



**ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE STRAND LONDON  
WC2A 2LL**

**24<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

Dear Advocates

**Open Letter to Advocates (2): remote hearings in the Crown and Magistrates' Courts in London and the South East**

We wrote to you on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020, which already seems a long time ago. The purpose of that letter was to advise that Skype for Business (“SfB”) would be used to host remote hearings in the Crown Court, at least for the time being. We now write with an update about remote hearings in the Crown and Magistrates’ Courts on circuit.

First, we wish to thank all of you for your efforts in making SfB work. Hearings are now taking place in every open or staffed Crown and Magistrates’ Court on circuit using SfB. The early teething problems have been resolved, and some ingenious work-arounds have been devised along the way. Your response has been superb and with your help we have been able to keep the criminal justice system going throughout this emergency.

Secondly, we know that there are still some frustrations in relation to the use of SfB for remote hearings, particularly where other systems are being used in the same hearing. There are sometimes difficulties with advocates having access to their clients in advance to take instructions, feedback and other audio problems have been reported, and some hearings have had to be aborted or significantly delayed because of these and other problems. We will continue to monitor these issues and resolve them where we can. We also know that participating in remote hearings can be very tiring for all involved and that is why we have encouraged our judges and listing officers to shorten the lists.

Thirdly, we want to update you on the introduction of the Cloud Video Platform, or “CVP”, which is currently being developed by HMCTS for use in all our courts and tribunals. CVP is already in use in the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) and in some tribunals and county courts. In London and the South East it has been successfully piloted in some of our Magistrates’ Courts. All those with experience of it say that it is easy to use and reliable. CVP will undoubtedly make remote hearings much easier for all participants. A draft national roll-out plan for Crown and Magistrates’ Courts has been prepared – but it is in draft and at the time of writing is liable to change. That plan starts with the Crown Courts in the North East, and is currently moving to some Crown and Magistrates’ Courts in the SE. The roll-out will be gradual and is based on the prisons serving our courts moving to CVP. All this means that CVP will not be operational in the Crown and Magistrates’ Courts on circuit for weeks or months yet. So, in the meantime, remote hearings will continue with SfB, and we ask for your continued help in making those hearings as effective as possible.

Fourthly – and this is a connected point - it is important to acknowledge the enormous challenge which the development and roll-out of CVP presents for HMCTS. We know that a huge amount of work is going into the CVP project at present. We have asked, and have been assured, that training and guidance on the use of CVP in the criminal jurisdiction will be provided for all participants. There is already some guidance in the public domain<sup>1</sup> and we anticipate publication of further, practical “how to” guides fairly soon. Please

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-join-telephone-and-video-hearings-during-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

**From: The Hon Mr Justice Edis and The Hon Mrs Justice Whipple  
Presiding Judges of the South Eastern Circuit**



**ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE STRAND LONDON  
WC2A 2LL**

do invest time and effort in familiarising yourself with CVP once the material becomes available; and do share knowledge amongst yourselves, so that implementation can occur as quickly and smoothly as possible. We will continue to work with you and your professional associations to help where we can.

We understand that the current emergency is placing real pressure on the legal professions, that many of you have experienced a significant reduction in income as a result of it, and that you will be concerned about your own health and that of loved ones. You have our continued good wishes at this difficult time.

Please circulate this letter as widely as you consider appropriate.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Edis'.

**Andrew Edis**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philippa Whipple'.

**Philippa Whipple**