

## Resources for LiPs and clients using unbundled services

We have a series of easy-to-use, step-by-step guides for people involved in family cases aimed at LiPs and those who have to take a case to court with only a little legal help (users of unbundled services). I want to bring these resources to your attention, and to ask for your help in getting them to the people that need them.

We have step-by-step guides to applying for a divorce, a financial order, a child arrangements order and parental responsibility. Most guides are in written form, but we also have a film showing users how to complete form E, and another film giving LiPs some simple tips for representing

themselves in the family court. We also have "How to get help if you are representing yourself at court or tribunal", which explains what help there is available for LiPs and how to access it.

Most of our guides are available both as webpages and (where funding allows) easy-to-print PDFs. Unfortunately, we don't have the funding to produce any paper copies of these guides. I know some Resolution members print out our guides to give to unrepresented people on the "other side", and this is one of the most helpful things you can do.

We know that many people who have access to the internet don't have access to a printer, so a physical copy they can take with them and make notes on is very helpful to them. There is also evidence, particularly from studies in health, that when information is given to you by a person with greater knowledge, you are more likely to act on it.

If you don't have the resources available to hand out printed copies, please just point LiPs towards the website. I know I don't need to tell you that information is no substitute for legal advice, but it does make a difference not only to people's ability to make their case and navigate their way through the process, but also, importantly, to how people experience the process.

A better informed and prepared "other side" will often make the process easier for your client too. Our "Survival guide to sorting out your finances when you get divorced", for example, aims to help the reader understand what a judge might do in a case like theirs, so that they have a better chance of making a fair agreement (and don't feel that

they should go to court to get “a better deal”). Some people who have representation also find these guides helpful as a way of better understanding the process they are involved in.

## Resources for clients with representation or using mediation

Advicenow also has a series of “Survival guides” that focus on helping readers at an earlier stage of the problem. Many of these will be useful to clients who have representation or who are using (or thinking about using) mediation, to help them understand the law and enable them to better manage their problem.

For example our “Survival guide to divorce or dissolution of a civil partnership” explains how divorce and dissolution of civil partnerships work, what you can expect, what you need to think about, what the law says, and how to come to agreements. We also have survival guides to making arrangements for your children and using family mediation, which may be useful for clients at the beginning of the process.

## *“Our guides focus not just on explaining the law, but showing people how to use it”*

All of our guides (both the step-by-step “How To” guides to the legal process, and the “Survival Guides” that aim at early resolution and increasing understanding and skills) are available on the website above.

We recognise that not all LiPs will have the capability, literacy or language skills to access our guides. Guides to such complex processes as these that were accessible to all would be so simplistic they wouldn’t be much help to anybody. Our guides are also written for intermediaries to use with their clients, whether those intermediaries are Personal Support Unit or CAB volunteers, other advice workers, community workers or court staff.

## What’s so special about Advicenow’s resources?

Advicenow has always been about improving the quality of law-related information aimed at the public. Over the last ten years we have developed and tested methods for producing genuinely effective information for the public, and our work is known for being as helpful and user-friendly as possible.

Our guides focus not just on explaining the law, but showing people how to use it. They are not just in Plain English, but are built around the needs of the audience. We start from the user’s point of view and address the issues users need to deal with, in the order they need to deal with them. We also provide help with the skills and attitudes needed to manage

## What users have said...

“Thank you so much, I have no legal representation and my ex has the bank of Mum & Dad helping her... Getting legal help is not an option for me as I simply can’t afford it. So when I found this video, you made my life so much easier and I thank you for that.”

Comment from Advicenow user September 2015

“Please could you send me as much information on how I address the courts... as possible. This will be my third court appearance without any legal assistance, and every appearance I have left feeling overlooked, insignificant, and ignored.”

Comment from Advicenow user, February 2016

“It helped so much. I had to do my own divorce, borrowing money to pay my court fees and even for parking to attend court... After doing my own non-molestation orders, I needed the support this gave.”

Comment from Advicenow user September 2015

the problem, and address the stress and emotions involved so that the user can better take on board the information and feel supported.

We plan and pilot our guides with members of the target audience and those that work to support them (often advisers, solicitors, community workers, and volunteers at the Personal Support Unit) so that we can be sure they meet their needs. This sometimes results in radical changes – for example, through consultation our plan to make a film giving “tips” on completing form E for LiPs in financial order cases, changed into a 33-minute step-by-step guide – making it a Ben-Hur of Youtube instructional videos. Check it out!

Once published, we evaluate our resources so that we can improve them and our future work. You can tell us what you think of our resources and how we can improve them using our evaluation survey at [www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Advicenowbaseline](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Advicenowbaseline)

## What next?

We know that many more resources are needed for LiPs and users of unbundled services, and as funding and resources allow, we will be adding more to the website. We are always up for hearing from you about the problems you see and the resources that you think might help. Get in touch with us at [advicenow@lawforlife.org.uk](mailto:advicenow@lawforlife.org.uk)

Lastly, I want to thank all the Resolution members who have helped us to create, update and tell people about Advicenow resources over the years.

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