

**Diane Abbott:** Trevor Phillips has got to stop talking and start delivering

## Divorce lawyers make a plea for dignity

By Lawrence Conway

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The image of a wild-eyed Heather Mills declaring her legal victory over Sir Paul McCartney on the steps of the High Court last week was one that emblazoned itself on the memories of all who had followed the couple's epic divorce battle for months.

But the ruling of Mr Justice Bennett yielded another picture which managed to nudge Ms Mills out of the full glare of the spotlight: that of the former Beatle's formidable solicitor, Fiona Shackleton, emerging from the court sporting, instead of her usual bouffant, a slicked-back hairdo. Ms Shackleton's "drenching" – the result of Ms Mills throwing a carafe of water over her during one of many heated discussions on the last day of the bitter legal proceedings – has done nothing to harm the lawyer's reputation.



**DANIEL BEREHULAK/GETTY**

*Heather Mills addresses the media outside the Royal Courts of Justice after the settlement*

But the incident, and the outlandish media circus that surrounded one of the most expensive divorces in history, has made one thing clear to Britain's leading lawyers: enough is enough.

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Fearing that a series of high-profile celebrity separations have brought the whole business of divorce into disrepute, 19 top City and West End lawyers, who represent a wide range of wealthy clients, have come together with the aim of bringing dignity and decorum back to breaking up.

The Central London Collaborative Forum aims to spare rich couples wanting to separate and divorce the full glare of the media by settling their differences outside the courtroom and thereby protect their children.

The move is in line with other lawyers' organisations which have expressed concern after the McCartney-Mills case. The Law Society described Ms Mills' conduct in court as disastrous and warned others considering representing themselves in divorce proceedings not to make the same mistake. And

Resolution, which represents 5,000 family lawyers, believed the case was unfortunate and that "a high-conflict court battle is not the inevitable end to marriage breakdown, even when there is a lot of money on the table".

Whether the legal profession can now manage to save its most famous, wealthy and outspoken clients from their own moments of divorce-court folly in the future remains to be seen.

Ms Mills certainly advised differently last week. On representing herself, she said: "Do it yourself, be a litigating person. You know, the power of one". And with the finalising of her £24.4m divorce deal, she said: "I feel as if a great weight has been lifted." She was scathing too about Sir Paul's solicitor. "Fiona Shackleton very sadly handled this case in the worst manner you can ever, ever imagine. She has called me many, many names before even meeting me when I was in a wheelchair," she said.

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