



Justice Committee

The Baroness Levitt

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice
By email only

16 October 2025

Dear Baroness Levitt,

WEDDING REFORM

I would firstly like to congratulate you on your recent ministerial appointment; I look forward to working with you.

Thank you for your further update regarding the Government's intention to reform the law around weddings, and for the Government's commitment to legally recognising Humanist marriages in England and Wales.

Humanist Marriages

While I welcome the introduction of a single set of universal rules for weddings and the proposed shift from a system based on the regulation of buildings to one focused on the regulation of officiants, it is disappointing to learn that the Government considers a further consultation necessary, and that any resulting legislation will only be brought forward 'when parliamentary time allows'.

Your response notes the need to "build consensus on the remaining policy details". This is particularly disappointing given that four separate consultations have already taken place over the span of the last 12 years.

The Law Commission's 2007 report on Cohabitation¹ followed an extensive consultation, "receiving over 250 responses from a wide range of stakeholders including women's groups, LGBT+ organisations, religious bodies, legal practitioners, and academics".² Similarly, the majority of respondents to the Government's 2014 consultation on Marriages by Non-Religious Belief Organisations supported legal recognition of Humanist ceremonies.³ Against this backdrop, the rationale for another consultation is unclear.

The 2014 consultation identified complex issues with broader implications for marriage law. Particularly the concern that allowing belief-based ceremonies in unrestricted locations would create further disparities, given that most religious and non-religious couples are currently restricted in where they can marry. I welcome the Government's acceptance of the Law Commission's recommendation to shift away from regulating buildings, removing restrictions on where weddings take place, and I am pleased this concern is no longer held. The proposed framework would create a level playing field and remove the inconsistencies that previously justified delay.

The Marriage Act 2013 provides the Secretary of State with the power to make provision, by order, permitting marriages according to the usages of belief organisations.⁴ In September 2022, the then Government declined to exercise this power, citing the need to consider the

¹ Cohabitation: The Financial Consequences of Relationship Breakdown (Law Com No 307, 2007)

² Women and Equalities Committee, [The rights of cohabiting couples](#) (HC 2022 – 23 92) para 48

³ Ministry of Justice, [Consultation outcome - Marriages by non-religious belief organisations](#), 26 June 2014

⁴ Section 14(4)



Justice Committee

recommendations of the Law Commission's "Weddings" report in full.⁵ Humanists UK rightly recognise that any bill would take years to be implemented and have recently urged the Government to fast-track legal recognition⁶. There is precedent for this approach: Scotland legally recognised humanist marriages in 2005 on an interim basis before being put on a statutory footing in 2014 and the previous Government fast-tracked outdoor civil marriage recognition in 2021.

Cohabitation

Research by the National Centre for Social Research in 2019 revealed that 46% of the public is under the impression that cohabiting couples form a common law marriage. This attitude has remained largely unchanged from the 47% who took the same view in 2005.⁷ In its 2022 report on the rights of cohabiting partners, the Women and Equalities Committee found that the consequences of believing in the common law marriage myth could have profound consequences for cohabiting partners, many of whom do not realise the reality of their situation until it's too late.⁸ Additionally, your predecessor noted that the lack of comprehensive legal protections for cohabiting couples "disproportionately effects the vulnerable, including survivors of domestic and economic abuse, and women, who are often the financially vulnerable party in a relationship."⁹

Given that cohabitation reform is of utmost importance, I am concerned that your substantial update provides no further detail on this matter.

The Committee would, therefore, ask that the Ministry provide clarity on the following:

- Whether the proposals outlined in your letter will affect the timetable for reforming the law on cohabitation, and whether a formal consultation on cohabiting couples is still expected before the end of this year?
- Given the acceptance of the Law Commission's recommendations, what consideration has been given to the recognition of humanist marriages on an interim basis, while any future Bill progresses through Parliament?

I would be grateful if you could provide a response by 6 November.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Slaughter MP
Chair, Justice Committee

⁵ [Answer to written question on 20 September 2022](#), HL2156

⁶ Humanists UK, '[Celebrations as UK Government announces legal humanist marriages, but law change some way away](#)', 2 October 2025

⁷ House of Commons Library, '[Common law marriage and cohabitation](#)', 3 November 2022

⁸ Women and Equalities Committee, '[The rights of cohabiting couples](#)' (HC 2022 – 23 92)

⁹ Letter from Lord Ponsonby, dated 10 February 2025 – [Cohabitation and Humanist Marriages](#) (Response to the Committee)