

**Independent Review into the Defence Communications Directorate's response to  
Declassified UK**

**Terms of Reference**

**Purpose**

1. To explore allegations pertaining to the Directorate of Defence Communications' (DDC) adherence to both the Government Communication Service Propriety Guidance and the Civil Service code.

**Context**

2. In September 2020, correspondence was received by various officials and Ministers in the Ministry of Defence (MOD) from other MPs via Parliamentary Questions (Annex A), Council of Europe, International Press Institute, and Leigh Day relating to allegations that a Ministry of Defence Press Officer acted outside of the Government Communication Service Propriety Guidance in their correspondence with a Media Outlet – Declassified UK. Concerns were expressed (in the correspondence from Leigh Day) that a blacklisting policy effectively existed in MOD and (in the correspondence from the International Press Institute) as to whether such a policy did exist. An alert was also created on the Council of Europe platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists indicating that Declassified UK had been "blacklisted" by the MOD.
3. On the 16<sup>th</sup> September, the MOD Secretary of State agreed with the Minister for Defence Procurement and the Permanent Secretary that an independent review would be undertaken to look into the allegations and establish what underlay them.

**Scope**

4. In order to assess these allegations, Tom Kelly, the designated lead, will independently investigate:
  - a. The specific circumstances.
  - b. Whether DDC's policies are in conformity with Cabinet Office guidelines.
  - c. Whether those policies are being followed in the day to day practice of the Directorate.
5. The independent lead will be supplied with internal MOD support throughout the review.

**Timing**

6. A draft report will be developed during October, with a final report submitted to the Permanent Secretary and Secretary of State as soon as possible thereafter.

**21 September 2020**

## **Annex A – PQs**

### **Martyn Day**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the decision by the Council of Europe to issue a Level 2 media freedom alert after his Department refused comment to the media organisation Declassified UK, what assessment he has made of the compatibility of his Department's communications policy with the Government Communication Service Propriety Guidance to deal with all news media even-handedly. 86713

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the letter of 4 September 2020 addressed to him from the International Press Institute, for what reason his Department's press office has decided to refuse comment to the news outlet Declassified UK. 86712

### **Lloyd Russell-Moyle**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, for what reason his Department's press office decided to no longer deal with the news outlet Declassified UK. 86140

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment his Department's media officers made of the implications for their adherence to Government Communication Service propriety guidance on dealing with all news media even-handedly when they decided not to deal with the media organisation Declassified UK.86139