

COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOL BETWEEN MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND THE PRISONS AND PROBATION OMBUDSMAN

The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's office (PPO) is operationally independent of, though it is sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The MoJ Communications Directorate will aim to provide the highest standard of professional communications services, whilst ensuring the independence and integrity of the Ombudsman.

The MoJ Communications Directorate will provide professional communication advice and services to PPO which are designed to build and protect the reputation of the PPO (and, by virtue of its sponsoring role, the Ministry of Justice) and support the delivery of strategic business objectives and priorities.

The MoJ Communications Directorate offers 7 key services to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. These are:

1. Media support

1.1 MoJ is providing the PPO with a 24/7 Press Office service, currently at no cost to PPO.

1.2 The MoJ Press Office service currently provided to the PPO includes:

- news planning and co-ordination for announcements
- 24/7 Press Office support (including media monitoring, dealing with media enquiries and interview bids, facilitating media interviews)
- drafting and issuing press statements (e.g. press releases, media lines to take) as appropriate
- providing media handling advice to the PPO and staff.

1.3 MoJ Press Office will have a dialogue with the PPO to help deliver these services, meeting every 6 months to review progress. The PPO will provide the MoJ Press Office with:

- a forward plan of reports and announcements that require Press Office input and support (i.e. if they are likely to be of interest to the media)
- detail on the content and publication timing of reports and announcements
- detail of any emerging or planned issues that are likely to attract media attention
- draft media briefing material as necessary
- points of contact and up-to-date contact details (including out of hours contact details).

1.4 The MoJ Press Office service is provided as necessary and resource allocation is not dedicated to PPO. However, there is a named Press Office liaison point for PPO. The level of service and allocation of staff resource depends upon the competing demands made upon the MoJ Press Office team.

1.5 The MoJ Press Office has a role in protecting the reputation of the MoJ, including NOMS (which includes the Probation Service). This means it can often play two conflicting roles – for example by publishing a press notice on an Ombudsman report and also rebutting/responding to it. This is a situation not without risk (including reputational risk) and not without danger of mixed messages. Within the MoJ Press Office, work to support the PPO is handled by a different team in

order to provide some division of business within the same office. Press Officers are trained to appreciate and respect these sensitivities.

1.6 In the event of the appointment of a dedicated press officer/press function for PPO, this protocol will need to be reviewed and updated.

2. Digital Communications

2.1 The responsibilities are agreed as follows:

- **Hosting:** The Digital team agrees to arrange suitable hosting to ensure access to the PPO's information and services on online channels used.
- **Updates:** The PPO agrees to take responsibility for the accuracy and legitimacy of the information (content) in their area(s) (including any specific disclaimers) and for providing staff resources to draft and publish that content, and to keep it relevant and up-to-date.
- **Editorial Control:** The PPO has editorial control over content on ppo.gov.uk and should ensure that it conforms to policies, guidelines and standards as appropriate. The editorial control over PPO content published on other online channels (eg Direct.gov.uk) is outlined in the Publication and Editorial Guidelines document. All PPO published content remains the property of the PPO.
- **Access & Training:** The Digital team agrees to provide a user name, password and interface to enable the PPO to maintain its content on ppo.gov.uk and other online channels within agreed support level agreements. The Digital team will provide training and support for the PPO's staff to use the interface, and provide email addresses for feedback and suggestions.
- **Security:** The PPO agrees to keep usernames and password secure for any online interface, and only provide them to their trained security cleared staff.
- **Costs:** Where changes to content on online channels, site design or requests for new functionality incur costs for the PPO, MoJ will discuss and agree how those will be met prior to work commencing.
- **Promotion:** The Digital team and PPO agree to promote the use of the online channels to identified audience groups, and to keep each other informed of their plans to promote.

2.2 The principles upon which the Digital team and the PPO will work together are:

- Work as a team.
- Support each other in finding the most efficient ways to deliver project requirements.
- Be open, frank, honest and constructive in all dealings with each other.
- Share work equitably and reasonably, consistent with agreed arrangements.
- Use this protocol as a benchmark against which each party, and the team as a whole, can set its approach to potential issues of conflict between them as work progresses.

- Optimise the value and benefit delivered to the Justice Community by the team.

3. Brand Management

- 3.1 PPO is an independent body funded by the Ministry of Justice, reporting directly to the Secretary of State. As such it has an identity and brand which expresses its role and independence. PPO's brand is recognised within the wider family of MoJ brands.
- 3.2 MoJ will support PPO to maintain its brand integrity whilst PPO takes sensible steps to reduce costs and improve public and customer access to information. This will be done in line with the agreed MoJ strategy of minimising the proliferation of Ministry brands.

4. Strategic communications

- 4.1 The MoJ strategic communications team will act as a centre of expert advice for the business, providing consultancy on the development of integrated communication strategy and planning which supports delivery of business objectives. PPO may engage with Strategic Communications to seek advice on marketing and campaigns as and when needed.
- 4.2 The MoJ strategic communications team expect the PPO to give the MoJ planning function adequate advanced notice of reports and announcements, and to give early and clear indications of their communications plans, including sharing their strategy documents. The notice required will be determined on a case by case basis subject to other commitments, priorities and resources available at the time.

5. Stakeholder engagement and internal communications

- 5.1 PPO has its own stakeholder communication capability but from time to time it may draw on the wider expertise of MoJ communication, for instance in producing and publishing the PPO annual report (see also point 6 below) or in announcing senior staff changes. MoJ internal communications in conjunction with MoJ stakeholder communications will act as a centre of advice for PPO on how to communicate to and engage with internal and stakeholder audiences and those who work with the PPO to achieve their priorities and objectives. This will include advice on planning, use of channels, prioritising of messages and audiences and engagement techniques.
- 5.2 The MoJ stakeholder communications team are responsible for the Ministry's overarching stakeholder approach and, as part of this, can provide PPO with advice on effective engagement with third parties.
- 5.3 The Communications Directorate expects PPO to provide the internal and stakeholder communications teams with adequate notice of any requirements for advice and support to enable effective planning and allocation of resources appropriately.

6. Publications

6.1 The Communications Directorate supplies an editorial design and publication service for parts of the Ministry of Justice. From April 2010 the MoJ may, with one month's notice, fully charge for design and publication services.

6.2 MoJ Design and Publications will provide a full publishing service to PPO including:

- advice and guidance on the most cost effective way of publishing reports to reach PPO audiences
- providing a cost estimate, if appropriate, for each publication and agree this with PPO
- managing on behalf of PPO design and print buying, cataloguing and distribution of PPO reports and publications, getting best value for money
- providing copywriting and editing services
- liaising with the press office and digital communications to ensure a co-ordinated approach to statutory reporting, publication and press notification

6.3 The PPO is free not use these services if it can prove alternative services are better value for money.

6.4 If it so chooses, the PPO may work with MoJ design and publications to:

- agree standard design and print requirements for routine reports
- complete design and print briefs for non-standard publications
- agree cost estimates and timescales
- provide content and sign-off to agreed publication plan timeframes

7. Charging

7.1 With the exception of digital work (para 2.1) and design/publication work (para 6.1), none of the services provided by Corporate Communications is currently chargeable. This will be kept under review to ensure that service levels can be sustained and delivered in the most cost effective manner across MoJ. Any plans to move to a partially or fully charged service will be discussed and agreed between all parties and reflected as appropriate in this protocol.

8. Professional standards of propriety

8.1 MoJ communications will develop and lead on an overarching communications policy and professional standards and propriety guidelines in support of those offered by the Government Communications Network and the Civil Service Code of Conduct. In addition, acting as Head of Profession, MoJ communications will represent the interests of communications professionals within the Ministry across Whitehall and externally.

8.2 MoJ communications will act as a specialist resource and provide professional guidance and support across the spectrum of communications services to the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman as and when they are required but particularly in specialist areas such as press.

8.3 MoJ communications will advise PPO in effective procurement and use of specialist communications services needed to deliver PPO's business objectives.

8.4 MoJ communications will invite PPO communications staff to MoJ communication profession events, seminars and opportunities for continuing professional development.

9. Monitoring and reporting

9.1 Performance against the areas of responsibility outlined in this protocol will be discussed on a quarterly basis between business managers. The intention is for the service to be agreed for a full financial year. A six-month review will be carried out each year. Significant changes in services requirements or delivery should be raised by either side three months before the end of the financial year or sooner if possible.

Agreed by:

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Communications Directorate
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