

Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee
Minutes of a Meeting Held in the Ministry of Defence
At 6pm on 11 May 2017

D/DSMA/3/2/1

The following were present:

Mr Peter Watkins Chair	Mr Jonathan Grun, ViceChair
Mr Jonathan Allen (FCO)	Mr Joe Fay
Mr Graeme Biggar (Home Office)	Mr Charles Garside
Mr Paddy McGuinness (Cab Office)	Mr James Green
Mr Dominic Wilson (MOD)	Mr David Higgerson
	Mr Paul Johnson
	Mr David Jordan
	Mr James MacManus
	Mr Ian Murray

Brigadier Geoffrey Dodds	Secretary
Air Commodore David Adams	First Deputy Secretary
Lieutenant Colonel John Morrison	Secretariat (on secondment)

1. There were apologies from Laura Adams, Mr John Battle, Mr Michael Jermey, Mr John McLellan, Mr Owen Meredith, Mr Charlie Redmayne, Mr Philip Rutman (represented by Mr Graeme Biggar), Mr Bob Satchwell (represented by Mr Ian Murray) and Sarah Whitehead.
2. The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming two new members to the committee. Joe Fay, Group Editor of the Register, filling a new position, and Laura Adams, one of the Editorial Directors for News at Archant, nominated by the News Media Association to replace Geoff Martin. The Chairman also welcomed Lieutenant Colonel John Morrison who was on a short secondment to the Secretariat.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 November 2016

3. The minutes of the meeting were approved by the Committee as an accurate record.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters Arising from the Previous Meetings

4. There were 2 matters arising from the 3 November 2016 meeting:

- a. Para 17: The Second Deputy Secretary would proceed with the restructuring and rationalisation of Notice 3 with the aim of reaching agreement out of committee and ahead of the next meeting (this was to be covered under Item 4).
- b. Para 25: Work would continue to increase digital representation on the Committee and would be taken forward by the Secretary and First Deputy Secretary (this was to be covered under Item 5).

Agenda Item 3 – Secretary's Report

5. The Secretary summarised his report which had been circulated before the meeting.

6. Day-to-Day Business During the last 6-month period the Secretariat had received 86 enquiries and requests for DSMA Notice advice, averaging about 3.5 per week. This was a higher level of activity than in the previous reporting period (57) and closer to the historical average (118).

7. DSMA Notice 'Advisory' Letters to All Editors. Only one 'Advisory' (general DSMA guidance to all UK editors) had been sent out during the period. This had been issued under the 'old' DSMA Notice 5 (Personnel and their families who work in sensitive positions) and concerned the identity of a former member of one of the intelligence agencies.

8. Main Areas of Enquiry. Requests by the media and officials for DSMA Notice advice during the period had been focussed on 4 major areas:

- The National Intelligence Agencies
- Special Forces

- Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Security
- The DSMA System and Application of DSMA notices

9. The Intelligence Agencies. Thirty-one of the occurrences and requests for DSMA Notice advice during the period involved the intelligence agencies, almost the same as the total in the previous period. Topics addressed included the naming of present and former agency members (including the one formal Advisory issued during this period).

10. Special Forces (SF). The last 6 months saw only 14 requests for DSMA advice concerning SF, 18 less than for the previous period.

11. Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Security. This period had witnessed significant activity generated by 2 articles published in the Sunday Times on consecutive weekends in late January 2017. Both articles had concerned the HMS VENGEANCE's Demonstration and Shake-Down Operation (a live firing of a TRIDENT missile with an inert warhead) in June 2016. The secretariat had offered advice to the journalist prior to the publication of both articles.

12. Protection of Official Data. The Secretary explained that the Secretariat had been asked to contribute to the Law Commission's consultation work on the Protection of Official Data. Although the process was focussed purely on legal instruments, there was clearly a potential overlap with the workings of the DSMA Committee. DSMA system provided effective protection for the State against inadvertent disclosure of material that could cause damage to national security. The voluntary, non-statutory and independent nature of the system worked well (and frequently) for the overwhelming majority of cases. The Secretary said he intended to reply to the Commission along these lines.

Discussion

13. The Chairman and the Chairman of the Media Side both thanked the Secretary for his comprehensive report. Discussion then focussed on the Law Commission's work on the Protection of Official Data. Although the Media Side were keen to work with the Secretary on a response to the Commission, the Official Side felt that it was inappropriate for the Committee to be commenting at

this stage; it would be better to wait until the Law Commission made their recommendations. The Chairman said that this did not preclude the Media Side engaging with the Commission or the Secretary writing to explain the DSMA System. It was therefore agreed that:

- The Secretary would write to the Commission explaining the DSMA System and how it worked.

Action: The Secretary

- The Media Side would be encouraged to engage with the Commission.

Action: The Chairman of the Media Side

Agenda Item 4 – Review of the DSMA Notices

14. This work had now been completed. The website had been updated and a new booklet produced. Posters were also available for display in newsrooms. The Committee reiterated its thanks to the Secretary for the work involved in the review over the past three years.

Secretary’s Note: The final stage of this process was to make the website device friendly so that the notices can be readily accessed from mobile devices (a journalist’s usual method of access). The secretariat is currently considering a number of options in conjunction with the MOD’s Technology Manager.

Agenda Item 5 – Increasing the digital representation on the DSMA Committee

15. The two new Media Side members both have extensive experience in the digital publishing industry. The Secretary said that he was still planning to have exploratory meetings with several digital news operators and had some promising leads to follow.

Action: The Secretary

Agenda Item 6 – Any Other Business

16. There was no other business.

Farewells

17. This was Jonathan Allen's final meeting before taking up a posting in New York. The Chairman thanked Jonathan Allen for his contribution to the Committee's work and wished him well in his new appointment.

Next Meeting

18. The next DSMA Committee Meeting would take place at 1800 on Thursday 9 November 2017. It would be preceded by the Media Side pre-meeting which would begin as usual at 1700.

19. The meeting would be followed by the Annual Dinner at the RAF club.

Geoffrey Dodds

Geoffrey Dodds
Brigadier
Secretary, DSMA Committee

23 May 2017

Distribution

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