



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

Media Working Group: Minutes

Tuesday 14 May 2024

Attendees:

Members

Presenters

Guests

Apologies

Secretariat

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- 1.1 ----- thanked and welcomed attendees to the meeting and confirmed the previous minutes from the meeting on 14 November 2023.
- 1.2 Papers had been circulated in advance and shared again with ----- at the meeting. ----- advised ----- that any questions relating to the Single Justice Procedure (SJP) briefing note would be dealt with outside of committee.
- 1.3 ----- informed members the agenda would be reworked as -----, Development Director needed a later slot.
- 1.4 All actions from the previous meeting were approved to be closed.

2.0 Strategic overview: HMCTS initiatives which affect media access

- 2.1 Presentation deferred as ----- was unfortunately unable to attend.

3.0 Update on remote hearings

- 3.1 ----- provided an update on the Video Hearings Service (VHS) and timelines for its national rollout, from late autumn 2024. ----- highlighted features that were agreed with stakeholders to be delivered ahead of the national rollout.
- 3.2 ----- confirmed there would be two ways for the media to observe hearings. The first by user account when they request to attend a particular hearing in advance. Individual usernames would be provided allowing access to specific hearings and any others booked which will appear in a hearing list page on their account. Users will be able to use functionality such as viewing the participant list, requesting technical support, reviewing camera and microphone settings and will be able to automatically join their hearings.
- 3.3 The second would be via a unique video link, to a specific hearing emailed to the journalist for each hearing. Users would have the choice to join as a participants or observers and they would then enter a waiting room. Members of the media should join as observers.
- 3.4 ----- queried start times for hearings. ----- advised hearings begin subject to the Judge's discretion.
- 3.5 ----- questioned if individuals could be admitted to hearings once started, if the link is not shared in time. ----- advised the sharing of a hearing link is the responsibility of the relevant court. ----- also advised the link would allow users in even if hearings are in session and advised contacting the relevant court or tribunal or our Court and Tribunal Service Centre (CTSC) who could provide the hearing link. The CTSC may be able to provide a link sooner than the court or tribunal.
- 3.6 ----- queried whether observers would be able to speak or ask questions in hearings if needed. ----- informed they would be able to do so, at the discretion of the Judge.
- 3.7 ----- emphasised a focus on transitioning users from Cloud Video Platform and VHS seamlessly and asked the group to feedback on how this could be achieved.
- 3.8 ----- advised the News Media Association could circulate any press release and other supporting guidance materials. ----- suggested a troubleshooting document to address commonly asked media questions, supported by -----. ----- offered to share any information with the Crime Reporters' Association members.
- 3.9 ----- suggested creating a focus group to allow court reporters and the media to experience a demonstration of the VHS technology which ----- agreed to arrange.
- 3.10 ----- suggested hosting a series of webinar or visiting media organisations such as the News Media Association and the Crime Writers Association to talk about the technology, supported by ----- and agreed by -----.
- 3.11 The remote hearings team are to develop a guide of commonly-asked media questions for external members to share among their representative groups. ----
-- **Action AP01/14.**

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- 3.12 ----- to consider a range of options for media professionals to use the VHS technology in advance, including live demonstrations, a series of webinars or visits to media organisations. ----- **Action AP02/14.**

4.0 Solutions to issues with reporting restriction order processes

- 4.1 ----- acknowledged media frustrations on reporting restriction order operational processes and advised HMCTS was working to improve the issues.
- 4.2 ----- advised HMCTS had taken onboard feedback from ----- in June 2023 to work to improve the circulation of discretionary reporting restriction orders. ----- requested that if members were not receiving media registers or discretionary reporting restriction orders for Crown Courts they have previously signed up to, they should inform ----- and ----- will query with the relevant court(s).
- 4.3 ----- informed the group that following the Media User Journey workshops in November 2023, process and guidance changes were made to ensure the media were receiving Crown Court Common Platform media registers. Each Crown Court should now be sending their media registers on a daily basis.
- 4.4 ----- advised that whilst HMCTS had made progress, it was not evident from the media's perspective as some courts are still not circulating media registers.
- 4.5 ----- agreed that the media had not experienced a change in service. ----- shared feedback from a colleague who had experienced issues with reporting restrictions and flagged the main issue is useability of content and sometime missing fields. ----- and ----- agreed to take their discussion out of committee and sharing examples to help identify route causes.
- 4.6 ----- advised ----- would liaise with Common Platform colleagues to explore how the quality of information in media registers could be improved. ----- shared her email address for members to provide any feedback on the issue.
- 4.7 ----- queried if a meeting with a wide range of stakeholders could be arranged to cover reporting restrictions order processes and ways in which they could be rectified. ----- advised ----- would consult with colleagues and partners to test support for a roundtable stakeholder discussion.
- 4.8 ----- requested that any members of the media contact her if not receiving media lists from courts where they have registered. ----- / ----- **Action AP03/14.**
- 4.9 ----- and ----- are to further discuss the issue faced by ----- colleague about useability of content out of committee. ----- **Action AP04/14.**
- 4.10 ----- to consider hosting a roundtable stakeholder discussion on resolving reporting restriction issues. ----- **Action AP05/14.**

5.0 Judicial Office update

- 5.1 ----- provided an update on the Family Court Transparency Project and advised the pilot was extended to include 20 courts in late January 2024 and is anticipated to extend to all courts later in the year. Increased reporting on family cases would be useful to help identify cases of interest
- 5.2 ----- advised of the Lady Chief Justice's Transparency and Open Justice Board launch and plans to work across jurisdictions, with multiple sub working groups. There will be opportunity for engagement as the Board establishes itself. [The Terms of References have been published and can be viewed on the Judiciary's website.](#)
- 5.3 ----- reflected on a positive experience at East London Family Court, where the Judge welcomed the media. Some journalists struggle to access information from Family Courts and to find which authority is responsible for cases suggesting a checklist for journalists might be useful. ----- advised reporters to

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contact Judicial Office Press Office for more information and reiterated that work was ongoing to ensure people can access the relevant information.

- 5.4 ----- raised a query relating to county court access for journalists and queried how to raise the issue. ----- advised it was an operational service issue that would be picked up in central teams. ----- advised ----- would pick up operational performance issues as a short-term escalation route for an ongoing issue via this forum.
- 5.5 ----- reiterated the need for a guide to accessing documents due to discrepancies in sharing documents and papers in court. ----- felt having access to the appropriate documents would allow for more accurate reporting.
- 5.6 ----- and ----- advised they could help to resolve county court access issues faced by some media professionals and requested those affected contact them. - ----- /----- **Action AP06/14.**

6.0 Ways of working: future options

- 6.1 ----- expressed the view that the current format of the group may not be working effectively for all members. ----- advised with the conclusion of the Reform Programme in March 2025 there would be a reduced amount of large project and change updates.
- 6.2 HMCTS attendance at meetings often outweighed external members and asked members to reconsider their needs from the group.
- 6.3 ----- informed that as a longstanding member of the group, ----- found great value in the work being undertaken and would support the group going forward.
- 6.4 ----- also expressed benefit in attending the meetings and felt there were projects within HMCTS that would be of interest to the MWG. ----- also reiterated his willingness to be involved in the group in the future.
- 6.5 ----- advised ----- would be arranging 1-1 meetings with some members of the group to gather their views on the matter.
- 6.6 ----- to coordinate meetings with the relevant MWG members to discuss the future of the group. ----- **Action AP07/14.**

7.0 AOB

- 7.1 There was no other business for this meeting. ----- thanked everyone for their contributions and closed the meeting.