



PRESIDENT OF THE
FAMILY DIVISION

Transparency Implementation Group

Notes of Media Engagement Meeting

Tuesday 28 June 2022, 16.45 – 17.45 (via MS Teams)

Attendees

The President of the Family Division (Chair)

Olivia Kirkbride (Secretary) (Sergeants Inn Chambers)

HHJ Michelle Corbett (Circuit Judge)

HHJ Jessica Pemberton (Circuit Judge)

HHJ Philip Harris-Jenkins (Circuit Judge)

Femi Ogunlende (Barrister, No.5 Chambers)

Angela Frazer-Wicks (Parent with lived experience)

Emma Petty (HMCTS)

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

Merryn Hockaday (Head of Communications, Cafcass)

Sian Harrison (Law Service Editor, PA Media)

Claire Powell (HMCTS)

Lisa Allera Judicial Office Comms

Maria Kavanagh (PFD Private Secretary)

Kim Webb (Secretariat)

Media Reps

Louise Tickle (Independent Journalist)

Emily Wilson (Bureau of Investigative Journalism)

Tristan Kirk (London Evening Standard)

Sam Tobin (Law Society Gazette)

John Battle (ITN)

Zoe Norden (Guardian)

Joseph Andriano (Guardian)

Sanchia Berg (BBC)

Vanessa Allen (Daily Mail)

Flora Fordos

Apologies

Josh Ivinson (Ministry of Justice)

Amy Orgill (Department of Education)

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

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

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Sayra Tekin (News Media Association)
Guy Vassall-Adams (Barrister, Matrix Chambers)
Victoria Bird (Sky News)

1. The President explained the goals of the Transparency Implementation Group (TIG) and the aims of the specific sub-groups. To look at how to establish long term relationships and channels of communication locally and nationally. Look at what we do and how we do it and what makes the family court tick. There is no source of information currently on how the family court works.
2. Talk through how that might be done and what would be useful on a journalistic view.
3. The President suggested a good idea would be for local Designated Family Judges (DFJs) to meet local journalists, visit family courts to get understanding of the work it does and the level of judge. Open up channel of communication so that journalists would know who to call if they needed info and the court would know them.
4. The President requested advice on setting on a national group to look at bigger issues.
5. Sian Harrison suggested that this meeting would be useful especially where matters came out of other groups, which might need discussion from a media perspective. This size is a good group. Keep it ad hoc in terms of membership.
6. Louise Tickle liked the idea of a group but recommended careful thought about who is on it. It may be difficult for journalists to be on a group where there might be judges to whom they might be making applications in the future or may at some point have criticized.
7. President confirmed that this should be containable with a set of ground rules.
8. John Battle agreed with the idea of a group. Industry representative bodies need to be on the group; News Media Association, Society of Editors, Media Lawyers Association, freelancers and periodical magazines. He suggested monthly meetings to start with moving to quarterly.
9. President agreed that meeting more regularly to start with would be useful especially when the pilots start and when the rules are going to change.
10. The President wants to connect to those in the media that don't know much about what the family courts do, whereas people on this call generally do know what we do. To have the media feel able to ask us questions about what we do and why we do things in certain ways.
11. Sanchia Berg asked about the status of discussions in this group and whether a transcript or note or short summary would be published. It would be useful for a wider audience to know what is being discussed and to feed in.
12. The President responded that a balance needed to be struck but agreed that a short summary, in two parts, which covered procedural matters and then a more reportable part would be helpful.
13. Sam Tobin agreed a group was useful, but the target should be those regional and national journalists that don't have the experience of the family court but sometimes do report on high profile cases.

14. Sam raised concern around the length of time since the Transparency review was published to get to this point, which the President accepted.
15. Tristan Kirk is an occasional family court reporter who sits on the HMCTS media group, which is fairly closed shop. He stated that this group would benefit from being more outward focused. He suggested a dedicated email inbox and commented that anything that can be done to involve the wider community without having an enormous meeting would be a positive thing.
16. In response to the inbox suggestion, the President stated there would be a risk that it would attract enquiries from individuals about their cases. The JO press office deal directly with journalists.
17. Louise referred to the question about how media reps should provide feedback to the family courts in the list of questions. She mentioned COP had a group headed by Hayden J (Hive), where the rapporteurs can take issues to and where best practice is disseminated. Useful to get feedback on urgent matters. Troubleshooting portal. Perhaps to be worked out during pilot.
18. The President confirmed that the Pilot group would work that out but it wasn't a matter for this group.
19. Emily Wilson agreed that there are a lot of local journalists without the knowledge of the family courts and no time to do research and preparation to cover family courts. There needs to be a separate discussion on how to support them. She acknowledged particular concern around anonymity issues of local reporters.
20. Emily confirmed the Bureau has been working with Louise and has some funding that could help to support some journalists and family who may be worried about media intrusion. Feels that sustained training and feedback that will come from pilot.
21. The President confirmed that he would engage separately with Emily on this point.
22. The President asked the group for comment on his idea for the local editor or reporter to meet key local judges and see the court.
23. Louise and Emily thought this was a good idea. Emily thought the designated judge for each area should have regular (possibly quarterly) meeting with local editors and reporters to aid understanding of family courts.
24. The President said he hoped this group will draw up template guidance for local judges to take on and engage with local judges.
25. Sanchia thought it was a good idea in principle but there is an awkwardness if you have met the judge and then have to challenge the judge by making an application. She wasn't sure a regular quarterly meeting would be a good thing. Anything to foster relationships with wider community in FJS ie barristers, solicitors would be helpful but not necessarily judges. An introductory meeting would be a good idea.
26. Angela Frazer-Wicks said it would be helpful for any local meetings with reporters to include parents with lived experience as they don't understand the complexities of what they are reporting.
27. Sam said it was also beneficial for judges. Familiarity helps in both directions.

28. Sian confirmed that where this happens in the criminal courts, it has been very beneficial. There is scope to find out where it happens already rather than reinventing the wheel. A lot of the issues will be ironed out in the pilots.
29. Louise Tickle – added to the chat:

‘I wanted to ask whether any consideration had been given to the information to be provided to families going through the courts as to the pilots, and how things will change, and how to put their points of view?’

I feel very strongly that there needs to be formal information given to family members, explaining the way the pilots will work, what their rights are, what they may do now that they were not able to do before’.

Action: Kim Webb to pass Louise’s comments onto the chair of the Pilots sub-group – COMPLETE

30. HHJ Michelle Corbett suggested regular meetings with DFJ would be helpful but twice yearly may be more realistic.
31. In reference to the question about the number of judges on a national group and what level, HHJ Corbett recommended a cross section across the country. There should be a high court judge and potentially a judge who sits in COP.
32. Her concern regionally was that a journalist would ask about the law so it would help to improve communications if this group could agree a document for them.
33. Merryn Hockaday agreed the suggestions that journalists have a centralized place for finding out information about not only the family court but Cafcass and so it acts as a joined-up family reporting system. She agreed that children and young people can say what transparency means to them so journalists are able to understand from a child’s perspective what it feels like to have your case reported on in the press.
34. President commented that the working group would need to meet fairly soon to take on board the various points.
35. There was general agreement to the suggestion that the group waits until it has something more substantive to report on before holding a bigger meeting with other journalists.

Meeting ended.