

The Family Court sitting at Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley and Telford

Having considered the President's Guidance, and in particular the imperative to avoid personally-attended hearings wherever possible, the following emergency arrangements will be in place for both public and private law cases with effect from 23 March 2020:

1. TRIALS IN EXCESS OF ONE DAY: these will inevitably require to be vacated to a date to be fixed. In all such cases, the parties will be offered a telephone directions appointment which may be vacated if no additional directions are required, but which may also be used to identify any urgent discrete issues which may be capable of being resolved by a skype or telephone hearing.
2. CMCs AND OTHER DIRECTIONS HEARINGS: the parties should endeavour to agree directions wherever possible, and submit a draft order to the allocated judge (copying in the Family inbox at Wolverhampton in case the judge in question is away from work). The judge may then make the order ex parte, or propose amendments. In cases where difficulties arise, a telephone hearing will be offered.
3. HEARINGS OF ONE HOUR OR LESS: examples may include Part 25 applications or contentious issues such as contact which are capable of being dealt with on submissions: these will take place by telephone or skype.
4. EMERGENCY HEARINGS: examples may include contested ICOs with a plan of removal. This is one category where attendance of at least some parties may be inevitable, with one or more joining in by skype or telephone. The arrangements for these will be made on a case-by-case basis
5. BUNDLES: we hope that arrangements can be put in place for electronic bundles to be acceptable in all cases. If not, then for short hearings, the applicant should email a case summary and any essential documents such as any orders which address timetabling of the case.
6. NON-COMPLIANCE COURT: this will be dealt with electronically until further notice, with telephone hearings arranged for cases where there is a particular difficulty.
7. TECHNOLOGY: Paragraph 16 of the President's guidance is to be followed i.e.
 - a) By the Local authority in public law cases:
 - b) By Solicitors where at least one of the parties is represented.
 - c) LITIGANTS IN PERSON: in most cases, hearings will be by telephone using BT Meet Me, but the arrangements will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be made by the court

We are happy to consider video calls where appropriate and possible.

HHJ Sally Dowding

