



Department
for Culture
Media & Sport

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Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill Minister
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Dear Julia,

Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill

When we met earlier this week, I said we had followed-up on your comments during the debate in Committee on amendment 11 [Hansard columns 103-130], about the nature and scope of the consultation the National Panel for Registration undertook with the local registration service and that I would provide further information as soon as I received it.

I am pleased to enclose a further letter to the Secretary of State from Jacquie Bugeja, Chief Executive of the National Panel, which addresses the points raised during the Committee Stage debate.

I am copying this letter to all the Peers who spoke during the debate and am placing copies in the House Libraries.

*Yours ever,
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Stowell of Beeston

Baroness Cumberlege CBE DL
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**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

2 July 2013
Our ref: JB/LG

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Rt Hon Maria Miller MP
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Dear Rt Hon Maria Miller MP

Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill – possible amendments

Thank you for your letter of 14 June 2013 in response to my original letter about the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill. I am pleased that you found the letter, and subsequent briefing, helpful.

You asked if I could provide some further information on the nature and scope of the consultation the National Panel of Registration (NPR) carried out on the conscience clause. Our consultation has been comprehensive via our ten regional panel members, each representing between 13 to 32 local authorities; covering all 174 local authorities across England and Wales.

Our consultation has been as follows:

- First, in response to the Government's Equal Marriage consultation in June 2012, the ten panel members each held a regional meeting with their local authorities; at which Equal Civil Marriage was debated. At none of these meetings, attended by both managers and registrars representing all of England and Wales, did anyone raise the issue of wanting a conscience clause inserted into the Bill.
- Second, in June 2013 the NPR met in London where the issue of a conscience clause was specifically discussed. The NPR was unanimous that they did not call for, or support, a conscience clause for Registrars.
- Third, further engagement and regional meetings have subsequently taken place during June and July 2013, and the conscience clause was again specifically discussed. I can confirm that all regional meetings neither called for nor supported the insertion of a conscience clause for Registrars.

The objection to a conscience clause is based on Registrars being local authority employees who are expected (and willing) to carry out all the functions that their role covers. On a daily basis, Registrars deal with many scenarios that for those with strong beliefs (religious or otherwise) would possibly not be able to carry out. Examples include: registering the birth of a child from a same sex couple; undertaking marriages for previously divorced persons; or carrying out civil ceremonies and registrations.

Registration Services and, in particular the Registrars, are passionate and proud about the services they deliver and the customers they work with. For the past 176 years, Registrars have been carrying out their duties and have never wanted a conscience clause, and do not see the need for one now. In the Registration Service we leave beliefs at home and deliver neutrally. The beliefs we bring to work are respect and tolerance and we would wish that to continue.

Thank you for offering to keep me informed about progress of the Bill and on implementation plans. I look forward to hearing more but do let me know if you require further information in the meantime.

Yours sincerely

Jacquie Bugeja

Chair of the National Panel for Registration
England and Wales