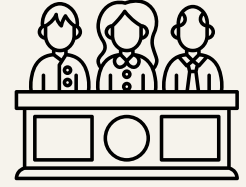


# The Family Courts



|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>COURT</b>          | <p>Previously there were 3 family courts: Magistrates, County and High Court. Since the 22nd April 2014 there is a single family court. The Single Family Court deals with all family proceedings, except for a limited number of matters, which will be exclusively reserved to the High Court.</p>  |
| <b>JUDGES</b>         | <p>Lay magistrates and all levels of judges are able to sit on the Family Court.</p> <p>A Designated Family Judge (DFJ) will lead a gatekeeping team that allocates cases to lay justices and different levels of judges on the basis of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the need to make the most effective and efficient use of the local judicial resources that is appropriate, given the nature and type of application;</li> <li>• the need to avoid delay;</li> <li>• the need for judicial continuity;</li> <li>• the location of the parties or of any child relevant to the proceedings; and</li> <li>• complexity.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>COURT HEARINGS</b> | <p><b>Directions Hearings / Case Management Hearings (CMH) / Issue's Resolutions Hearing (IRH):</b> The court outlines the steps required to prepare for a final hearing, such as deadlines for filing evidence and scheduling future hearings. The aim is to streamline the process and focus on the key issues.</p> <p><b>Contested Interim Hearings:</b> The court listens to arguments from both sides regarding temporary arrangements and makes interim orders that remain in place until the final hearing.</p> <p><b>Fact-Finding:</b> The court examines evidence, hears testimonies, and makes findings on disputed facts. These findings then influence the decisions at the final hearing.</p> <p><b>Final Hearings:</b> The court reviews all the evidence, listens to witness testimonies, and hears final arguments from both sides before making a conclusive decision regarding the welfare of the child or children involved.</p> |
| <b>TIMESCALES</b>     | <p><b>Initial Application:</b> When a local authority applies for care proceedings, they must do so promptly and the court usually schedules a first hearing within a few weeks.</p> <p><b>First Hearing:</b> The first court hearing is when the local authority's application for a Order is considered. Case Management Hearing, usually takes place within a 18 days of the application.</p> <p><b>Fact-Finding Hearing:</b> If required, these hearings are to determine the facts of the case.</p> <p><b>Final Hearing:</b> The final hearing, where a decision about the child's future is made, should be completed within 26 weeks from the start of proceedings. This is a strict timescale set to ensure that decisions are made as swiftly as possible in the child's best interest.</p>  |

