Online Procedure Rule Committee

Minutes of meeting on 14 July 2025 at 14:00-15:00

Conducted in a hybrid format at The Royal Courts of Justice, Fetter Lane, London and via video conference.

Members in attendance

- Sir Geoffrey Vos, Master of the Rolls (MR)
- Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division (PFD)
- Lord Justice Edis (interim SPT)
- Sarah Stephens (SS)
- Brett Dixon (BD)
- Gerard Boyers (GB)

Non-members in attendance

- Lord Justice Baker
- Lord Justice Birss
- Mrs Justice Joanna Smith
- Sarah Rose, MoJ
- Harriet Ainsworth-Smith, MoJ
- Helen Timpson, MoJ
- Irram Khan, OPRC Secretariat
- Fola Shodeinde, OPRC Secretariat team
- Marcia Williams, MoJ
- Jenny Pickrell, MoJ
- Jennifer Tugman, MoJ
- Elena Birchall, MoJ
- Vijay Parkash, TPC Secretariat
- Carl Poole, CRPC Secretariat
- Joshua Gibson, JO
- Crystal Hung, JO
- Nick Lee, JO
- Graeme Miller, JO
- Amy Shaw, Acting Private Secretary to the MR
- Connor Keschari-Robson, Deputy Private Secretary to the MR
- Heidi Bancroft, SPT's Private Office
- Bee Ezete, Private Secretary to the PFD
- Rosemary Rand, HMCTS
- Rachael Peters, HMCTS

Item 1 - Welcome, Apologies and Introductory Remarks

1. **Welcome:** The MR thanked Edis LJ for his contribution to the OPRC in his role as interim SPT. The MR confirmed the appointment of the new SPT will have taken place by the time the committee meets again in October.

2. **Minutes**: the minutes from last meeting on 9 June 2025 were approved.

Item 2 – SI and Forward Look

3. HT talked through paper 3 on the next enabling SI, where it is proposed to include Online Civil Money Claims (OCMC) and Damages Claim Portal (DCP). It was noted that this would require collaboration between the OPRC and the CPRC to establish a working group following a similar structure to the recently formed Property and Possession Working Group. HT also asked the committee to consider how OCMC and damages proceedings should be defined in the SI.
4. The other proposed proceedings for the next enabling SI is Employment Tribunals (ET). Policy work is already underway to ready the ET for the Employment Rights Bill. It was noted that it is unclear at this stage whether this work is likely to lead to any future digitisation projects but bringing the ET into the OPRC's remit would provide an opportunity for early engagement should this arise.
5. HT requested agreement from the committee to start engagement with the judiciary and to seek ministerial agreement in the autumn to begin work on the draft SI.
6. Edis LJ noted the importance of engaging Barry Clark, Employment Tribunal Chamber President soon on this matter, and NL offered to support this from JO.
7. Joanna Smith J highlighted the Tribunal Procedure Committee (TPC) paper on digitisation in the Employment Tribunals, previously circulated to the committee in January 2025. The paper included suggestions from TPC members on potential future projects in the Employment tribunal.
8. Birss LJ indicated that the committee would need to consider the OIC Official Injury Claims portal.
9. The committee confirmed agreement in principle to OCMC, DCP and Employment Tribunals in the next SI and requested a provisional timetable for the next meeting.

Item 3 – Event and Consultation

10. BD provided updates on event planning and attendance.
11. MR expressed thanks to BD and HAS for organising the event.

Item 4 - Draft Core Online Procedure Rules

12. HT talked through paper 5 and confirmed that an updated draft SI had been circulated that morning. Feedback from Property and Possession Working Group on the previous draft was that the broad scope presented challenges in the time available. The project is under a tight timeline. While the Working Group endorsed the ultimate ambition for the core rules should be that they operate effectively across the Civil, Family and Tribunals jurisdictions, they felt that a pragmatic solution may need to be found that meets the timeline for the possession service.

13. The paper therefore proposed amending the scope of the SI to simply the OPRC to make pilot Practice Directions. HT confirmed the Practice Directions would then contain all other necessary provisions so that it could be converted to permanent OPR as soon as the service is fully operational for all users.
14. The OPRC noted that work would continue to simplify the language and make sure it takes account of the inclusion framework. The Committee also noted that the drafting would need to work across Civil, Family and Tribunals jurisdictions, and Joanna Smith J agreed to consider and provide specific feedback.
15. Birss LJ emphasised that the OPRC was likely to require the ability to be more agile in its rulemaking than would be supported by the use of Statutory Instruments, and therefore it was important that this first SI gave the OPRC the necessary flexibility.

AOB

- Edis LJ asked the OPRC to nominate a representative to join the Working Group established to develop a single set of procedural rules for contempt of court in Courts and Tribunals. Other rule committees also have representation.
- MR congratulated Birss LJ on his new role as Chancellor of the High Court that he will take up in November.

Actions

- HT to ensure a draft Online Procedure Rules SI is circulated ahead of publication for out of committee approval.
- SPT to brief his successor on the need be certain that the wording of the SI is suitable for Tribunals.
- Joanna Smith J to consider the language in the draft OPR SI and provide input on any necessary changes to allow them to accommodate tribunals proceedings.
- Secretariat to re-circulate the TPC paper on digitisation in the Employment Tribunals.
- The committee to nominate a member to join the Working Group for creating unified contempt of court rules.
- Secretariat to provide a provisional timetable for the next SI at the next meeting.