



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

Media Working Group: Minutes

Tuesday 14 November 2023

Attendees:

Members

Presenters

Guests

Apologies

Secretariat

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1.0 Introduction and Welcome, Previous Minutes and Actions

- 1.1 ----- thanked and welcomed attendees to the meeting and confirmed the previous minutes from the meeting that took place on 23 May 2023.
- 1.2 ----- introduced -----, HMCTS Chief Executive to the group.
- 1.3 ----- reiterated the importance of engaging with media representatives through the group and thanked them for their ongoing contributions.
- 1.4 Papers for this meeting had been circulated in advance to the group.
- 1.5 **Action AP12/23:** ----- confirmed the media access measures at the high-profile trial at Southwark Crown Court worked well and similar measures could be used in future high profiles cases.
- 1.6 **Action AP01/23:** An update on OPA processes was previously provided out-of-committee in July and work is ongoing.
- 1.7 All actions approved to be closed.

2.0 Common Platform update and Courts and Tribunals Hearing Service

- 2.1 ----- apologised for the coding error in Common Platform which meant that the reporting restrictions in some cases had not featured on the media register, which was brought to the group's attention and shared by email in September. --
----- advised that the issue was fixed and thanked the group for their co-operation in sharing the communications.
- 2.2 ----- presented an update on the Common Platform (CP) and confirmed it is now live in all magistrates' and Crown Courts in England and Wales and over half a million cases have been accepted onto CP. Work is ongoing to address and enhance the system further and new features are planned for the coming year.
- 2.3 ----- provided an update on the Court and Tribunals Hearings service (CaTH) and subgroup meetings that had been taking place throughout the year. The subgroup has provided feedback relating to service design, functionality and SJP media lists.
- 2.4 Following discussions amongst the group on questions relating to OPA, CP and the CaTH subgroup, the following actions were agreed:
- 2.5 ----- to provide details about when police forces will be added to CP as part of OPA, including anticipated volumes of weekly caseloads and what details will appear on OPA/SJS lists/registers. ----- **Action AP01/14.**
- 2.6 ----- to review issues relating to CP and listing. Reporters are not always seeing charges or defendant addresses against names. Registers are issued from some Crown Courts as PDFs which are unusable for media. ----- **Action AP02/14.**
- 2.7 MWG members to contact ----- to be added to membership of the CaTH subgroup. ----- **Action AP03/14.**

3.0 Reporting restrictions

- 3.1 ----- provided an update on the two workshops that had taken place with media representatives in early November 2023 to review discretionary reporting restrictions. ----- emphasized the importance of building working relations with media colleagues and HMCTS' commitment to follow up on the issues identified and provide feedback on proposed solutions.

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- 3.2 ----- raised concerns about the amount of time it would take for changes to happen to the reporting restrictions process and issues about how and when are the media notified of an application.
- 3.3 ----- to provide further evidence of where notifications of reporting restriction are not provided in the London region. Any concerns should be directed to ----- to log how often this happens and look into causes and mitigations.
- 3.4 ----- and ----- to discuss using their injunction application alert service as a potential solution to notify the media about reporting restriction orders.
- 3.5 The following actions were agreed:
- 3.6 ----- and ----- to develop and share a document that captures the short, medium and long-term solutions to issues with reporting restrictions order processes. ----- /----- **Action AP04/14.**
- 3.7 HMCTS to share feedback from journalists about how Reporting Restrictions are handled with legal professional representative bodies, highlighting the role that lawyers play and inviting further discussion about how this interplays with HMCTS' role. ----- **ACTION AP05/14.**

4.0 **MoJ Open Justice: Call to evidence update**

- 4.1 ----- updated the group on the MoJ's Call for Evidence on Open Justice. Over 100 written evidence pieces were received and 35 stakeholders attended a number of roundtable sessions. Work is ongoing to evaluate the responses and will be published early next year. Engagement with teams across HMCTS is ongoing on issues raised through the Call for Evidence.
- 4.2 No actions from this item.

5.0 **Video Hearings Service**

- 5.1 ----- shared a presentation relating to the Video Hearings Service (VHS) and explained how the software would work for journalists, how they'd access it and support channels available. ----- asked group members for their feedback on the service from a media perspective which would help to improve the service as it is currently going through a stage of continuous improvement, ahead of national rollout due to start in late 2024.
- 5.2 ----- raised a number of issues relating to the Cloud Video Platform (CVP) including receiving links to the wrong sessions, some courts imposing strict timeframes in joining or access is denied, delays in courts responding to requests, audibility issues and access to hearings denied while evidence is being shown. ----- suggested an open link for media access.
- 5.3 ----- advised that when booking onto a case using VHS, a link will only be sent to the specific case selected. Court timescales are due to operational challenges as often, the closer the hearing is, the busier staff are to respond. --- advised that administrators refusing entry after a session has started are usually localised practices, not general.
- 5.4 ----- expressed interest in joining the subgroup and particularly in participating in a mock hearing. ----- raised concerns relating to the visibility of the media during a hearing and supported the open link for media suggestion, which ----- also endorsed. ----- asked if observers would be able to speak. ----- advised that

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cameras and microphones will be turned off until a judge invites participants to speak.

5.5 Following further discussion, ----- / ----- agreed to look into the issues discussed further. ----- /----- **Action AP06/14.**

5.6 Members of the group to contact ----- / ----- to be involved in the subgroup to support the Video Hearings Service in designing the user journey for the media. ----- **Action AP07/14.**

5.7 ----- to develop a strategic overview of the HMCTS initiatives which affect media access. ----- **Action AP08/14.**

6.0 Family court transparency pilot update

6.1 ----- stated that the court transparency pilot started in January in Carlisle, Cardiff and Leeds and extends to Family Private Law proceedings. It included a forum for journalists, judges and stakeholders to discuss progress and feedback was positive. ----- added that additional journalists are required to report in family courts and that further courts in the south will be involved in due course.

6.2 No actions from this item.

7.0 AOB

7.1 ----- mentioned we are in the process of updating our staff media guidance training guidance, it had been updated following an internal review. ----- informed the training guidance will be rolled out in the new year and thanked group members for their participation in recording videos for inclusion in the guidance, which ----- will share with the group when finalised. ----- **Action AP09/14.**

7.2 ----- advised the 'Citizen's Charter' akin to the reporters charter we published last year is in the process of being finalised and is due to be published soon. This was a recommendation from the Justice Select Committee's inquiry into reporting in a digital age. ----- to share final publication date with MWG. ----- **Action AP10/14.**

7.3 ----- requested feedback on the effectiveness of the Media Working Group meetings and will commission a short survey. ----- /----- **Action AP11/14.**

7.4 ----- thanked everyone for their contribution at this meeting and closed the meeting.