

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTRY OF
DEFENCE IN HISTORIC ROOM 13 AT 5.45 PM ON
TUESDAY 31 OCTOBER 2023**

**THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY MEDIA ADVISORY
COMMITTEE**

D/DSMA/3/2/1

The following were present:

Mr Paul Wyatt (Chairman)
Ms Catrin Thomas (FCDO)
Mr Jonathan Sinclair (Home Office)

Mr John Battle (Vice-Chairman)
Ms Dawn Alford
Ms Natasha Anku
Mr Ian Brunskill
Mr Peter Clifton
Mr David Dillon
Mr Joe Fay
Mr James Green
Mr Michael Jermey
Mr John McLellan
Ms Lisa Mitchell
Mr Charles Redmayne
Ms Sarah Whitehead
Ms Eilidh Wilson
Ms Joy Yates

Brigadier Geoffrey Dodds (Retired) Secretary
Captain Jon Perkins RN (Retired) First Deputy Secretary
Lt Cdr Stephen Dudley RN (Retired) Second Deputy Secretary

The following provided apologies for absence:

Mr David Jordan, Mr Gareth Martin, Mr David Higgerson, Mr Paul Kunert, Ms Sayra Tekin, Mr Robert Winnett

The meeting was preceded by the official photograph.

The Chairman welcomed Eilidh Wilson and Natasha Anku and noted apologies from those unable to be present – including Gareth Martin who was standing in at the MoD to allow the Chairman to attend.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 25 April 2023

1. The minutes of the Spring Meeting were approved.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters arising from the Previous Meeting

2. Matters arising would be addressed under their own heading below.

Agenda Item 3 - Secretary's Report: 11 April to 17 Oct 2023

3. The Secretary presented his report covering the period 11 April to 17 Oct 2023.
4. Although there had been no supplementary notices during this period there was one after the end of the reporting cycle and ahead of the meeting to do with movements of UK forces in the Middle East.
5. Although the total number of Requests for Advice remained low, there was a substantial increase over the previous six months, including some extremely sensitive issues with significant potential to put lives at risk and cause harm to national security.
6. There was no particular discernible trend in the nature of the queries which embraced the whole gamut of categories.
7. Three examples of the system in action were presented:
 - The first involved the Intelligence Agencies and a foreign nation. Over the course of a month a particular journalist had spoken with the Secretary and both deputies. This illustrated the value of genuinely independent advice and the difficulty an official spokesperson may sometimes have in speaking to a journalist without confirming something in doing so.
 - Another issue arose with the leak of a large database of names of foreign nationals which included SPI of UK Personnel. In discussion the journalist quickly understood the sensitivity of the information and protected that which was most sensitive: this is a good example of the highly responsible approach of most UK journalists.
 - Finally, A manufacturer of sensitive parts for classified Defence Equipment had been subject to a ransomware attack, had paid the ransom, but not informed the MoD. The employment Tribunal of the responsible IT manager brought these details to the attention of a tech savvy journalist, who, following advice, did not name the company or the equipment.

Agenda Item 4 – Proposal to Incorporate Counter-Terrorism Policing into the DSMA Notice System

8. The Secretary introduced the item, outlining the origin from a study undertaken by RUSI¹ and explaining how the Committee had sought better evidence to understand both the need for change and what benefit it would bring.

9. A further short paper of evidence (outlining the case for change and including case studies) from CT Policing had been circulated ahead of the meeting, and a team from CTP had been invited to attend the meeting to open the discussion of this item.

10. The CTP Senior National Coordinator (SNC), accompanied by colleagues who headed the Media Communications team, briefed the Committee on the roles and responsibilities of CTP explaining that it embraced responsibility for investigating war crimes and espionage/hostile state threats as defined in the National Security Act as well as Counter Terrorism in all its forms.

11. The SNC highlighted the way in which the roughly 8000 staff were seconded from local forces and provided resources and expertise which could be focused where needed, coordinated across administrative boundaries and able to reduce waste and duplication.

12. He pointed out the peculiar anomaly of what was a pooling of talent and resources across constabularies; it was not a monolithic additional agency. Importantly, this grouping had brought significant operational benefits by comparison with the previous arrangement in which the Metropolitan Police had taken the lead for this topic. Significantly, collocation with Intelligence Agency colleagues was providing agility and effectiveness for the new grouping.

13. The Home Office representative made a clear distinction between those functions which fell into the realm of public safety (policy, Constabularies, Courts, Prisons), and the much smaller Homeland Security function which sat behind its own firewall of vetting and restricted information.

14. The National Coordinator also explained that over recent years specialist officers had been taking over some of the roles previously undertaken by SF, releasing the latter from Military Aid to the Civil Power (MACP) to military tasking. He highlighted that this meant increasing interoperability but perhaps just as importantly, the use of the same training, tactics and equipment.

15. There was also valuable technical exegesis of the differing command, control and judicial approaches in Scotland and Northern Ireland because of their unified constabulary and slightly different legal systems. Nevertheless the results on the

¹ A Complex Matter – Examining Reporting of Terrorism in the UK – RUSI Occasional Paper March 2021, Jessica White.

ground in tackling the CT threat were the same, as was the ability to call on the various specialist resources of the CTP organisation.

16. The Chairman thanked the CTP team for their enlightening briefing and helpful clarification of the Committee's questions. The CTP team then withdrew.

17. There was a wide-ranging discussion about the issue, which the Vice Chairman summed up, highlighting both the considerable support amongst members for some aspects of the proposal, and considerable opposition to others. He set out the major stumbling blocks which continued to make incorporating CTP into the standing notices problematic.

- In the same way as policing by consent depended on being local and accountable, the relationship between local press and the Police was a crucial one which needed to be protected.
- There should be no question of inclusion of CTP being used even inadvertently to stifle the reporting of routine policing which was fundamental to holding officers accountable to the communities from which they came and which they served.
- He echoed the views of many that the local agreements about sensitive material which might prejudice a case or identify the vulnerable were well worn and continued to work well.
- He foresaw practical difficulties arising from potential centralisation which would either inject a delay into reporting of matters of real public interest, or potentially overwhelm the Secretariat.

18. The Chairman confirmed that whilst he shared the MS concern with addressing the anomaly of extending protection to individuals in the Counter Terrorism Community and their families, he too was set very firmly against any expansion of the system into routine policing. The Chairman said careful drafting would be required; the avoidance of ambiguity would be key.

19. It was agreed that the Media side would convene a working group out of Committee to review its position and discuss possible textual amendments which might achieve the requirement but without undermining the key purpose of the Committee.

Action: Secretary/Vice Chairman

Afternote:

The media side members met on 30 November to continue the discussion on the proposal to incorporate CTP into the DSMA notice system. Ahead of that meeting,

one of their members had developed a set of proposed amendments to the DSMA standing notices which would, if accepted, address the requirements of incorporation. These had been circulated amongst the attendees prior to the meeting.

Following a discussion which included a number of studied concerns, the media side agreed in principle to specific changes to some standing notices and requested the secretary distribute these to media side members for agreement and/or further comment.

Of note, at this media side meeting, some members continued to express the concern that the difference between the actions of routine and counter-terrorism policing were not always clear and that any amendments would need to be subjected to a regular review process. It was also noted that the Secretary's judgement on individual cases would be key to ensure that the DSMA system was not misused.

Agenda Item 5 – Diversity and Inclusion

20. The 2nd Dep Sec commented briefly on the anonymous survey which Members had been invited to complete following agreement at the last meeting to examine the diversity of the Committee. Nineteen (from 25) members had responded to the survey, the results of which would serve as a baseline to monitor progress.

21. He drew the Committee's attention to the value of the Cabinet Office questions seeking to investigate the 'attainment gap'. A number of respondents did consider themselves from deprived backgrounds, and although almost half of respondents had been privately educated, half of them said that they had received scholarships or means-tested bursaries.

22. In conclusion, the Committee's composition might be predominantly male and pale, but it was more diverse than might at first appear.

23. The FCDO representative pointed out that re-examining the question in two years meant only four meetings, and urged that momentum not be lost.

24. The Chairman asked the Secretary to look again at the attendance of 'observers, shadows, or seconds'. He noted, however, the practical difficulties of trying to mandate this since many members might not have anybody immediately suitable, and a complete shadow board would be too unwieldy. (There might be merit in the bodies who nominated several Committee members seeing if they might nominate one shadow each). He was not, he said, tied to this idea, and welcomed any other initiatives.

25. There was agreement that the Spring Reception offered an ideal opportunity for such individuals to first engage with the Committee's work.

Action: Secretary

Agenda Item 6 – Any Other Business

Visits:

26. The Committee visited the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) in London on 20 September. Those who had attended had found it extremely useful; committee members found many of the revelations about emerging threats both startling and disquieting. There was widespread agreement about the value of trying to schedule a visit to an appropriate Defence and/or Security establishment once a year.

Spring Reception:

27. Administrative constraints had meant that the previously scheduled date was no longer suitable. There was agreement that if it was not practical to hold the reception on the same day as the Spring Meeting but at the same time it was agreed that the two events should not be held too close together. The Secretary undertook to investigate a new date which would be promulgated separately.

Six Monthly Summary

28. The Committee approved the publication on the website of the 'digest' of the Secretary's report on the last six months.

Agenda Item 7 – Date of Next Meeting

29. The next DSMA Committee meeting is planned to take place at 1800 on Tuesday 30 April 2024. It will be preceded immediately by the media-side pre-meeting, which will begin at the usual time of 1700.

Geoffrey Dodds
Brigadier, Secretary
Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee

13 December 2023

Distribution:

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