

Bristol Chancery Users' Group
Tuesday 22nd November 2022 @ 4:30 pm
Bristol Civil and Family Justice Centre, Redcliff Street
Judicial Library – 4th floor

Members Present

His Honour Judge Paul Matthews	Chairman
The Honourable Mr Justice Zacaroli	
His Honour Judge Russen KC	
His Honour Judge Blohm KC	
His Honour Judge Berkley	
District Judges, Markland, Wales, Woodburn	
Mr Richard Ascroft	
Ms Stephanie Bishop	
Mr James Forsyth	
Ms Kate Harrington	
Mr Jay Jagasia	
Mr Peter Williams	

In Attendance

Rob Casey	Civil Delivery Manager
Anne Steel	Chancery Clerk

Apologies

Mr Christopher Jones, Mr Jeremy Bamford, Mr Chris Preston, Ms Cara Hough, DJ Taylor, DJ W Brown

1. Introductions

HHJ Matthews welcomed the group and introduced The Hon Mr Justice Zacaroli, HHJ Russen KC and HHJ Blohm KC; as well as the district judges present, and additional court staff Rob Casey, Civil Delivery Manager, and Anne Steel, Chancery clerk.

HHJ Berkley was introduced when he arrived following his hearing.

2. New Designated Civil Judge

HHJ Blohm KC was welcomed as the new designated civil judge.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

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

4. Matters Arising

Practice Note on Interim Applications circulated this time – omitted from last year's agenda – produced by Jeremy Bamford.

Action (Anne): check the telephone number and delete if necessary.

HHJ Russen KC: this was produced on the basis that we might have a designated applications day for BPC. It might be a good time to put this forward as we now have 4 designated judges who can deal with these instead of 2 (HHJ Berkley + HHJ Blohm in addition to HHJ Matthews and HHJ Russen).

HHJ Matthews asked the group if they have a need for this.

Richard Ashcroft: would it end up producing more work? We need to promote this.

3.1-3.4: the current suggestion is that this is allocated to a Friday.

Proposal: move to Thursday, starting 12 Jan 2023, make it clear that it's going to be across BPC (so take out "Chancery" and replace with "BPC"), and adapt as necessary "Chancery/TCC guide", etc.

TZ: do ECROs satisfy the urgent applications rule? Will add to this "if urgent".

Action: HHJ Matthews to revise and circulate; will need to liaise with Anne Steel re rota for this.

Peter Williams asked which email address to use. Confirmed bristolspecialist@justice.gov.uk

HHJ Russen KC pointed out that users can refer to the BPC website for relevant contact details.

PW observed that this is relaunching a previous procedure which had been in place.

Check-list

Format of check-list discussed

RA: too cumbersome – puts users off; HHJ Matthews proposed that RA produces new checklist and email to AS. Suggested he looks at certificate for urgent applications and cross reference.

HHJ Russen KC suggested adding the period of notice required + whether it needs to be kept confidential

A discussion followed as to whether these should be dealt with in person. London has decreed they should; however, it can be more difficult for users further afield to attend in person.

Conclusion: Start with presumption of in person, court can then decide whether it may be remote. The check-list should include a question asking why parties cannot attend in person.

Action: Mr Ashcroft to produce a new checklist and email to Anne Steel for approval by HHJ Matthews.

Other matters arising will be dealt with in any other business.

5. Membership of the Bristol Chancery User Group

The group was invited to put forward any suggestions for new members to join. No suggestions were made. Please send suggestions to HHJ Matthews.

There is currently a good balance of solicitors and barristers, but it would be good to have a representative from users further afield, such as Exeter or Cheltenham.

Action: JF to check if colleague would join re Exeter; PW to check re Cheltenham.

6. BPC and Chancery Judges at the Bristol CJC

HHJ Matthews – resident chancery judge,

HHJ Russen KC – resident circuit commercial and TCC judge

Mr Justice Zacaroli as supervising judge

District bench: there are now 5 BPC district judges: DJ Wendy Brown, DJ Jan Markland, DJ CJ Taylor, DJ Wales, DJ Woodburn.

HHJ Berkley and HHJ Blohm KC now ticketed as Section 9 judges.

7. Statistics

HHJ Matthews referred to the statistics previously distributed to the group, comparing Chancery cases issued to date with the previous year.

Nearly all the figures show an increase.

High Court Chancery appeals is a new category.

Gaps in “Trials settled” categories due to migration to List Assist – can now only access stats for HHJ Matthews and not all BPC judges.

There has been an improvement in lead time for trials.

8. Lead times for listing before District Judges

Currently looking at March 2023 for any application, which is too long.

9. Revised listing guidance before District Judges

This will take effect in April 2023. This may or may not solve some of the issues.

DJ Woodburn: more time is now allocated to BPC work, for both County Court and High Court BPC work.

PW observed that the delays can be off-putting for practitioners.

HHJ M: urgent application list may help with this.

JJ asked if there was a system for dealing with applications? Are urgent apps dealt with before non-urgent apps?

(AS: applications are dealt with as and when they are received. If an application has already listed and hearing notices sent out to parties, it is then difficult to reschedule these at short notice when an urgent application comes in.)

HHJ M: hopefully the new practice directions will assist with listing applications more quickly. A shortage of admin staff is also causing issues in terms of backlogs of work.

10. BPC Specialist Team Changes

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

Rob Casey is now Civil Delivery Manager, taking over from Becky Lee.

Sally Boniface and Aleysha Davidge (Multi-Track), and Angela Garland (chancery) have left the Team.

Matilda Wilde has moved from Insolvency to Chancery; Thomas Head (Appeals), Anne Steel (Chancery and clerk to HHJ Matthews) and Debbie Greenwood (TCC) remain on the team.

Emily Price has joined the Team and taken over Insolvency work. She is due to move to the MoD in the new year.

Glen Pearson has joined the Team and has taken over Multi-Track work. He is also DSO so is taken away from work in the Specialist Team 2-3 days/week.

There are 2 new staff due to join the Team: Catherine Chapman currently being trained on Civil before moving to Specialist – to be trained by Angela Garland who previously worked on Chancery.

11. Staffing in Bristol CJC: update

HHJ Matthews handed over to Rob Casey to give an update.

There is a rolling programme of recruitment of temporary staff on fixed term contracts. FTCs are being offered instead of permanent contracts due to the HMCTS Reform Programme.

12. Impact of HMCTS Reform programme

Nothing to add to the above point.

13. Any other business

PW observed that there still hasn't been an event to mark Mr Justice Zacaroli's arrival as supervising judge.

14. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 7th March 2023 – 4:30pm BCJC

Meeting closed: 17:35