

**TRANSPARENCY IN THE FAMILY COURTS IMPLEMENTATION GROUP  
MEDIA ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP**

**Notes of meeting  
Thursday 3 February 2022 at 3.30pm (on MS Teams)**

**Attendees:**

**The President of the Family Division** (Chair)

**Olivia Kirkbride** (Secretary) (Coram Chambers)

**Angela Frazer-Wicks** (Family Rights Group & Parents' Panel)  
HMCTS Operational

**Femi Ogunlende** (Barrister, No.5 Chambers)

**Guy Vassall-Adams** (Barrister, Matrix Chambers)

**Jennifer Gibbon-Lynch** (FJYPB Co-ordinator, Cafcass)

Ministry of Justice Policy

**Lucy Reed** (Chair of The Transparency Project, Barrister & Blogger)

Department of Education

**Merryn Hockaday** (Head of Communications, Cafcass)

**Sian Harrison** (Law Service Editor, PA Media)

**MOJ Communications**

**Maria Kavanagh** (PFD Private Secretary)

**Kim Webb** (Secretariat)

**Apologies:**

**Katy Block** (The Association of Directors of Children's Services)

**1. Welcome and introductions**

The President welcomed everyone to the first meeting and everyone was given the opportunity to introduce themselves.

The President confirmed that this is now one of five sub-groups. A fifth has been brought in to look at transparency in financial remedies court.

This group will look at how we can develop a line of communication with the national or local media so that those in the media organisations have a greater understanding of who we are and what we do in the family court. It is hoped that this will not be a big piece of work and one which we can get on with quickly. We hope to offer guidance to local courts on how they can set something up in their local area.

## **2. Report of discussion between PFD and John Battle (Chair of the Media Lawyers Association)**

President confirmed that he had spoken to John Battle, a barrister working as the legal advisor to ITN. John recommended that on a national level, we should contact the News Media Association and the Society of Editors and the Media Lawyers Association of which he is the chair.

Guy Vassall-Adams confirmed that this would be the correct fora. He noted that all three are involved in the production of guidance on reporting restrictions which applies in criminal courts.

### **3. How should the work of the sub-group proceed with respect to:**

- a. Establishing channels of communication with national media;
- b. Establishing channels of communication with local media.

Sian Harrison recommended that we reach out to media group organisations as most of the press are owned by very few groups. Likely that they will have members in the three groups mentioned so there will be overlap.

The MOJ Policy official confirmed that he sits on the HMCTS media group, led by the director for communications in HMCTS. John Battle sits on that group and it includes major players including, BBC, ITN, the Press Association, Sky News, The Guardian and The Evening Standard.

The President suggested we could plug into this group as well. His aim, after this group has completed its work, is to be left with a small committee, which would include himself together with 2/3 from the family court side with 4/5 from these various organisations, which can chew over common issues. To get there we need to have a bigger discussion to find out what would help them.

It was confirmed that the BBC and The Times have a particular interest in this area and so their input would be valuable. Lucy Reed suggested the Bureau of Investigative Journalism as well as having a think about local journalism projects. She also mentioned local designated family or more likely criminal judges would have a better idea of contacts within their areas.

### **Action: Sian Harrison confirmed that she will draw up a list of potential contacts for a bigger meeting**

Whilst not directly for this group, it was recognised that when the Pilots sub-group has identified where the pilots will be, there would need to be more intense work in those areas to ensure contacts are established.

The President confirmed that his aim was to have a set of regular meetings and channels of communication nationally with guidance as to how to set this up locally. It was agreed that a bigger meeting should be held first to allow for brain storming followed by smaller more focussed meetings. The President suggested that we invite the HMCTS media group members to attend this initial meeting.

It was agreed that we would need to hear from the local judges at this initial meeting about what would work for them as well as the media. The President suggested that a judge should be on this group and agreed that 5 or 6 local judges should attend the bigger meeting.

The MOJ Communications official mentioned that the meeting would need to be focussed and therefore it was agreed that the group should draw up a list of questions for the participants in the bigger meeting to consider.

**Action: The President and Olivia Kirkbride to draw up a list of questions and circulate to the members of the sub-group for comments/additions**

**Action: MOJ Communications to have a conversation with the Director for communications in HMCTS about whether a contact from the MOJ Press Office should be involved**

Lucy Reed recommended also having someone from the judicial press office.

#### **4. Areas of cross working group collaboration or potential overlap?**

Points to consider:

- a. Are there links to the other sub-groups?
- b. Do we want to nominate a person to be the go-between for each group?

The following members agreed to act as the link with the other sub-groups:

- Lucy Reed - Pilots sub-group
- Femi Ogunlende – Anonymisation sub-group
- Olivia Kirkbride – Data sub-group

#### **5. Any other business**

If anyone has any further thoughts, please get in touch via Olivia Kirkbride.

The next step will be to pull together the list of contacts for the bigger meeting, which Sian is going to organise. The President had particularly noted the Guardian, Times, BBC and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.