

COVID-19

FAMILY & DOMESTIC PROCEEDINGS COURTS RECOVERY

7 AUGUST 2020

FPC and Domestic courts will recommence (remotely unless otherwise notified), as per the court schedules which are available at <https://judiciaryni.uk/coronavirus-covid-19>.

Judges in each region will resume more 'normal' business, **re-establishing appearances, whether physical or remote in every case listed which cannot be dealt with administratively (by way of forms lodged in advance)**. It is acknowledged that as business decants to the court venues as noted in the schedules that it will take a little time for these arrangements to bed in.

The legal profession and family justice partners involved should refer to **ICOS Case tracking** for details of cases listed in good time to allow them to prepare for the court date, and to check for compliance with any directions or orders previously issued by the court. Court Children Officers should lodge reports / written updates in advance of the court date, and attend the hearings as agreed with the court. Unrepresented parties / Litigants in Person will be asked to provide contact details in advance of any hearing in their case, and will be notified directly by the court office of the arrangements. **Parties should not attend court unless specifically required and directed to do so.**

In order to manage the business remotely, and to limit footfall of those who are required to attend at court, the following framework will be built upon locally by each judge to adapt to business needs:

- Business may be dealt with administratively where the judge determines it appropriate to do so:
 - parties are encouraged to lodge **FCI1** forms where they wish to highlight urgent family business or non-contentious matters where the parties have agreed a way forward to be undertaken on the papers;
 - a request for hearing (in a matter not yet listed) may be initiated by the parties where they confirm that the matter is ready to be heard, by lodging a **HR1** form with the court office;
 - all forms should be completed collaboratively and lodged with the relevant court office as directed by the judge or, in any event, no later than 4.00 pm four working days in advance of the hearing **in order to inform the arrangements to be made;**
 - the Judge may arrange to clarify or confirm matters with the parties via BTMeetme, Sightlink, or Webex (as notified by the court office).
- **'In Court'** business will generally be timetabled to make arrangements as appropriate for remote involvement on Sightlink and those who may be required to physically attend. All parties must ensure that only those with reason to attend are online when discussing their case;

- Lay magistrates' attendance may be in person or remote, as arranged with the court office;
- Remote hearing details (such as Sightlink or Webex) will be notified by, or available from, the court office in advance of the court date;
- Where specific arrangements have been made for a 'Hearing' this will proceed at the time and by the method pre-arranged. In the initial weeks any case shown as listed for 'hearing' is likely to proceed as a review only, and parties may be directed to lodge a form HR1 setting out all details needed to inform listing arrangements specific to that case, which will then be notified by the court office;
- Court staff will record results for each case and any orders or directions made, (whether in court or administratively) which can be viewed on ICOS case tracking, or as is normal for the business area. The court office will such issue orders or directions to unrepresented parties / Litigants in Person where applicable.