

Sentencing Council

CONFIDENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS SUB GROUP 26 October 2015 - Meeting Notes

Attendees

Council: Michael Caplan (Chair), Jill Gramann, Martin Graham, Julian Goose, Lynne Owens

OSC: Nick Mann, Gareth Sweny, Anthony Walker

Apologies: Helen Stear

Aims of meeting

1. To monitor progress against actions
2. To evaluate the media handling of the theft launch and plan for H&S
3. To discuss the proposal for a new film for the website
4. To review our plan for engaging with victims over the next six months.
5. To update on progress on our digital work
6. To discuss comms risks and budget

Introduction

Michael welcomed the members of the sub group and moved to the first item.

1. Action log

Anthony updated the sub group on progress made against the action log. The website survey is live and will be promoted via a pop up when created (action 4). Police engagement is planned to overlap with work with victims (actions 2 and 6) (see later). He talked about the increased interaction with parliamentarians (action 8), in particular on a one to one basis, and resending the pitches for women's magazines (action 9). Nick said that the ACT had now been paid so the materials can now be sent out (action 10). Anthony updated the sub group on progress on Twitter: now over 3,000 followers (action 12) and speeches: 14 delivered, three booked in (action 13). The possibility of new YBTJ scenarios is being explored (action 14). He also indicated the slow progress towards creating a CRM database (action 15) to plan and record stakeholder engagement and contact details.

Julian asked if there were plans to do another Parliamentary event: the plan is to continue with the one to one meetings and possibly target the 'awkward squad' of vociferous MPs at a later date.

Action:

- All members of the comms team to update the action log to reflect latest activities and next steps.

2. Media handling

2.1 Nick and Michael outlined the lessons learned from the theft launch. Nick highlighted the dangers of confusion in the media, in this case it was mistaking burglary for theft, and for H&S it could be trying to relate the guidelines to the horse meat scandal. In future these should be identified and planned for.

2.2 Nick also raised the point that there was some adverse comment in the media that the focus on harm to the victim had gone too far. *Julian pointed out that this is a statutory obligation of the Council.* It was agreed that we have to be prepared for this line of discussion so should be clear about the Council's remit. *Jill said that we should be wary of discussing individual cases and case studies.*

2.3 For the H&S launch Nick said that 2 sector press pieces had been placed so he is now looking at mainstream media, may be the Times. He is looking for a third quote for the press release (SC and HSE so far). *Jill suggested the CBI or IOD but these are wary of guidelines, Julian said trade unions will be supportive but this might be seen as too political or anti business. Martin suggested small business representative organisations might be better as one aim of the guidelines is to make fines more equitable. Jill suggested the Federation of Small Businesses or franchise business representative. She also asked if there were any big cases going through the courts that could be used to boost interest in the launch.*

Actions:

- Nick to look into third quote for the press release
- Nick to select and pitch to mainstream media.
- Nick to check the courts for big H&S cases that might tie in.

3. Film

Michael said that Colman had seen the Law Commission's new video and was keen to do something similar. Nick outlined the work he has done to research this and has drafted a script based on the court system infographic. The Law Commission's video cost around £5,000. It was agreed this video needed a strong message so as not to be a vanity project and be in the format that the audience would most appreciate. Julian asked if something could be done with the stock speeches we have. Jill suggested it might be better to focus on the role of the Sentencing Council and how guidelines are made rather than the court system as a whole. Martin said that the last two boxes of the infographic should be made clearer.

Actions:

- Nick to circulate the script he has drafted.
- Martin to suggest a redraft of the last two boxes of the infographic.

4. Victims

4.1 Nick outlined the ongoing work in this area, he reported on the meeting he and others had with Mark Castle and said he had a meeting scheduled with the Victim Support (VS) Head of Communications. Nick said the meeting would be based around the points identified at which victims need the information. *Jill asked if VS had identified any gaps in our message but it was indicated that it was more a matter of keeping lines of communication open. It was agreed all communications should be clear about the remit of the SC and what is the responsibility of the SC.*

4.2 *Jill pointed out it was important to manage victims' expectations. Lynne pointed out FLOs only really work on murder or manslaughter cases and we have that covered with the leaflets. She said that Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) have responsibility now for allocating victims' services contracts, so we should approach the PCCs victims sub group to raise the possibility of disseminating sentencing information on their agenda.*

Actions:

- It was agreed that the first of the key messages needed revising to include 'magistrates' and 'consistency of approach'.
- OSC to approach PPC victims sub group to raise sentencing information on their agenda.

5. Digital

5.1 MCSG User Survey

The sub group approved the MCSG survey. It would be timed to go live so that it didn't overlap with the general web survey. Gareth stated that a decision on how long to run the survey will be made after a few weeks and will be dependant on the number of replies.

5.2 Further development of the MCSG

Jill said that the more that can be done from the bench, without recourse to the legal advisors, the better. Some calculators that are on the app, such as driver disqualification, so should be included in the MCSG so as not to be a step back.

5.3 Crown Court guidelines

Some revision will be needed as the Sentencing Guidelines Council materials are in a different format and the sentencing powers are different. *Michael was concerned about the provision of equipment and wifi, especially for part timers like himself, but Julian reassured him about the electronic submission of papers, e-judiciary and wifi. Julian went on to request it was kept succinct with only information relevant to the experience level of Crown Court judges but still include relevant calculators such as the victim surcharge and discount for a guilty plea.*

Action:

- Judges to be surveyed to check they like the format of the guideline.

5.4 Document store

The sub group reserved judgement on this until they had seen it. *Julian was wary that it should not mean that the Council gets into group drafting.* It was resolved that this could be avoided by sticking to specific questions. Gareth clarified that it was intended to be used for documents which had been signed off at a Council meeting subject to specific members' approval.

5.5 Web stats

Gareth reported that following the launch of the online MCSG the number of visitors to the site had improved. There had also been more visits to the online MCSG than to the PDF version.

(Julian leaves the meeting)

6. Risk and budget

6.1 Budget

The sub group was reassured that the overspend was not a problem but asked what the Confidence and Communications budget was. An estimate was made using the percentage overspend figure given in the paper. *Jill was keen the office as a whole should spend its budget.*

6.2 Risk

It was pointed out that the matrix on the front page of the risk register does not match the entries below. The sub group suggested removing risk 3, the loss of support among key stakeholders should be removed from the front page.

Action:

- Suggest to SMT that we remove risk 3 from the front page of the risk register.

7. AOB

Michael requested a collated PDF of all sub group papers for each meeting be produced so everything can be printed off or saved in one, much like it is with Council papers.

NEXT MEETING: 7 DECEMBER

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