

Dinner to Her Majesty's Judges
Mansion House, 6 July 2022

It is a pleasure to welcome you all here this evening

We're especially pleased to have you, Lord Chancellor and you Lord Chief Justice

I know we're all looking forward to hearing your speeches later this evening.

For some of you who haven't been here before, it is a pleasure to welcome you to this grand hall.

It is a remarkable place to work. You certainly feel the deep history of this unique building.

Despite the way I am dressed, I'm not feeling 1750s...

I'm feeling much more 1980s.

Top Gun is the summer blockbuster and Kate Bush is at the number one spot...

The 80s was when I had started my training and nascent steps towards a career as a solicitor.

I was called to the Irish Bar – quiet in the back there – before what was intended to be year or two in London getting some wider commercial experience.

That turned into a somewhat longer stay!

A stay which had led me to my current position as a partner in DLA Piper... and, indeed, to becoming the 693rd Lord Mayor of the City of London.

As Lord Mayor, I am also the Chief Magistrate, a term which some of you may recall was also used by Oliver Cromwell, although I am afraid I claim no other similarity.

That constitutional connection is also reflected in the provisions of the current Senior Courts Act... which deem the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London to be judges of the Central Criminal Court.

Needless to say, that does not mean we ever engage in cases, but that historical backdrop does mean that we maintain a very close link with the judiciary, not just here in the City but across the UK.

We know first hand how difficult the work is that you all do – especially given the challenges of the pandemic... a pandemic where the courts kept open, opening up new 'Nightingale Courts' throughout the country to deal with the backlog.

I know that I speak for both our other two speakers tonight when I say I don't think we can thank you enough for your work over these difficult past two years.

In fact, I often hear that one of the most desirable aspect of doing business with the UK is how rigorous our rule of law is.

It underpins every single transaction, every single penny of every single pound of our six-hundred-and-forty-nine-billion-pounds of exports.

It is clear to me, as it has been clear to all Lord Mayors who have stood where I am standing, that if we don't continually invest in our judiciary – then our entire legal system is at risk.

Which is why the City of London Corporation has been so dedicated to the new court complex being constructed on the border of the City and the judicial heartland of the capital.

The civic site at Salisbury Square will provide a new facility with eighteen courtrooms...housing not only Crown, Magistrates, County and Civil Courts, but also a brand-new home for the City of London police.

The City of London Law Courts will not only create a new 'legal link' between the Square Mile and Fleet Street...but it will also create four-hundred new jobs, as well as a new site for commercial development.

If I can stick with jobs for a moment, 2022 is a momentous year for our Central Criminal Court, as it marks the 50th Anniversary of the appointment of the first female judge at the Old Bailey – Dame Rose Heilbron.

In an interview with the Independent published earlier this year, her daughter – Hilary, herself a silk at Brick Court Chambers and the 29th woman to become a QC – said that her mother had a great presence in the court room.

She told the journalist "Juries hung on her every word".

Now, I know as a solicitor that a hung jury is not entirely desirable for a judge, but it does show what an impact Rose Heilbron had in our world-renowned court.

How things have changed since Rose Heilbron's time at the Old Bailey - the Central Criminal Court now has gender parity across its full-time judges.

As our new Recorder of London Mark Lucraft pointed out in a press interview last August, it is so important that our courts reflect our society.

Recent research published by the Ministry of Justice, pointed out that white male barristers are the largest gender-ethnicity-profession group in the judiciary and occupy the majority of senior court posts.

I know that – for many of you – correcting these statistics is a priority and I commend you all for the work you're doing in this field.

Achieving greater socio-economic diversity is a priority for me, as part of my mayoral theme: People and Purpose – Investing in a Better Tomorrow.

An important part of my tenure is focused on ensuring the best and most diverse talent can be identified and promoted.

Last month, I launched 'Progress Together', an initiative to drive socio-economic diversity at senior levels across UK financial services.

We need an economy which has equality of progression and I am making it a central part of my year to focus on that.

Ladies and gentlemen, by my count we have about two hundred different members of the judiciary here with us tonight – which means there are probably about two hundred different opinions about the priorities of our judiciary.

But one thing that – I hope – we can all agree on is about how crucial it is that we not only invest in the infrastructure of our legal profession, but that we also ensure that the judiciary is reflective of the breadth and depth of our society.

We know – as you have shown throughout the pandemic – our legal sector can adapt to any challenge thrown at it and has, historically, outperformed the world...

I look forward to working alongside you all – and supporting the sector – to achieve even greater things in the future. Thank you all very much.

Finally, please join me in the toast:

“HER MAJESTY’S JUDGES”