

**Meeting of the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists**  
**19 July 2021 11.30-13.00**  
**Minutes**

**1. Welcome and actions review**

The Minister for Media and Data, chairing the meeting, welcomed the Committee, in particular new members Alison Gow (Society of Editors), Owen Meredith (NMA) and Superintendent Hilary Sloan (Police Scotland). He noted that since the last meeting, the National Action Plan had been published, and that progress had already been made in delivering some key commitments in the plan.

**2. Update on Progress**

Janis Makarewich-Hall, Deputy Director of Press, Radio and Media Freedom at DCMS, thanked all Committee members for their input so far. She explained that a subgroup had been set up to monitor delivery of the plan, and to measure its impact. The group will meet quarterly, and the Committee will receive biannual written updates. The first of these will be provided and published in January.

Acting Assistant Chief Constable Sam Donaldson, of the Police Service of Northern Ireland set out that PSNI had appointed a Journalists' Safety Officer and developed a journalists' safety group of experts. An NI specific journalists' safety strategy had been drafted and approved.

Alison Gow, President of the Society of Editors and Audience and Content Editor for the North West with Reach plc, explained that Reach Plc had been working on steps to tackle online abuse and harassment of journalists over the last 18 months. An escalation guide has been developed and an Online Safety Editor is being recruited. Reach want journalists to feel supportive, and to gather more evidence about the problem. They will be happy to share their processes with others.

**3. An update on international media freedom**

The Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, updated the Committee on the work of the media freedom coalition. The coalition will soon have 50 members and has recently issued a statement on the closure of Apple Daily in Hong Kong. The FCDO is keen to use the UK's expertise to encourage international partners and promote the National Action Plan. The G7 presidency was also used to promote media freedom. The FCDO continues to condemn human rights abuses internationally, including harassment of BBC Persia staff. Lord Ahmad was pleased with the continued cooperation between DCMS and FCDO. In response to a question about reports about the use of Pegasus Spyware, he said that the UK would look at the full facts.

**4. Media Lawyers' Association guidance**

John Battle, President of the Media Lawyers' Association (MLA) explained that they had commissioned Beth Grossman and Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC to draft a "know your rights"

guide entitled “Combatting Online Harassment and Abuse: A Legal Guide for Journalists in England and Wales”. He hoped this would be widely shared and used and noted that the law in this area is strong, and underlined the importance of supporting freelance journalists.

## **5. Call for Evidence**

The Minister for Safeguarding thanked Chief Constable Gavin Stephens and Greg Miles of Surrey Police for progress so far. She explained that the Call for Evidence was launched because the government wanted to strengthen the evidence base and was keen to hear from journalists, including freelancers, on the support available to them. She reflected that there were a number of chilling responses, and reiterated the importance of addressing this issue.

Tom Brocket, Head of Media Analysis at DCMS, gave a presentation on initial findings from the Call for Evidence. He noted that more analysis would be carried out later in the summer, and would inform the development of the survey due to launch later in the year. The government will respond to the Call for Evidence in due course.

## **6. Journalist panel discussion**

Michelle Stanistreet, Secretary General of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) led a panel discussion in which three journalists - Amy Fenton, Michael Casey and Patricia Devlin shared their experiences of threats, harassment and abuse. Michelle noted that their experiences showed that the platforms needed to do more to tackle online abuse. She said that Rianna Croxford, who was unable to attend today, had faced abuse that had led her to self censor, and that this abuse was often worse for women and BME journalists.

## **7. AOB**

There was no other business

## **8. Wrap up and date of next meeting**

The Minister for Media and Data thanked the Committee on behalf of himself and his fellow Ministers. He reiterated the importance of work on the safety of journalists, and of hearing both good and areas for improvement. Officials will continue to work on monitoring the plan. A full analysis of the Call for Evidence will be presented at the next meeting in 6 months's time.