

Speech: Lord Chancellor swearing-in

speech: David Gauke

Mr Attorney, I'd like to thank the Lord Chief Justice for that warm welcome and I look forward to working with you and other members of the bench.

I'd also like to start by thanking my predecessor and Cabinet colleague, David Lidington, who I think quickly established himself as an effective Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State. I very much hope to emulate his speedy grasp of such an important constitutional role.

Being appointed as Lord Chancellor is a huge honour and deeply humbling. Dare I say, it is also a little daunting, especially when you look back at some of the previous custodians of this historic title over the centuries.

In light of such an illustrious rollcall of historical figures, I think it is only natural for a new incumbent to look for a familiar reference point.

As the Lord Chief Justice has reminded us, a former Lord Chancellor from my home town of Ipswich was none other than Cardinal Wolsey. An auspicious connection given he went on to serve as Lord Chancellor for 14 years!

My enthusiasm was however a little tempered when I recalled how Wolsey's time as Lord Chancellor was made fraught through dealing with Henry the Eighth and his powers: stripped of his title and his wealth, he faced charges of treason after an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate a settlement with a powerful European supra-national organisation.

Thankfully, not all the duties exercised by Cardinal Wolsey continue to fall on the shoulders of the Lord Chancellor!

So, let me turn to the specific responsibilities I have affirmed to uphold today.

The Rule of Law

Defending the independence of the judiciary and respecting the Rule of Law, that is the foundation of our democracy, our way of life, and the safeguard of fairness and freedom in our society.

The pomp and the pageantry may be centuries old, but what they represent, forged from 900 years of history, remain relevant and important today.

You, the judiciary, are at the heart of the Rule of Law. You uphold and exercise that every day in the judgements and decisions you make and in being called upon to make decisions on some of the most difficult moral and technical issues of our time.

It is a job that requires expertise and deep knowledge. But your task also requires independence from the other branches of the State. You must be free

to make decisions without fear or favour and without undue influence.

That's why I take seriously the solemn affirmation I have made today to defend that independence and to respect the Rule of Law.

Efficient and effective courts

This commitment also includes ensuring efficient and effective support for courts. I want people to have confidence in every part of their justice system.

That means crimes being properly investigated. It means effective prosecutions where there is sufficient evidence and it is in the public interest. It means courts handing down sentences that fit the crime.

It also means a justice system that supports victims and ensures a smooth and efficient process for litigants, for example, through new technology and greater innovation.

I look forward to working closely with the Lord Chief Justice and senior judiciary to build on the important work that is already underway to reform and modernise our courts and tribunals system and to make this a reality.

UK legal services and English Law

Whether in criminal or civil law, the UK's legal system is respected around the world, something that I have seen for myself having worked in corporate law.

As a trainee solicitor over 20 years ago, I was struck working on a shipping litigation case, it was an English Tribunal applying English law that was determining a dispute involving cargo being shipped across the Pacific on a Greek-owned ship with, if I recall correctly, an Indonesian crew.

The only apparent connection to the UK was that the contracts were under English Law and determined by English tribunals.

That was the case then, it's the case now, and it will continue to be the case after we leave the EU. Because, the UK leads the way in global legal services. English Law and UK courts provide the certainty, clarity and flexibility that clients from around the world want.

I know just how important this sector is, not just for London, but for cities and regions across the UK. That's why I want an outcome from our negotiations with the EU that is good for our legal system and good for our position as a provider of legal services around the world, one that protects and promotes a strong and successful legal services sector.

That means ensuring close and comprehensive arrangements for civil judicial co-operation with the EU after Brexit. It means a legal services sector that benefits from and serves as a catalyst for future trade.

I want to see London continue to be an international hub for finance and

legal services, but also see legal services continue to grow and thrive in regional centres serving as specialist hubs.

I look forward to working with the legal services sector and the judiciary to build on our 'Legal Services are GREAT' campaign launched last year to promote the UK's legal services on the world stage.

A final word on the judiciary

The reputation of our legal services is underpinned by our world-leading judiciary, respected for its expertise and its independence.

As Lord Chancellor, I look forward to working with you, Lord Chief Justice, and other senior members of the judiciary, to ensure we continue to attract exceptional and talented people in order for it to remain strong, free from improper influence and truly independent – indeed, to remain the envy of the world.

Conclusion

I mentioned that Cardinal Wolsey managed 14 years as Lord Chancellor. With seven years at the Treasury, seven months at DWP and having just completed my first seven days at the Ministry of Justice, that may be an ambitious record to match.

Although, I have read on Twitter and elsewhere that I may have set a record of my own by being the first solicitor to be appointed Lord Chancellor. I'm pleased that, so far at least, this record remains intact even after such careful and scrupulous deliberation from you, Lord Chief Justice! They do say that the law is an iterative process, so, I await to be revised.

But what I can commit to today is that during my time as Lord Chancellor I will be ambitious for our country's legal services. I will be steadfast in my commitment to defend the independence of the judiciary and respect the Rule of Law, and I will be determined in our work to create a justice system that is open to all, a justice system that everyone in the country can have confidence in, and one that lives up to the deep-rooted sense of justice and fairness the United Kingdom is known for around the world.

Thank you.