

**Bristol Chancery Users' Group**  
**Wednesday 8 March 2023 @ 4:30 pm**  
**Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre, Redcliff Street**  
**Judicial Library – 4<sup>th</sup> floor**

**Members Present**

|                                         |          |
|-----------------------------------------|----------|
| His Honour Judge Paul Matthews          | Chairman |
| The Honourable Mr Justice Zacaroli      |          |
| His Honour Judge Russen KC              |          |
| His Honour Judge Blohm KC               |          |
| Mr Jeremy Bamford – Enterprise Chambers |          |
| Ms Cara Hough – IDR Law                 |          |
| Mr James Forsyth – TLT Solicitors       |          |
| Mr Jay Jagasia – Guildhall Chambers     |          |
| Mr Chris Preston – Burges-Salmon        |          |
| Ms Emily Reeve – Michelmores            |          |
| Mr Peter Williams – Ebery Williams      |          |

**In Attendance**

|            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| Anne Steel | Chancery Clerk |
|------------|----------------|

**Apologies**

DJ Taylor, DJ W Brown, DJ Markland, DJ Wales, Rob Casey (Civil Delivery Manager), Ms Stephanie Bishop, Mr Christopher Jones, Mr Richard Ascroft

**1. Introductions**

HHJ Matthews welcomed the group and introduced The Hon Mr Justice Zacaroli, HHJ Russen KC and HHJ Blohm KC; and additional court staff Anne Steel, Chancery clerk. Group members introduced themselves.

**2. Minutes of the last meeting**

No amendments required – minutes recorded as an accurate record of the meeting.

### **3. Matters Arising**

PW raised the question of what had happened to the request for an event for Mr Zacaroli J.

Action: CP to action

### **4. Membership of the Bristol Chancery User Group**

Welcome to Emily Reeve.

HHJ Matthews asked if there was anyone else who could be invited to the meetings?

PW had contacted Cheltenham but no interest shown.

HHJ Blohm raised the question of whether it would be possible to have a hybrid meeting to encourage people to attend from further afield? A discussion followed of the advantages and disadvantages: fewer people might attend in person if there were a remote option and such meetings can become a little fragmented, but it might encourage new people to join initially.

JJ suggested current attendees could reach out to contacts to see if there would be more interest if a hybrid option were offered. HHJ Matthews proposed this happen.

### **5. BPC and Chancery Judges at the Bristol CJC**

HHJ Matthews – resident chancery judge,

HHJ Russen KC – resident circuit commercial and TCC judge

HHJ Berkley and HHJ Blohm

Mr Justice Zacaroli as supervising judge

District bench: Bristol CJC has 5 BPC district judges: DJ Wendy Brown, DJ Jan Markland. DJ CJ Taylor, DJ Wales, DJ Woodburn.

### **6. Statistics**

HHJ Matthews referred to the statistics previously distributed to the group,

2022 statistics: the number of High Court Chancery cases issued in Bristol is looking very healthy, with an increase on previous years, and a 45% increase since 2017; HHJ Matthews commented on the high number of administration petitions. JF confirmed this reflected what they were experiencing at TLT; Chancery applications to DJ and CJ have also increased.

HHJ Matthews asked if more chancery issues are now being issued in Bristol, or if more local matters are still being issued in other courts (London/Birmingham/Manchester)?

HHJ Matthews asked about Working From Home arrangements post-Covid. TLT flexible; Burges Salmon varied; Michelmores – creeping towards more time in office.

## **7. Lead times for listing before District Judges**

This figure is still stuck at about 3-4 months. Some difficulty is being experienced by admin staff in listing 2-3-day trials before DJs due to sessions not being set up with consecutive days in BPC.

HHJ Blohm discussed the set-up with allocating judges: sessions have been allocated to ensure BPC is allocated sufficient time, which then may cause this problem. There may not be a structural answer.

## **8. Revised listing guidance before District Judges**

HHJ Blohm said that this is yet to come into force (April 2023). The main alteration will be that DJ Wales will be allocated more BPC work.

## **9. Urgent hearings list**

A list has now been set up for Thursdays, in operation since January. This has not been used at all: there have been just 2 without notice applications so far this year and neither was heard on a Thursday.

JJ acknowledged that a hearing was listed within hours of an application they made for which they were grateful.

HHJ Matthews observed that this has been set up and advertised and issued a plea to the group to ensure that all clients are aware of this facility. The group agreed that it may take some time for take-up to increase as firms become more aware of this option.

HHJ Blohm asked if any further useful publicity could be actioned.

JJ – chambers clerks should be made aware.

Action: AS to send out copy of the practice note to chambers; CH to raise with firms in Devon; AS to investigate whether the statistics can reflect the applications that come in for the Thursday list and to tweak the check-list to indicate that these can be listed on Thursdays.

## **10. Publication of BPC listings**

HHJ Matthews noted that online lists are available for sittings at the RCJ and asked what happens in Bristol?

Various members stated that this information was taken from Courtel, but this is a subscription service. JJ and JF stated that chambers clerks tend to deal with this and produce the typed lists. It was raised that this is a problem for litigants in person who cannot access this.

BPC listings not easily accessible outside of London.

Mr Justice Zacaroli asked if it would be useful to have them listed as with London? Group agreed it would.

Action: Mr Justice Zacaroli to raise this possibility with London

JB asked if it would be possible to have an indication of availability of trial dates for certain cases – London gives lead times which helps in negotiations with clients.

The group agreed that it would be useful to have stats on lead times from issue to CCMC + from CCMC to trial. These stats just need to be made available once a month to give a rough estimate of time frames. Issue to CCMC needs to be at least 3 months to allow for preparation of case.

Action: Mr Justice Zacaroli to investigate whether this information can be provided for Bristol BPC.

### **11. BPC Specialist Team Changes**

Eddie Hunt remains the Specialist Team leader reporting to Rob Casey.

Rob Casey continues to be Civil Delivery Manager.

Tom Head (appeals) and Emily Price (bankruptcy) have left HMCTS. Catherine Chapman also left the Specialist Team after a short spell.

Matilda Wilde (Chancery + clerk to HHJ Berkley), Anne Steel (Chancery and clerk to HHJ Matthews), Glen Pearson (Multi-Track and clerk to HHJ Ralton), and Debbie Greenwood (TCC and clerk to HHJ Russen) remain on the team. Glen Pearson is also a Digital Support Officer so is taken away from his work in the Specialist Team 2 days/week.

Dale Sinclair was to move from Listing but may be moving now to another team.

Betty Steger has joined the Team and taken over Insolvency work.

Deborah Allen has recently joined the Team and is currently being trained on work on CE-File. Amy Smallcombe is due to return to the Team, working in Chancery, after Easter.

### **12. Staffing in Bristol CJC: update from Rob Casey**

There are ongoing programmes of recruitment in Bristol CFT. This includes recruitment for agency and permanent staff.

This quarter we have also been given authority to make some of our current fixed term contract positions into permanent posts.

We have staff (currently in vetting) due to join as permanent AOs.

JJ raised the issue of documents not always being processed in order or on time for hearings (e.g.skeleton arguments) even when they had been submitted according to the deadlines – he observed that this was not an issue with BPC work but in other sections. HHJ Matthews suggested that this is due to the high turn-over and shortage of admin staff in HMCTS, with training on occasion being an issue.

### **13. Impact of HMCTS Reform programme**

Rob Casey had provided the following information:

As a result of the Reform Programme, HMCTS are proceeding with Go-Live for the Default Judgments and Standard Directions Orders releases, including Work Allocation for both the Online Civil Money Claims and Damages Claims services in March.

- **Digital Default Judgment requests from March 2023**  
The release of this feature will enable a legal representative to digitally request and issue a default judgment in either the OCMC (specified) or damages (unspecified) service digital against another legally represented party.
- **Digital Directions Orders from March 2023**  
This release of this feature will allow a judge or legal advisor (in appropriate cases under £1k) to provide a small claims or fast track standard directions order on a case after reviewing the digital case file.

HHJ Matthews observed that these changes did not affect BPC.

### **14. Any other business**

JF raised a potential issue. They had filed an application which had been returned very quickly but someone else in the firm who was not involved in the case had been cc'd. This might have been an issue if this had been sent to someone else.

### **15. Date of next meeting**

**Wednesday 8 November 2023 – 4:30pm BCJC**

Meeting closed: 17:44