

The Defence Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee

Minutes of a Meeting Held in the Ministry of Defence

At 6pm on Tuesday 10 May 2011

D/DPBAC/3/2/1

The following were present:

Ursula Brennan, Chairman
Mr J Day
Ms M Calam (representing
Dame Helen Ghosh)
Mr C Martin (representing
Mr O Robbins)

Mr S Bucks, Vice-Chairman
Mr P Barron
Mr J Battle
Mr E Curran
Mr R Esser
Mr J Green
Mr J Grun
Mr D Jordan
Mr M Jermey
Ms U Mackenzie
Mr J MacManus
Mr R Satchwell

Air Vice-Marshal A Vallance
Air Commodore D Adams

Secretary
Deputy Secretary

1. Apologies: Mr T Dowse; Dame Helen Ghosh; Mr O Robbins; Mr H Carnegy; Mr J McLellan; Mr B McIlheney, Mr A Qualtrough.
2. There was one new member to the Committee who was unable able to attend this meeting:
 - Dame Helen Ghosh – Permanent Under-Secretary representing the Home Office.
3. The Chairman welcomed Ms U Mackenzie and Mr J Day to their first meeting.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 November 2010

4. There were no amendments to the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2010, which were approved by the Committee as an accurate record.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting

5. Para 10: Media Response and cooperation in the event of a major terrorist attack in a “crowded place”. The Secretary remained engaged in the projected table-top exercise for media handling in a Mumbai-style attack, but no date for the exercise had yet been set.

6. Para 16. The DA Notice System – Difference between Privacy and Security. A link to the Society of Editor’s Code of Conduct had been sent to all DPBAC official-side members. The Secretary remained in contact with St James’s Palace to ensure that the distinction between privacy and security was maintained in the matter of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge’s house in Anglesey.

7. Para 20. Disclosure Control Systems of Other Nations. In coordination with the Cabinet Office, the Secretariat of the Intelligence and Security Committee had been made aware of the findings of the DPBAC’s Survey of Other Nations’ Systems for national security media guidance, but had not asked for further information.

Agenda Item 3 – Secretary’s Report

8. The Secretary reported that the DA Notice Secretariat had received 232 requests for DA Notice advice during the preceding 6 months. The average of nearly 9 per week represented a 40% increase over the previous period and, indeed, over all other previous periods. He had also sent out 7 ‘Advisory’ letters to all editors, which was again more than the norm. The main subject areas in which DA Notice advice had been requested were: the third tranche of Wikileaks disclosures (19 enquiries), current British military operations (71 enquiries, nearly all concerning operations in or over Libya), the Intelligence Agencies (50 enquiries) and the Special Forces (52 enquiries). In virtually all cases DA Notice advice had been accepted and complied with in full. The Secretary had also received 23 enquiries about issues which fell outside the DA Notice code; this was again a substantial increase over the norm. He had provided DA Notice advice on the manuscripts of 5 books (a notable decrease over recent periods), but had the day before received 2 further manuscripts for DA Notice advice. The Secretary had continued his efforts to improve the awareness and understanding of the DA Notice System. These latter efforts included briefing/seminars to the following audiences: Westminster University (MA course in Journalism), Goldsmiths College, University of London (MA course in Journalism), News International

journalists and editors, University College Falmouth, Plymouth University, (MA course in Journalism) Indian Government Delegation of Senior Communications Officers, Defence Staff Officers & Security Advisors Forum, DISC Chicksands and Bournemouth University (MA course in Journalism). He also reported that the SIS and Security Service had hosted a joint seminar on 6 April for DPBAC Media-side members in Thames House.

9. In discussion, the Secretary said that, despite frequent requests, he was wary about issuing too many advisory letters to Editors, particularly those that were simply reminders about the importance of seeking advice on matters covered by the standing Notices. The advisory letter to all editors needed to be used sparingly if it was not to lose its effectiveness. The Committee agreed.

10. In response to a question about the book “Dead Men Risen” by Toby Harnden, the Secretary confirmed that the DPBAC had not been involved in the decision to pulp the first edition.

11. The Secretary briefed the Committee on the potential impact of the Government’s website rationalisation programme on the DA Notice website. There had been a suggestion that the website would have to be incorporated into the Government website architecture which would lead to the site having a gov.uk address. He believed this would undermine seriously the credibility of the DPBAC as an independent organisation. The Secretary said that the simple solution was to move the website to a non-public server. The Committee fully supported this proposal and agreed that the independence of the DPBAC, perceived or otherwise, was essential to its credibility.

12. The Chairman thanked the Secretary for his comprehensive report covering an exceptionally busy period.

Agenda Item 4 – Special Forces Public Information Policy

13. The Chairman invited Nick Pett (MOD Press Office) to update the meeting on the day to day management of the SF Public Information Policy. Nick Pett highlighted 3 specific issues:

- **The Royal Wedding.** There had been a good deal of speculation in the media about SF involvement in the security operation. However, the reporting had not caused any concern.
- **Libya.** There had been and still was intense interest in SF operations in Libya. The Media continued to play its part in not reporting details of strengths, tactics or plans.

- **The Olympics.** Another area of intense interest in potential SF activity. It was important that the Media avoided publishing details that could prejudice capabilities or put lives at risk.

14. In discussion, Media Side members highlighted the contrast of what they saw as excessive secrecy at the top of the SF organisation and the numerous disclosures to journalists originating from lower down the chain. There was a clear disconnect between the official position and the numerous leaks. It seemed to them quite wrong that the Media gained most of its information on SF activities from leaks rather than from formal briefings. The Vice-Chairman reiterated the Media Side's belief that DSF should engage with the Committee more in line with the approach taken by the Agencies, an approach which all agreed worked very well. There was some sympathy with this view on the Official Side and the Chairman concluded by saying that a fresh look at the possibility of senior level SF briefings for the Media seemed justified. Mr J Day agreed to take the necessary action.

ACTION: Mr J Day

Agenda Item 5 – Any Other Business

15. There was no other business.

Next Meeting

16. The next DPBAC meeting was planned to be held at 1800 on Tuesday, 8 November 2011. The meeting will be followed immediately by the annual DPBAC dinner in Admiralty House. The annual DPBAC Reception was planned to take place in Admiralty House at 1830 on Thursday, 24 November.

Andrew Vallance
AVM
Secretary, DPBAC

18 May 2011

Distribution

All DPBAC Members
The 'dnotice' Website