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**ADCS response to Social Work England consultation on amendment to rules, electronic service and remote hearings**

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd. (ADCS) is the national leadership organisation in England for directors of children's services (DCSs) under the provisions of the *Children Act (2004)*. The DCS acts as a single point of leadership and accountability for services for children and young people in a local area, including children's social care and education. ADCS welcomes the opportunity to respond to Social Work England's consultation on rules, electronic services and remote hearings.

**Do you think the changes to the rules we have proposed will support continued flexibility with our approach to the format of hearings?**

ADCS broadly agrees with the proposals set out for the format of hearings. Making use of technology to increase flexibility is to be welcomed, especially if this helps clear backlogs and leads to quicker outcomes. Further, it is important that social workers facing fitness to practice hearings or registration appeals can take part in the process in familiar surroundings without the burden of travel where being physically present is not necessary.

It is important that social workers have a clear choice between remote or in-person hearings. Where Covid restrictions have been lifted, social workers should always have the option of in-person hearings as long as this does not lead to unacceptable delays in achieving a hearing.

**Do you think there are any other amendments to Social Work England's rules that could be made to better support the continuation of remote hearings?**

ADCS does not know of any other amendments that could be made to support the continuation of remote hearings. However, this is a relatively new approach to conducting hearings and as the sector adapts, other amendments may become necessary. ADCS would welcome continued engagement with Social Work England to help ensure the effectiveness of remote hearings in the future.

**Do you think that the changes to the rules have the potential to impact people based on protected characteristics positively, neutrally or negatively? If so, how?**

Individuals with visual or hearing impairments may find it harder to participate in remote hearings in certain circumstances, depending on the nature of any disability. It will be essential to offer simultaneous transcription, for example, for hearing impaired participants.

Whilst it is important that there is discretion for the social worker to insist on an in-person hearing if required, those with visual or hearing impairments should still be

presented with the choice of a remote or in-person meeting, with appropriate adaptations, that meets their needs where possible.

**Any other comments you might have.**

ADCS hopes that embedding remote hearings will help reduce the backlog in fitness to practice hearings. ADCS members have raised concern about the increased use of lawyers to help clear the backlog which has resulted in the process becoming more legalistic. This can be particularly unhelpful where the hearing relates to a history of vexatious complaints with lawyers turning their attention to the whole organisation instead of just the individual social worker. ADCS would welcome further discussion on this issue via the Workforce Development Policy Committee. Please contact [Matt.Cunningham@ADCS.org.uk](mailto:Matt.Cunningham@ADCS.org.uk) in the first instance.