



Media Pilot Sub-group meeting: minutes

Date 26 June 2024: 4.30pm – 5.15pm (via MS Teams)
Author: PFD Office
Attendees: Mrs Justice Lieven, Jack Harrison, Guy Vassall-Adams KC, Lucy Reed KC, Julia Steels JP, Andrew Wood JP, Sian Harrison, Olive Craig, MoJ Legal, MoJ Policy, HMCTS Operational, PFD Office.
Apologies: HHJ Claire Murden, DJ Joanna Geddes, Connie Purdy, Angela Frazer-Wicks, Julie Doughty, DfE Policy.

1. Progress of the expanded Pilot and next steps

- 1.1 The purpose of the meeting was to update the group on the progression of the Pilot. Mrs Justice Lieven, Jack Harrison and MoJ Legal would be attending the Family Procedure Rule Committee meeting, on 8 July, where they would invite the Committee to agree, in principle, for a Rule change which would imbed the Pilot's procedure into the Family Procedure Rules (i.e. to allow the press to report on hearings subject to preserving anonymity). The detail would be set out in Guidance (contained in a Practice Direction) rather than being set out in the Rules: this would allow for flexibility. It was anticipated that the Rule change would take effect in January 2025.
- 1.2 Mrs Justice Lieven thanked MoJ Policy and MoJ Legal for progressing this work in the manner which they had.
- 1.3 Private law cases would be incorporated into the Pilot, on 14 July; the aim was to roll it out in Magistrates Courts in early-October 2024; online training sessions would be arranged.
- 1.4 Olive Craig raised the issue of transparency/disclosure, in the Family Court, for stakeholders beyond the media and legal bloggers i.e. by amending Practice Direction 12G. It was agreed that this issue would be considered separately to media and legal blogger reporting as it could impact on the timetable for introducing the Rule change and Practice Direction (as set out in Paragraph 1.1).

Action: Olive Craig to send details of transparency/disclosure issues and stakeholders, beyond the media and legal bloggers, to Mrs Justice Lieven, Jack Harrison and MoJ Legal – in relation to potentially amending Practice Direction 12G. The issue could then be taken forward via the President of the Family Division's Office.
- 1.5 Jack Harrison had been in discussion with the Judicial College regarding judges' and magistrates' training: he invited comments from group members about their experience of training and what the training requirement might be.

Action: group members to e-mail Jack Harrison about their experience of transparency training and their views on what the future training requirement might be.

2. Update on media engagement

- 2.1 Media engagement continued to be limited. Mrs Justice Lieven, Jack Harrison and members of the Judicial Office's Press Office had met with media representatives in an effort to assist with this – one of the suggestions was to simplify the process of providing redacted case summaries to reporters to help them decide whether to commit resources to reporting on a case. It was important to build relationships, so Family Division Judges and Designated Family Judges had been encouraged to proactively engage with the press via the Judicial Office's Press Office. Group members were also encouraged to speak to individual contacts about attending family law cases – these contacts could then approach the Judicial Office's Press Office.
- 2.2 The President of the Family Division's Office had circulated guidance, for the Designated Family Judges, on media engagement; this would be published after the General Election. A member of the Judicial Office's Press Office would also visit courts in order to engage with the local press: this would also take place after the General Election.
- 2.3 Jack Harrison raised the issue of improving messaging in terms of giving judges and lawyers greater confidence when dealing with the news media.
- 2.4 It was noted that limited resources, and the inability to identify litigants, made press reporting more challenging - indeed journalists were not attending Crown Courts in the same volume that they used to. The reporting which had had taken place had been excellent and it was important to develop local contacts.
- 2.5 It was suggested that, in due course, publicity could be given to the Pilot and the progress which had been made, while highlighting that, hitherto, there had not been a great deal of press attendance in Family Courts.

3. Any other business

- 3.1 **Action: Jack Harrison to confirm whether the National Centre for Social Research's Pilot Evaluation Report had been published yet.**