

# Lord Chancellor Swearing-in Speech: Brandon Lewis MP

I would like to thank the Lord Chief Justice for that warm welcome. I look forward to working with yourself and other members of the Bench during my time in office. As I look forward to working in Cabinet with you, Mr Attorney – and I would like to congratulate you on your re-appointment.

You bring with you not only your background as a respected barrister, but also your experience serving in the role during your predecessor's time on maternity leave. I have no doubt that you will carry out your duties as a Law Officer with both the diligence and dedication that you are renowned for.

And I'm also delighted to welcome my esteemed colleague, Michael Tomlinson, to his new role as Solicitor General.

As the Lord Chief Justice has described, your role is historic and vital to our democracy – providing essential support to the Attorney and overseeing the work of our prosecuting authorities.

I know you will bring the same commitment and enthusiasm to the role as you have throughout your parliamentary career.

It is a huge honour to become Lord Chancellor and join such a long – if slightly daunting – list of names that includes Cardinal Wolsey, Sir Francis Bacon and Ken Clarke. The patron saint of statesmen and politicians himself goes before me – Sir Thomas More is also one of my predecessors.

Like me, Sir Thomas was fortunate enough to be the Member of Parliament for the fantastic, stunning constituency of Great Yarmouth. He was famously beheaded for treason – so I'm hoping I cannot match that similarity!

Today is, of course, the culmination of a years-long journey for me. From being called to the bar in 1997. To getting elected as a councillor in 1998 and leading Brentwood Borough Council. All the way through to the point where I entered Parliament in 2010, my first ministerial posting in 2012 and the four departments in which I've served since.

I hope to bring all of that experience to this job, but I recognise that the English legal system does have about 900 years more experience than I do! Throughout that time it has evolved to offer a crucial mix of flexibility and reliability that guarantees citizens' rights and allows businesses to thrive and grow as well.

As we continue to pass it down through the generations, I hope to play my part in being both a good steward and a trustworthy custodian of English Law. That is why I take my responsibility to respect its enduring principle, the Rule of Law, so incredibly seriously.

The idea that everyone is equal before the law and that public authorities

must act lawfully is the foundation of our society. It guarantees freedom and fairness in a modern democracy like ours. And we must always be aware that it is not guaranteed and therefore must be protected.

Judges are at the forefront of that work to safeguard the Rule of Law in our justice system, and I will do all I can to defend their judicial independence. I'm clear that the work of our judiciary matters...

...As does the work of our world-leading legal professionals, who are also represented here today. Together they not only deliver justice, they each play a crucial role in the evolution of the law and making sure that it continues to meet the needs of our country.

What this adds up to is a legal system that works. It is not just crucial to our success as a nation, it is one that is also recognised internationally, which is why the world looks to us to be its counsel and its courtroom.

In fact, in 2019 English law was trusted to govern some £250 billion of global mergers and acquisitions, and in 2021, over half of the cases heard in our Commercial Court were international in nature.

We lead Europe in legal services and globally we're second only to the United States. In terms of what this means for UK plc, the figures speak for themselves.

Our legal services sector contributes over £29 billion gross value added to our economy each year, employing some 350,000 people. I want to make sure that justice continues to drive our economic growth as we recover from the pandemic and rise to the cost-of-living challenges that we see ahead of us.

We've maintained our world-leading position because of the flexibility of our system and our willingness to embrace change. I'm clear that if we want to remain an attractive legal centre then we must continue finding those new and better ways to provide legal services.

As Lord Chancellor, I will do all I can to support legal innovation – so that our legal services can be transformed, not just for the benefit of businesses and the public, but for our legal profession too.

I want to see a modern justice system that is built around the people who use it. One where we do more online, with the right guidance and support.

Whether that's through making a claim or resolving a dispute. So that we can save time, cost, and stress to people seeking justice and reduce the burden on those who work in the system.

And we've got to be agile enough to ensure that English Law provides clarity for businesses through a period of constant change – in particular when it comes to digital and emerging technologies such as blockchain and smart contracts.

These technologies offer the opportunity for us to transform how our businesses operate, with more transparent and efficient ways of working.

I'm very much aware that we have already begun a process of modernising the courts to make sure that they are in good working order for the digital age.

As part of my duty for the efficient and effective running of the courts and tribunals, I intend to see through this ambitious and innovative programme.

I am also cognisant of the fact that COVID-19 was an extraordinarily difficult period and time for the justice system, the judiciary and our hardworking court staff who played a huge part in keeping things moving. I want to thank you for your hard work and determination to meet those challenges head on, including through innovation that was delivered at rapid pace.

While the knock-on effects of COVID-19 continue to be felt today, it is thanks to your dedication that we drove down the Crown Court backlog by around 2,000 cases from its peak in June 2021. This is a huge achievement – but there is still substantial work to be done. The family court sat to its highest ever level in 2021, and in the immigration and employment tribunals we have reduced the caseload from its peak during the pandemic.

As Lord Chancellor I am hopeful to see an end to the disruptive strike action that risks undoing the progress we have all worked so hard to achieve, and that is delaying justice for hundreds of victims – and causing the backlog to start to increase.

I'm pleased to have reached agreement with the leadership of the Criminal Bar Association today. They will be re-balloting their members quickly following new proposals for further reforms to criminal legal aid. These are generous and I would encourage CBA members to consider them carefully and positively.

I would like to say something about prisons and probation, for which I am also responsible as Secretary of State for Justice.

Prison and probation officers – some of whom were involved in the State Funeral procession – play a huge role in our justice system and are so often the hidden heroes of our society.

I want to also take the opportunity this morning to thank them for their immense efforts throughout the pandemic – and for their continuing hard work – to keep our prisons and the public safe.

I will continue to prioritise the creation of secure and modern prison places – ones that champion rehabilitation by equipping offenders to become active in the jobs market. This in itself will keep the public safe by preventing reoffending, but it will also help us play our part to drive the government's agenda for economic growth.

I also want to explore options for reforming the Probation Service, which is vital in steering prison leavers towards better futures.

And I am determined to make public protection the overriding factor in parole decisions – so that we can be assured of the confidence of both victims and the public.

Mr Attorney, I want to finish by thanking you all for your warm welcome and reiterating my dedication to the oath I have sworn today. As I step into this ancient role, I am very, very much aware of my constitutional responsibilities, as well as my duty to the judiciary, the courts, tribunals and to justice more broadly.

I look forward to working with all of you as we each play our part in the justice system – to cherish and protect the ideals on which it was built and to carry on building it around the people who are using it every day. Thank you.