
Guidance Note

For costs law firms



23 April 2026 (version 4)

Costs Lawyer Standards Board

CLSB



Who is this guidance for?

1. You should read this guidance if you have responsibility for a business that:
 - employs Costs Lawyers or has officers (such as partners or directors) who are Costs Lawyers;
 - markets or provides costs law services; and
 - is not authorised by a regulator (such as the Solicitors Regulation Authority) under the Legal Services Act 2007 (LSA).

Such businesses are often referred to as “unregulated” because they are not regulated specifically under the LSA, although they are likely to be regulated in other ways, not least under general consumer protection legislation.

2. Many costs advisers have established partnerships, limited liability partnerships, limited companies or other vehicles through which they work. We refer to these organisations as “costs law firms”. Costs law firms often employ a combination of regulated Costs Lawyers, unregulated costs advisors, paralegals and other staff. Because the CLSB only regulates individuals and not organisations, these too are “unregulated” organisations even if they are owned by or employ regulated individuals.
3. This guidance is relevant to anyone who has a position of responsibility in a costs law firm. Aspects of the guidance will also be relevant to unregulated organisations that employ Costs Lawyers on an “in-house” basis, such as insurers, litigation funders and government agencies.
4. A Costs Lawyer will always remain liable for their personal conduct within a costs law firm. Where the practices or arrangements of an unregulated employer conflict with the regulatory obligations of a Costs Lawyer, then if the Costs Lawyer is unable to resolve that conflict it is likely they will need to leave their employment.
5. In addition, the more control a Costs Lawyer has over their organisation (for example, if they are a director or partner) the more likely it is that we will hold

that Costs Lawyer responsible for ensuring the organisation puts in place procedures that enable Costs Lawyers who work for the business to comply with the Code of Conduct and their other regulatory obligations.

6. It is therefore very important that everyone working in a costs law firm environment understands the professional obligations to which a Costs Lawyer is subject. Costs law firms should not create an environment where a Costs Lawyer cannot comply with their obligations and should not penalise a Costs Lawyer for complying with them. Contracts of employment should reflect Costs Lawyers' professional obligations.
7. There is more detailed guidance on what many of these issues mean for Costs Lawyers in the rules and guidance set out in the [Costs Lawyer Handbook](#).

Reserved legal activities

8. Under the LSA, certain legal activities are reserved to authorised persons, meaning that only qualified, regulated practitioners – such as Costs Lawyers – can undertake those activities.
9. Costs Lawyers are authorised to carry out the following reserved legal activities in unauthorised businesses:
 - conducting litigation in relation to costs;
 - appearing before and addressing a court (exercising a right of audience) in proceedings or on issues that relate to costs;
 - administering oaths.See our [Guidance Note](#) on reserved legal activity rights for more information.
10. The above reserved legal activities can be undertaken by a Costs Lawyer for the benefit of their unregulated employer if they work “in-house”, or can be undertaken directly to or for a costs law firm’s external clients.

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11. Costs Lawyers cannot delegate their right to carry on reserved legal activities to unauthorised members of staff, such as costs advisors. It is an offence under the LSA for anyone who is not authorised or not an exempt person (under Schedule 3 of the LSA) to carry on a reserved legal activity.
 12. However, Costs Lawyers may, for example, bring a unauthorised person with them to court to take notes, and courts may also allow unauthorised persons to address them in certain hearings.
 13. Costs Lawyers may also delegate ancillary tasks (such as preparing a draft of a document) to unauthorised persons, providing it is the Costs Lawyer who is in fact conducting any litigation and, for example, approving any documentation filed with the court prior to it being signed. While an unauthorised person signing a document filed with the court is not necessarily conducting litigation, the CLSB encourages Costs Lawyers to sign these documents themselves to evidence, at least in part, their supervision of the unauthorised individual in the litigation matter.
 14. A person to whom the Costs Lawyer delegates ancillary reserved legal activity work under supervision must not further delegate that work. Only the Costs Lawyer may delegate ancillary reserved legal activity work. That right is not transferable to an unauthorised person. The Costs Lawyer must not only remain responsible for the reserved legal activity work, but must also be able to demonstrate supervision.
 15. A Costs Lawyer who chooses to delegate a task to a colleague remains responsible for regulatory compliance and for client outcomes. The Costs Lawyer must therefore retain proper oversight of the matter and supervise their colleague appropriately. This includes ensuring that:
 - delegated tasks are carried out in accordance with the CLSB's regulatory arrangements;
 - the client understands in advance that the task will be delegated to a person who is not an authorised Costs Lawyer;

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- the delegation complies with the Costs Lawyer Code of Conduct, in particular that delegating the task is in the client’s best interests; and
 - the insurance policy upon which the Costs Lawyer relies extends to cover the outcome of any delegated tasks.

Some core obligations

16. Costs Lawyers are obliged to follow the seven principles of professional conduct set out in the [Code of Conduct](#). They must:

Principle 1: Act with honesty and integrity and maintain their independence.

Principle 2: Comply with their duty to the court and promote the proper administration of justice.

Principle 3: Act in the best interests of their client.

Principle 4: Provide a good quality of work and service to their client.

Principle 5: Deal with the regulators and the Legal Ombudsman (LeO) in an open and co-operative way.

Principle 6: Treat everyone fairly and equitably, and with dignity and respect.

Principle 7: Keep the affairs of their clients confidential.

17. Under Principle 2, a Costs Lawyer’s duty to the court means that (amongst other things) Costs Lawyers cannot mislead the court, or knowingly allow their clients or their employer to do so, even inadvertently.
18. Under Principle 5, Costs Lawyers have duties of disclosure to the CLSB. Costs law firms should be aware that Costs Lawyers might need to disclose matters relating to the firm’s work or business to us if they relate to compliance with our regulatory rules. Your contracts with Costs Lawyers should not prohibit disclosure by them of information in accordance with their professional obligations. Costs Lawyers also have duties of disclosure to LeO; these are dealt with below (see “Complaints about a Costs Lawyer”).
19. Costs Lawyers are also required, under our Practising Rules and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Rules in the [Costs Lawyer Handbook](#), to maintain

their knowledge and undertake ongoing training to ensure they remain competent to fulfil their role. Costs law firms should provide Costs Lawyers with the time and opportunity to maintain and build on their professional skills. While you are not obliged to pay for a Costs Lawyer’s CPD training, you should keep in mind the benefits to your organisation and your clients of Costs Lawyers having access to high quality, relevant learning activities. You can read more about Costs Lawyers’ CPD obligations on our [CPD webpage](#).

Supervision

20. You should have an effective system of supervision in place within your costs law firm to help ensure that Costs Lawyers meet their own regulatory obligations when they are carrying out work, and that Costs Lawyers themselves supervise staff appropriately, as explained at paragraph 14 above.
21. An effective system of supervision is even more important if a large proportion of your staff are working at home for some or all of the time. This will include maintaining regular contact and checking work online where possible.
22. A “litigant in person” cannot delegate their personal right to conduct litigation. As such right is personal to the individual it cannot be delegated. If an unauthorised employee assumes responsibility for the conduct of litigation which is not merely mechanical or administrative, they will have committed an offence under the LSA.

Costs law firms and client protection

Professional indemnity insurance

23. Costs Lawyers are required to have professional indemnity insurance (PII) to cover claims against them for negligence.
24. [Practising Rule 9](#) provides that they must:

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- have PII cover at a minimum level of £100,000 (for any one claim), to include loss of documents; and
 - on an ongoing basis, assess all financial risk associated with their work and ensure they have PII in excess of the minimum at a level commensurate with that risk.
25. The insurance policy will normally be in the name of the organisation. Costs law firms should therefore make sure that the policy meets the above conditions and covers all work undertaken by the Costs Lawyer, including any delegated work for which the Costs Lawyer is responsible. This will include a regular review of the financial risks to be insured – something that a prudent business will do in any event. See our [Guidance Note](#) on indemnity insurance for further information.

Client money

26. Costs Lawyers are not allowed to hold client money, pursuant to Principle 3.6 of the Code of Conduct. So, if as an unregulated costs law firm you do hold money that belongs to your clients, the relevant account should not be in a Costs Lawyer's name.
27. By client money we mean, for example, money:
- from an opponent in contentious proceedings, to satisfy a costs award made in the client's favour;
 - from your client to satisfy a costs award made against that client; or
 - money paid in advance on account of charges for your services or disbursements such as court fees.
28. Costs Lawyers can however receive payment in their own name from clients in settlement of an invoice for services or for disbursements already incurred. They can also make use of a Third Party Managed Account (TPMA), whereby a reputable financial institution handles the client's money in a pre-agreed way.
29. Where a costs law firm has its own legal identity (usually a limited company or LLP), then if any client money is held by that body it will not be held by the

employed Costs Lawyer. In such cases, the prohibition in Principle 3.6 is not directly relevant. However, Costs Lawyers who work under this kind of arrangement still need to uphold their professional obligations, which will include safeguarding clients' money where relevant. See our [Guidance Note](#) on handling client money for further information.

Complaints about a Costs Lawyer

30. Under the Code of Conduct, a Costs Lawyer must provide for an effective complaints procedure for handling complaints from clients, covering issues relating to their professional conduct as well as the service they provide, in line with the CLSB's guidance on complaints procedures.
31. They must ensure that complaints are dealt with promptly (within a maximum eight-week period from date of receipt) openly and fairly, and that appropriate provisions for redress exist.
32. If a complaint is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant, or is not resolved within eight weeks, individual clients have the right to take a complaint about the standard of service provided by the Costs Lawyer to LeO. Complaints about a Costs Lawyer's professional conduct can also be considered by the CLSB. The Costs Lawyer must tell clients about the right to escalate a complaint to LeO or the CLSB both at the time of engagement and when any complaint is made, and provide contact details for those organisations.
33. If LeO upholds a complaint it has a range of options available to it, including ordering a Costs Lawyer to reduce a bill or to pay compensation. As well as looking at the substance of the complaint, LeO will look at the way in which the complaint was handled and this will be a factor in its determination, including whether to charge the Costs Lawyer the case fee for the matter.
34. If you do not already have one, your costs law firm will need to establish a complaints procedure that complies with these provisions as far as the work of the Costs Lawyer and any work that they supervise is concerned.

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35. You should ensure that your employment contract with the Costs Lawyer permits them to disclose relevant information to LeO and the CLSB.
 36. Issues may arise where a client complains about a matter where the Costs Lawyer did not perform all of the work and some of it was carried out by a unauthorised person such as a costs advisor. LeO only has authority to deal with complaints in relation to authorised persons under the LSA. LeO may therefore decide to deal with only part of the complaint, or may decide to treat the whole case as the Costs Lawyer's responsibility where the Costs Lawyer was in charge of the matter or supervising the unauthorised colleague.

Information to clients

37. The Code of Conduct requires Costs Lawyers to ensure that clients are able to make informed decisions about the work being undertaken on their behalf throughout the lifetime of a matter, including how it will be priced, the costs incurred and the likely overall cost of the matter (including any potential liability for the costs of other parties).
38. This means that a Costs Lawyer must give an estimate of fees and details of their charging structure to clients in advance of instruction. Where that estimate subsequently becomes inaccurate or that charging structure changes, the Costs Lawyer must provide an updated estimate or notice of revised charges.
39. The Costs Lawyer must also let the client know what steps will be taken in the matter and the likely timetable. For more detailed information, see our [Guidance Notes](#) on price transparency and client care letters.
40. Any publicity of your business must not be misleading or inaccurate insofar as it concerns the Costs Lawyer or their work.
41. It is important that costs law firms make it clear to clients which work is going to be carried out by a Costs Lawyer and which work will be undertaken by staff who

are not authorised under the LSA, and what the consequences are for the client. In particular:

- Whilst the client will have a right to complain about the Costs Lawyer's service to LeO or about their conduct to the CLSB, they will have no such rights in relation to the unauthorised person, although they will have the right to complain that there has been no, or no adequate, supervision by the Costs Lawyer of the unauthorised person.
- Whilst professional indemnity insurance will be in place to cover any claim relating to the Costs Lawyer's work, that insurance might not extend to the work of unauthorised persons who are not supervised by the Costs Lawyer.

Conflicts of interest

42. A Costs Lawyer must decline to act if it would not be in the client's best interests to do so, including where that client's interests conflict with the Costs Lawyer's interests or with the interests of another client (other than in certain circumstances). See Principle 3.1a of the Code of Conduct and our [Guidance Note](#) on conflicts of interest.
43. Examples of such situations include:
 - Providing costs services to opposing parties in a costs dispute or other litigation.
 - Providing costs services to both an instructing solicitor and a third-party funder in negotiating funding terms for the same proceedings.
44. A Costs Lawyer must also decline to act for a client if the client has a conflict of interest with you, as the Costs Lawyer's employer, or with a fellow employee. This may mean, for example, that if the Costs Lawyer considers that a fellow employee at your costs law firm has been negligent in relation to the client's case then the Costs Lawyer may be obliged to inform the client and to stop acting for them.
45. Your costs law firm will want to put systems in place to ensure that conflicts of interest do not arise or, if they do arise, they are identified and properly managed. This might include, for example, erecting information barriers if a Costs Lawyer is

acting (or has acted) on a matter for a client and your firm intends to have another employee work on a related matter in a way that could be adverse to the client's interests.

Confidentiality

46. Under Principle 7.1 of the Code of Conduct, a Costs Lawyer must keep the affairs of clients and former clients confidential unless disclosure is required or allowed by law or if the client consents in writing to disclosure, having had the consequences of such consent explained to them.
47. Costs law firms will want to ensure that they have appropriate arrangements in place to help the Costs Lawyer meet their obligations in relation to confidentiality. This will also assist you in complying with the requirements of data protection legislation. For example:
 - Information should not be passed to third parties (for example, for marketing purposes) without the client's consent.
 - Personal data should not be used for a purpose other than for which it was supplied (for example, for cross-selling of services) without consent.
 - Client records should be held securely.
48. Confidential information regarding one client should not be shared with another.

Complying with general consumer protection legislation

49. Costs law firms, like all other businesses, must comply with consumer protection legislation when marketing or providing costs law services to consumers. Consumer protection laws impose requirements around contract terms, cancellation rights, information provision, advertising, ADR and complaint handling, and the way in which services must be performed. Whether or not a costs law firm employs Costs Lawyers, these rules must be followed.
50. The CLSB has published a comprehensive [guide to dealing with consumers](#), which applies to all costs law firms.

Setting up or closing down a costs law firm

51. There are many things to consider when setting up a costs law practice, regardless of whether you intend to employ Costs Lawyers. Our [Guidance Note](#) on setting up a practice provides advice on issues such as whether your firm needs to be authorised, what type of services you can provide, and what arrangements you will need to put in place.
52. It also explains how you should refer to the regulatory status of your costs law firm and how to use the CLSB's Mark of Regulation.
53. Equally, if you are closing a costs law firm, you will need to take steps to protect your clients and ensure minimal disruption to third parties. Our [Guidance Note](#) on regulatory issues when closing down a practice covers matters such as insurance run-off, managing client files and informing stakeholders.

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