

# **The Defence Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee**

## **Minutes of a Meeting Held in the Ministry of Defence**

**At 6pm on Tuesday 8 November 2011**

D/DPBAC/3/2/1

The following were present:

Mr J Day, (MOD) Chairman  
Mr D Wilson (Cabinet Office)  
Mr J Sinclair (representing  
Mr T Drew (FCO))

Mr S Bucks, Vice-Chairman  
Ms J Crust  
Mr E Curran  
Mr R Esser  
Mr R Satchwell  
Mr M Jermey  
Mr J McLellan  
Mr D Jordan  
Mr J MacManus

Air Vice-Marshal A Vallance  
Air Commodore D Adams

Secretary  
Deputy Secretary

In attendance: Mr S Wren (Director of Media and Communications, MOD)

1. Apologies had been received from Ursula Brennan, Dame Helen Ghosh, Mr T Drew, Mr J Battle, Mr J Grun, Mr J Green, Mr B McIlheney, Mr P Barron, Mr A Qualtrough and Ursula Mackenzie.

2. The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming to the Committee Jane Crust, Deputy Managing Editor of The Financial Times, who had taken over from Hugh Carnegie, as one of the 3 representatives of the Newspaper Publishers Association on the DPBAC.

### **Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 May 2011**

3. There were no amendments to the minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2011, which were approved by the Committee as an accurate record.

## **Agenda Item 2 – Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting**

4. Para 14: Special Forces Public Information Policy. Mr J Day had agreed to take a fresh look at the possibility of senior level SF briefings for the Media. This would be dealt with under Agenda Item 4.

## **Agenda Item 3 – Secretary's Report**

5. Day-to-Day Business. The Secretary reported that he had received 125 enquiries or requests for DA Notice advice since the last DPBAC Meeting, a marked fall-off from the previous (very intensive) period. In large part, this fall-off could be attributed to the succession of major story lines (including telephone-hacking, recurring financial crises, the August riots) which had dominated the news during the previous 6 months. Requests for DA Notice advice in the period were centred on five main areas: the Special Forces (42), the UK Intelligence Agencies (30), current British military operations (8), sensitive military equipment (14) and the DA Notice System itself (19). A further 9 enquiries had been received on issues which fell outside the DA Notice code. During the period the Secretary had sent out only one general letter of advice to editors (which concerned DA Notice 5) and had been asked for advice on 4 book manuscripts. He had continued the programme of lectures and workshops within the media, the Armed Forces and at University schools of journalism, and further lectures and seminars were planned for the following months. The BBC Radio 4 programme 'D for Discretion' (broadcast first on 23 August) had been generally very well received and had helped to promote a better understanding of the DA Notice System to a wide audience. While DA Notice business had been far lighter than in the previous period, work on administrative issues – notably website hosting and address, DA Notice Secretariat duties, terms and conditions of service - had been intense. The Secretary said he was conducting a Review of DPBAC executive and administrative support functions, the scope of which would be outlined under Agenda Item 5. He concluded his report by outlining for the Committee's consideration a proposal by Warwick University to hold a seminar on 'Managing Open Secrets: "Lessons-Learned" from the CIA's Public Affairs Program', for DPBAC members and officials from MOD, the Home Office and the FCO.

6. Committee Discussion. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman thanked the Secretary for his comprehensive report. The Committee discussed the proposal from Warwick University to hold a seminar for DPBAC members and officials from the MOD, Home Office and FCO. It was agreed that this was an excellent idea and the Secretary was tasked with taking forward the arrangements.

**ACTION: The Secretary**

## **Agenda Item 4 – Special Forces Public Information Policy**

7. The Chairman introduced this item by summarising the work on SF disclosure that he had commissioned following the last meeting when the Media-Side had raised a number of concerns about how the policy was operating. The Chairman said that the disclosure policy was designed to do 4 things:

- protect lives
- protect operational techniques and tactics
- ensure that SF units could deploy effectively
- protect relationships with allies and partners

8. In noting the Media-Side comments that the Agencies had a more open and effective approach, the Chairman said that, although there were similar red lines, there were also differences which accounted for the MOD's position on SF disclosure. Furthermore, there was a misconception that the policy was always "no comment". It was in fact more nuanced than that with stories dealt with on a case by case basis by the Press Office who maintained close links with SF. The Chairman said that a more accurate description of the policy would be "not committed to comment" rather than "no comment".

9. The Chairman then turned to the question of leaks. Any leak was a matter of concern but evidence showed that only a very small number of serving members of SF were responsible for leaking information. A new generation of SF members were fully supportive of the current policy, which they acknowledged was to protect their interests. The Media-Side expressed the view that the best way to stop leaks was to be more open.

10. The Chairman then invited Simon Wren (DMC) to brief the meeting. Simon Wren said that the Press Office tried to deal with SF stories like any other story. There were three nominated contacts in the Press office for SF matters who all kept in close contact with HQ DSF. A story would be cleared directly if possible, but if there was anything that could breach the DA Notice code then the matter would be referred to the Secretary. The aim was to protect as much as possible without spoiling the story. Responding to Media-Side concerns that that this usually left little to report, the Chairman added that it was extremely difficult to brief in depth without revealing sensitive information. Post Afghanistan this might become a little easier. The Chairman of the Media Side said that he was reassured to a degree but there was an expectation that information on SF operations which did not fall within the DA Code should be available.

11. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman suggested that the forthcoming seminar (paragraph 6 above) could provide a useful opportunity to take these discussions forward in the context of US experience. This was agreed.

**ACTION: The Secretary**

**Agenda Item 5 – Review of DPBAC Administrative & Executive Support Functions**

12. The Chairman briefed the meeting on the projected Review of DPBAC Administrative & Executive Support Functions. He said that the work had been set in hand to ensure that the arrangements to support the Secretariat were suitable in the era of the 24 hour news cycle and the rapid expansion of web-based journalism. The current contracts for the Secretary and Deputy Secretary had been written in the print era and were no longer relevant to the way the Secretariat functioned. He was keen to put in place an up to date framework before the Secretary's successor was in post. The Secretary had been tasked with carrying out the review, the findings of which were to be submitted by 30 November.

13. The Secretary explained the steps which had been taken so far. The TORs had been agreed and an initial strawman paper approved. He had also tabled a note (attached to these minutes) outlining the review, its aim, assumptions and a list of minimum requirements. He said it would be helpful to have the Committee's approval of the minimum requirements. These were agreed.

14. In discussion, the Chairman of the Media-Side said that, whilst accepting the need for a review, there were certain red lines, in particular the need to maintain the Secretariat's independence. This was fundamental to the credibility of the system. It was also important to have a single point of contact and responsibility – the Secretary – who would provide trusted and consistent advice. The strongly held view of the Media-Side was that, whilst recognising the need for financial constraints, the system offered excellent value for money. Without it there would be inevitable recourse to legal alternatives which would be very costly for both sides. The Chairman of the Media-Side said that members would like to contribute to the review process but felt that the current timescale was too short.

15. In summing up the discussion, the Chairman said that he agreed with all the points made by the Media-Side and that both independence and consistency of advice were key to the effectiveness of the System. Furthermore, MOD and Whitehall more widely received extraordinarily good

value from the system. He could not think of any alternatives that would be better. Nevertheless, it was important to have a more relevant support structure in place when the next Secretary and Deputy Secretary were recruited.

16. Finally, it was agreed to extend the deadline for the review findings by two weeks. The Media Side were asked to submit their comments to the Secretary by 23 November. The review findings were to be with 2<sup>nd</sup> PUS MOD by 14 December.

**ACTION: Media Side members and the Secretary**

### **Agenda Item 6 – Any Other Business**

17. No additional business was raised.

### **Closing Remarks**

18. The Chairman recorded the Committee's thanks to Hugh Carnegy of *The Financial Times* who was now based in Paris for his long period of much-valued service to the DPBAC. He reminded Committee members that the DPBAC Annual Reception would be held in Admiralty House between 6.30 pm and 8.30 pm on Thursday 24 November.

### **Next Meeting**

19. The next DPBAC meeting was planned to be held at 6.00 pm on 9 May 2012, immediately after the Media-side pre-meeting, which would begin at 5.00 pm.

Andrew Vallance  
AVM  
Secretary, DPBAC

10 November 2011

### **Distribution**

All DPBAC Members  
The 'dnotice' Website

# REVIEW OF THE DPBAC SECRETARIAT FUNCTIONS AND ORGANISATION

## Review Assumption

The Review assumes that the DPBAC, its independent role and the DA Notice System it oversees, will continue in broadly their current forms, albeit evolving in response to wider developments.

## Review Task

The task of this Review is to define the minimum administrative and executive functions required to support the work of the DPBAC, explore the full range of possible options for providing those functions and recommend the preferred solution.

## Proposed Minimum Operational Requirements

- Availability of DA Notice advice: 24/7 coverage, 365 days per year
- Timeliness of DA Notice advice: Able to respond every day to requests for DA Notice advice from officials and the media within media deadlines
- Credibility of DA Notice advice: Strong and up-to-the-minute knowledge of UK and international defence and security news reporting – current and recent past
- Consistency of DA Notice advice: Ensuring that consistent advice is offered; maintaining a confidential log of requests received and advice offered to support this
- Independence of DA Notice advice: Credibility with and receptiveness of advice, particularly to the media
- Capacity for Damage Limitation: Timely response to breaches of the code to limit consequential damage to national security through widespread repetition.