



TRIBUNALS
JUDICIARY

JUDGE MARK HINCHLIFFE

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MENTAL HEALTH

Thank you for visiting our website. Whether you are a patient, a family member, a professional person involved in our work, or a member of the community, I hope that you find the information that you are looking for. If not, please let us know.

I have been in post for four months now, and have continued pounding up and down from Manchester to London, sometimes via our Administrative Support Centre in Leicester. From all my visits and conversations I'm pretty clear what our priorities have to be this year. It's all down to A B C ... namely Adjournments (or the avoidance thereof), Booking - and the hard-worked bookings and listings team know how important it is to book panels and list cases promptly, and Case Management where, under the Rules, we can take steps to ensure that our files are properly prepared for hearings, and that all cases have judges, and judges have cases, at an early stage.

Of course I know I'm not the first to try and achieve this, and I guess that some people will be saying: 'Here we go again!' But I'm probably the first to face these issues when the financial climate in the public sector is as dire as it is.

Needless to say, if you are involved in our work in any way, I need your understanding and your help. Adjournments, for example, are nearly always expensive (for us, for the hospitals, and for the Community Legal Service), and often distressing to patients. So far as possible, everyone needs to be ready to proceed at the first hearing.

This is not to suggest that cases should never be adjourned. Some cases have to be, and sound judgment involves spotting those rare situations, and making appropriate directions, so that time isn't wasted on the next occasion. But I do believe that, with good advance case management, we can significantly reduce the number of hearings that fail to reach a proper judicial conclusion at the first hearing.

This is why over the coming months we will all see some changes in our procedures, and I hope most of you can support most of the changes, which have been devised with the sole aim of improving our service, in a cost-effective way.

In my short time in the job I have been moved by how committed everyone in the system is. More than any tribunal I have been involved with, the Mental Health Tribunal seems like a family. I think I am very lucky to have this job, and I will do my best to ensure that we remain accessible to all who need us, and continue to do justice.

Mark Hinchliffe.