

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTRY OF
DEFENCE IN HISTORIC ROOM 13 AT 6 PM ON TUESDAY 5
NOVEMBER 2024**

**THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY MEDIA ADVISORY
COMMITTEE**

D/DSMA/3/2/1

The following were present:

Mr Paul Wyatt (Chairman)
Mr Adam Trigg (FCDO)
Mr Jonathan Sinclair (Home Office)

Mr David Jordan (acting Vice-Chairman)
Mr Peter Clifton
Mr Joe Fay
Mr James Green
Mr David Higgerson
Mr Michael Jermey
Mr Paul Kunert

Mr John McLellan
Mr Charles Redmayne
Ms Sayra Tekin
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

Apologies had been received from:

Mr John Battle, Mr Gareth Martin, Ms Natasha Anku, Ms Dawn Alford, Mr Ian Brunskill, Mr David Dillon, Mr Ben Lowry, Ms Lisa Mitchell, Ms Sarah Whitehead, Mr Robert Winnert.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 April 2024

The minutes of the Spring Meeting were approved.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters arising from previous Meeting

Matters arising would be addressed under their own heading below.

Agenda Item 3 - Secretary's Report: 17 Apr - 18 Oct 2024

1. The Secretary presented his report covering the period 17 Apr - 18 Oct 2024.
2. There had been 53 Requests for advice broadly evenly split between Media and Official side, and very few from members of the public. Noting that the period covered the extension of war in Gaza into Lebanon, one supplementary notice had been issued during this period: it was concerned with protecting individuals deployed in small numbers in the region. This proved effective, and the story of concern was not repeated.
3. There was no particularly discernible trend in the nature of the queries which embraced the whole gamut of categories. There were 9 to do with cyber security; 6 from the same journalist which would be covered later in the agenda.
4. The Committee approved the 'digest' of the Secretary's report for publication on the website.
5. Two examples of the system in action were presented:

A Cyber Example.

A journalist who was a frequent inquirer engaged several times on the issue of Russian hacking into UK computer systems including local government and the NHS.

- ii. On the face of it, there were no concerns by the strict letter of the Standing Notices, and the journalist was well-known to the secretariat as someone keen to seek and consider DSM advice.
- iii. However, several Official Side Departments had concerns about the potential second order effects of these articles. There was widespread concern that they might have been pushing at the boundaries of national security issues.
- iv. This illustrated that sticking rigidly to the standing notices themselves risked frequently disappointing both Government and Media colleagues in equal measure, but served to highlight the genuine independence of the system upon which its effectiveness depended.

b. An Historical Example.

Not all enquiries are fast-paced, real time news issues. The Secretariat was frequently asked for DSM advice on manuscripts. Despite having between them over 100 years of military experience and decades of 'alongsider' security clearance, because the most sensitive operations and intelligence work was strictly 'need to know' it was possible that without confirmation, sensitive details might slip through.

A recent example provided a good illustration. Although the manuscript dealt with Cold War submarine operations over 30 years ago, the Secretariat were uneasy about some of what had been included. With the publishers' permission they sought

RN SME advice. This confirmed that it was likely that some of the retired submariners to whom the author had spoken, had more likely than not broken their obligations under the OSA in some of the detail they had shared.

Some operations remain classified for good reason, and if the political landscape had changed since the Cold War, oceanography had not.

6. There was a discussion about Express Prior Approval in Writing (EPAW), and the acting Vice Chairman questioned the role of the SF 'disclosure cell'. The Chairman explained that this was as involved in releasing information where it was required (eg legal cases) as it was in preventing unauthorised disclosures.

7. There was further discussion about the potential serious impact on publishing schedules of delays created by SMEs unable to deliver advice to the secretariat in time to meet these publishing timelines. The Chairman asked that the Secretary compile data about how long SME clearances were taking in order to enable the Committee to consider what if any action could be taken to improve matters.

8. The Chairman noted that there were numbers of extremely talented colleagues across government who were able to articulate why a department would rather not see something published if it were embarrassing or inconvenient.

9. He highlighted the importance of the purity of the Notice system sticking unwaveringly to the letter of the notices themselves, and that it was important for the Secretary to know that he had full confidence of the Committee when interpreting them.

10. Referencing the supplementary notice referred to in paragraph 2, he contrasted the difference between movements of ships in support of possible Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations - impossible to hide, and themselves having a significant diplomatic and strategic impact, and small numbers of advanced recce personnel on the ground who might be particularly vulnerable if their presence were publicised.

Agenda Item 4 - Incorporating Counter-Terrorism Policing (CTP) into the Notice System

11. The acting Vice Chairman confirmed that the Media Side was now content that the proposal to incorporate CTP be implemented, noting that the intent remained the correction of an anomaly in which some personnel and their techniques and equipment had previously been covered whilst others had not.

12. The Chairman welcomed this decision – which had taken nearly four years to bear fruit and re-iterated his commitment to maintain the extremely narrow focus of this inclusion.

13. The safeguards against 'mission-creep' would include the Secretary noting and reporting back to the Committee any instances of CT policing being the subject of advice.

14. The Secretary would update the standing notices on the committee's website and for the next edition of the booklet, He would also provide a form of words with which Committee members could inform colleagues and organisations in their bailiwick about this change.

Action: Secretary/Committee members

Agenda Item 5 - Operational Update

15. The Chairman gave an update on current UK operations and strategic concerns followed by a Question and Answer session. This briefing as well received by members.

Agenda Item 6 – Any Other Business

16. Australian Visit.

The Secretary updated the Committee about the visit of two Australian academics looking into reviving the Australian notice system which had fallen into disuse. Prof Peter Greste and Dr Rebecca Ananian-Welsh of Macquarie University, Queensland visited the UK in the Summer and had discussions with the Secretary, a number of committee members and other senior members of the UK media profession.

The academics had expressed their gratitude for the help offered but highlighted the continued lack of trust between media and government officials in Australia.

In his opinion, the current severity and complexity of Australian secrecy legislation created little space in which a voluntary system could operate effectively, particularly when set against the background of a breakdown in trust between the Australian government and a fiercely independent media. In short, the time was not yet right.

However, the fact that the conversation was being had at all, was a good sign. It had, after all, taken 6 years in a much less regulated environment for the British Committee to become established.

17. Reception 2025. The First Deputy Secretary briefed the Committee that the annual reception would be held at 1830 at Admiralty House on 11 June 2025. He hoped as many members of the committee as possible would attend.

18. Valette. The Chairman noted the departure of two very distinguished members of the Committee and thanked them for their work and engagement.

Michael Jerney was leaving to join the Disaster and Emergency Committee. The Chairman particularly noted his hugely important work in the wake of the Snowden review.

Mr Jerney responded that he knew exactly how long he had served on the DSMA Committee having joined the week his son was born. He said he felt proud to have been a part of a peculiarly British institution which was effective in preventing harm.

Peter Clifton had been a stalwart of the Committee for seven years and his contribution, not least in the difficult drafting of recent amendments to the standing notices.

Mr Clifton said he was delighted to have met some fascinating people and helped ensure the Committee was as open as it could be. He contrasted the new cyber era with his previous work as one of the originators of CEEFAX.

Agenda Item 7 – Date of Next Meeting

19. The next DSMA Committee meeting is planned to take place at 1800 on Tuesday 29 April 2025. It will be preceded immediately by the media-side pre-meeting, which will begin at the usual time of 1700.

Geoffrey Dodds
Brigadier (Retired)
Secretary
Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee

Distribution:

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