

Bristol Chancery Users' Group
Wednesday 2nd April 2025 at 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 Michael Green – Teams	Supervising Judge
His Honour Judge Russen KC	
HHJ Berkley	
District Judge Taylor	
District Judge Brown	
District Judge Wales	
District Judge Napier	
District Judge Gibson	
Mr James Forsyth (of TLT)	
Mr Peter Williams (of Ebery Williams)	
Hanah Coton-Smith (of Irwin Mitchell)	
Jay Jagasia (of Guildhall Chambers)	
Robert Bailey (of Burges Salmon)	
Mr Richard Ascroft (of Guildhall Chambers)	
Mr Mark Cullingford (of Thrings)	

In Attendance

Oliver Harris	Chancery Clerk
Nathaniel John	Chancery Clerk
Edward Hunt	Specialist Team Leader

Apologies

Cara Hough, Christopher Jones, Vanessa Kibble, Chris Preston, Michael Duncan, Simon Price, Jeremy Bamford and District Judge Markland

1. Introductions

HHJ Matthews welcomed the group and introduced everyone.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

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

3. New Chancery Clerks and Members

Anne Steel has retired. Oliver Harris and Nathaniel John are the newly allocated chancery clerks in Bristol.

Stephanie Hambridge has retired from the group. Simon Price and Michael Duncan are to join the group as new members.

4. 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 Michael Green is the supervising high court judge.

District bench: Bristol CJC has 6 BPC district judges: DJ Wendy Brown, DJ Jennifer Gibson – IPEC DJ, DJ Jan Markland, DJ Jon Napier, DJ CJ Taylor, and DJ Wales.

5. Statistics

The statistics show that that the number of cases remain much the same when compared to the previous year. The number of appeals are less. There are twice as many bankruptcy petitions so far, but half as many winding up petitions.

Emergency Injunction Applications at short notice are half of what they were compared to the previous year.

Applications to both District Judges and Circuit Judges are slightly reduced compared to the previous year.

Applications to a District Judge from January to March 2024 totalled 90, whereas it was 66 during the same period in 2025. There were 40 applications to a Circuit Judge, and this has decreased to 32.

Applications to District Judges in 2023 totalled 300, whereas in 2024 it was 403.

Applications to a Circuit Judge in 2023 totalled 100, whereas in 2024 it totalled 170.

6. Lead times for listing before District Judges

HHJ Matthews asked Oliver Harris for his anecdotal evidence of this.

OH: This depends on the time estimate: finding a slot for a 30minute listing was a 1 month and two weeks lead time. Lead times for hearings of 1 hour or longer were significantly longer.

HHJ Matthews commented that DJs are allocated different slots, and slots are allocated to different lists; such as BPC, Bankruptcy, Family. In practice, most of the BPC slots go to Chancery work because HHJ Russen deals with most TCC matters.

It was asked if it was the time to request more BPC slots before DJs, though it was noted that this would mean a reduction in slots for other areas. The availability of DDJs was mentioned as a possible option for BPC hearings, which would provide more listing availability. A balance between County Court Civil and BPC slots was discussed, and it was suggested that this could be discussed with the Civil Managers as a possibility.

Mr Ascroft then asked what would realistically be achieved in a 30minute hearing, and it was noted that a limited amount could be done. 30 minutes has been discussed as it is regarded as the shortest possible time-estimate for a BPC hearing.

The ability to deal with items within boxwork was discussed, and it was highlighted that many applications to the Court are already dealt with as box work.

Action: HHJ Matthews will talk to Civil Team manager to find out if the balance between County Court Civil slots and BPC slots before DJs could be made more equal.

7. Urgent hearings list

HHJ Matthews asked if there was a general awareness amongst firms that there was an urgent hearings list. Jay Jagasia (of Guildhall Chambers) acknowledged that it is the case for his chambers.

Action: It was stated that any urgent matters that cannot be listed promptly before a DJ should be referred to a CJ for consideration to list on a day allocated to urgent applications.

8. BPC Specialist Team Changes

As previously mentioned, Anne Steel has retired and Oliver Harris has taken over as the chancery clerk, supported by Nathaniel John. It was noted that Oliver used to assist Anne with Chancery before her retirement.

Eddie Hunt remains the Specialist Team leader reporting to Livija Aluzaitė.

There have been no other changes to the Specialist Team:

Oliver Harris (Chancery and clerk to HHJ Matthews), Glen Pearson (Insolvency work and Multi-Track), Debbie Greenwood (TCC and clerk to HHJ Russen), Fiona Johnstone (clerk to HHJ Berkley and Multi-Track work), Nat John (King's Bench Appeals and Chancery work), Zahir Ali (King's Bench Division and clerk to HHJ Blohm), Emma Harwood (Insolvency work) 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.

Action: Edward Hunt stated that an additional two staff members are needed in the Specialist Team, and there is a recruitment drive to address this.

9. Staffing in Bristol CJC

HHJ Matthews raised that a number of agency staff have generally left because they weren't told whether their contracts would be renewed. Edward Hunt acknowledged that this was the case for some people.

There is also a general recruitment drive for a number of staff positions.

Becky Lee remains as Operations Manager.

10. Any Other Business

Upcoming BPC Forum

Jay Jagasia mentioned the third BPC forum on the 9th July, to be chaired by The Honourable Mr Justice Michael Green.

Artificial Intelligence and ENE

HHJ Russen KC highlighted the use of artificial intelligence with the use of ENE, and it was suggested that Bristol's use of artificial intelligence is minimal. It has previously been suggested as an idea, but most Judge's experiences of using AI have been in London.

DJ Wales indicated that ENE is of use depending on the prospect of success. HHJ Matthews then commented that it could be useful if done early enough within proceedings.

Hearing Loops

PE raised the issue of the hearing loops used in Court. He noted that the "loop" system in the court is out of date (wearing a necklace isn't effective for profoundly deaf people). He had thought when Bristol moved to the new court buildings the

matter would be resolved, but an old system was installed which is unacceptable. There should be a loop which works with hearing aids where people do not have to wear a necklace, and he would like to know where he can take this issue next. As far as he is aware, it is a problem with the whole Court estate, not just Bristol. Though, he noted that one Judge in Bristol had recently had a Courtroom adapted to facilitate his ability to hear, and this was done at great expense. This technology doesn't seem to be portable.

Action: Mr Justice Green to make enquiries with The Right Honourable Lord Justice Birss about what improvements can be made.

Ce-File

The Honourable Mr Justice Michael Green expressed that some appeals don't go onto Ce-File in Cardiff, and asked if this was also the case for Bristol.

HHJ Matthews highlighted that as far he is aware, High Court appeal matters are generally put on Ce-File. Edward Hunt expressed that appellant's notices should generally be submitted directly to Ce-File, and an appeal number is then issued via Ce-File. The use of Ce-File is necessary in order to gain a high court appeal number. If the original claim file was maintained as a hard-copy document, this will remain as a hard-copy file that can be referenced, even if the appeal is on Ce-file.

11. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 22nd October 2025.