PRESS REPORTS ABOUT LIMITED SITTING DAYS FOR RECORDERS

Thank you for your letter of 7 February 2019 about sitting days for recorders in the Crown Court. I am sorry for the delay in responding formally.

To respond to your questions, Presiding Judges in the Western Circuit and London/South East Circuit issued letters to Recorders in their areas last Summer, setting out the position for Crown sitting days and encouraging Recorders to plan ahead and book their sitting days. We do not recognise the language used by the Criminal Bar Association, these letters made clear that the intention is to ensure Recorders are deployed as effectively and fairly as possible. Of course, we do not expect to penalise Recorders who do not sit their ‘minimum’ number of days through no fault of their own.

As far as the overall picture for resources is concerned, I set the overall HMCTS budget (including ‘sitting day allocations’) in conjunction with the Lord Chief Justice and Senior President of Tribunals – and within this, the number of Crown Court ‘sitting days’ is decided in the light of how much work the Court has. The number of sittings in the Crown Court has therefore reduced as the number of cases has gone down in recent years – the most recent published statistics show that the number of outstanding cases in the Crown Court (and magistrates’ courts) continues to fall, and that average wait time for Crown Court defendants is the lowest since 2014.