

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTRY OF
DEFENCE AT 6PM**

ON TUESDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2021

**THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY MEDIA ADVISORY
COMMITTEE**

D/DSMA/3/2/1

The following were present:

Mr Dominic Wilson (Chair)	Mr David Jordan (A/Vice-Chair)
Mr Chris Rampling (FCDO)	Ms Dawn Alford
Mr Paul Wyatt (MOD)	Mr Peter Clifton
Mr Jonathan Sinclair (Home Office)	Mr David Dillon
	Mr Joe Fay
	Mr James Green
	Mr Michael Jermey
	Mr John McLellalan
	Ms Lisa Mitchel
	Mr Charlie Redmayne
	Ms Joy Yates
Brigadier Geoffrey Dodds	Secretary
Captain Jon Perkins RN (Retired)	First Deputy Secretary
Lt Cdr Stephen Dudley RN (Retired)	Second Deputy Secretary

1. Apologies had been received from John Battle, Beth Sizeland, David Higginson, Craig Tregurtha, Rob Winnert, Sajeeda Merali and Sarah Whitehead.

2. The Chairman was pleased to welcome members back in person, having conducted the last two meetings online. The Chairman further

remarked that the meeting was held in the MOD's Main Conference Room to ensure that members were in a position to respect social distancing requirements.

3. The Chairman announced the following new members who had recently joined the Committee:

- Dawn Alford, Executive Director at the Society of Editors.
- David Dillon, Deputy Editor of The Mail on Sunday, nominated by the News Media Association (NMA)
- Sajeeda Merali, CEO at the Professional Publishers' Association (apologies received).
- Lisa Mitchell, Editorial Content Director at BFBS and is a new member.
- Jonathan Sinclair has assumed the Home Office's seat on the Committee as Director National Security in the Homeland Security Group at the Home Office.
- Joy Yates, nominated by the News Media Association (NMA).

4. The Chairman regretted that John Battle had been prevented from attending the meeting following a bereavement. He requested the Committee's condolences be conveyed to him. John had invited David Jordan to act as Vice Chair for the meeting.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Thu 6 May 2021

5. The minutes of the previous meeting of 6 May were approved.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters arising from the previous meeting

6. There were four substantive ongoing matters from the last meeting, each addressed in its own agenda item below.

- Para 10, Incorporating Cyber into the Standing Notices. This was addressed under item 4.
- Para 12, Protection of Official Data. This was addressed under item 5.

- Para 15, incorporating Counter-Terrorist Policing (CTP) into the DSMA Notice System. This was addressed under item 6.
- Para 20, Increasing Diversity within the DSMA Committee. This was addressed under item 7.

Agenda Item 3 – Secretary’s Report

7. The Secretary presented his six-monthly report. During the 6-month period (noting varying COVID restrictions), the DSMA secretariat received 78 inquiries and requests for DSMA Notice advice, a 44% increase over the previous period (54). The ‘Request for Advice’ rate was similar to that in the pre-COVID period and only slightly below the 10-year historical average (88). 34 requests were initiated by members of the UK media, 29 by Government officials and 15 by members of the public. No supplementary DSMA notices were issued during this period. One such notice was drafted but not sent.

8. The Secretary continued with details of three particular examples: one was focussed on military operations; one concerned the inadvertent, online disclosure of sensitive procurement documents and one involved the loss of classified documents. These events were good examples of the DSMA notice system working well in practice.

9. The Chairman highlighted how trust and communication between the duty adviser and the media representative in all three cases were key to the successful resolution of quite complex issues. Media side members highlighted the importance of journalists and editors asking searching questions themselves about the implications of what is published. The MoD member expressed appreciation for protecting live operations and acknowledged that it does save lives.

10. During this current reporting period the secretariat conducted one formal DSMA presentation at Sheffield University. The annual briefing offer to universities and colleges was distributed in mid-September and to date, the following presentations have been requested:

- Sheffield University 26 Oct 21. MA, Political & Public Communication.

- University of Salford 24 Nov 21. MA Journalism and BA Journalism.
- University of the West of England (UWE, Bristol) 7 Dec 21. MA Journalism and BA Broadcast Journalism.
- University of Lincoln 4 Feb 22. BA Journalism.

Agenda Item 4 – Incorporating Cyber into the Standing Notices

11. Dep Sec 1 introduced this item. He highlighted that this important question had been engaging the committee for at least 4 years but that progress had been galvanised following a cyber threat briefing to media side colleagues by the MoD Director of National Security earlier this year. Following this, a small working group had been created which engaged with officials to make detailed recommendations. Their focus had been on updating the existing notices to take account of this significant new threat to National Security whilst ensuring that they stayed within the strict remit of defending National Security and protecting life. They did not stray into the field of curtailing reporting on routine policing or ‘observable events’.

12. The draft notices including the amendments to incorporate Cyber had been circulated to members ahead of the meeting. These amendments were, above all, discrete, minimal, and coherent with the existing notices. The proposed amendments to the standing notices were unanimously accepted and adopted. The Secretary would ensure these amendments were incorporated into the text and published as soon as possible.

13. Post Meeting notes:

- Media side members would work to make colleagues aware of these amendments.
- The Secretary published the amendments on the website on 4 Nov.

Agenda Item 5 – Protection of Official Data

14. Jonathan Sinclair, Director National Security, Homeland Security Group at the Home Office, updated the meeting about the progress of the Counter States Threats Act (which included reform of the Official Secrets Acts). Highlighting the need to modernise the legislation which in the digital age still referred to espionage as ‘making plans, sketches or maps’, he pointed out that the world had changed enormously even since the 1989 Act. He wished to assuage concerns that tougher sentences and a more non-permissive environment for spying (including industrial espionage) was in no way intended to make life difficult for journalism - recognising that press freedom was an important part of our democracy and that whistleblowing was also crucial to hold wrongdoing to account.

15. The Media side welcomed the assurance and took the opportunity to re-emphasise concerns that the space for journalism needed to be protected - preferably by the retention of a requirement to prove that disclosure would cause damage, or by the introduction of a Public Interest Defence.

16. Both sides agreed that there was advantage in a safe route for whistle-blowers. The media side observed that previous historical disclosures might never have happened had such a route been in place and had the ‘leaker’ felt that their concerns had been taken seriously.

Agenda Item 6 – Incorporating Counter-Terrorism Policing in the DSMA Notice System

17. Following the RUSI study for the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) the Committee had agreed for the merits of such a move to be investigated and had commissioned a joint paper, written in a collaboration of senior Counter Terrorist Policing (CTP) Staff and the Secretariat. This was currently awaiting ministerial approval at the Home Office and will be presented to the Committee once this has been obtained.

18. Both Media and Official sides concurred that the current situation was somewhat incoherent: SF often worked closely with CTP on operations, yet one group was covered and the other not. The Home Office member undertook to continue to monitor this issue and encourage progress if possible.

19. In a side note, it was pointed out that often it was local journalists who might be first on the scene at a Terrorist incident outside the metropolis. As generalists, rather than Defence and Security journalists, they were less likely to be familiar with the standing notices. This point only served to highlight the continued importance of outreach and briefings on how the system worked. All media side members might be able to contribute here.

Agenda Item 7 - Increasing Diversity within the DSMA Committee

20. The media side had taken the opportunity to discuss this important topic during the pre-meeting. The opportunity had already been taken to fill positions that had become vacant and increase the membership's diversity. The Chairman looked forward to the fresh insight and contribution of these new members.

21. Significant steps that had recently been taken in the industry: examples included - the BBC addressing the gender pay gap, the Guardian appointing a senior executive for diversity and development, the FT appointing its first female editor, Reuters publishing its first annual diversity report, and Reach providing paid apprenticeships for journalists.

22. It was, however, acknowledged that it takes time in to gain the necessary experience in knowledge professions, which is why the senior echelons often reflected not the composition of today's workforce, but its composition in the previous generation. (Despite women serving at sea since 1991, it is only next year that the RN will see its first female flag officer, for example).

23. It was, however, felt that the concept of 'seconds' proposed in Dep Sec 2's short paper was not an ideal fit as it stood: although media side members were not 'delegates' in the sense of 'reporting back' to their organisations, it was essential that they could speak with authority for the constituencies from which they were drawn. More junior observers would not be able to do this, and too many such members risked making the committee unwieldy.

24. On the other hand, there were no set limits to media side member numbers. There were undoubtedly 'emerging leaders' who could add value for both the committee and themselves. These 'emerging leaders' were likely already known to current members; but a sensitive approach would be needed if they were not to be 'scared off'.

25. The Chairman acknowledged that the question merited further work and considered it sufficiently important to be retained as an agenda item for the next meeting.

Action: Second Deputy Secretary

Agenda Item 8 – Any Other Business

26. Report Summary. The Secretary had again produced a one-page digest of his six-monthly report. This important additional publication increased transparency by providing statistics about the types of enquiries, but maintained confidentiality for those involved. The Committee approved this for publication on the website.

27. Media Government Relations in Australia. The Secretary briefed the Committee at the Autumn 2019 meeting on the early discussions that had taken place between officials from the Australian Government and the Chairman. Following further discussions both with the Secretary and individual members of the Committee, the Australians had expressed a wish to explore options to improve media/Government relations. One such option included the review of Australia's existing but unused DSMA-style system. The Australians felt that an amended system might suit the current requirement.

28. Way ahead: the Secretariat had provided redacted and unclassified examples of the UK system working in practice. The Australians were now keen to seek the Committee's support in future discussions and workshops in which they sought involvement from UK media, security, secretariat and Committee members. The Secretary would coordinate engagement with the emerging Australian Committee and inform members of the requirement when it became clearer.

Action: Secretary

29. Annual Reception. Chairman was pleased that the success of COVID countermeasures and vaccinations meant that it should be possible to resume the annual reception next year. The aim of this event was to enable wide, informal discussions between Defence editors, more junior journalists, relevant Government officials and committee members. He asked members to 'save the date' for 30 March.

Agenda Item 9 – Date of Next Meeting

30. The next meeting will be held at 1800 on Thursday 12 May 2022 in MOD Main Building. It will be preceded immediately by the media-side pre-meeting, which will begin as usual at 1700. Following the meeting there will be a short historical presentation on the lost Tudor Palace of Whitehall in the King Henry VIII wine cellar (MOD Main Building basement) with light refreshments until 2030.

Geoffrey Dodds

Brigadier

Secretary

Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee

22 Nov 2021

Distribution:

All DSMA Committee Members

The DSMA Website

**SUMMARY OF SECRETARY’S REPORT TO THE DSMA
COMMITTEE COVERING ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD
24 APR – 22 OCT 21**

- No formal, supplementary DSMA notices were issued during this period.
- Defence and security media advice was sought on 78 occasions during this reporting period, a 44% increase over the previous period but just below the historical average of 88 over 6 months. 34 requests were initiated by the media, 29 by Government officials and 15 came from members of the public.
- The number of requests for advice on particular topics included:

UK Special Forces	24	Counter-Terrorism	0
Intelligence Agencies	11	Physical Property & Assets	1
Cyber	0	DSMA Notice System	6
Current & Recent Military Ops	10	Historical	16
Military Equipment	2	Miscellaneous	8
Nuclear Weapons	0		

The Committee agreed to incorporate the jointly drafted cyber amendments into the DSMA standing notices. The Secretary will publish these on the DSMA website www.dsma.uk.

In addition, the DSMA Committee’s secretariat briefed on its continued work on:

The Home Office’s lead on a Counter Hostile States Bill (implementation of the Law Commission’s Final Report on the Protection of Official Data); update only.

- The incorporation of Counter-Terrorism Policing into the DSMA notice system; update only.
- Options to increase further the diversity of the Committee’s membership.

The Committee's Secretary delivered a formal presentation to the Politics and Law MA students at Sheffield University on 26th October. Further presentations are planned for University of Salford (24 Nov), UWE Bristol (7 Dec) and University of Lincoln (4 Feb 22).