



Auckland Family Law Section Bulletin - 8 October 2021

Tēnā koe

Below is a message from Judges de Jong and Mahon in respect of the operation of the Auckland courts:

1. After consultation with Judges Pidwell (Waitakere) and Maude (North Shore) and the registries, it is intended that all conferences (COCA, PRA, General) will continue by telephone until the end of this year and if there is any change to this arrangement counsel will be notified.
2. Oranga Tamariki reviews will also continue by telephone or VMR (virtual meeting room) while Covid restrictions prevent in-person appearances. At the stage when parties and counsel can attend court, the Manukau Family Court will adopt the procedure already in place in the other Auckland Courts and each OT review will be allocated a specific appearance time.
3. The greater risk of infection from the Covid Delta strain poses significant challenges for the court in meeting safety requirements for short and long cause hearings proceeding in person. In accordance with the Principal Family Judge's level 3 protocol only defended hearings which meet the threshold of priority proceedings and can be held safely: physical distancing, numbers of witnesses and persons who need to be in court etc, can proceed. The ability of each court to meet safety standards will vary. Also the availability of judges and staff support will continue to be limited while courts are operating separate bubbles each week.
4. So while some priority cases may proceed in person on these conditions and with agreement of the presiding judge, parties and counsel, most hearings will

continue to be conducted remotely. Defended hearings are taking place remotely via VMR in some cases. The courts are also trialling the use of VMR and MS Teams for judicial settlement conferences.

5. Finally, a reminder, if you are concerned about the effects of delay on a particular case and file a memorandum which identifies the urgency of the case being addressed by a Judge, then a telephone conference will be convened to explore ways in which to progress the case.

Judge Lex de Jong (Liaison Judge Auckland)

Judge Antony Mahon (Liaison Judge Manukau)

Family Law Section, New Zealand Law Society, 17 Whitmore Street, PO Box 5041, Wellington 6145, DX SP20202 Phone: 04 472 7837 Fax: 04 463 2983

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This email was sent to kath.moran@lawsociety.org.nz

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