

THE DEFENCE & SECURITY MEDIA ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
AT 6PM ON THURSDAY 3 NOVEMBER 2016**

The following were present:

Mr Peter Watkins (Chairman)

Mr Jonathan Allen (FCO)

Mr Graeme Biggar (Home Office)

Mr Paddy McGuinness (Cabinet Office)

Mr Dominic Wilson (MOD)

Mr Jonathan Grun, Vice-Chairman

Mr John Battle

Mr Charles Garside

Alison Gow

Mr James Green

Mr David Jordan

Ursula Mackenzie

Mr James MacManus

Mr John McLellan

Mr Bob Satchwell

Sarah Whitehead

Air Vice-Marshal Andrew Vallance

Air Commodore David Adams

Brigadier Geoffrey Dodds

Secretary

First Deputy Secretary

Second Deputy Secretary

1. There were apologies from Mr Mark Sedwill (Home Office - represented by Mr Graeme Biggar), Mr David Higginson (represented by Alison Gow), Mr Michael Jermy, Mr Paul Johnson, Mr Owen Meredith and Mr Charlie Redmayne.

2. The Chairman opened the meeting by saying that this was Andrew Vallance's last meeting as Secretary after 12 years in the post. He was delighted to announce that Geoffrey Dodds had been appointed as the new Secretary as of 4 November. Andrew Vallance had kindly offered to stand in as 2nd Deputy Secretary until a new appointment had been made.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 May 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 3 matters arising from the 19 May 2016 meeting:

- a. Para 20: The Secretary's Replacement (covered at para 2 above)

- b. Para 21: Review of the DSMA Notices (to be covered under Item 4)
- c. Para 25: Digital representation on the Committee (to be covered under Item 5)

Agenda Item 3 – Secretary’s Report

5. Day-to-Day Business. It had been a very quiet 6 months during which the Secretariat had received some 58 enquiries and requests for DSMA Notice advice, averaging less than 3 per week. This was even lower than the previous reporting period in what had been a very quiet 18 months. The reasons for this were open to conjecture. However, one factor may have been that the principal terrorist outrages had been committed in other countries, and that our continuing combat operations (most notably ‘Op Shader’) were largely out of public sight.

6. DSMA Notice ‘Advisory’ Letters to All Editors. No ‘Advisories’ (i.e. general DSMA guidance to all UK editors) had been sent out during this reporting period.

7. Main Areas of Enquiry. In common with recent reporting periods, requests by the media and officials for DSMA Notice advice during the period had focussed on 3 major areas:

- The National Intelligence Agencies
- The Special Forces
- The DSMA Notice System itself.

8. The Intelligence Agencies. Only 8 of the occurrences and requests for DSMA Notice advice during the period involved the intelligence agencies, in comparison with 32 during the previous reporting period, a very sharp decline to far less than the historical average of 47. The ‘naming’ of present and former agency members had also been an issue during the period, as it had been for some years. In most cases of this type the issue was clear cut: only those who were officially avowed should be named by the media. However, 2 of the cases during the reporting period were not straightforward. The first involved the self-naming of a GCHQ senior official through social media, which also led to the inadvertent disclosure of his wife’s name and their address. It had transpired that this self-naming was part of a new GCHQ policy to widen the number of those who were authorised to debate security issues in public. The second unusual ‘naming’ issue to appear during the reporting period was the renewed media interest in a former Metropolitan Police officer, who was now working for one of the Intelligence Agencies. The Secretariat’s advice on this had continued to be that, although the officer in question was a public figure, their current employer and the work in which they were now involved should not be disclosed. That guidance, like that in the other cases, had so far been accepted.

9. Special Forces (SF). The last 6 months had seen 29 occurrences and requests for DSMA advice concerning the SF, about the same as for the previous period. Topics had included alleged SF operations in Libya, special SF equipment, the inadvertent official naming of SF members, photos of alleged UKSF operating in Syria and coverage of the alleged UKSF 'shoot-to-kill' policy in Northern Ireland during 'The Troubles'. In all cases DSMA advice had been accepted. A major feature of this reporting period concerned the series on retired Special Forces personnel televised by Channel 5. The Secretariat had learned of this through a media alert and subsequently coordinated actions on it with DSF staff. The producers proved to be a model of responsibility and cooperation. After extensive discussions and the viewing some time before transmission of one of the 4 episodes in the series, the Secretary had seen no DSMA difficulties with it. This case had underlined the importance of the independence of the Committee and its Secretariat and the Secretary's role as an intermediary and 'honest broker'.

10. The D/DA/DSMA Notice System Issues. During the last 6 months there had been some 16 enquiries and occurrences about the workings of the DSMA Notice System, little more than half of that for the previous reporting period. As usual, they had come from a variety of sources - the media themselves, officials, academics, fringe organisations and members of the public. They had also covered a wide range of issues, some of which were valid but most spurious. The latter had included an allegation that 'D-Notices' had led to the limited media coverage of a contentious report to the European Parliament in 1994 by Winnie Ewing (a prominent Scottish Nationalist and left-winger). Another, in the form of a letter from a Member of Parliament, alleged that DA Notice action had been used to prevent media reporting on Unaoil (an oil company involved in a bribery scandal). A third was a police query as to whether an individual had 'DA Notice status' which he had claimed (apparently to frustrate police enquiries), while a fourth - in the form of a batch of 6 'Freedom of Information' requests - had asked whether DA Notices had been used to prevent the reporting of issues related to HM Prisons. In none of these issues had the DSMA Notice System in any way been involved, but each had illustrated how the still widespread ignorance of the System could lead to misconceptions and at times exploitation.

11. Miscellaneous Enquiries. The Secretariat had received only 2 enquiries during the period on non-mainstream issues, both of which been outside the boundaries of the DSMA code.

12. Administration and Review Implementation. Although activity in the core business of providing DSMA Notice advice had been relatively low during the reporting period, the Secretariat had continued to deal with a substantial weight of administrative work. Part of this was to complete the implementation of the accepted recommendations of *The Independent Review of the DA Notice System and DPBAC*. This included the final stages of the redrafting the five standing DSMA Notices (covered in more detail under Item 4) and the continuing efforts to establish contacts with and possible Committee membership from the digital publishing industry (covered in more detail under Item 5). The arrival of the Secretariat's new PA on 13 September had helped

greatly to reduce the administrative load. This was timely, as the period November to April was traditionally the busiest of the year for the Secretariat, due to the need to organise the Autumn Meeting, the Annual Dinner, the Annual Reception, the winter lecture programme and usually a DSMA Committee visit to an agency.

13. Promotion of the DSMA Notice System. One of the consequences of the lack of administrative support in the Secretariat had been a fall in the number of lectures on the DSMA System which the Secretary had been able to give to University Schools of Journalism. During the period the Secretary had briefed the staff of Janes IHS at Coulsdon and the Second Deputy Secretary had given a briefing on the revised DSMA Notices to the Society of Editors during its annual conference in October. A further 8 lectures were in the planning stage for the coming months.

14. Books. During the last 6 months, DSMA Notice advice had been provided on 4 books.

Discussion

15. The Chairman and the Chairman of the Media Side both thanked the Secretary for his comprehensive report. The Chairman of the Media side echoed and endorsed the comments about the Secretariat's involvement with Red Planet which had illustrated how useful the system could be in acting as an honest broker in difficult cases.

Agenda Item 4 – Review of the DSMA Notices

16. The Chairman introduced this item by reminding the Committee about progress so far. Provisional agreement had been reached at the last meeting on rewording the existing notices. The next step had been to restructure Notices 3, 4 and 5 to eliminate overlap. He then invited the Second Deputy Secretary to bring the Committee up to date. Notice 3, probably the most complex one was still outstanding. It was still with the Official Side but agreement was close. It would then be circulated to the Media Side with a view to reaching full agreement by the end of the year.

17. The Chairman and the Chairman of the Media Side asked for their thanks to be recorded to Geoffrey Dodds for his work. The Chairman concluded by saying that once the review had been completed it would still be important for the Committee to take a look at the Notices from time to time to ensure that they remained current and relevant.

Action: Secretary

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

18. The Media Side were keen to make clear that they were all “digital” these days and that what we were seeking was more engagement with the purely digital publishing industry. The First Deputy Secretary reported that progress had been slow given the continuing difficulty in identifying a representative body for the various independent digital news organisations. Attempts had been made and would continue to have discussions with First Draft News, which was a coalition of social media news gatherers. The representative from Trinity Mirror had produced a list of a very useful potential contacts which the Secretary and First Deputy Secretary planned to pursue in the coming months. It was again acknowledged that the DSMA Committee was not the only organisation trying to tie in some form of representation from the digital publishing industry.

Action: Secretary and First Deputy Secretary

Agenda Item 6 – Secretary’s Valedictory

19. The Chairman introduced this item by saying that Andrew Vallance had been Secretary for 12 years during a period of dynamic change and development in the risks and threats to UK national security. The Secretary’s Valedictory Report had been circulated but the Chairman asked Andrew Vallance to highlight a few key points.

20. The Secretary said that his term had indeed been governed by a period of unprecedented change. He made three specific points:

- The greatest change had been in the development of digital news and the 24/7 news cycle.
- His time in office had convinced him that a voluntary system with clearly defined guidelines remained and must be the way forward.
- He had been impressed by the way the members of both the Media and the Government were willing to work together to make this peculiarly British system work so effectively.

21. The Chairman of the Media Side asked for the Committee’s wholehearted thanks to Andrew Vallance for his dedicated stewardship over the past 12 years to be recorded. The Official Side expressed the Government’s appreciation for the vital work that Andrew Vallance had done during his tenure to protect the many and varied critical aspects of our national security.

Agenda Item 6 – Any Other Business

22. There was no other business.

Farewells

23. The other departure from the Committee, apart from the Secretary, was Ursula Mackenzie who represented the Book Publishers' Association. The Chairman thanked Ursula Mackenzie for the key role she had played during 5 years on the Committee and wished her well for the future.

Next Meeting

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

Geoffrey

Geoffrey Dodds
Brigadier
Secretary, DSMA Committee

24 November 2016

Distribution

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