



Media Pilot Sub-group meeting: minutes

Date	4 December 2024: 4.30pm – 5.30pm (via MS Teams)
Author:	PFD Office
Attendees:	Mrs Justice Lieven, HHJ Nancy Hillier, HHJ Claire Murden, HHJ Adem Muzaffer, DJ Jamie Saunders, DJ Jack Harrison, Guy Vassall-Adams KC, Lucy Reed KC, Angela Frazer-Wicks, Julie Doughty, Lisa Harker, Judicial Office's Press Office, Ministry of Justice Legal, Ministry of Justice Policy, HMCTS Operational, President of the Family Division's Office.
Apologies:	President of the Family Division, Julia Steels JP, Charles Hale KC, Jack McCabe, Sian Harrison, DfE Policy.

1. Welcome and update

- 1.1 Mrs Justice Lieven welcomed group members to the meeting and advised that this was likely to be the group's last formal meeting because, on 27 January 2025, there would be a Rule change which would implement the reporting pilot into the Family Procedure Rules. The reporting provisions would initially be implemented in public law cases, then in private law cases, in the spring, and then in children cases before magistrates, in the autumn.
- 1.2 Most judges had received training on the reporting provisions, via the Judicial College; the aim was to hold one further judicial training session in January 2025. Consideration would be given to holding a further training session for other family justice professionals.
- 1.3 The upcoming Rule change and Practice Direction would not apply to Financial Remedies, which was being piloted separately, however it would apply to Hague and international cases.
- 1.4 Mrs Justice Lieven and the Judicial Office's Press Officer gave positive feedback on the recent 'Family Court Reporting Week,' which was run by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (between 4-8 November); it had been well attended, particularly from the legal community. A number of journalists had contacted the Judicial Office's Press Office following these events. Mrs Justice Lieven suggested that she, District Judge Jack Harrison or the Judicial Office's Press Officer attended some academic journalism courses to give a talk on reporting in the Family Court.
- 1.5 Ahead of the roll out it was queried whether there was a guide for court staff, i.e. to use in situations where they received enquiries from journalists/legal bloggers. HMCTS Operational said that guidance would be sent to all courts: it would cover the issues of attending hearings and who could report.

- 1.6 In an effort to increase the information available to the media, a listing coding scheme had been developed during the Pilot which categorised family law cases; Mrs Justice Lieven sought the group's views on whether this should continue once transparency was rolled out across England and Wales? There were a range of views: one view was that the more informative the lists were the more it would contribute to open justice and encourage reporting, however it was noted that the coding scheme made demands on both judicial and staff time. Statistical data, from Cardiff, did not suggest that there had been increased press attendance since the introduction of the scheme. The scheme created an administrative burden since the codes had to be manually inputted, however the case portal was due to integrate with the listing system, in mid- 2025, and would therefore reduce the administrative burden.
- 1.7 It was queried whether the coding scheme could also be used in private law cases? The difficulty in private law cases was that the issues often crystallised later in the proceedings. However, it was felt that this was less of an issue in the Pathfinder Courts where judges were able to review gathered information and request further documentation before cases reached court.
- 1.8 It was confirmed that it was not possible to tell from the list whether or not a transparency order had been made.
- 1.9 It was noted that the open justice notices, which used to be on the top of lists published on CourtServe, had disappeared: these provided contact e-mail addresses for people who wished to provide courts with notice of their attendance; case duration information had also disappeared.

Action: group members to liaise with any academic contacts they may have so that Mrs Justice Lieven, District Judge Jack Harrison or the Judicial Office's Press Officer could attend and give a talk on reporting in the Family Court.

Action: HMCTS Operational to investigate why certain information was no longer available on CourtServe.

Action: Mrs Justice Lieven and District Judge Jack Harrison to carry out a consultation exercise on the future of the listing coding scheme, and group members to share any ideas on how to increase the information which is provided to journalists and legal bloggers.

2. Discussion of Magistrates being brought into Reporting Pilot

- 2.1 Mrs Justice Lieven was not aware that much reporting which had occurred in children's cases in the Magistrates' Courts.

3. Discussion of the Media Launch

3.1 The Judicial Office's Press Officer would announce the launch of the reporting provisions prior to the Christmas break, and then highlight them when the Rule change occurred, as well as prior to the implementation date. The aim of the announcement was to inform the public about the new arrangements and encourage press/legal blogger attendance. It was anticipated that certain members of the media would also publish articles ahead of the January launch.

3.2 It was highlighted how the Judicial Press Office had played a key role in signposting people towards cases; it was hoped that journalists continue to use it as a key contact.

Action: group members to publicise details of the reporting provisions' launch among their contacts.

4. Any other business

4.1 Mrs Justice Lieven thanked everyone for their contributions and hard work since the group's inception. This would be the group's last meeting but any future issues could be raised with her as and when they arose.