

NOTICE

Upcoming hearings in the County Court at Norwich (and hearing centres at Great Yarmouth, Kings Lynn, Bury St. Edmunds and Ipswich)

The transition to remote hearings

The current national public health emergency requires all cases to be heard remotely unless personal attendance is absolutely unavoidable in the interests of fairness and justice. For hearings to be effective the court must be satisfied that there is an appropriate HCMTS approved method by which the remote hearing is to take place and that it has adequate judicial resources.

The court does not currently have the administrative resources to make arrangements for all hearings that have been listed in the foreseeable future to be converted into remote hearings. If the court is to conduct as many remote hearings as possible the parties will need to make the arrangements for the hearing to be conducted remotely keeping the administrative burden on the court staff to the absolute minimum. Those arrangements should be made as early as possible and once those arrangements have been made the parties should inform the court of the arrangements made.

Making arrangements for remote hearings

The current methods available for remote hearings are:

- a. BT Conference Call
- b. Skype for Business.

Please note that other applications such as Zoom, Lifesize and Teams are not currently available for remote use in this court. If further applications or technology become available the parties will be notified.

The following guidance is issued:

- (a) Hearings which will not involve witnesses giving evidence are generally best organised as telephone hearings via one of the telephone conference providers listed below; and
- (b) Hearings which will require the court to hear live evidence from witnesses are better arranged via a video conferencing service such as Skype for Business; and
- (c) The parties may wish to consider whether a hearing is required at all and whether the court could be invited to determine the hearing based on written evidence and written submissions.

Bundles of documents for use at hearings

Electronic bundles are essential for any remote hearings to proceed.

The parties should seek to agree a bundle containing all the relevant documents for use at the remote hearing and file this with the court electronically as far in advance of the hearing as possible.

Larger bundles will need to be indexed using an electronic indexing system as a large bundle is unlikely to be manageable without this.

Personal attendance at court

If it is contended that personal attendance is required by one or more parties in the interests of justice an application must be made explaining fully the reasons for such attendance. In the current situation the circumstances justifying personal attendance are likely to be very unusual.

Paper hearings and Alternative Dispute Resolution

To reduce the pressure on the available resources at this unprecedented time parties are reminded that there are other alternatives to a court hearing. For example:

- In Family Money cases parties should adopt the accelerated procedure where practicable or they may ask for a paper hearing in First Appointments.
- In Family Money cases parties should consider making use of private FDRs, arbitration and other non-court based methods for dispute resolution in so far as practicable.
- In civil cases parties should also consider making use of mediation, arbitration and other non-court based methods for dispute resolution in so far as practicable.
- In some cases it may be appropriate for the parties to agree that no hearing is required and to invite the Judge to decide the case based on the documents produced by both parties including written submissions.
- In Small Claims Track cases there is already a procedure under the Civil Procedure Rules (CPR) for the parties to invite the court to decide the case in their absence taking into account the documents produced by the party (see CPR rules 27.9 and 27.10)

This guidance will be kept under review and may be amended as matters develop over the coming weeks.

27th March 2020

Telephone Conference

The telephone number for the Court is 01603 728200.

Please use one of the numbers below to arrange a Telephone Conference:-

Provider:-

British Telecoms Plc:	0800 028 4194
LegalConnect:	0800 953 0405
Kidatu:	0800 279 4595
Arkadin:	0800 279 5596

The procedure is as follows:

- 1) Call your chosen Provider, remembering to have ready the Court case reference number, the time and date of the hearing, the telephone numbers of the participants to the case and the name and address of the court.
- 2) The Provider will then make all the necessary arrangements.
- 3) At the appointed time, the provider will telephone the solicitors to the case first, and then telephone the Judge. The co-ordinator will start the tape recorder and connect the Judge to the other participants.
- 4) The Provider will send a tape cassette directly to the court labelled in the most appropriate way for the court to retain on file. (Additional copies of the tape can be made and forwarded in accordance with the instructions of the party arranging the call).
- 5) The Provider will arrange for you to receive an invoice after each hearing in the preferred format that meets the requirements of the party setting up the call.