
COVID-19: The Most Recent Court Directions in Northern Ireland

Published 20 March 2020

The presiding members of the judiciary met with the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland on 18th March 2020. Presently, a full package of directions to include the regional Courts, province wide, is being prepared. A link to these directions will be provided once published on the Law Society Northern Ireland's home page.

In the meantime, the main points to note from the new Northern Ireland Queen's Bench Masters Direction, applicable in the weeks ahead, are:

- The termination of oral hearings in court
- Adjournments Applications will be dealt with administratively by written submission. Cases will be adjourned generally rather than a new date being fixed
- With regard to Summons already issued, parties are encouraged to agree a position amongst themselves but if this is not possible, contested summons will be dealt with by way of written submissions. Written submissions must be detailed and comprehensive rather than simply outlining arguments.
- All trial bundles and submissions will only be accepted in electronic format and sent to centraloffice@courtsni.gov.uk. Responsibility for preparation of this bundle rests with the party who issued the summons.
- Review and Summons courts will recommence next week with a limited number of telephone reviews being made available to parties seeking urgent directions. In all other reviews, it is intended that the parties agree their position with a timetable for outstanding matters and forward proposed directions by email to the Central Office for approval.
- In the event that a party fails to engage in agreeing directions, the Master will consider the directions proposed by the other party/parties.
- No new Summons should be issued. New Summonses will only be considered if it can be demonstrated that the matter is urgent

We also anticipate that we are perhaps weeks away from a period during which, all but the most urgent court business, will cease. Very little Civil business will be dealt with by the courts during that time. Whilst impossible to tell for certain at this time, the court service anticipates that court business will not return to normal until September.

Our Belfast office continues to provide a full service despite many of its members now working remotely. Rest assured we will continue to keep you updated on the new court directions and developments as they arise.

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