

COVID-19 GUIDANCE FOR COURTS

MAGISTRATES' COURTS - FAMILY PROCEEDINGS COURTS (FPC) PILOT: ARDS AND LISBURN

22ND MAY 2020

The OLCJ issued updated guidance and announced on 12th May 2020 that, as part of the business recovery process, reviews of outstanding family business would be undertaken on a gradual and incremental basis as conditions permit.

Judges continue to hear urgent matters or those where the legal representative or a party to the proceedings has requested a hearing and the judge considers it appropriate. Judges will now commence administrative reviews of FPC cases listed in **Ards and Lisburn** as set out below.

The judges will review cases starting with those listed for **weeks commencing 8th June which will include cases adjourned since the start of the pandemic**. A list of these cases, showing details of ICOS numbers and solicitor firms, will be made available to the profession via the Law Society, Bar Library, Directorate of Legal Services (DLS) and NIGALA **10 days in advance of the proposed review date**. This will assist the profession in identifying their own cases so they can collaborate, complete and return the requisite forms [FCI1](#) by the specified date - **5 days in advance of review start date**. In cases where an unrepresented party / Litigant in Person is required to provide details on their position, they will be contacted directly by the Court Office to complete and return a form LIPCI1 in line with the guidance found [here](#). The subject line of the email should include 'FPC Review'.

It would assist the office staff and the judges if electronic copies of any documents relied upon or referred to in the [FCI1](#) form were attached to it on submission. The judge will review the forms received, together with any relevant reports lodged, and determine whether each matter can be dealt with administratively or will require a hearing. **Where the judge determines a hearing is required the court office will notify all parties of the sightlink arrangements, date and time specific to their case.**

Where the judge deals with the case administratively, court staff will result the case and any orders or directions made, 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.

Where the judge determines a matter **cannot be progressed at this stage**, it will be adjourned to a fixed date determined by the judge for future review.

Otherwise where no form has been lodged the judge will adjourn the matter to a fixed date for further review.

This review process will continue on a rolling basis each week with notice of cases to be reviewed issued by Friday for cases 2 weeks in the future to be returned by the following week. The process during the pilot will be kept under review and be revised as necessary before considering extending to other areas.