

**Meeting of the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists**  
**17 July 2023 13:00-14:30**  
**Minutes**

## **1. Welcome**

**The Secretary of State, Lucy Frazer KC MP**, opened the meeting by emphasising the government's ongoing commitment to the safety of journalists and thanking the Committee for its ongoing work to date delivering the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists (NAP). She highlighted the increasing risks to journalists posed by Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and noted plans to set up a new Taskforce to tackle SLAPPs, encouraging the Committee to help identify how this could add most value.

**The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries, Sir John Whittingdale MP**, chairing the meeting, then introduced himself as current Committee co-chair, noting Minister Julia Lopez is on maternity leave. He was clear that updating the NAP was a priority, especially in expanding its remit to address SLAPPs. Minister Whittingdale also welcomed guest speakers Steven Jarman, Deputy Director of Civil Justice & Law Policy at the MoJ; Kanbar Hossein Bor, Media Freedom Coordinator at the FCDO; John Battle, Head of Legal and Compliance at ITN; Catherine Belton, journalist and writer; Niamh McDade, Government Affairs Lead in UK and Ireland, Twitter; and Sarah Brown, Head of Northern Europe Media Partnerships at Meta. Minister Whittingdale also welcomed new Committee members, Chief Constable Pippa Mills, taking over from Chief Constable Gavin Stephens for the National Police Chief's Council, and Grace Ononiwu, taking over from Sue Hemming for the Crown Prosecution Service.

## **2. Remarks by Minister Dines**

**The Minister for Safeguarding, Sarah Dines MP**, the co-chair of the Committee, reiterated her strong support for the work of the committee and provided an update on measures in the Public Order Act 2023 to protect journalists. This includes a measure to make it explicitly clear that the police are not to use their powers for the sole purpose of preventing someone from observing or reporting on a protest.

## **3. Remarks by Lord Ahmad**

**The Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and United Nations, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**, introduced himself and provided an update on international work including engagement with the Media Freedom Coalition and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, expressing his strong support for the work of the Committee and the NAP.

## **4. Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation**

**Steven Jarman, Deputy Director of Civil Justice & Law Policy at the Ministry of Justice**, introduced himself and gave a brief overview of the features of SLAPPs and how they originate.

Steven outlined legislative measures to tackle SLAPPs linked to economic crime being introduced via the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency bill, of which these account for approximately 70% of all cases. Steven noted that the government intends to legislate to tackle all SLAPPs when parliamentary time allows.

**Catherine Belton, writer and journalist**, shared her experience of being subjected to multiple SLAPPs lawsuits and the impacts these had on her and her publisher. She noted the risks posed by SLAPPs including self-censorship by journalists as well as links to physical safety. She welcomed both the legislative changes to tackle SLAPPs and the intention to launch a SLAPPs Taskforce.

**Janis Makarewich-Hall, Deputy Director for Radio, Advertising and Press at DCMS (JMH)**, outlined plans to launch the new SLAPPs Taskforce, specifying that the aim will be to bring together government, representative bodies for journalists, and legal services to coordinate a response to SLAPPs that will complement the new legislation.

**Jessica Ni Mhainin from Index on Censorship** welcomed the Taskforce and noted the potential for the UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition to provide support.

**Fiona O'Brien, UK Bureau Director of Reporters Without Borders**, also voiced support for the SLAPPs Taskforce.

## **5. National Action Plan refresh**

Janis Makarewich-Hall then led a discussion on plans to update the NAP.

**Kanbar Hossein Bor, Deputy Director of Democratic Governance at the FCDO**, noted the FCDO is committed to continuing to promote the NAP internationally.

**Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary of the National Union for Journalists**, outlined plans to explore an online tool to enable data-gathering on safety issues taking place in the UK.

**Carly Nimmo, Head of Press Policy at DCMS**, outlined new actions to be led by the NPCC and police forces which include the appointment of further Journalist Safety Liaison Officers (JSLOs) across England and Wales, monthly engagement with industry to discuss live issues and identify learnings for police and journalists, and promotion of new College of Policing public order guidance.

**Acting Assistant Chief Constable for the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI), Sam Donaldson**, noted the importance of the updated Plan holding forces accountable for appointing JSLOs as well the value of forces introducing a support group to complement the role. He agreed to write to the Committee co-chairs with further detail of PSNI's approach.

**Niamh McDade, Government Affairs Lead in UK and Ireland at Twitter**, provided an update on the tools introduced by Twitter to address the abuse faced by journalists on the platform including visibility filtering and conversation controls. Niamh noted Twitter's commitment to working with the Committee as the refreshed NAP is developed.

**Sarah Brown, Head of Media Partnerships at Meta**, provided insight into Meta's work to empower journalists to address safety issues experienced on the platform including Journalist Registration tools. She highlighted the importance of ongoing dialogue with industry to inform the platforms' response to safety issues.

Janis raised the potential for Meta and Twitter to join the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists which both agreed to consider.

**John Battle, Head of Legal and Compliance at ITN**, discussed plans to update existing guidance for journalists on combating online harassment and abuse to reflect incoming Online Safety legislation and case law in this area as well as to cover legal systems in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Carly noted plans to launch a new bi-annual sub-committee attended by publishers, radio stations, and broadcasters to discuss experiences of tackling safety issues.

Janis noted that the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology will continue to support media literacy by publishing annual Action Plans. She also noted that the Committee would continue to promote work underway to improve safety of journalists through public facing events.

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

Minister Whittingdale thanked the committee on behalf of himself and Minister Dines, encouraging members to continue engagement with DCMS and Home Office to develop the new actions agreed to refresh the NAP, noting he would like to see this made public, if possible, during Journalism Matters Week later this year. He noted plans for the Committee to meet again in winter 2023.