Jane Ramsey
Committee on Standards in Public Life
1 Horse Guards Road
London SW1A 2HQ

Dear Jane,

Following your evidence before the Home Affairs Select Committee, I wanted to write to you with an update on the work Facebook has been carrying out to protect MPs and candidates who might experience abuse and intimidation online during the election.

At the hearing, you explained that although you had heard from Facebook about our plans, you had not received written confirmation of the steps we would be taking, including any 'pop-up' support teams. To confirm, as well as setting up a temporary 'elections operation centre' team that has been monitoring events during the UK election, Facebook have also established a permanent dedicated reporting channel for UK MPs to report issues they encounter on the platform to us. This channel runs year-round for sitting MPs, and during the election access has been expanded to all candidates for Parliamentary seats.

We have worked with the political parties, the Cabinet Office, and the Parliamentary authorities to ensure that all MPs and candidates are aware of and can make use of all of the resources available to them. The information is also available alongside other platforms' guidance, on the Internet Association [website](#).

To ensure full transparency and awareness of this and our wider plans, our VP Richard Allan published an op-ed in the Telegraph setting out our work in full. You can read this article [here](#), and I have copied the text overleaf.

At the outset of the election, we also ran a press call to outline all the measures we're taking to protect the security of the election and the candidates standing. The full transcript is available [here](#)—details on candidate safety are included in Ella Fallows' section.

If you would like to discuss any of this in more detail, a member of my team would be happy to meet with you at your convenience to answer any questions you may have.

Kind regards,

Rebecca Stimson
Head of Public Policy, UK

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How Facebook is preparing for the next general election - Richard Allan

The world over, election campaigns are now played out as much on social media as they are on the doorsteps, in our newspapers and on TV screens. From Austria to Tunisia, candidates, parties and voters have used Facebook and other platforms to make their voices heard in hundreds of elections this year. And it looks like a general election could soon be on its way in the UK too.

Most of this activity is good for democracy as voters have new ways to share information and express their views. Candidates can get their ideas out to those who follow their pages or by using paid advertising to reach a wider audience. But we also recognise that social media can bring significant new risks to the political process. People who want to interfere unlawfully with the outcome of an election will use every available means to try and do so, including platforms like ours. We have learned the lessons of 2016, when Russia used Facebook to spread division and misinformation in the US Presidential election. Since then we have made big changes. We've built stronger defences to prevent people using our platforms to interfere with elections and we're continuing to make improvements in key areas.

First, removing fake accounts and reducing the spread of misinformation. As in other areas of life, cheats will commonly try to conceal their real identities so we now identify and shut down millions of fake accounts every day. Specialist teams also investigate and remove networks of Pages, Groups, and accounts involved in coordinated inauthentic behaviour – which is when groups of people using fake profiles work together to mislead others about who they are or what they're doing.

To strengthen our efforts to combat the spread of misinformation and viral hoaxes, here in the UK we now partner with Full Fact. Images and videos on Facebook which they assess to be untrue will now be more clearly labelled as false and we'll continue pointing people to reports which debunk the myth. Our algorithm also heavily demotes this content so it's seen by fewer people and far less likely to go viral.

Second, bringing more transparency to political adverts. Anybody who wants to run a political ad on our platforms in the UK must go through a verification process and provide ID documents to prove who they are and that they live here. Political ads are then labelled so you can see who has paid for them. We also put them into an Ad Library for seven years so that everyone can see what ads are running, what types of people saw them and how much was spent.

From next week, all ads in the UK about social issues such as immigration, health and the environment will also have to go through this process. And we're making improvements to our Ad Library, which is already being used by journalists and researchers to analyse in real time what political parties and candidates are saying

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and doing. These changes mean that political advertising on Facebook and Instagram is now more transparent – and can be more heavily scrutinised – than traditional forms of election campaigning, whether that's billboards on streets corners or leaflets through letterboxes.

Third, tackling hate speech and harassment of candidates. There is, rightly, a focus in the UK about the current tone of political debate. Hate speech and threats of violence have no place on our platforms and we're investing heavily to tackle it. More than 35,000 people now work on safety and security for Facebook and our technology is helping us to automatically detect more of this harmful content. While there is further to go, the proportion of hate speech we remove before it's reported to us has almost tripled over the last two years. We recently introduced a dedicated reporting channel for MPs to flag any abusive and threatening content directly to our teams and this will be extended to all candidates when an election is called.

Finally, once a UK election is underway we will set up a dedicated operations centre to bring together the teams who monitor activity across our platforms. This will be an added layer of defence, helping us to more quickly remove content that breaks our rules and respond to any emerging threats or challenges.

But while we are taking a number of steps, there are many areas where it's simply not appropriate for a private company like Facebook to be setting the rules of the game or calling the shots. For instance, we do not believe it should be our role to fact check or judge the veracity of what politicians say – not least since political speech is heavily scrutinised by the media and our democratic processes.

We agree with the likes of the DCMS committee and the Information Commissioner's Office that we need new rules for the era of digital campaigning. UK electoral law needs to be brought into the 21st century to give clarity to everyone – political parties, candidates and the platforms they use to promote their campaigns.

What constitutes a political ad? Should all online political advertising be recorded in a public archive and should that extend to traditional platforms like billboards, direct mail and newspapers? Should anyone spending over a certain amount on political ads have to declare who their main funders are? Who, if anybody, should decide what politicians can and can't say in their adverts? These are all questions that can only be properly decided by Parliament and regulators.

The law may not be changed before Britain goes to the polls again, but we are determined to play our part in protecting elections from interference by making our platform more secure and political advertising more transparent. While we can never say for sure that there won't be issues in future elections, we are confident that we're better prepared than ever.

Richard Allan is Facebook's Vice President of Policy Solutions