



Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts
House of Commons
London
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24 July 2019

Dear Chair,

Fifty Sixth Session of 2017-19: Ministry of Justice – Transforming Courts and Tribunals

When I wrote to you in January providing our initial response to the Committee's fourth recommendation on the scope and timing of the evaluation of the court reform programme, I said that we would aim to provide the Committee with an update in July. This letter sets out the progress we have made to date.

The overarching evaluation is one of a number of ways that evidence and data are used to assess the impact of the reform programme, so that the programme can adjust and adapt quickly as we design and test reforms. The Committee will recall that Ministers have established three key objectives to assess the cumulative effect of reform:

1. whether Reform has affected outcomes for users (fairness e.g. case/hearing outcomes, sentencing and financial awards).
2. whether Reform has changed the ability of users to pursue a case effectively (access to justice e.g. ability and speed at which court users can access and pursue a case).
3. whether Reform has affected the costs incurred by those who use courts and tribunals (e.g. travel costs, costs of time wasted).

We said in our earlier response that we intended to put in place an external advisory panel for the evaluation. I am pleased to say that we have established the panel which includes academics with expertise in the criminal, civil, family and tribunal jurisdictions, along with experts in policy evaluation and research methods. Its role is to provide independent advice to Ministers on the evaluation methodology and approaches to data analysis, including advising on what should be within and outside the scope of this evaluation. The panel met for the first time on 22 May and the intention is for it to meet two or three times a year at key stages of this work. Panel members will be invited to attend meetings that relate to their specific expertise, and they may also submit comments to the evaluation team in writing prior to or following meetings to ensure all views are gathered and considered. The membership of the advisory panel and its terms of reference are at Annex A.

We are currently finalising the details of our evaluation approach. So far, in designing our approach to the evaluation, we have drawn heavily on recommendations from your Committee's report on the reform programme. For example, through focusing on vulnerable

people, as well as those with limited digital capability and litigants in person, by exploring opportunities to engage with the legal profession as part of the evaluation, and conducting impact evaluations on projects that contain the key themes of reform.

The senior judiciary are a crucial partner in the reform programme. The Lord Chancellor has recently written to the Lord Chief Justice and Senior President of Tribunals to gather their views on how best to involve the judiciary in the evaluation.

The Committee wanted to understand how we would evaluate the impact of the reforms on vulnerable people. The evaluation will look at the effects of the reform programme on vulnerable people and whether it is different to other users. The focus of our work will be on those users who are vulnerable because they are, for example, disabled or because of their age but we will also be considering the effect of reform of those who are vulnerable because of the proceedings they are involved in (including, for example, victims of, and witnesses to, crime).

We are keen to make sure that the evaluation is objective and independent, and for this reason, we intend to commission external providers to undertake specific components of the evaluation, for example, academic consortia, or independent research agencies. Each component of the evaluation will be subject to the normal public sector procurement process and tendering exercise to ensure best value for money.

Our plan is to begin commissioning the research required for the evaluation during summer and autumn 2019. We remain committed to our aim of completing an interim report by Summer 2021, and I will write providing a further update on the progress of the evaluation, including information on specific components of the evaluation research, in due course.

As you will be aware, the Justice Committee is also currently undertaking an inquiry into the courts and tribunals reform programme, and I am therefore sending a copy of this letter to the chair of the Justice Committee, Bob Neil MP.

Yours sincerely,



Richard Heaton