‘No reservations’: Linklaters hires divisive director of public prosecutions Alison Saunders

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As City firms continue to ramp up their efforts to snare former prosecutors, the UK’s director of public prosecutions (DPP), Alison Saunders, will join Linklaters shortly after she steps down in October.

Saunders, who became the first internal candidate to lead the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) when she replaced Keir Starmer in 2013, will join Linklaters as a partner in its business crime team.

Saunders has been with the CPS since 1986, later serving as chief crown prosecutor for London between 2009 and 2013. During that time – in 2012 – Saunders oversaw the successful prosecution of the two men guilty of the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

However Saunders’ spell as DPP was marred by criticism, particularly surrounding her handling of sexual abuse cases. She faced calls to resign in June 2015 after she opted not to prosecute Labour peer Lord Janner over historic sexual abuse claims, with an independent QC later overturning her decision.

Further, the CPS has been chastised after the collapse of a number of recent rape trials due to disclosure failings. In December, the trial of Liam Allan, who was charged with 12 counts of
rape and sexual assault, fell through after last-minute disclosure supported the defendant's case.

When asked if he had any reservations about Saunders’ track record, Michael Bennett, Linklaters global head of dispute resolution, told Legal Business: ‘No, we haven’t had any reservations at all. She will be a very good fit. She’s a real team player who likes working with people and she has a refreshing lack of ego.’

‘We are seeing the trend of firms hiring ex-prosecutors more and more in the UK. Clients appreciate when they have someone advising them who has come from a prosecution background’, he added.

A spokesperson for the Crown Prosecution Service said: ‘The criminal justice landscape is changing rapidly, as crime trends shift and courts become digital. Under Alison Saunders’ leadership, the CPS has adapted to that changing environment, maintaining performance without compromising our core principles of independence and fairness.’

The next ex-prosecutor likely to be on firms’ wishlists is Serious Fraud Office (SFO) director David Green, who is due to stand down this month. The body’s well-regarded general counsel, Alun Milford, is hotly tipped to be named as his replacement.

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