Dear Chair,

**Engaging with our external stakeholders: Our approach and plans**

In October 2018, the government accepted the Committee’s recommendation to publish our plans on how and when we will engage with stakeholders as we reform the courts and tribunals service. Please find attached a copy of our plans, which we are also publishing tomorrow on our GOV.UK pages.

**Putting people at the heart of court and tribunal reform**

The central principle of the court reform programme is to put the people who use our courts and tribunals at the heart of how we design and run our services. While there has already been wide engagement with a range of different users and stakeholders, we’ve been clear that there is more to do.

Early on, the reform programme rightly involved a range of high-level public statements and consultations. This included a joint vision statement\(^1\) by the then Lord Chancellor, Lord Chief Justice and Senior President of Tribunals in 2016 followed by a Ministry of Justice consultation, *Transforming our Justice System*\(^2\), which set out the Government’s broad approach to reform and sought views on three specific proposals: the assisted digital strategy; automatic online conviction and statutory standard penalty; and tribunal panel composition.

**Wider engagement to support delivery**

Wider engagement with stakeholders, particularly with the legal professional community, has developed further over the last 12 months as the reform programme has gathered pace and moved in to its foundational delivery phase. We’ve published regular progress reports - our *Reform Update* - and send more than 15,000 subscribers a monthly e-newsletter. We’ve held events around the country (as well as online) to share information and hear feedback about reform.

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\(^1\) [Joint Vision Statement](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transforming-our-justice-system-joint-statement)

\(^2\) [Consultation](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-our-courts-and-tribunals)
and specific projects within the programme. Through our strategic stakeholder engagement groups (there are currently eleven of these, each with clear Terms of Reference), we have regular dialogue with representatives of key stakeholder groups, in particular the legal profession and public court users.

In parallel, our user research programme has involved interviewing more than 3,700 people about either coming to court or using our systems and processes, so that we can learn from their experiences. This work continues. Alongside this we have a rolling programme of workshops and design events, designed to facilitate collaboration.

Together, these have enabled representatives of public and professional users to directly influence our work across all jurisdictions including our online divorce application in the family jurisdiction, the end-to-end case management system called Common Platform in the criminal courts, our online money claims service in the civil jurisdiction and our ‘submit your appeal’ and ‘track your appeal’ functionality in tribunals, which will help people appealing a benefit decision to do so online.

Engaging with stakeholders: our approach and plans

We are now publishing our plans to go further. In the attached paper, Engaging with external stakeholders: Our approach and plans, we describe what we have done to step up our engagement activity since we were audited by the National Audit Office in Autumn 2017, and further since the report was published and the Committee’s hearing held in May and June 2018 respectively.

It also sets out our commitment and plans to increase our engagement activity further, providing greater visibility, more opportunities to contribute to and shape the programme, and giving greater confidence in it.

This paper sets out:
- Our overarching approach to engagement;
- Who we engage with;
- How we engage with stakeholders and when;
- What engagement has been undertaken so far; and
- Our future plans for developing our engagement with external stakeholders.

The Committee’s report rightly recognised the need for comprehensive stakeholder engagement, which we fully support, and over then next year we will:

1. Develop greater understanding of stakeholder perceptions and needs.
2. Better audit, assess and track our engagement activities.
3. Improve consistency in the frequency and level of engagement that we undertake.
4. Increase the visibility of opportunities for our stakeholders to engage with us, as well as the visibility of engagement that has been undertaken and its impact.
5. Extend the reach of our engagement to involve more and different people.
As well as providing you with a copy of our plans, we are also publishing them on our GOV.UK pages for all to see. We will proactively share this document with our key stakeholders and will use it as a shared guide to ways of working together.

**Further response to PAC recommendations**

This is the first of our responses to your recommendations from the June 2018 hearing. I will write to you again by the end of January to outline the details you requested about the timetable for reform, what changes will mean in practice for users and how we will evaluate the impact of change. In the interim the Ministry of Justice will set out its wider portfolio of change, and how this is balanced and prioritised.

We stand ready to provide further information on *Engaging with external stakeholders: Our approach and plans* and any other issue if required.

Yours sincerely,


_Susan Acland-Hood_
Chief Executive, HM Courts & Tribunals Service