

## Covid 19

### Greater Manchester Family Court Approach

1. There is an expectation that the Family Court and those who work in it will continue to deliver justice, particularly in those cases where the delivery of justice is necessary for the protection of the vulnerable.
2. That expectation comes with a recognition that we are unlikely to be able to do so in any way normally.
- 3. Everyone must take a risk averse approach to any decision about self-isolation etc. to protect others more vulnerable than themselves. The default preference is remote working.**
4. There is no single solution to the problems we face in the justice system in this unprecedented situation. Each case will require a bespoke approach determined by the judge with the assistance of the advocates, the parties and the professionals who work in the system.
5. The judges are stocktaking their respective caseloads with a view to clearing cases from the list which can be postponed after an assessment of the harm of delay. We intend to prioritise work which protects the vulnerable from serious harm.
6. Judges will seek to work with professionals and volunteers to reduce the number of hearings and to enable hearings to be conducted remotely utilising technology. We must all be sensible and pragmatic and take a problem-solving approach.
7. There may still be hearings attended by parties and the judges are committed to conducting these as safely as possible. Our overall objective is to reduce to an absolute minimum the need for anyone to come physically to court.
8. The preferred methods of remote working are BT Meet Me telephone conferencing and Skype for Business video conferencing. However the limitations of the IT available to the Family Court Judiciary mean:-

- a. That we will need to work with the Bar and Solicitors to facilitate Skype for Business hearings.
  - b. Where we use BT Meet Me appointment slots will need to be allocated and strictly adhered to.
  - c. The likely demands on the system and the limitations of the preferred methods may require the parties and the judge to use alternative remote working methods. The key is pragmatism and common sense.
  - d. Whatever the methods of remote working used – hearings must be capable of being recorded on Court equipment.
9. Judges appreciate that even more work than usual will be done remotely before hearings by advocates and are committed to supporting them in being properly remunerated for that work.
10. Judges’ email addresses and telephone details must be protected. More detailed and technical guidance on this and relevant directions templates are in preparation and will be circulated as soon as practicable.
11. Our ability to facilitate remote working is developing. We hope and expect a constructive problem-solving approach from everyone.
12. The situation changes hour by hour and decisions as to the best and safest approach require almost constant review. I had taken a deliberate decision not to burden people with detailed “Guidance” but rather to work with the national guidance. This document merely outlines an overall Greater Manchester approach to encourage and enable the judges and professionals in each case to make a bespoke plan for that case to be heard safely or to be safely delayed.

Sarah Singleton QC  
Designated Family Judge for Greater Manchester

22nd March 2020

