

## MEETING OF THE SCOTTISH SENTENCING COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday 21 March 2019, held at Edinburgh Sheriff Court

### Minutes

- Members present:** Sheriff Norman McFadyen (Chair)  
Krista Johnston  
Sue Moody (until item 2.5)
- Secretariat:** Graham Ackerman (Secretary)  
Stuart Ritchie (Communications Officer)
- Apologies:** Summary Sheriff Jillian Martin-Brown

### 1) PROCEEDINGS

#### *Item 1.1: Draft minutes of last meeting*

1. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

#### *Item 1.2: Progress of actions*

2. An update was provided on the action points from the previous meeting, as follows:

**AP1: Secretariat to take forward the communications plan in relation to the launch of the 2018-21 business plan and principles and purposes of sentencing guideline.**

This was discussed as part of Item 2.1

**AP2: Committee to hold further discussions in due course about potential public events during the 2018-21 period.**

This was discussed as part of Item 2.3

**AP3: Secretariat to provide a general update to the Committee on a quarterly basis.**

A communications report for 2018 was provided for this meeting (paper

2.2). The first quarter of 2019 report will be issued to members by correspondence in April.

**AP4: Secretariat to respond to the correspondence from the Society of Solicitors in the Supreme Courts of Scotland.**

The secretariat confirmed that, as agreed at the last meeting, a response had been sent to the Society of Solicitors in the Supreme Courts of Scotland following their previous correspondence regarding use of the abbreviation SSC. The Society responded to acknowledge receipt of this letter and to note that this matter would be discussed at its meeting in December 2018.

### Action Points

**AP1: Secretariat to circulate Q1 2019 Communications Report to members of the Communications Committee during April.**

## 2) COMMUNICATIONS

### *Item 2.1: Review Launch of Business Plan 2018-2021 and Principles and Purposes Guideline*

3. Paper 2.1 provided an overview of the launch of the “Principles and purposes of sentencing” guideline and the 2018-2021 business plan, with a focus on the awareness-raising activity carried out by the Council and the resulting media coverage.
4. Members discussed the paper and any lessons that could be learned from this experience, particularly given the importance of informing the public and any affected stakeholders of new guidelines coming into force.
5. It was agreed that, overall, the launch of the business plan and guideline had gone well, with significant interest from the media and evidence of increased traffic on the Council’s website. However, while not possible on this occasion (as a result of fixed timescales around the submission of the new business plan), it was agreed that it would be preferable in future to avoid the publication of any other major documents such as business plans at the same time as the approval or coming into force of a guideline.

*Item 2.2: 2018 Communications Report*

6. The 2018 Communications Report highlighted that the Council featured in 75 articles during 2018 with the “Principles and purposes of sentencing” guideline and the 2018-2021 business plan generating the majority of that coverage. The report also highlighted a 28% increase in visitors to the website during the year.

*Item 2.3: Priorities for 2019 – General discussion*

7. The committee held an open discussion on priorities for 2019. In particular, the Committee discussed:
  - Possible stakeholder and public events
  - Ways of improving public knowledge of sentencing and highlighting the work of the Council
  - Development of further educational material for schools
  - Development of additional interactive case studies for the website
8. In relation to potential stakeholder events, the Committee asked the secretariat to develop and circulate a proposal for a small round table discussion in mid-2019 on the sentencing of people with mental welfare issues. This is highlighted as an area of interest in the current business plan, and it was felt that an initial discussion with key stakeholders would assist in highlighting any issues for further consideration in due course.
9. It was agreed that consideration should be given to the possibility of holding public events to coincide with public consultations on future guidelines (particularly those on more specific topics), and that the secretariat should seek views from the relevant working group committees on this.
10. It was suggested that in addition to considering the feasibility of hosting public events in due course, the secretariat should explore what existing conferences and professional events the Council might be able to contribute to.

**Action Points**

- AP2: Secretariat to circulate a proposal for a round table discussion on sentencing people with mental welfare issues, liaising with the Research Committee in relation to the main topics to be discussed**

**AP3: Secretariat to examine the feasibility of possible public events, liaising with relevant working group committees as necessary.**

*Item 2.4: Sexual offences guideline and conference report*

11. The Committee noted recent Council discussions around its plans to develop guidelines on sexual offences, and the likelihood that multiple guidelines will be prepared (rather than one guideline covering all sexual offences). Ahead of further discussion about sexual offences at the Council's May meeting, the Committee discussed how best to communicate the Council's plans in this area in due course, given widespread interest from the public and stakeholders.
12. The Committee also discussed the recent debate in the Scottish Parliament, which largely focused on sentencing in sexual offence cases. In particular, members discussed how the Council might build on its initial engagement with justice spokespeople within Parliament and with the Justice Committee, to raise awareness of the Council's work and encourage further discussion.

**Action Points**

- AP4: Secretariat to circulate communications plan relating to work on sexual offences for comment**
- AP5: Secretariat to explore the possibility of holding further meetings with MSPs to discuss the work of the Council**

**Sue Moody left the meeting at this point.**

*Item 2.5: Website*

8. Given time constraints, it was agreed that this item could be discussed through correspondence.

**AP6: Secretariat to circulate item on website for discussion**

**3) Engagement**

*Item 3.1: Modern Studies Association (MSA) Conference and Education Resources*

9. It was agreed that this item could be discussed through correspondence.

**AP7: Secretariat to circulate item on MSA Conference for discussion**

*Item 3.2 Young People and Process guideline consultations*

10. Members discussed possible communications activity relating to the public consultations for both the Process and Sentencing Young People guidelines, both of which are planned to take place during 2019 (this was also covered to an extent by the discussion under item 2.3). Members discussed how best to maximise publicity and so encourage responses to both consultations, including through possible events, use of social media and the Council's website, and direct engagement with the media through interviews and articles.

**4) Media Enquiries**

*Item 4.1: Latest media enquiries*

11. Members briefly discussed the latest media enquiries received by the Council.

*Item 4.2: Discussion on handling media requests for interview*

12. The Committee noted the recent increase in media enquiries and requests for interview, and discussed how the latter might be approached.

**Item 5.1: Next meeting**

13. It was agreed that this item could be discussed through correspondence

**Item 5.2: AOCB**

*2018/19 Annual Report*

14. The secretariat will soon be commencing work on the 2018/19 Annual Report. Relevant drafts of the communications section will be circulated in due course for comment.

**AP8: Secretariat to circulate a draft of the communications section of the Annual Report for comment.**