



Tuesday 23 May 2023

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- 1.1 ----- thanked and welcomed attendees to the meeting and outlined the agenda.
- 1.2 Since the last meeting in November 2022, ----- had been appointed MoJ Head of Open Justice Policy, however this would be his only meeting with ----- attending in future. ----- will attend for HMCTS Central Operations and ----- for RADAR.
- 1.3 Papers for this meeting had been circulated in advance to the Group.
- 1.4 Minutes of the meeting on 16 November 2022 were approved.
- 1.5 The Action Log had also been circulated in advance.

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Action AP17/22, a written update on Online Plea Allocation (OPA) had not been circulated as stated in the actions – this was included as an agenda item for discussion at this meeting and a written update will be circulated after this meeting.

- 1.6 All actions approved to be closed.

2.0 Online Plea Allocation -----

- 2.1 ----- and ----- presented an update on OPA (ANNEX A). Work on OPA changes to the Criminal Procedure Rules is ongoing, with final changes to Rules expected to be agreed by December 2023 with anticipated implementation in Spring 2024.
- 2.2 Following an open discussion by the group on how OPA would work in practice for the media and some clarification on the format and content of media lists, the following actions were agreed:
- 2.3 -----/----- to review OPA processes and consider full process for releasing court documents and OPA-related information (eg case docs) to the media, develop operational guidance with Courts/CTSCs as necessary, and update Staff Media Guidance to reflect agreed process (similar to SJP cases). Written update to be provided out-of-committee to MWG by 30 September 2023. -----/----- **Action AP01/23**.
- 2.4 -----/----- to confirm that defendants' address can/should be included in OPA media lists (similar to existing magistrates' courts media lists) taking into account any technical/governance/data compliance issues that would need addressing. -----/----- **Action AP02/23**.
- 2.5 -----/----- to provide the website URLs for existing Rule 5 (open justice) and Rule 9 (Allocation and sending to trial) IM/BS **Action AP04/23 – Rule 5:**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1146647/crim-proc-rules-2020-part-05.doc and **Rule 9:**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1097497/crim-proc-rules-2020-part-09.doc
- 2.6 It was explained that OPA Rule changes which have been agreed by Rules Committee in advance of them going live later in year would need to be sourced from ----- Criminal Procedure Rules Committee Secretary. ----- to contact Criminal Procedure Rules Committee/----- to request sight of Rule changes and check how media can work with Rules Committee to inform OPA Rule changes. ----- **Action AP03/23**.
- 2.7 .
- 2.8 -----/-----/----- to develop a plain English operational briefing note for journalists, providing a status update on OPA implementation, that can be shared more widely within the media. This is not intended for publication, but to provide adequate briefing to journalists as key service users and stakeholders by 30 June 2023. -----/-----/----- **Action AP05/23**.

3.0 Court and Tribunal Hearings service update (-----)

- 3.1 ----- provided an update on the Court and Tribunal Hearing service (CaTH). Single Justice Procedure lists have been live on the service since last summer and in April five civil and family courts in the Thames Valley region began publishing lists automatically from ListAssist to CaTH. Further civil and family court lists are due to be added later this year.
- 3.2 The Subgroup established following the last MWG met in March to discuss details of the service design and functionality, including SJP media lists. The next meeting is due to be arranged shortly. Additional volunteers wanting to be involved in the Subgroup should contact -----.

4.0 Media enquiries to our Service Centres (-----)

- 4.1 ----- advised the meeting that there are 5 Court and Tribunal Service Centres (CTSCs) that will become the central point for enquiries as our reform programme ends. As part of their transition – all magistrates' court enquiries for cases which appear on Common Platform are now answered by CTSCs as is the case for SJP enquiries. This was a 'soft handover' and the media may still get through to court admin teams, but once Common

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Platform is fully rolled out the CTSC should be the first point of contact for the media. There is no change to Crown Court enquiries - they should continue to be directed to the local court.

- 4.2 ----- added that it was recognised that based on the current SJP enquiries line, the response time to calls needed improvement but having centralised services means we can react quicker to demand and offer a better user experience as we have the data and call analysis to improve consistency of our service. There is work to understand if media calls can/should be prioritised – this would need to go through our governance approval process.
- 4.3 In response to ----- about no responses to e-mails from certain court, ----- stated that the CTSC's email service would improve the service, providing a faster turnaround and an escalation process which would be based on data and insight. Following discussion on the issues above, ----- undertook the following actions:
- 4.4 ----- to keep media informed of changes and next steps, including if media will have prioritised enquiries line. Next progress update to be provided out-of-committee to MWG by 30 September 2023. ----- **Action AP06/23.**
- 4.5 ----- to review and confirm if existing media escalation route/process works within CTSC by 30 June 2023. ----- **AP07/23.**

5.0 Ministry of Justice Call to Evidence on Open Justice (-----)

- 5.1 ----- informed the meeting that the Justice Call to Evidence on Open Justice had been published a few days ago. There will be six round table sessions available. Booking will be via an online link, which will be circulated. There will be further sessions for stakeholders and legal professionals.
- 5.2 In response to ----- about others who wished to be involved and receive feedback, ----- stated that that a summary of responses and next steps is likely to be published.
- 5.3 MOJ Policy to set up roundtables session and share invite with Media Working Group members. ----- and ----- **Action AP08/23.** [this was done last week]

6.0 Family court transparency pilot update (-----)

- 6.1 ----- stated that that the court transparency pilot commenced in January in Carlisle, Cardiff and Leeds and extends to Family Private Law proceedings. The pilot was going well and will be extended to January 2024. The final report will be published.

7.0 Reporting Restrictions (-----)

- 7.1 ----- provided an update to the group on work to improve non-automatic reporting restriction notifications to the media following various request from media representatives. ----- also provided the group with information about recent operational review workshops to look at reporting restrictions processes and which have identified areas of improvement.
- 7.2 The meeting discussed issues on complexity of reporting restrictions rules and guidance including how and when are the media notified of an application when, in most cases, they are verbal applications on the day of the hearing.
- 7.3 It was recognised there was a need to clarify operational processes and guidance for reporting restrictions. ----- and several members were keen to be involved in discussion to take this forward.
- 7.4 -----/Crime Services team to set up working group with media reps on agree reporting restrictions process/practicalities – including ideas on how things could/should work. Invitation to working group to be issued by 30 June 2023. ----- **Action AP09/23.**

8.0 AOB (-----)

Citizen's Charter

- 8.1 ----- stated that HMCTS had accepted a Justice Select Committee recommendation last year as part of the open justice inquiry for a "Citizen's Charter" and were planning on publishing it later this year.
- 8.2 ----- confirmed the SJP media guidance in our media protocol will be updated following

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legal advice which confirmed that if a photograph formed part of the witness statement or statement of facts it should be shared with the media.

- 8.3 ----- stated it could sometimes take 30 minutes for media reps to clear through security at some courts and asked if there was any way for the media could join the professional user access scheme. ----- explained that all visitors, including HMCTS staff who are not based on site, must go through security and that the current Professional User Access Scheme was funded by the legal profession and required them to meet a verification threshold, and that those requirements would similarly need to be met by the media for them to be considered as additional users.
- 8.4 ----- stated that some magistrates' court were issuing Common Platform court lists. ----- to send details of Common Platform lists issues for Colchester/Wimbledon. HMCTS Central Ops to investigate. ----- **Action AP10/23.**
- 8.5 From a group discussion, there was uncertainty around Crown Court Common Platform media registers. There was also a need to clarify the protocols and arrangements at courts during a high-profile trial. HMCTS comms to work with Crime programme to raise media awareness that Crown Courts will issue media registers by email when they transition to Common Platform. ----- and Crime Programme (----- to nominate) **Action AP11/23.**
- 8.6 ----- flagged an upcoming high-profile trial in Southwark Crown Court. Central Ops to work with court to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for media access. ----- **Action AP12/23.**
- 8.7 ----- thanked everyone for their contribution at this meeting and closed the meeting.