

Meeting of the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists
4 December 2024 09:00-10:00
Minutes

1. Welcome

The Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth, Stephanie Peacock MP, opened the meeting by welcoming members' progress against the refreshed National Action Plan (NAP), and noting the meeting would take place under the Chatham House rule. Minister Peacock spoke of her experience meeting journalists covering civil unrest in August 2024, which highlighted the challenges many journalists face, and the need for further progress in implementing NAP commitments. Minister Peacock noted her recent meeting with SLAPPs Taskforce members, and plans to bring the Taskforce under the umbrella of the National Committee as a sub-group focused on legal threats against journalists.

Minister Peacock welcomed Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls, Jess Phillips MP, who noted the importance of safeguarding measures for journalists and the common experiences of other public figures who have faced abuse. Both Ministers agreed on the need for tangible, outcome-driven progress via this committee.

2. Discussion on progress in 2024 and priorities in 2025

- I. Minister Phillips opened discussion on the criminal justice response to tackling crimes against journalists.

Minister Phillips welcomed the progress that had been made by policing representatives in delivering the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists, including:

- Public order guidance published June 2023 by College of Policing, followed by further guidance on national protest, which sets out principles police should follow when engaging with journalists.
- Regular engagement between police and the media is now taking place.

Minister Phillips noted the challenge of varying contexts across multiple UK forces, and asked for a progress update on National Action Plan commitments in this area (the appointment of journalist safety liaison officers, the uptake of public order training) have been implemented, and whether they have been effective. Key outstanding issues raised in discussion included:

- The need to inform journalists **and this Committee, which police forces have safety liaison officers** (it is estimated that around only half currently do); Police representatives noted they were considering how to **implement an accessible register of contact details**, alongside asking journalists to flag their job when reporting incidents via normal routes.
- Whether it was possible for the **police to record crimes against journalists more consistently**; Police representatives suggested that **mandating this via the Home Office Annual Data Return** could be one option to do this.
- The importance of **attaching senior investigating officers to cases**, as was already happening in Northern Ireland.

- Encouraging **consistent training** across the country within different police forces, in line with **public order guidance**.
- Encouraging **employers** to do more to **signpost journalists to the right complaint routes** (including for example stalking protection orders), and considering how to disseminate to freelancers.

Action: The Committee agreed to consider the above issues in sub-groups, and report progress at the next meeting in summer 2025.

Police representatives proposed setting up a quarterly meeting between the National Police Chiefs' Council, Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and invited the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) to join existing monthly meetings between police and media organisations. The Police Service of Northern Ireland's appointment of a head of communications who also acts as their Journalist Safety Liaison Officer, and Police Scotland's recently launched journalist engagement group were noted as good practice.

II. Minister Peacock opened discussion on online and offline harassment of journalists at work.

Minister Peacock welcomed the progress made in delivering the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists, including:

- DCMS's work with the Media Lawyers Association to update their Online Harassment Guidance for Journalists, due for launch in late January, which will reflect Online Safety Act (OSA) measures.
- Establishment of an employers' sub-group, which has met three times to share best practice on journalist safety.
- The National Union of Journalist's [journalist safety tracker](#), which was developed as part of the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists. Minister Peacock noted the importance of members and employers promoting the tracker. It was suggested in discussion that **guidance or training on using the tracker may be helpful**, as well as **sharing learning from other countries** (such as the Netherlands) on how they operate similar tools and train journalists.

Members raised that journalists face regular abuse and harassment online, citing examples, and noted that approaching online platforms to tackle instances of harassment was challenging. Members noted the need to deliver online platforms' outstanding commitments in the National Action Plan. Members also raised the impact of wider digital attacks, such as hacking and deep fakes; harassment which follows journalists beyond their work and into their personal lives.

Actions: The Committee agreed to consider the above in relevant sub-groups, and report progress at the next meeting in summer 2025. Ministers and members also resolved to identify suitable methods of engaging online platforms in this work.

- III. Ministers invited Christian Rogg, Director for Development and Open Societies from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to provide an update on international journalist safety initiatives.

Christian Rogg acknowledged comments raising the importance of transnational threats against journalists, and noted these would be taken on board, and that these are often a consular matter. FCDO engages bilaterally through its embassies and also multilaterally on journalist safety. He also highlighted key progress from the FCDO, which includes:

- The FCDO's International Cyber Values-Based Campaign, which delivers an open-source early warning tool to detect and monitor hostile cyber activity targeting women journalists.
- The UK-founded Media Freedom Coalition continues to expand and is a valuable platform.
- UNESCO's Global Media Defence Fund, which the FCDO funds, has supported over 8000 journalists through 150 projects worldwide.
- A new media development programme in partnership with BBC Media Action has provided support to six countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

3. Agree updates to terms of reference

Members agreed to make minor changes to the terms of reference, which will be published on Gov.uk.

4. AoB and closing remarks from Ministers

Minister Peacock thanked members for their engagement, remarked on the importance of setting achievable, tangible goals and noted that Minister Phillips would chair the next meeting in 2025.

Attendees

Members:

Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth Stephanie Peacock (MSMCSY)

Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women Jess Phillips (MfSV)

Christian Rogg, Director for Development and Open Societies from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

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

Lisa Benbow, Director of Communications (Crown Prosecution Service)

Laura Buchan, Head of Policy and Engagement (Crown Office and Prosecutor Fiscal Service)

Richard Burgess, Director of News Content (British Broadcasting Corporation)

Michelle Stanistreet, General Secretary (National Union of Journalists)

Laura Davison, General Secretary (National Union of Journalists)

Fiona O'Brien, UK Director (Reporters Without Borders)

Dawn Alford, Executive Director (Society of Editors)

Owen Meredith, Chief Executive Officer (News Media Association)

Assistant Commissioner Pippa Mills (National Police Chiefs Council)

Chief Superintendent Sam Donaldson (Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI))

Chief Inspector Michelle Grant (Police Scotland)

Observers:

Elena Cosentino, Director (International News Safety Institute)

Valeriya Chudarova, Coordinator (Justice for Journalists Foundation)

Professor Ivor Gaber (UNESCO Communications Sector Representative)

Deborah Bonetti, Director (The Foreign Press Association)

Rozita Lotfi, Head of BBC Persian (BBC World Service)