

## Advocates Meetings and Consent Orders

The following guidance is intended to avoid the need for advocates meetings to be organised at short notice, reduce the administrative burden on everyone involved and to ensure they are more effective in resolving issues. The court would encourage advocates to use these meetings as effectively as possible to agree consent orders and avoid the need for a remote hearing.

- 1) There should be a standard direction in all CMOs providing for an advocates' meeting no less than 10 days in advance of the 'week commencing' listing date. Timetabling of evidence and listing dates will need to accommodate this.
- 2) Where matters are listed urgently, and where time allows, the advocates meeting should be held no less than 3 days before the hearing. Upon issue of a new application the child's solicitor should take immediate steps to convene the meeting.
- 3) The child's solicitor should prepare an agenda for the meeting.
- 4) The Local Authority should circulate a draft order for discussion in advance of the advocates meeting.
- 5) All advocates should attend the meeting with instructions on the key issues. It is helpful if those advocates instructed to attend the hearing, attend the advocates meeting.
- 6) Advocates should come to the meeting seeking to reach agreement on the case management directions. The details of the order should be agreed **at the meeting** to limit the need for post-meeting email correspondence.
- 7) To assist everyone at this difficult time, email communication should be limited to that which is essential. There is no need to say thank you!
- 8) An agreed consent order should be sent to the court for approval no less than 7 days in advance of the 'week commencing' date. This will enable the Court to approve orders and vacate unnecessary telephone hearings. The court will be willing to deal with non-contentious Part 25 applications on the papers.
- 9) If you know there is a FCMH approaching in a case which has not been dealt with remotely before (meaning an advocates meeting may not have been directed), the Court can direct such meetings on paper to enable a timely meeting to be convened. There is no need to wait for the hearing notice providing the date and time of the telephone hearing.

Thank you for your help and cooperation in managing the work more effectively at the current time,

HHJ Harris

Designated Family Judge for Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire

27<sup>th</sup> April 2020