

Midlands Civil COVID-19 Initiatives

1. There are six Midlands DCJ areas: Birmingham ('B'ham'); Notts, Derbys and Lincolnshire ('NDL'); Leicester and Northampton ('L&N'); Black Country and Warwickshire ('BCW'); Staffordshire and West Mercia ('SWM') and Herefordshire and Worcestershire ('H&W').
2. DCJ areas range from a single large metropolitan Court ('Bham') to wide geographical areas with multiple Court centres, some of which where the main Court remains 'open' (e.g. NDL/LN), and the other three where the 'open' Court is not the administrative hub, although those all remain 'staffed'. Accordingly, there are a range of approaches.
3. In each area, there are one or more 'duty judges'. B'ham has 1-2 DJs and one CJ; NDL has one at each open or staffed court who are not listed; L&N rota duty judges with Family in both Leicester and Northampton for Civil, Family and CoP work; BCW (which is very wide) divides into two with two duty judges in one and one in the other; SWM has one duty judge alongside the DCJ; in H&W (smallest) the DCJ or nominee is duty judge. Duty judges support staff, triage work and deal with urgent 'in person' cases at open courts.
4. Other Judges everywhere are undertaking remote hearings, but some consider it 'necessary' to come to Court if they are not practicable at home. Boxwork can be done at home in principle but this depends on practically conveying it. This varies by area.
5. All areas are going through upcoming cases and work and determining what is urgent – now applying the DHCJ's Civil Listing guidance – and what can be done remotely and issuing standard orders (re-)listing such work. Generally, non-urgent trials in all tracks listed before 17/04 have often been adjourned or converted to telephone directions. There have been a few short 'in person' hearings if urgent and remote hearing is not practicable. This may reduce now the national 90-day stay on possession/warrants is in.
6. The vast majority of hearings are now dealt with remotely rather than 'in person'. As ordinary telephone conferencing is overstretched, those with sufficient lines tend to use BT Meet Me facilitated by staff, those without tend to use Skype either recording on it or in court (if at home by 'inviting' staff). All areas have issued standard directions for remote hearings covering e-filing of essential documents (often limiting bundles) and Judges either get parties to file orders or draft them personally to ease staff workload.
7. Several areas have also encouraged more use of paper determination e.g. Small Claims by agreement (CPR 27.10) or 'short work' in DJ lists by paper orders vacating the hearing and inviting representations then paper decision with right to set aside under CPR 3.3.
8. All areas are conducting regular wellbeing conversations with judges – some formally by Skype conference every few days or at least weekly, some informally on an *ad hoc* basis.
9. Some areas are also liaising with staff and Civil Court User Groups – some by regular remote meetings, some by round-robin emails and local protocols.
10. All areas have been hit to differing extents by judge/staff absence and are trying to reduce workloads by standard orders and Judges/parties drafting orders etc. **31/03/20**