Dear Court User,

I am writing to let you know what steps we are taking to keep the civil courts running in these difficult times. Specific arrangements apply to BPC work and to Family cases. The steps set out in this letter (“the Temporary Measures”) will apply to county court cases in Greater Manchester and to general Queen’s Bench Division work.

Our overarching aim in setting out these Temporary Measures is to facilitate access to the courts whilst ensuring that all court users, HMCTS staff and Judges operate and work in a safe environment. Where there are court hearings we will do what we can to avoid the need to congregate with others. The listing of cases will remain a matter for individual judges, who may, in appropriate circumstances, override the general practice set out below.

This letter is addressed to both litigants in person and representatives. I appreciate however that it will be read and acted upon, in the main, by lawyers. Where any party to a claim is represented, I confidently expect those representatives to ensure this general practice is followed, and to take steps to ensure that litigants in person are fully informed.

Temporary Changes

Until further notice the following will apply:

* 1. From 25 March 2020 all interim applications, costs and case management conferences and pre-trial reviews will take place by telephone or video. The guidance set out at the end of this letter should be followed in each such case.
	2. With immediate effect and until 25 March, if all parties involved in a hearing consent (and arrangements for a telephone or video hearing are made) the hearing will take place by video or telephone. Parties are encouraged to co-operate and take a realistic view when considering the question of consent.
	3. Any applications seeking the adjournment of hearings (by consent or otherwise) will be dealt with as a priority and in the first instance on paper.
	4. Parties may agree that a hearing not covered by (a) should be heard by telephone or video. If that is the case the court is likely to accommodate the request. Where the parties have not been able to agree, any application for a video or telephone hearing (where the hearing does not fall within (a) or where there is an absence of consent under (b) above) will be dealt with as a priority and also in the first instance on paper.
	5. Judges are likely, in accordance with existing powers to make more orders on paper and without a hearing, giving parties an opportunity to apply to vary such orders where appropriate.

Urgent applications arising out of the processes set out in this letter should be communicated in the first instance to the court by email to manchestercivil@justice.gov.uk . The email **must** include in the subject line the claim number and the date and time of any relevant hearing.

Any email or other correspondence should be copied to all parties and be succinct. The body of any email must contain a brief explanation of what the court is being asked to do, why it is being asked to do it, and on what basis it should do it.

General Points

All Judges are likely to have access to Skype for Business in the near future, some have access now. Parties may wish to consider this as an alternative to telephone hearing.

Some matters (included most block listed applications) are not covered by the above specific steps. The parties should in those instances consider how matters might best proceed and make an application to the court accordingly. The parties are encouraged to carefully consider if applications might be dealt with by consent.

It is likely that some hearings (including trials and some block-listed matters) may be vacated by the Court and re-listed. We will do what we can to keep such orders to a minimum.

The processes set out above will be subject to change and are temporary. Where it is necessary to make changes, and to update the Temporary Measures, we will let you know as quickly as possible.

I would encourage feedback and views on the points I have set out – please email manchester.dcj@justice.gov.uk if anything arises.

Kind regards,

Nigel Bird

DCJ Greater Manchester

The Guidance

1. This guidance applies to all interim applications, costs and case management conferences and pre-trial reviews listed to be heard on or after Wednesday 25 March 2020 in the county court at Manchester, Wigan or Stockport or in the District Registry of the Queen’s Bench Division in Manchester, Wigan or Stockport. It does not apply to the Business and Property Courts.
2. All hearings covered by this guidance shall be conducted by telephone, skype, BTMeetMe or some other mutually convenient method. In each case arrangements for the remote hearing shall (unless otherwise agreed in writing between the parties) be made by the Claimant or, if the Claimant is a litigant in person the first named represented party
3. No less than 3 days before the hearing is to take place the parties shall send to the court at manchestercivil@justice.gov.uk :

	1. An agreed focussed reading list of documents for the Judge who will conduct the hearing together with an agreed estimate of the time it will take the Judge to read the documents
	2. attached to the email as separate attachments each document referred to in the reading list or where appropriate relevant extracts from such documents. The total length of the attachments when printed shall not exceed 100 pages.
4. The parties should prepare the focussed reading list and attachments on the basis that the Judge may have no previous knowledge of the case and may not have access to the court file