

A dangerous precedent

Hilary Meredith says that Chris Grayling's court fee hikes are going to hit injured and vulnerable claimants hard



As an SME we spend around £600,000 a year on disbursements where we have no deferred arrangement.

As a largely multi-track firm, the new increase in court fees means an additional £292,500 per year. This is going to seriously impact on

claimants' access to justice and the consequences are huge.

Writing on behalf of the senior judiciary, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Thomas, has already said there is likely to be a "disproportionately adverse impact" on SMEs.

The Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) has also stated that the increases "could have a profound impact on access to justice", saying that the severity of an injury has nothing to do with the injured person's capacity to pay. "This new regime will dictate that some seriously injured people will be expected to pay £10,000 up front to bring their cases to court, and many simply won't be able to afford it," it says.

The irony is that there was little wrong with the court system before the Ministry of Justice began its much heralded

campaign of cuts. Those cuts have had a devastating impact. We are now left with a shockingly poor service beset with delay. On occasions, there is simply no one to speak to by phone, documents are lost, and there are no counter staff.

Having failed in his attempt to make money for the courts service at the expense of the taxpayer, 'failing' Grayling now wants to find more cash by forcing a huge extra charge on an injured and vulnerable claimant. Of course it's the law firms carrying (for us nearly £1 million) these exorbitant court fees on behalf of the Claimant, for as much as four years until trial, or until the case settles.

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Can you imagine your plumber saying "I will buy the bathroom fittings for you and you can pay me in four years?" Or can you think of any other business that operates in this way?

A recent poll said that Grayling was the most ineffective Justice Secretary in living memory – and I agree.

An efficient, effective and fair justice system is one of the pillars upon which a society should be based. Unfortunately the cuts are turning the system into a scandal and, sadly, that undermines the legitimacy of so many of our institutions. ●