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Lesley Banfair
Committee on Standards in Public Life
1 Horse Guards Road
London SW1A 2HQ

12 December 2019

Dear Lesley,

I am writing in response to your letter to David Skelton on the steps we have taken to promote the safety of candidates on our platform during the General Election campaign. This is an important issue and we welcome the opportunity to set out the action we've taken to ensure our platforms are safe.

Regarding the specific steps we are taking to counter intimidation during this general election period, we have published candidate safety guidance on the [Internet Association's website](#), alongside Facebook, Microsoft and Twitter, detailing our Hate Speech, Harassment and Cyberbullying, and Harmful or Dangerous Content policies, and providing detailed instructions on how to report content that violates these policies. In addition, in October 2019 we wrote to all sitting MPs and political party headquarters to outline the security and safety measures we offer. This letter offered in-person briefings on the following features:

- YouTube moderation tools, to manage comments and block users on their YouTube channel.
- How to flag content that violates our Community Guidelines on YouTube.
- The Advanced Protection Program, which offers our highest level of security for Google account holders.
- The Project Shield tool, which helps to protect websites from DDoS attacks.

We have also provided both of these resources to the UK Government, for distribution to Returning Officers and continue to work with the political parties to support their needs. Throughout the General Election campaign, we have continued our dialogue with the Home Office, security, policing and electoral authorities to ensure that safety and reporting guidance reaches the widest possible audience of candidates and electoral staff.



Regarding the Committee's particular recommendation that platforms set up an ad hoc election campaign team, we have a cross-functional team focused on the election which has regularly met to discuss developments throughout the election period.

At YouTube, we remove content that violates our Community Guidelines. While we have always had clear policies against harassment and hate speech, we have a dedicated team that systematically reviews all our policies to ensure that they are current. For example, on December 11 we announced a [series of policy and product changes](#) that update how we tackle harassment on YouTube, including a stronger stance against threats and personal attacks, consequences for repeated incidents of harassing behaviour, and finetuning our systems to address toxic comments. This includes no longer allowing content that maliciously insults someone based on protected attributes such as their race, gender expression, or sexual orientation. This applies to everyone, including public figures.

We also continue to invest in our Trusted Flagger program and we are working with the Parliamentary Security Department to support them in addressing any concerns they may have with content on our platforms.

I would be delighted to discuss this issue and any other questions you might have on this in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Katie O'Donovan
Head of Government Affairs and Public Policy, Google UK