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

**Committee on  
Standards in  
Public Life**

**Tuesday 8 September 2020**

Dear Katie O'Donovan,

### **Intimidation in Public Life Review Follow up**

In December 2017, the Committee published its report on the subject of [Intimidation in Public Life](#). Three years on, we are following up progress made against our recommendations in that report with the intention of publishing a formal update by the end of the year.

During the review, we heard evidence of an increasing prevalence of intimidation in public life, including of Parliamentary candidates at elections. We found that social media had been the most significant factor accelerating and enabling intimidatory behaviour in recent years.

In our report, we made a package of recommendations to all social media companies, arguing that they must act more transparently, quickly and consistently to take down intimidatory content and develop user options, and that steps should be taken during elections in particular to protect candidates from abuse. The recommendations made to social media companies are attached in full for your information.

You kindly wrote a year ago to confirm the steps Google had taken to counter intimidation at the December 2019 general election; a copy of your letter is attached for ease of reference. We were glad to see that progress had been made.

In advance of our review of progress made against our recommendations, I would be grateful if you could write before 31 October 2020 and confirm any steps Google has taken to tackle intimidation since 2019. This will ensure our follow up work is as up to date as possible.

If you would like to discuss this in more detail, a member of my Secretariat would be happy to have a call at your convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you. I am writing similarly to Facebook and Twitter.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Evans of Weardale KCB DL

Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life

Recommendation	Timeframe
Social media companies must develop and implement automated techniques to identify intimidatory content posted on their platforms. They should use this technology to ensure intimidatory content is taken down as soon as possible.	Immediately
Social media companies must do more to prevent users being inundated with hostile messages on their platforms, and to support users who become victims of this behaviour.	Immediately
Social media companies must implement tools to enhance the ability of users to tackle online intimidation through user options.	Immediately
All social media companies must ensure they are able to make decisions quickly and consistently on the takedown of intimidatory content online.	Immediately
Twitter, Facebook and Google must publish UK-level performance data on the number of reports they receive, the percentage of reported content that is taken down, and the time it takes to take down that content, on at least a quarterly basis.	At least every quarter, beginning in the first quarter of 2018
Social media companies must urgently revise their tools for users to escalate any reports of potential illegal online activity to the police.	Immediately
The social media companies should work with the government to establish a 'pop-up' social media reporting team for election campaigns.	Before the next general election
Social media companies should actively provide advice, guidance and support to Parliamentary candidates on steps they can take to remain safe and secure while using their sites.	Before the next general election