



HM Courts & Tribunals Service

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Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts
House of Commons
London
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via email

7 April 2020

Dear Chair

As part of the committee's progress review report into our courts and tribunals transformation programme published at the end of the last Parliament, you set out the following recommendation:

HMCTS should set out what it will do to shift its engagement with key stakeholders from broadcasting information to genuinely listening and responding to feedback. It should provide examples where this engagement has resulted in change.

In our initial response, we said that we would respond more fully to this recommendation by the end of March 2020. Given the unprecedented crisis we are dealing with at the moment, however, I hope you will understand that I am not able to provide as full a response as I would have hoped to at this stage. But I will respond fully with in due course with the further details I outline below.

As your report acknowledges, we have significantly increased our effort to engage stakeholders on all aspects of the reform programme over the last 18 months. This has involved a variety of two-way activities involving a wide range of stakeholder groups including legal professionals, their representative bodies, and public user groups. In addition to these, there are ongoing and frequent discussions that take place with judicial partners and other public agencies involved in the justice system.

These discussions and activities take place at all levels. Extensive discussion and engagement with stakeholders has helped determine the shape of key projects such as Flexible Operating Hours (currently being piloted), the current video hearings pilot (currently being independently evaluated) as well as the development of the recently launched 'MyHMCTS' introduced to provide a single place for legal firms and other organisations to issue, pay for and manage applications online.

At a programme-wide level, there is regular engagement, not least with monthly meetings with representatives of the key legal professional bodies and events such as the Public User event in November that drew more than 100 representatives of groups like Disability UK, Support Through Court and Citizens Advice to engage with us on all aspects of reform.

I am very clear that our engagement activities have and will continue to make a significant impact on the shape of reform. But we recognise that we have not, until now, measured and recorded this routinely or systematically. We have now established new processes and structures that will enable us to do this, and better quantify the stakeholder engagement activity that is being done at every level of the programme.

Once fully embedded into the programme, these structures will provide us with the information and evidence of effective engagement to report back to the committee, and share back more consistently with those who have participated.

Firstly, they will provide those who have participated in HMCTS engagement activity, with a more consistent, unified system through which to feedback to us. They will enable participants to let us know whether they felt their views and opinions were listened to during the activity, as well as the extent to which they feel their voice is influencing the reform programme.

They will also provide HMCTS reform teams with a formal way of recording, tracking and quantifying their stakeholder engagement activity in an aligned way, across all jurisdictions, and support them to provide information and statistics on who, how, and on what topic they are engaging. This will help them to align how they centrally report on their engagement and, crucially, provide detail on where engagement has influenced the design or delivery of a service.

These arrangements were planned to be introduced this month. But current events have required us to pause this work. They will however, in due course, provide us with a more robust evidence-base of our engagement activity which we will be keen to share with the committee in due course.

Finally, it is perhaps relevant for me to reflect the extensive work we are undertaking to engage, inform and support our stakeholders during the current COVID-19 crisis. I attach a note reflecting some of the activities we have established as part of our work to maintain a functioning justice system despite the unprecedented challenges we face.

I do hope this update is helpful, and will be in touch with the committee with further information on the results of the measures outlined above as soon as we are able to do so.

Yours sincerely,



Susan Acland-Hood

Chief Executive, HM Courts & Tribunals Service