



7 February 2025

Engagement with Local Media: Guidance for Designated Family Judges

1. In the report of the Transparency Review, published in October 2021, I highlighted the need for there to be an open channel of communication between Family Court centres and the media agencies based in their locality:

Communication between the Family Court and Editors

55. There is a need to work with the media to establish a relationship of trust and confidence in order to ensure that any reporting of Family Court proceedings is reliable and well informed. It is now 15 years since one of my predecessors, Sir Nicholas Wall, said:

"There should be an ongoing dialogue with the press and the media generally about Family justice and how it is administered. We, the judiciary and the practitioners, have nothing to fear from public scrutiny: indeed, we should welcome it."

I agreed with those words at the time and they remain just as valid today.

56. Links at a national level need to be established between the PFD and the Society of Editors, and at a local level between DFJs and their local media. In addition, I will establish a Media Liaison Committee comprised of journalists, media lawyers and judiciary (together with others who may include individuals who are wholly from outside the spheres of Family Justice or the media).

57. One aim of these channels of communication would be to assist journalists to learn more about the general working of the Family Court and the various categories of proceedings which it hears. In addition, it is well known that all MPs receive regular complaints about the operation of the Family Court; I consider that it would be a positive move for DFJs to invite local MPs to the court so that a fuller understanding of the work and approach of the Family Court can, over time, develop.

2. The Transparency Review was published at a time when the courts were under extreme pressure in the Covid period. As a result, I deliberately held off issuing guidance on this discrete aspect of transparency then and in the three years that have followed. Now that the transparency reporting provisions have become part of 'business as usual' in every court in England and Wales since 27 January 2025, the time has come to support and encourage local courts to establish links with the media agencies in their area. The purpose of this short

guidance is to assist DFJs by offering advice and some ideas. I am grateful to the Judicial Office press office who have agreed to be available to any DFJ who requires specific advice in taking this project forward.

How to contact local media

3. The following points may be of assistance in making contact with local media:

- i. Local media might be a local newspaper, an online-only outlet, or a BBC or Press Association reporter based in a particular area.
- ii. Contact details for local media can usually be found on their website.
- iii. There may not be local media in every area of the country, but the nearest big town or city that does have active media may still be interested in your court.
- iv. It is best to contact the editor in the first instance, making clear that the email is coming from the local DFJ. It is likely that an editor would then delegate to a reporter who would be available to engage with the Family Court.
- v. If contact details for local media are not readily available you can ask the press office, who may help with finding contacts, and search for local BBC and Press Association reporters.
- vi. The [BBC Local Democracy Reporting Scheme](#) may provide a useful means of engaging with local media. There is a document on the webpage listing the companies which have won tenders for each local area, who can then be searched for and contacted.
- vii. The [Transparency Project](#), an educational charity, is a useful resource for the possible contact of legal bloggers and may be able to assist with media contacts.
- viii. Any follow up queries from local journalists should be directed to the appropriate press offices, i.e. Judicial Office press office, local authority press office, CAFCASS press office, and so on.

What to offer

4. The aim of this project is a modest one. It is simply, but importantly, to establish a link between the court and local media in order to increase mutual awareness and understanding. The following suggestions may be useful:

- A principal aim for DFJs should be to ensure that local media are aware of the Family Court and know that they can observe and report on cases.
- Invite media representatives to visit the court, meet key staff and judiciary and see the building. During the visit there may be a discussion about issues of mutual interest and an opportunity to improve understanding of the work of the Family Court, as well as specific discussion of reporting under a transparency order.
- Local media could be invited to Local Family Justice Board meetings, including court reporters.
- DFJs ought to be prudent in discussion with the media regarding political topics, remembering their independence and impartiality.

Local MPs

5. As well as contacting local media, DFJs may wish to contact their local MP[s]. Every MP's mailbox or surgery will include constituents who may have had a negative experience of the Family Court. Whilst it is obviously not appropriate for an MP to raise an individual case with a judge outside the court process, it is likely to be of benefit for every MP to gain greater knowledge of the scale and type of work undertaken in their local Family Court centre and to meet the local DFJ and other key judges and staff there. This is particularly so at a time, like the present, when many MPs are new to Parliament. It is likely that an MP will in the course of a year visit each hospital, school, college and police station in their constituency. It is likely to be of mutual benefit for the local Family Court to be included in that list.
6. MPs are not prohibited from contacting judges except for in the manner set out in the [Parliamentary Standards Commissioner's guidance](#). As such this is not the type of communication covered by this document.
7. Contact details for local MPs can be found on their website.

Sir Andrew McFarlane

President of the Family Division