

Meeting of the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists
2 July 2025 11:00-12:00
Minutes

1. Opening remarks from the Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth and Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls

The Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls, Jess Phillips MP, opened the meeting by noting her intention to discuss progress in delivery of the National Action Plan (NAP), in particular the outstanding actions on criminal justice outlined in the previous meeting.

Minister Phillips welcomed the Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth, Stephanie Peacock MP, who highlighted government's aim to refresh the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists. Minister Peacock also reflected on the Department's work on the Local Media Strategy, and DCMS plans to commission research on journalist safety later this year, part of which will look at the impact of abuse on journalists from small publishers and freelancers.

2. Discussion on progress in 2025

Minister Phillips opened discussion on progress in 2025 by inviting police representatives to give an update.

I. *Progress on actions relating to the criminal justice response to crimes against journalists*

The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) provided the following updates:

- Each police force in England and Wales had now appointed a Journalist Safety Liaison Officer (JSLO), as well as a dedicated operational lead to support JSLOs with operational advice and guidance linked to reported cases involving journalists.
- The NPCC is working with the Society of Editors' and the UK Press Card Association to update the UK Press Card guidance document, to raise awareness of the UK Press Card among police force communication teams.
- A media engagement group formed of media and police representatives meets regularly to discuss live issues.

Action: NPCC representatives agreed to share a list of JSLOs with all National Committee members in the coming weeks, and agreed to feedback further progress at the next meeting.

Minister Phillips welcomed this significant update. Police Scotland agreed to share further information with the NPCC following the meeting about some of their relevant experience in this space.

Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) noted positive engagement with journalists via established JSLOs and engagement groups, which have

allowed industry to report concerns and cases of abuse directly to police. The PSNI noted ongoing work to respond to a recent Amnesty International report on journalist safety.

II. *Progress on actions relating to legal threats*

Minister Phillips invited Janis Makarewich-Hall, Deputy Director of Radio, Advertising and Press at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), to provide an update on the first meeting of the legal threats sub-group in May 2025.

Janis noted the legal threats sub-group discussed outstanding non-legislative actions from the SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) Taskforce workplan, and agreed objectives for this group to take forward, which include:

- Building an evidence base.
- Raising awareness.
- Monitoring risks and opportunities.
- Reporting to the National Committee with recommendations.
- Sharing learning to inform any future Government measures to tackle SLAPPs.

Representatives from the National Union of Journalists updated that their Journalist Safety Tracker has received a number of submissions, which include instances of online and physical abuse, seizure of equipment and one instance of a legal threat against a journalist. Janis noted that questions on legal threats would be included in proposed DCMS research into journalist safety. Members suggested that research could also include questions around barriers to the prosecution of crimes against journalists.

DCMS noted the MoJ would gather as much data as possible on the operation of the ECCTA to begin to build up a picture of how it was working, and other departments should speak to their stakeholders to see how it was changing behaviour.

Action: As part of the evidence building strand, members agreed to seek and share examples of legal threats received by journalists, including pre-action communication such as cease and desist letters. Views on the implementation and operation of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act would also be welcome.

Action: Members agreed to promote the NUJ's Journalist Safety Tracker to their own stakeholders. DCMS agreed to raise further awareness of the Journalist Safety Tracker via sub-groups, and share a summary of DCMS's proposed research into journalist safety with National Committee members for views.

III. *Update from FCDO*

Janis passed to David Osborne, Deputy Head of Democratic Governance Department, at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, for an update on international media freedom work.

David noted that the FCDO's media freedom work fits within the Human Rights approach set out by the Foreign Secretary and Lord Collins in speeches on 10 December, Human Rights Day. He described the FCDO's recent negotiations at the UN Human Rights Council, to

protect language on media freedom in UN resolutions, as well as raising media freedom in statements at the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Council of Europe. He also mentioned the UK's continued support for the Media Freedom Coalition, which now has 51 member countries. David noted the launch of the Public Interest Media Healthy Information Environment - a media development programme offering practical interventions to support trusted local media in a number of countries.

The FCDO also sponsored the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) to deliver an early warning tool to detect and monitor malicious cyber activity targeting women journalists, and alert first responders to the risk of escalation to offline violence. A digital dashboard has been used successfully in 5 international news organisations to detect, analyse, monitor and report attacks on journalists.

Action: FCDO agreed to share further information on this work with National Committee members.

IV. Progress on actions related to online and offline journalist safety

Minister Phillips invited Dr. Rebecca Whittington, Online Safety Editor at Reach PLC, to provide an update on behalf of the employer sub-group. Key updates included:

- Recent issues of journalists being unable to attend court cases due to harassment campaigns run by high profile individuals, and fears of online and physical harassment by individuals connected to the court case being covered.
- Non-journalists having access to press cards and using them to access court hearings and harass journalists. Sub-group members have met with the Press Card Authority (PCA) to discuss next steps.
- The sub-group has also raised concerns around the cost of security for journalists facing physical threats and the potential chilling effect this could have on covering high risk stories.
- Recent contact with online platform X regarding online safety was noted, with a representative from X attending a recent meeting. Employers agreed that further discussions with online platforms, and a direct point of contact within the organisation, would be beneficial. Minister Phillips noted there may also be value in inviting online platforms to a National Committee meeting.

Action: The sub-group will consider next steps for engaging with platforms.

3. Discussion on the refresh of the NAP

Minister Peacock noted that the progress to date has meant that many of the actions in the 2023 National Action Plan are now en route to being delivered. She asked for views from members on the next version of the plan.

One member raised the issue of transnational repression, due to their concerns that journalists for high profile international news outlets in the UK being targeted either directly or through their families by foreign states. Members noted the positive progress in other areas flagged in the action plan and asked whether transnational repression could be included in the next action plan.

Action: DCMS, FCDO and HO agreed to undertake further discussions on transnational repression of journalists.

Action: Before the next NCSJ meeting, DCMS will engage with members and sub-groups in developing the next version of the National Action Plan.

4. AoB and closing remarks from Ministers

Ministers thanked members for their engagement, and noted that Minister Peacock would chair the next meeting.

Attendees

Members:

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

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

Dervla Morris, Public Prosecutor (Public Prosecution Service of Northern Ireland)

Laura Davison, General Secretary (National Union of Journalists)

Felicity Garvey, UK Advocacy Officer (Reporters Without Borders)

Dawn Alford, Executive Director (Society of Editors)

Owen Meredith, Chief Executive Officer (News Media Association)

Hayley Equi, Director of Communications (National Police Chiefs Council)

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

Superintendent Joanne McEwan (Police Scotland)

Observers:

Deborah Bonetti, Director (The Foreign Press Association)

Maria Ordzhonikidze, Director (Justice for Journalists)

Other attendees:

Rebecca Whittington, Online Safety Editor (Reach PLC)

Janis Makarewich-Hall, Deputy Director of Radio, Advertising and Press (DCMS)

David Osborne, Deputy Head of Democratic Governance Department (FCDO)