



## **St Ives Chambers: Paperless Working**

### **Introduction**

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the shape of our practices significantly. Whilst it is right to say that legal services have been moving towards paperless operation for some time, there is no denying that the national public health crisis has accelerated the process. The courts have adopted remote working and paperless proceedings at a pace which was previously unimaginable.
2. St Ives Chambers is embracing this change. From 5<sup>th</sup> February 2021, all members, staff and pupils at St Ives Chambers are moving to implement completely paperless working practices. We believe that we the first chambers in the Midlands to formally adopt a paperless policy. This policy will remain in place long after the spectre of COVID has left us.
3. The move offers a number of important benefits to both our valued lay and professional clients as well as to our members, staff and pupils. These include:
  - a. Reduced environmental impact.
  - b. Enhanced security and confidentiality in the storage of case papers.
  - c. Complete GDPR compliance.
  - d. The near instant transmission of material between clients, staff and members, as well as the courts.

### **Obligations on members of chambers**

4. Each member of chambers will:

- a. Have access to suitable electronic device(s) with which to conduct their practice.
- b. Ensure they have all necessary software with which to conduct their practice.
- c. Comply at all times, with their obligations under GDPR in the storage of digital materials.

### **Obligations on staff**

5. Our staff team at St Ives Chambers will:
  - a. Be able to receive electronic papers by a wide variety of digital means.
  - b. Ensure that papers received electronically are provided to members in a timely manner, by secure means.
  - c. In the event that hard copy papers bundles/briefs/documents are received from solicitors (please see 'exceptions' below), staff will ensure that these documents are scanned and sent to members.

### **Exceptions and Reasonable Adjustments**

6. In line with Chambers' Reasonable Adjustments Policy, Chambers remains committed to making reasonable adjustments where possible in order to avoid substantial disadvantage to people with a disability within the meaning of s.6 Equality Act 2010.
7. The commitment of St Ives Chambers to ensuring equality of access to the services our staff and members provide also extends to our lay and professional clients. In the event of difficulty with the move to paperless working, our clerking teams will be able to make reasonable adjustments to ensure any substantial disadvantage is avoided. This may involve an exemption to the general principles of paperless working.
8. Some matters may still require handling of paper bundles for the court. St Ives Chambers is aware of this difficulty and will still handle paper bundles if the case

requires it. The clerking teams will be able to discuss this situation with any lay or professional clients on a case-by-case basis.

### **Chambers' Provisions and Aims**

9. All members, staff and pupils will be moving to paperless working practices forthwith. There may be some delay in digitising some old paper records, but it is hoped that all instructions, bundles and other documents pertaining to cases are in electronic form by the date below.
  
10. To assist in the move, St Ives Chambers has been investing heavily in our IT systems and provision of digital services to our members, staff and pupils. This includes:
  - a. A substantial upgrade of all 'back office' systems to a cloud-based system.
  
  - b. The chambers-wide provision of Microsoft 365 to all members, staff and pupils of chambers, including full access to Microsoft Teams.
  
  - c. The provision of headsets and webcams to all staff to enable communication by Microsoft Teams.
  
  - d. The provision of secure cloud storage and the facility to securely transmit files and documents.
  
  - e. Improvement in the internet connection and WIFI provision within our premises.
  
  - f. Improvements to our electronic diary systems (LEX).
  
  - g. The provision of new training materials being rolled out across the first half of 2021.
  
11. The aim is for St Ives Chambers to be able to work with our valued lay and professional clients to ensure that by **Monday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021**, all new instructions being sent into chambers are paperless.

12. In the overwhelming majority of cases, this is already happening. However, St Ives Chambers is committed to assisting in this process. The training materials which will be coming available for members of chambers will be made available to our professional clients to assist in this process. It is also the intention to provide live training / webinars to those professional clients throughout 2021. This will include not just the means of how St Ives Chambers will operate, but also paperless working generally and using to the benefit of our clients in court.

**David Payne, Management Committee Member responsible for IT**  
**Matthew Maynard, Management Committee Marketing Liaison**  
January 2021