

Address to the 'Security Talks: Improving Regulation and Raising Standards' Conference, 16 June 2008

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SIA Chair

Please note that the text below is not a transcript of the speech given but the draft text that Ruth Henig read from. There may therefore be some variation in the final wording and phrasing that Ruth used.

I am delighted to welcome everyone here today, security providers and purchasers, our partners and stakeholders, to what I hope you will agree is a very appropriate venue for a security industry conference, the Royal Armouries Museum, which clearly shows how far security has progressed over the years.

We have a number of interesting and topical seminar sessions for you today; licence integration, in-house guarding and company registration in the morning and ACS, training and enforcement in the afternoon. There are also a number of SIA staff here to listen to your views and to inform you of our plans over the next year.

We have also invited Stuart Lowden who is Vice Chair of the BSIA and Managing Director of Wilson James, and well known to many of you, to say a few words after lunch.

This conference follows on from the highly successful conference we held last year in partnership with Professor Martin Gill and Perpetuity Group, which I know many of you attended. We used that event to launch our first comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and evaluated what the SIA had achieved through introducing licensing and regulation of the private security industry in its first four years.

The SIA has just celebrated its fifth birthday, and this year we would like to use this opportunity to work together with you to discuss how we might all work together to improve regulation and raise standards further.

We recognise that our journey has to be a collaborative one; it has to be travelled in step with the private security industry and alongside all our stakeholders and partners. We need to become, and to be recognised as a valued and respected strategic partner, to government and its agencies, to the industry and its representative bodies, to training organisations, the police and other sector bodies.

I want to look take this opportunity today to reflect on the success of last year's stakeholder engagement plan and to highlight the key aspects of this year's plan. Firstly I will look at what we have achieved over the last year, the successes and challenges, what we have learned as an organisation, what has worked well, and what needs to be improved. I then want to go on to outline our new stakeholder engagement plan for this year, to inform you

what we have done over the past year in terms of stakeholder engagement and highlight the priority issues moving forward.

Before I come to this, I would like to take a few moments to highlight our awareness of the difficulties you are experiencing as a result of our current licensing performance issues, which our Chief Executive, Mike Wilson will talk about in more detail afterwards. There have been delays in our processing of licence applications and I am well aware that it has been difficult to get through to our contact centre. We have been working with our service provider to try to resolve these issues and significant progress has been made, but it has not been as rapid as we had hoped. We apologise for the poor service provided in recent months but we ask you please to bear with us as we work to implement an improved system. I do find it really ironic how often it happens that new systems which are implemented to improve the service to customers in fact result, over the short term at least, in a worse system than before.

Communication and Engagement with the Industry

What I'd like to turn to now is the central issue of communication and of engagement with the industry, with leading individuals and representative groups within it, with strategic partners and with stakeholders generally.

Last year we launched our Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, which set out the way in which we would engage both at an operational and at a strategic level. Wide ranging, but at the same time clearly focused engagement with the private security industry is essential in order to understand the wide range of interests and issues involved, and to develop appropriate future plans and priorities. We know that revisiting this on a regular basis will help us and you, the industry, to work together to improve regulation and raise standards.

Our strategic approach is to be a modern, efficient and collaborative regulator, introducing regulation 'with the industry' and not 'to the industry', continually balancing the public purpose of regulation with the commercial implications.

Our commitment to you is that we want and need to know what is important to our stakeholders, to understand the SIA's impact and what people think of us, to ensure that we respond to stakeholders' expectations and communicate effectively whilst delivering what Parliament set us up to do. We also recognise that these are not opinions and needs that are set in stone, but ones that will change with time. Therefore we acknowledge that the SIA must align with its stakeholders, to acknowledge and work with the changing nature of the industry.

Let me turn to some specific examples. What have we done since last year?

We have contributed to the 2012 Olympic security planning through membership of various working groups, committees and steering groups with the Home Office, Metropolitan Police and the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games, and through tactical level engagement with partners. We recognise that the Olympic Games is an opportunity to show the world the professionalism of the industry and in turn raise the standards of private security at this important event.

We have supported efforts to reduce the threat of crime against CVIT guards by signing up to the CVIT Crime Reduction Charter. This is important to us as we share your concern about the threat to CVIT guards of attack by organised armed gangs and by opportunistic youth gangs.

We have connected with EU bodies and regulators in preparation for compliance with the EU Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications.

We have also been committed to changing perceptions about SIA compliance and conformance activity through one-to-one meetings with concerned stakeholders and through trade press articles. These have reinforced the message that there is a level playing field and there is no such thing as respectable offending.

We have promoted and improved the benefits of the Approved Contractor Scheme (ACS) through consultation forums, meetings with insurers and the Association of British Insurers and implementing a project to develop an extranet for ACS exclusive use. This project is currently still ongoing but the extranet will be available within the next year.

We have been committed to improving engagement with some sectors who felt we hadn't been listening and communicating with, through establishing self-perpetuating networks for door supervision, vehicle immobilisation and small businesses of all sectors and we have reported the outcome to stakeholders via our website. These meetings have proved to be a great success and the networks continue to meet regularly to pursue the issues which matter to them, They provide a valuable opportunity for sector representatives to network with other colleagues and to communicate with the SIA on sector specific issues. This year we will continue to attend and contribute to these network meetings.

We have undertaken a written consultation on the proposal to delay, long term, consideration of the security consultancy sector for regulation, gaining Ministerial agreement to delay and have notified this to stakeholders.

In December we hosted a think-tank to discuss the issues around the potential for licensing in-house guards and we have reported the outcome to stakeholders via our website. This meeting was attended by a large cross section of relevant stakeholders and has resulted in greater knowledge of the in-house sector, and a way to take this forward – this year we will lead a

broad-based study aimed at making recommendations, one way or the other, to Ministers on the in-house guarding issue by December this year. This will be further explored in one of the seminar sessions this morning which some of you are attending.

We have also consulted with Skills for Security, BSIA, Awarding Bodies, the Research Forum and network meetings to develop a revised licensing framework proposal for wider written consultation in 2008-9. This year we will be taking this forward and another one of the seminar sessions this morning will focus on revising the licensing framework so we look forward to hearing what you have to say on this topic.

We have hosted workshops and meetings on training malpractice with awarding bodies, training providers, qualification regulators and Skills for Security to discuss best practice in investigating and managing malpractice, and implementing various actions to improve the way in which we manage malpractice in order to maintain the integrity of our training standards. This year we will continue to raise awareness and work with awarding bodies and other key partners to improve the quality of training and assessment, and we will continue to publish information about malpractice on our website. Again, this is one of the topics of this afternoon's seminar sessions and we look forward to working with you on this.

We have consulted with Police partners about potential ways to give updates to information providers and whistle blowers and to improve the information on this provided on the website so that information providers feel it is worthwhile engaging with us. Clearly, more people do feel that it is worth engaging, as we now receive over 600 items of information each month and it is still growing. I would like to point out here that we operate an intelligence-led enforcement approach so that every piece of information we receive from you is valuable and we welcome all communication on this either directly to us or through Crimestoppers. We have also improved the user-friendliness of the Register of Licence Holders and have provided guidance on the website about the principles upon which it is compiled. Lastly, we have assessed the feasibility of a website message board to improve communication with stakeholders, to canvass opinions and provide information.

So, that extensive list of activities we have undertaken in the past 12 months has, I hope, reinforced our relationship with you and all our stakeholders and has led to yet more priorities for us to concentrate on this year.

As well as a few of the issues mentioned above that we are taking forward; this year primarily we want to improve our customer service. We know that it has been difficult to contact us over the past few months, and our Chief Executive, Mike Wilson, has been writing to the industry regularly to explain why we have customer service problems, what we are doing to resolve

them and when customers can expect to see improvements to service levels. He will continue to do this until our customer service levels have returned to an appropriate level. In addition we have appointed an Interim Director of Customer Relations whose remit is to develop a more robust customer relation approach to enable us to focus more effectively on your requirements and to make sure that your needs are at the heart of everything we do. Also, in response to company requests for named contact points at the SIA we will consider ways to resolve our customer relationship problems perhaps through a joint help-line initiative with partners such as the BSIA, and we will publish our proposals once we have worked through the logistics.

Aside from customer services, some of our other priorities for this year include carrying out a path-finding study into the feasibility of a company registration scheme, prioritising vehicle immobilisation companies, aiming to deliver such benefits as codes of conduct and better controls over illegal company activity.

This year we will also meet with buyers of security services and their insurers to promote ACS and to seek to influence them to specify ACS as their security procurement standard. One of the seminar sessions this afternoon will be focusing on this and we look forward to hearing the outcomes.

So that we ensure we are an effective regulator, we will implement the Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) guidance on managing expectations about what compliance with the Regulator's Compliance Code should deliver and we will arrange a series of workshops and seminars with advisory organisations to gain assistance in improving our diversity schemes

We will also continue to work with delivery partners, principally with awarding bodies, the Criminal Record Bureau and the UK Border Agency to identify and implement efficiencies where our performance is dependent on theirs. We are committed to learning from and collaborating with other agencies and regulatory bodies, and working to reducing the potential threat of terrorism and protecting the Critical National Infrastructure. We will also contribute to the delivery of the National CCTV Strategy.

In addition to the existing stakeholder engagement network meetings we set up last year, we will arrange network meetings for the Public Space Surveillance CCTV sector and the Close Protection sector in the expectation that these networks, like the door supervision and vehicle immobilisation networks, will become self-perpetuating in the future. The Transport & General Workers Union and Unite the Union which represent some vehicle immobilisers and security guards have specifically requested to be included in our stakeholder meetings. We will include them in our

various consultations planned for this year and we will arrange bilateral meetings from time to time as required.

We will also arrange a meeting with key people from representative organisations from all sectors at national, regional and local level to identify and discuss possible unintended consequences of the Private Security industry Act (2001).

We will review our approach to the licensing of company directors by establishing whether any change is desirable or possible given legislative restrictions and if a change is required, we will identify an appropriate legislative vehicle and assess the timescale for this process.

We will ensure we are consulted about any potential regulation of UK private security military companies by keeping in contact with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the British Association of Private Security Companies and we will continue to participate in the Swiss PMSC Initiative Expert Consultation on “Territorial State & Private Military and Security Companies”.

This year we will work with the industry and compliance partners in Northern Ireland in preparation for the introduction of SIA regulation and we will also include consultation arrangements with Private Investigators/Precognition Agents and Enforcement Agent sectors as part of the relevant implementation projects.

We will also carry out a review of our stakeholder engagement strategy this year to ensure that we are still on the right track with our strategy and priorities for the future. It is absolutely essential that we make sure we reflect your views and have your full support for our future business and corporate strategies.

Conclusion

I hope you will feel that we have been listening very hard and responding as appropriately and effectively as possible to what the industry and you, our partners, have been saying to us. Like you, I am totally committed to taking forward the SIA and the private security industry, both in terms of improving regulation and by raising standards across the board. There have been many improvements and successes in recent months. I also know that there are things that the SIA and the industry need to do better. But one thing I believe above all else is that at the core of everything we do, both at the SIA, and throughout the industry, should be the mission of protecting and safeguarding the public. Only through working together and trusting each other will we reach the goals for regulation and for the improvement of the industry to which we all aspire.