



JUDICIARY OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES

**HER HONOUR JUDGE WATSON**  
DESIGNATED FAMILY JUDGE FOR COVENTRY AND WARWICKSHIRE

15 July 2020

Dear All Local Practitioners,

I would like to update you on progress at Coventry Family Court during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

We are now operating both hybrid and remote hearings on a regular basis.

In the last two weeks we have been able to run 9 Family Courts. Three “ hybrid” and 6 remotely. This has been hugely assisted by our ability to call in the services of experienced Recorders and Deputy Judges. And, thanks to you and all our colleagues in Coventry Family Court, we have been able to keep going in Coventry. We are steadily working through our priority (Red, Amber and Blue) cases and we are very grateful to you all for your assistance with the prioritisation of cases and the care which has been put into the Covid Plans.

From July 27 2020 the Crown Court will return to Coventry and will be taking Class 1 cases. This means that we will be welcoming HHJ Simon Drew QC as the new Resident Judge as a permanent addition to the judicial team in Coventry although he has not yet been persuaded to assist with family work. Because of the nature of jury trials in a Coronavirus pandemic it will be necessary for both courtrooms 1 and 3 to be used for one jury trial.

This will have implications for the Family Court and for us all. Fortunately, we have been able to secure courtrooms 12 and 8 in the Coventry Magistrates building for the use of Family and Civil judges. We will continue to use Courtroom 2 with the screens, courtroom 4 and the Hearing Room in the Combined Court Centre. Family Magistrates will begin to sit in Nuneaton to conduct hybrid, remote and attended hearings from August and there will also be a Family District Judge and Family Circuit Judge listed into Nuneaton. I would ask you to check carefully the venue for any attended or hybrid hearings.

FDAC ( Family Drug and Alcohol Court) has adapted and has continued to sit. We are grateful to District Judges Sue Jones and Shammi Qureshi for their hard work and dedication to the FDAC ethos. We welcome on board District Judge Louise McCabe who will take up the FDAC mantle as Warwickshire join FDAC.

We are now anxious to reinstate the Adolescent Project and a few suitable cases have been identified. I have been asked whether it is possible to list cases into the Adolescent Project where there is potential for a young person to be required to give evidence subject to the usual Re W assessment. In my view this would not be a bar to the young person being involved in the Adolescent Project because the nature of the engagement with the young person is for a very different purpose. The Adolescent Project engages young people in a very different way and does not look at the evidence or the proceedings. A minute is taken and distributed and is open and transparent. I don't see any conflict with potentially giving evidence in court.

I shall be handing over to your new Designated Family Judge on 12 August 2020. Her Honour Judge Elizabeth Walker is well known to you all and I could not be handing over the responsibility for such a precious vessel as the Family Court in Coventry and Warwickshire to anyone better. I shall be more than happy to work alongside her.

Keep safe and always prioritise your own health and wellbeing and that of your colleagues. If you (or they) are struggling please let us know.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Watson

Designated Family Judge for Coventry and Warwickshire.