



## *Law Society of Ireland*

# News Release

2 December 2013

### **LAW SOCIETY WELCOMES THOMAS BYRNE SENTENCE – FASTEST EVER CLOSURE OF A SOLICITOR’S PRACTICE ULTIMATELY COST PROFESSION €3.3 MILLION**

The Law Society welcomes the sentence today of 12 years’ imprisonment (16 years with four suspended) handed down by His Honour Judge Patrick McCartan to former solicitor Thomas Byrne.

Director General of the Law Society, Ken Murphy, said: “The conduct of Thomas Byrne is a direct affront to every value that the solicitors’ profession holds dear. The solicitors’ profession views Thomas Byrne’s crimes as disgraceful and abhorrent. We welcome the sentence handed down today.”

“The Law Society closed Thomas Byrne down faster than any other solicitor in our history. The whistleblower complaint which led to Thomas Byrne’s practice being closed was made at the Law Society on a Thursday (18 October 2007) and, once we had completed our initial investigations, the Law Society changed the locks on the doors of the practice the following Monday (22 October 2007).”

“The next day (23 October 2007), the Law Society applied to the President of the High Court for a number of orders, including freezing all bank accounts operated by Byrne or his firm. The President granted the freezing order based on oral evidence given by a Law Society investigating accountant. The granting of a freezing order on the basis of oral evidence alone is extremely rare and allowed this very serious case to be dealt with as quickly as possible.”

“Once the Law Society, through the High Court, had placed every restriction possible around Byrne, including, in particular, restraining him from practising as a solicitor, we immediately took possession of Byrne’s 3,500 client files and stored them safely and confidentially. All of Byrne’s current clients were contacted by the Law Society, to inform them their files were being held and to urge them to nominate new solicitors to complete any outstanding work.”

Since October 2007, the Law Society has processed all requests for files; responded to court orders granted to the Criminal Assets Bureau and the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation for the production of individual files; and answered queries from clients, their new solicitors, solicitors on

the other side of particular transactions, banks and other interested third parties. This work required the acquisition of secure premises and extra staff. External legal and accountancy services were also required, which cost the Law Society €1.1 million.

Every client of Thomas Byrne who has made a valid claim on the Law Society's Compensation Fund has been compensated. The Law Society has paid €7.2 million to victims of Thomas Byrne out of this fund, which every practising solicitor contributes to on an annual basis. In total, Thomas Byrne has directly cost the Law Society, and by extension the solicitors' profession, €8.3 million.

Following a complex and detailed forensic investigation by the Law Society, and on application of the Society, Thomas Byrne was struck off the Roll of Solicitors and ordered to pay a penalty of €1 million by the President of the High Court on 16 June 2008. The penalty against Byrne remains unpaid.