



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

HER HONOUR JUDGE WATSON
DESIGNATED FAMILY JUDGE FOR COVENTRY AND WARWICKSHIRE

10 April 2020

Dear All Local Practitioners,

I write to you at a time when we should all be out in the sunshine enjoying our well-earned Easter break instead we are enduring a government lockdown and unprecedented anxiety about our own health and that of our families and fears about the future and the impact on our own livelihoods and ways of life. This is bound to take its toll and we at this time need to look after ourselves and look out for others.

We have now received further guidance in the form of a Message for Circuit and District Judges sitting in Civil and Family from the LCJ, the MR and the President of the Family Division which I have sent out to you in full, so you can understand where I am coming from.

This guidance is supplemental to the announcement on the Government's Covid-19 website which I have also sent out to you for ease of reference.

Firstly, can I congratulate you on how quickly you have adapted to the changes and the new ways of working. We could not have continued to offer any form of service without your flexibility and co-operation. You have had to endure video intrusions into your homes and family life. This has enabled the important business of the Family Court to continue and we, as family judges, legal advisers and magistrates have been able to adjudicate remotely on serious issues which have had consequences for children and family life.

Secondly can I reassure you that we will continue to deal with all urgent applications which relate to child protection and safeguarding, whether in private or public law cases and all cases involving personal protection (domestic abuse), ICOs and EPOs.

But in the light of the recent guidance from the President we must now review our ability to properly and fairly conduct contested final hearings whether in private or public law children cases. The President, FLBA, Resolution and the Transparency

Project and the Family Justice Observatory will be reviewing remote hearings in the next three weeks and we can expect some further guidance to follow.

In the meantime, in Coventry and Warwickshire Family Court, in line with the President's current guidance, we will be pausing all contested final hearings listed in the next three weeks unless the case falls into the categories of case set out by the President namely the case is largely agreed or is to be conducted by written or oral submissions or where only very limited evidence is to be heard from a social worker or guardian or where the hearing consists of medical evidence only.

Fact Finding Hearings, which are often single-issue cases, will be reviewed on a case by case basis by the trial judge or legal adviser in consultation with the DFJ and applying the same guidance in relation to final hearings.

You can expect to receive notification from the court that listed final hearings will be listed for a FCMH, IRH or DRA to deal with any matters which can be dealt with by agreement and to consider any interim directions.

Can I thank all of you who have tried to make the electronic bundles more relevant and user friendly for judges. Warwickshire County Council have excelled in this with the book marked and flagged index system. We would be very grateful if this practice could be more widely used.

Finally, can I urge you to take some time for yourselves and enjoy the fine weather and the gardens of Coventry and Warwickshire. We are all finding remote working more tiring and more intensive and time out is important. Our amazing administrative staff are now on a working from home rota and I would ask you to be patient as this beds in.

With my thanks.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Watson

Designated Family Judge for Coventry and Warwickshire

