

Sentencing Council

CONFIDENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS SUB GROUP 7 December 2015 - Meeting Notes

Attendees

Council:	Michael Caplan (Chair), Jill Gramann, Martin Graham, Lynne Owens
OSC:	Nick Mann, Helen Stear, Gareth Sweny
Apologies:	Julian Goose

Aims of meeting

1. To note current spending restrictions as well as risks and budget
2. To monitor progress against actions
3. To comment on our progress with engaging victims
4. To receive an update on progress on our digital work
5. To feedback on media handling plans for allocation, imposition, robbery and guilty pleas

Introduction

Michael welcomed the members of the sub group and congratulated Lynne on her appointment as Director General of the National Crime Agency, a post she is due to take up on 4 January 2016.

1. Impact of spending restrictions, risks and budget

- 1.1 Helen updated the group to let them know that the emergency spending restrictions for this financial year had little impact on the communications team as there has been a freeze on all communications spending for several years. Any budget which has already been committed is protected so the digital work can continue as planned.
- 1.2 Helen went through the risk register and noted that there were too many risks listed under communications and suggested that any risks with a score of one for either impact or likelihood should be removed.

Action:

- Helen to remove risks with a score of one from comms sub-risks

2. Action log

Helen went through the action log and highlighted three items which were not covered elsewhere in the meeting's papers.

- In relation to item 8 the Chairman has been meeting with members of the Justice Committee and other interested MPs. Helen will bring options around any future parliamentary events to the next meeting.
- In relation to item 9, Helen proposed that this be de-prioritised as we have had no interest from the women's media and Anthony is no longer here meaning we have a reduced capacity. The group agreed with this although Jill Gramann noted that we should keep a clear record of what attempts have been made to reach this audience.
- In relation to item 10, Nick let the group know that he is now actively promoting the educational materials and was considering whether we could, given the spending restrictions outlined at point 1, justify paying the Association of Citizenship Teachers a further small fee to publicise the materials via their channels.

3. Victims

- 3.1 Nick updated the group on latest activity relating to victims. Helen and Nick met Victim Support's head of comms in November to discuss some potential ways in which the two organisations could work together. It also led to some suggestions for useful contacts for other organisations it would be useful to establish links with such as the Victim Support homicide service, who may be able to use our existing leaflets, the police pan-London domestic violence service and the umbrella body for the PCCs.
- 3.2 As a result of the meeting, lines of communication were established which meant that VS contacted the OSC before issuing a press release about victim personal statements, allowing some changes to be made which avoided the suggestion that a lack of a VPS affected a judge's ability to sentence.
- 3.3 Nick reported that the head of comms had now moved to another role in VS and therefore another meeting with the new head of comms would be necessary. Nick also said that given the spending restrictions in place, the development of video material was looking unlikely to be possible and so he would approach relevant stakeholders, the Witness Service in the first instance, to see if there was any

potential for a collaborative approach, with the OSC bringing the concept, script, and expert contacts within the CJS, and the partner having the resources to be able to get it into production.

3.4 Jill suggested that Victim Support may be a good avenue to follow with regard to finding some speaking opportunities for Council members.

Action:

- Nick will arrange a meeting with the new VS head of comms and another with the Witness Service.

4. Digital update

4.1 Helen updated the group on all areas of digital work. The group were content with the update and were happy to receive and demonstration of the new online document store at the Council meeting later in December.

4.2 Jill noted that one clear difference between the requirements for digital guidelines in the magistrates' and the Crown court was that magistrates had a much greater need for quick access to guidelines as they may sentence many cases in a short time whereas Crown Court judges would not have to do this.

5. Media handling

5.1 Nick expanded on the media handling paper, outlining the approach to the announcements relating to allocation, imposition, robbery and guilty pleas.

5.2 The group noted that in relation to the guilty plea guideline it was important to emphasise the differences between the existing approach and the new one and that this is not 'new policy'.

5.3 Lynne noted that the police would respond well to messages around the guilty plea guideline making things tighter and clearer. The message should be clear that victims and witnesses, rather than the criminal, will benefit from the new guideline, giving them more certainty as to whether a trial is going ahead.

5.4 It was also emphasised that it was important to ensure defence lawyers were reached regarding the allocation guideline as well as the other procedural guidelines namely, guilty pleas and imposition as there was some evidence that the messages were not always getting through. Michael offered to act as a spokesperson with relevant titles such as the Law Society Gazette.

5.5 Jill noted that we should clarify which offences are covered in the robbery guideline and provide definitions of robbery, burglary and theft to avoid any confusion.

Action:

- Nick will be developing the approaches to the guideline publication comms and will update at the next meeting, along with providing summaries of the guideline publication response to the announcements that occur in the meantime.

6. AOB

Helen informed the group that she and the Head of Office were having ongoing discussions with various contacts regarding the provision of guidelines in Welsh. There is some demand for these and we are working with the HMCTS Welsh Language Unit to establish what resources would be required to deliver sentencing guidelines in Welsh.

NEXT MEETING: 8 February