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The Venue:

The HNW Divorce Litigation Flagship Conference was held at One Moorgate Place this year, with delegates arriving on the morning of 24 November. The location of the venue perfectly aligned with the purpose of the conference; Moorgate being home to many thriving law firms. Likewise, One Moorgate Place appropriately accommodated the conference; being a widely chosen host for many high-value events and conferences over the years. The preservation of the building's historic features, namely a plaque listing past presidents can be seen when first entering, such originality was met with bright modern lighting within the conference room - this gave a warm and welcoming feeling to delegates. The conference room connected to a smaller room, which is where lunch and refreshments were served – the room conveniently provided stand-up, rounded tables which were ideal for a break from being seated.

Networking Opportunities:

The day catered to the professional development of delegates; with refreshment breaks being a comfortable 20 minutes to network and ask any further questions to panellists. All delegates were provided with a lanyard with a large card detailing their business of belonging and their names; an easy way to facilitate networking. The event ended with a drinks reception held in a room on the lower ground floor of One Moorgate Place which was inclusive of a well-stocked bar. Whilst I did not stay for the reception;

I am assured that the delegates were able to relinquish from the opportunity to further make connections with experts in their field and develop their professional relationships.

ThoughtLeaders4 Organisation:

The organisation of the team at ThoughtLeaders4 is hard to be criticised. Prior to the day of the event, communication via email remained consistent and swift. Upon arrival, delegates were met with a representative providing lanyards for the event and a complimentary bag which contained a booklet detailing the events of the day and a useful notebook and pen. The event was held to time and finished exactly at 17:20pm with zero technical delays. Moreover, all refreshments were indeed served fresh. Throughout the conference room banners detailing the event and the sponsors of the conference were clear to the eye and placed in visible areas around the room. The posters also reminded delegates of upcoming HNW Divorce events for delegates to take a note of. The conference was presented by the esteemed Jane Keir and Jonathon Hillard who ensured they gave a summary of all sessions on the mic prior to their commencement.



My Thoughts:

The conference gave lawyers that deal with HNW divorce clients the opportunity to hear from some of the industry's leading professionals. Tips and tricks for potential divorce issues were shared, that was, both from the perspective of achieving success when representing the claiming spouse and wealth-hoarding spouse. Being a law student, the day provided as a critical starting point for me to understand some of the nitty gritty issues faced in the HNW divorce world. Many of the sessions covered during the day included crossovers between departments within law firms, for example, hearing from litigation and family lawyers on the same panel, a realistic reflection of law in practice. The day also provided me with the knowledge on how the law can be 'legally avoided', for example through spouses setting up offshore trust structures. Whilst this sounds like a juxtaposing statement, thus seemingly impossible, lawyers with years of expertise continue to defend and help their clients achieve the best divorce outcomes using the law to their advantage. Manoeuvring around the law, in a legal manner of course, is a method unfound in textbooks and that one may only get to grips with in practice.

The conference refined my interest in family and private client law and helped me critically assess divorce issues with a forward-thinking approach.

Having attended alongside current practicing lawyers and professionals that encounter divorces during their work, I am assured it was an amazing opportunity for professional development. Though the conference served also to facilitate personal development; it is always important to be wary of such real-life issues surrounding divorce since they can be faced by many ordinary people. The sessions touched on many humanist aspects of divorce and the need to deal with parties in a sensitive manner whilst fighting to achieve the best possible outcome for your client.

Key Takeaways:

There were many gems that were shared by panellists at the conference though there are some that I hope to take along with me into my professional journey.

The conference reaffirmed that at the heart of being a good divorce lawyer and becoming a leader in the divorce industry is to understand the human element of your client's case.

To understand their wants and needs from a human perspective without becoming overly sprung on receiving a huge settlement; often cases involve children and vulnerable parties and the best way to end a divorce is in an amicable manner if possible. Though panellists were sure to expose the shortcomings of the courts when settling cases – the use of coercive control within courts does not always help to reach the most humane nor logical settlement. I was also enlightened on the possibility of finding an asset using corporate intelligence despite a claiming spouse having zero knowledge when seeking legal advice. Further, I am sure if ever faced with assets on divorce in future, I will be careful not to discount them as 'fantastic' or high value.

Stand-out Sessions:

Amongst the sessions which stood out to me was the discussion surrounding 'Asset Protection & Enforcement: Strategies to be Aware of' led by Hannie Davie from Grant Thornton, Robert Brodrick of Payne Hicks Beach, Amy Radnor of Farrer and Co. and Professor Jonathon Harris of Serle Court. Considerably, the use of differing structures as a protection prior to divorce proceedings even commencing was of interest to me. The panellists advised on the case of HNW individuals placing their funds in a trust structure as an alternative when considering the option of a pre-nuptial agreement to avoid the ramifications such agreement may have on a relationship. Though they emphasised that such structures must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis; with international families being advised to keep assets in the name of the family and transfer funds to the HNW individual for expenditure when necessary. Likewise, advice differed where relatives were no longer living; here, panellists recommended that a trust should include a contractual clause detailing the potential situation should the beneficiary (HNW individual) marry or cohabit. As a result, clients avoid the potential claims

against their assets in the potential case of a divorce.

The fascinating topic of 'Fantastic (or extraordinary) Assets and where to find them' was hosted by Carmel King from Grant Thornton, Withers partner Natasha Thourton, Alex Cooke from Schnieder Financial Solutions, Christopher Pocock KC and Kelan Mchugh (1KBW). The speakers begun by distinguishing between chattels and intangible assets, they identified what may be classified as either – this is vital to ascertain at the beginning stages of investigation to ensure the correct sources are searched and precious time is saved. Though I was rather surprised to learn the different luxury assets which fell into these categories. Luxury chattels included a racehorse despite being on its deathbed and a classic car collection. In these cases, insurance comes to save the day. The panellists also touched on the different methods taken to find such fantastic assets when a spouse has no idea as to their existence, it true to say social media has fallen enemy to many. Intangible assets covered

crypto assets such as domain names and Non-Fungible Tokens. The method to find such assets differed from finding chattels, however, social media served useful in both searches. Investigating who spouses are following on discord and telegram was amongst techniques used to discover possible crypto assets – a rather modern-day tell-tale.

Dr Charlotte Proudman, University of Cambridge graduate and member of Goldsmith chambers shed light on 'Coercive Control in the Family Courts' alongside Kingsley Napley partner Sandra Paul and Geoffrey Kingscote (1 Hare Court). The panellists provided an interesting insight on where criminal and family law intersect. Proudman criticked the use of coercive control within courts and its ability to influence the needs-based claim of a party. She presented that the court often looks at allegations in a vacuum rather than within the claim more broadly, a view supported by the Court of Appeal. The Griffiths v Griffiths case was drawn on to develop the argument that coercive control can appear in many different and unrecognised forms, namely, the party in

this Griffiths felt she would have been silenced should the judgement be published with the party names anonymised. The panellists highlighted the possibility of traumatic experiences being interrogated by the courts and the courts frequent insensitivity to traumatic experiences. To conclude, I leave you to contemplate on a question posed by Sandra 'can you quantify to the court your inability to attend work (loss of work) when your nudes have been exposed?'.

The 2022 Flagship conference was an invaluable opportunity for me as an aspiring Family Law solicitor. Whilst I may not be able to implement the knowledge just yet, the thoughts of the leaders will definitely be put in storage and thus allow me to begin thinking forward. I am grateful to Paul Barford and Maddi Briggs for enabling me to gain such benefit through their invitation.

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