**Meeting of the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists**

**18 January 2022 11.00-12.00**

**Minutes**

1. **Welcome and introductions**

The **Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure**, **Julia Lopez MP,** chairing the meeting, introduced herself. She welcomed members and emphasised the government’s ongoing commitment to the safety of journalists before thanking the Committee for its work to date delivering the National Action Plan. Minister Lopez also noted that today was the final meeting attended by Anthony McGeehan, Head of Policy at the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, thanking him for his support and welcoming his successor, Kenny Donnelly.

1. **Introduction by Minister for Safeguarding**

**The Minister for Safeguarding, Rachel Maclean MP,** theco-chair of the Committee,introduced herself and confirmed the Home Office’s ongoing commitment to the safety of journalists.

1. **National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists update**

**Janis Makarewich-Hall, Deputy Director for Press, Radio and Media Freedom** at DCMS (JMH), summarised key achievements to date, including publication of the Media Literacy Strategy in July 2021 and publication of the DCMS and Home Office Call for Evidence analysis. She thanked the Committee for their engagement and efforts to date and the importance of maintaining the positive momentum. JMH then led a more detailed discussion on progress across the Plans’ five key themes.

JMH outlined work to increase our understanding of the problem and strengthen the evidence base, setting out the work of the government, the National Union of Journalists and the Society of Editors in preparing for the annual survey on the safety of journalists. This is expected to take place over the coming months. Minister Lopez encouraged members to use their networks to promote this survey to as many journalists as possible.

Committee members provided updates on their organisations’ progress. **Chief Constable Gavin Stephens**, **Crimes Against Journalists lead**, **National Police Chiefs’ Council**, spoke about the work being done by police forces noting a small number of journalist safety liaison officers have been appointed by forces across the UK. He explained that work is also ongoing with the Society of Editors, National Union of Journalists and National Council for the Training of Journalists to support journalists' engagement with police forces. Work is also ongoing to develop training opportunities including on policing and safety and public order and safety issues.

**Michelle Stanistreet**, **General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists,** outlined positive collaboration with the police and the College of Policing to update a training video on the role of journalists; ongoing work to develop an Online Safety Support Pack; and creating a new video to tackle the culture of acceptance with personal testimonies from journalists who have experienced threats, harassment or abuse.

**Owen Meredith,** **Chief Executive of the News Media Association**, outlined some of the work carried out by publishers, noting that the issue of journalist safety was a key theme during Journalism Matters Week in November 2021. He set out some of the challenges faced by publishers of implementing different measures due to their size and availability of resources.

**John Neal**, **Head of Newsgathering and online abuse lead at the BBC**, updated the activities underway there, noting updated guidance for staff and freelancers including new information on reporting incidents and the introduction of a system that logs cases of abuse. Ensuring that resources were available across the UK, especially for those journalists in more rural locations, was a key priority.

Minister Lopez suggested that action by journalists’ employers was an area for further progress and asked for additional engagement between government, publishers and broadcasters on this ahead of the next Committee meeting.

JMH then provided an update on tackling online abuse, noting the publication of the draft Online Safety Bill and the measures platforms are implementing to improve journalists' safety. Minister Lopez noted that further detail would be helpful on the steps being taken by Facebook and Twitter to respond promptly to complaints of threats to journalists’ safety and will raise this issue directly with them as well as inviting them to the next Committee meeting.

JMH concluded by updating on improving public recognition of journalists, noting publication of the Media Literacy Strategy by DCMS and the success of Journalism Matters Week in November 2021.

1. **Guest speakers**

The Committee heard from **Reach PLC’s Online Safety Editor**, **Dr. Rebecca Whittington**, who discussed her work to date and her future priorities. Dr Whittington highlighted the need for cultural change to address journalists’ acceptance of abuse as part of their profession. She also highlighted that collaborative work across the industry will be key to improving the safety of journalists.

**Superintendent Hilary Sloan**, **Police Scotland**, updated the Committee on the progress Police Scotland has made, including the appointment of a Journalist Safety Liaison Officer, Steve Smith. Superintendent Sloan also noted that supporting the development of training opportunities, both virtual and face to face, for journalists is ongoing. Based on learnings from the COP 26 conference in Glasgow, an online communication system is now being explored to improve the speed at which journalists can reach police support. Training in relation to Public Order attacks and wider operational issues also continues to be a priority.

1. **AOB**

There was no other business.

1. **Wrap up and date of next meeting**

Minister Lopez thanked the Committee on behalf of herself and Minister Maclean, noting there is no room for complacency on this issue and encouraging ongoing engagement on this work. Minister Lopez summarised priority next steps including discussions with Twitter and Facebook on the risks posed by social media, further engagement with publishers and broadcasters on steps taken by journalists’ employers and increasing our understanding of the experiences of journalists working for foreign publications in the UK.

Members

Rachel Maclean MP, Minister for Safeguarding, Home Office

Julia Lopez MP, Minister for Media, Data and Digital Infrastructure, DCMS

Michael Agnew, Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, Public Prosecution Service Northern Ireland

Acting Assistant Chief Constable Sam Donaldson, Police Service Northern Ireland

Dawn Alford, President, Society of Editors

Sue Hemming, Director of Legal Services, Crown Prosecution Service

Owen Meredith, Chief Executive, News Media Association

Anthony McGeehan, Head of Policy, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service

John Neal, Head of Newsgathering, BBC

Jessica Ní Mhainín, Index on Censorship

Ruth Smeeth, CEO, Index on Censorship

Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary, National Union of Journalists

Chief Constable Gavin Stephens, National Police Chiefs Council

Rebecca Vincent, Director of International Campaigns, Reporters without Borders

Superintendent Hilary Sloan, Police Scotland

Observers

Deborah Bonetti, Director, The Foreign Press Association

Elena Consentino, Director, International News Safety Institute

Ernest Sagaga, Deputy Head, Human Rights and Safety, International Federation of Journalists

Prof. Ivor Gaber, UK representative, UNESCO Communications Sector

Rozita Lofti, Head of BBC Persian, BBC World Service

Maria Ordzhonikidze, Director, Justice for Journalists

Guests

Dr Rebecca Whittington, Online Safety Editor, Reach PLC

Government officials

Kanbar Hossein Bor, Coordinator, Global Campaign for Media Freedom, FCDO

Janis Makarewich-Hall, Deputy Director, Press, Radio and Media Freedom, DCMS