



JUDICIARY OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES

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

1<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY 2021

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

(A rather belated) welcome back to 2021 and a new year. I hope that you all had an opportunity over Christmas to have a rest and switch off from work. I am sure that, for some of you, Christmas already feels like a long time ago.

It is now almost twelve months since the first lockdown and I am acutely aware that we are all still having to cope with what has become the 'new normal'. As ever, without your continued hard work and commitment, we would not be able to achieve anything at all. But there is no doubt that the start of a new year does not offer the quick return to our old lives that we all hoped that it might. The next few months are going to be the hardest of all. But it remains as vital as ever that we continue to protect the children and families who need the intervention of the court.

I hope that you have all had the opportunity to read the latest Road Ahead from the President. If you have not read it yet, can I encourage you all to do so. <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/message-from-the-president-of-the-family-division-the-road-ahead-2021/>

Within that document, the President reminds us of the continued need to think about each other's wellbeing, and that no-one should be expected to either read or send emails in to the night and early morning. Equally, the court day should not routinely be extended beyond the normal sitting hours of 10.30am -4.30pm.

With Wellbeing firmly in mind, it is my intention to review our policy and to implement some of the principles endorsed by the President in relation to remote working.

Since November of last year, I have been encouraging the Magistrates to begin to resume public law work, and it has been agreed that they will do so one week per month. We have a number of new recruits to the magistrates, who will be grappling with a new job as well as conducting their hearings remotely. I do ask for your assistance and support in enabling those hearings to proceed as smoothly as possible.

You will also all be aware of the move towards the Family Reform Project, which will enable our local authorities to issue care proceedings via an on-line platform which can then be accessed by the parties and the allocated judge. All orders and applications will then be approved and made via that platform. It is right that other courts on this Circuit that had 'gone live' before us encountered some difficulties before Christmas and the decision was taken to pause whilst some of those issues were ironed out. I am assured that we are now in a position to move forward, and we intend to do so, on a gradual basis with immediate effect. If you have

not acquainted yourself with the platform and how it works, can I encourage you to do so. There is a helpful YouTube video to be found here. [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLORVvk\\_w75PymzQAXP1dChFi5ER7ssnxQ](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLORVvk_w75PymzQAXP1dChFi5ER7ssnxQ)

As we continue to undertake a significant proportion of hearings via a video platform, can I also indicate that it is important that all advocates are able to access those hearings. The default position is that cameras are expected to be on, unless the Judge gives permission for them to be switched off. Clearly, some lay parties may still need to attend by way of a telephone connection if video facilities are not available to them, but that can not be the position in relation to any professional.

And finally, a further plea, and one that I have made before. Bundles must be compliant with PD27A, which means that they should not exceed 350 pages unless the Judge has given permission for them to do so. For interim hearings, I would expect most bundles to be much reduced.

With my very best wishes as always,

Liz

Her Honour Judge Elizabeth Walker