

STRATEGY FOR SETTLEMENT CONFERENCE ROLL OUT

Judicial Training

Judicial training is required for those who wish to do Settlement Conferences.

Judicial training will consist of the following:-

- a) Familiarisation of relevant documentation (Protocol as to Basic Principles).
- b) Observation of Settlement Conference with experienced Settlement Conference Judge.
- c) Mentoring from Settlement Conference Judge thereafter (immediate availability of advice).

Regular Meetings of Settlement Conferences

Judges to discuss problems and issues surrounding Settlement Conferences should be set up.

Initial Meeting of all Judges in the Cluster

This is a meeting for the DFJ to explain the process of Settlement Conferences and the need for referral of appropriate cases for Settlement Conference. This meeting should include Magistrates who will need to refer cases for a Settlement Conference.

The process of a Settlement Conference will need to be explained and the need to have a final hearing set up in case the Settlement Conference does not succeed.

DFJ/Settlement Conference Judge Address CAFCASS

CAFCASS needs to be appraised as to the process of Settlement Conferences, the basic principles and how they will proceed in the area. They need to be encouraged to embed the culture of Settlement Conferences and encourage consent where appropriate.

Local Authorities

There needs to be meetings with Assistant Directors/Team Leaders to explain the process of Settlement Conferences and to encourage the same in Public Law cases.

Barristers/Solicitors

There will need to be a meeting with all professionals within the area again to explain the process and to explain that a hearing date will always be set up.

A Settlement Conference Judge needs to run through the basic principles with the professionals, particularly emphasising their involvement and the fact that there is no pressure to agree anything.

Misconceptions particularly need to be addressed.

Court and Listing Staff

A presentation needs to be given to court and listing staff as to the process of Settlement Conferences and how they are being recorded by the FOJ.

Further, listing as to final hearings (shortly after Settlement Conference) needs to be accommodated as well as forcing the Settlement Conferences into available lists.

Court User Meetings

At all meetings with court users, Settlement Conferences need to be on the agenda and feedback needs to be invited as to what improvement, if any, can take place and what the current experience is.

Steering Group

It is helpful to set up a steering group of court users to meet on regular occasions to obtain feedback as to how Settlement Conferences are progressing, and how improvements can be implemented.

Her Honour Judge Margaret De Haas Q.C.
Designated Family Judge for Cheshire & Merseyside

Her Honour Judge Claire Jakens
Designated Family Judge for Sussex