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Press Release

Basingstoke firms offer couples chance to settle out of court

New service for Basingstoke couples who are breaking up

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by Ann Corrigan, Family law solicitor

Direct line 01256 460830 email acorrigan@phillips-law.co.uk

Couples in and around Basingstoke who intend to separate or divorce can now take advantage of a new service which will help them settle out of court. It's called collaborative law and it's a new approach built upon mutual problem solving, where both parties and their lawyers pledge to work together to negotiate an agreement without going through a costly court case.

Ann Corrigan from law firm Phillips Solicitors, who pioneered the introduction of collaborative law to couples in Basingstoke and Hampshire's surrounding counties over a year ago, will now be working together with Nick Massey-Chase of Brain Chase Coles to offer lower cost, less painful divorces by using the new service that helps couples focus on rebuilding the future. It is aimed at keeping divorce and separation cases out of court and making the process quicker, cheaper and more amicable. In the process the couple, each represented by specially trained lawyers like Ann and Nick, agree in writing to reach a settlement out of court in a series of special four-way, face-to-face meetings.

This way of working means that proceedings are open at all times. Most significantly, if an agreement cannot be reached, and court is the only solution, the lawyers involved cannot then act for either party in court – so they have an extra incentive to settle the case.

Ann Corrigan, 48, family lawyer and mediator at Phillips Solicitors in Basingstoke, is part of a regional group of lawyers now offering collaborative law. She explained how it can be a godsend to divorcing couples, particularly those with children: "Collaborative law operates on the idea that every family going through a divorce has its own different needs. It then takes the best of what's out there and offers it to them. By all sitting down together, we ensure that couples stay in control of their own futures, instead of leaving decisions to a judge in a courtroom. From a solicitor's point of view, there's an element of working in the best way we

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can – not compromising - but being tough on an issue yet being on the side of the people. For the family it can mean helpful advice and support, without the long, drawn-out and often painful recriminations involved in a court case.'

Nick Massey-Chase, 55, family lawyer for over 30 years at Brain Chase Coles, has recently trained as a collaborative lawyer. Nick explains: 'This is not a soft option, it helps you to see both sides as we work together towards an agreement, but the difference is you are in control, it's your process, and we are focussed on solutions rather than confrontation. Collaborative lawyers put your problem in the centre of the table and use our combined knowledge and experience to help you resolve your difficulties.'

Sadly, family breakdown is a fact of life, but where this national initiative has been practised elsewhere in the UK, it has achieved remarkable results. Now couples in Basingstoke and Hampshire have the chance to use it.

SPLIT STATISTICS

Divorce rates in England and Wales fell by 8% in 2005 - the lowest for five years, according to the Office for National Statistics. There were 141,750 divorces in 2005 compared with 153,399 in 2004. The last time the figure was so low was in 2000.

Marriages which ended in divorce were lasting - on average - slightly longer at 11.6 years in 2005, compared to 11.5 years in 2004. The UK has the world's highest divorce rate per head of population, twice that of the second placed country, Sweden.

ENDS



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Note to editors:

About Ann Corrigan

Ann, a family lawyer and mediator at Phillips Solicitors, has specialised in family law for over 20 years and was one of the first tranche of lawyers to train in collaborative law in the UK. From her experience it is clear that clients value the process because it allows them to resolve their issues in a non-aggressive way and continue a relationship with responsibility even after it breaks down. This is so important, particularly where there are children involved. Ann is also a trained mediator and member of Resolution.

About Nick Massey-Chase

Nick is a founding partner at Brain Chase Coles and has been a family lawyer for over 30 years, dealing with all aspects of marriage and relationship breakdown. Nick has seen the value of couples working together towards their common solution instead of battling things out in court and so he decided to train in collaborative law. Nick is also a member of Resolution (formerly the Solicitor's Family Law Association) and leads the firm's family law team.

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Pam Whittle, marketing manager, Phillips Solicitors, Town Gate, 38 London Road, Basingstoke, Hants RG21 7NY.
www.phillips-law.co.uk t. 01256 854642, f. 01256 364333 e. pwhittle@phillips-law.co.uk