

**THE DEFENCE & SECURITY MEDIA ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
AT 6PM ON THURSDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2017**

The following were present:

Mr Peter Watkins (Chairman)	Mr Jonathan Grun, Vice-Chairman
Mr Lewis Neal (FCO)	
Mr Charlie Edwards (Home Office)	Ms Laura Adams
Mr Campbell McCafferty (Cabinet Office)	Mr John Battle
	Mr Joe Fay
	Mr Charles Garside
	Mr James Green
	Mr David Higgerson
	Mr Paul Johnson
	Mr John McLellan
	Mr Ian Murray
	Mr Charlie Redmayne
	Ms Sarah Whitehead
Brigadier Geoffrey Dodds	Secretary
Air Commodore David Adams	First Deputy Secretary
Group Captain John Alexander	Second Deputy Secretary
Lieutenant Colonel John Morrison	Seconded

1. There were apologies from Mr Michael Jermeay, Mr David Jordan, Mr James MacManus, Mr Owen Meredith, Mr Graeme Biggar (represented by Mr Charlie Edwards), Mr Paddy McGuinness (represented by Mr Campbell McCafferty) and Mr Dominic Wilson.

2. The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming four new members to the committee and one to the Secretariat; all attending their first meeting. Lewis Neal had assumed the appointment of Director National Security at the FCO from Jonathan Allen. Laura Adams, one of the Editorial Directors for News at Archant, nominated by the News Media Association, was replacing Geoff Martin. Ian Murray was the new representative from the Society of Editors having taken over from Bob Satchwell who had stood down due to ill health. Charlie Redmayne from Harper Collins was the new representative of the Book Publishers Association. The new member of the Secretariat was Group Captain John Alexander who had been appointed in August.

**Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 May 2017**

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 was one matter arising from the 11 May 2017 meeting:
  - a. Para 12: The Secretary would respond to the Law Commission’s consultation paper on the protection of official data by explaining the DSMA System and how it worked (this was to be covered under Item 3).

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

5. Day-to-Day Business. During the last 6-month period the DSMA Secretariat had received some 92 enquiries and requests for DSMA Notice advice. This was a slightly higher level of activity than in the previous reporting period and closer to the historical average. Most of these requests had been made within the first 3 months, covering the Manchester Arena, London Bridge and Grenfell Tower events.

6. DSMA Notices to All Editors. Two advisory notices (general DSMA guidance to all UK editors) had been issued during the period. Both were issued in connection with the events following the Manchester Arena incident on the evening of 22 May. The first had been prompted by the screening of video footage on 23 May showing personnel disembarking from a helicopter in the Manchester City Football Stadium. The second advisory notice had been issued on 25 May following concerns that video footage of an associated bomb disposal operation in Newport had appeared on a private twitter account and was in the process of being sold to a media organisation. In both cases, the purpose had been to remind editors of the provisions of DSMA Notice 3 (Special Forces engaged in counter-terrorist operations including methods, techniques and activities) and DSMA Notice 2 (capabilities, vulnerabilities and technologies used in counter-terrorist weapon systems). The advice had been acted upon in a way which reduced the potential risk to CT operations and capabilities.

7. The DSMA System and Application of DSMA Notices. Shortly after the Grenfell Tower Fire on 14 June, some less well-known media organisations published claims that the Government had ‘slapped a D notice’ on the number of casualties. Other media organisations requested clarification from the secretariat; and duly published the rebuttal.

8. Protection of Official Data. At the Committee’s last meeting, the Secretary had been tasked to respond to the Law Commission’s Consultation paper (Feb 17) to explain the DSMA system and how it worked. The Law Commission had not yet requested further information.

9. Promotion of the DSMA Notice System. During the period the Secretariat had continued to do as much as possible to promote a better understanding of the DSMA Notice System. Six presentations had been completed and a further 7 had been arranged for the coming weeks.

10. Discussion. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman thanked the Secretary for his comprehensive report. The Vice-Chairman highlighted how the Secretary's actions in relation to the activities following the Manchester bombing had helped corral undue interest. In cases where alleged SF operations were being streamed live on social media, it was generally helpful for the established media to be advised on the implications. This also helped to distinguish between police and military operations. The episode had further illustrated the importance of good relations with DSF; he hoped for a more transparent dialogue in future. All agreed that it had also reaffirmed the utility of the DSMA System and the importance of the Secretariat being proactive where necessary.

11. On the subject of the Law Commission's consultation on the protection of official data, the Vice-Chairman said that he had engaged with the Commission on behalf of the media Side but had yet to receive a response.

#### **Agenda Item 4 – IICSA – Allegations of the use of D Notices**

12. The Chairman asked the Secretary to introduce this item. The Secretary said that he had been contacted earlier in the summer to brief and inform a team of inquiry solicitors through the medium of a formal presentation about the DSMA system. The brief had prompted a further IICSA request for a corporate witness statement which had been delivered on behalf of the Committee to the Inquiry with the aid of a Government Legal Adviser on 20 September. The Secretary had been advised that it was unlikely that he would be called as a witness and, if he was, it was unlikely to be before March 2019. The Secretary had drafted a statement which would only be issued on behalf of the Committee at the appropriate time; and if deemed necessary.

13. As part of the process the Secretariat had carried out an extensive search of the MOD and National archives which together contained all the known and extant D, DA and DSMA files and documents from the early 1960s to the present day. Nothing had been found to suggest that the D Notice system had in anyway been involved in covering up child abuse as had been alleged.

14. Discussion. The Vice-Chairman thanked the Secretary for the enormous amount of work put in by the Secretariat during the past few months. Although impossible to prove a negative, the Secretariat had done all that was possible. The Chairman noted that numerous rebuttals had been made by the Secretariat over the years when challenged on involvement in the cover up of alleged child abuse. He hoped that the witness statement would now be treated as the last word.

#### **Agenda Item 5 – NCSA and NCA – Future involvement in the DSMA System**

15. National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). Following the NCSC's timely contribution to the Committee's meeting in May, the Secretariat had attempted

to explore ways in which the DSMA notice system might assist NCSC in its work. The Secretary had met the Head of Communications and an operations staff officer. The impression given was that NCSC believed it already had close links to the 'technical media' and was content to keep it that way for the time being. There was agreement to meet again within 12 months.

16. National Crime Agency. The Secretary said that the Secretariat received requests from time to time for advice in connection with the NCA's property and assets. There had been 5 such requests in the last 12 months. Some of these assets were used by other Government agencies/departments in connection with national security operations. Although the DSMA notice system did not include the NCA's normal law enforcement activities, it did cover the details of operations, operating methods and techniques used by the NSA in security, intelligence and counter-terrorist operations (DSMA Notice 03). It also included high security sites associated with the security and intelligence agencies (DSMA Notice 04). In the spirit of these texts, the Secretariat had offered advice on NCA property and assets. The Secretariat had established a good working relationship with the NCA's Head of Security.

17. Discussion. In relation to the NCSC, the Cabinet Office representative offered to encourage further engagement. The Vice-Chairman said that would be helpful for the Media.

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

18. There was no other business.

#### **Farewells**

19. The Chairman offered thanks to Lieutenant Colonel John Morrison who had been seconded to the Secretariat for 2 days a week since March, and was now retiring.

20. Sadly, Bob Satchwell had stood down from his seat on the Committee on the grounds of ill health. Bob had been a member of the Committee since 2008. He was a staunch defender of press freedom, the DSMA System and the work of the Committee. The Chairman highlighted Bob Satchwell's deep understanding of the purpose of the Committee and the need to safeguard certain sensitive information concerning national security.

21. The Vice Chairman echoed the Chairman's remarks and said that he would pass on his words about Bob Satchwell to the family. He also expressed the Committee's sympathy to the family of Robin Esser, who had died earlier in the week, a stalwart member of the Committee over many years.

## **Next Meeting**

22. The next DSMA Committee Meeting would take place at 1800 on Thursday 17 May 2018. It would be preceded by the Media Side pre-meeting which would begin as usual at 1700.

23. The Chairman concluded the meeting by reminding members that the DSMA Committee Reception would be held on 23 November in Admiralty House from 6.30 – 8.30 pm.

*Geoffrey Dodds*

Geoffrey Dodds  
Brigadier  
Secretary, DSMA Committee

19 December 2017

## **Distribution**

All DSMA Committee Members  
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