**NOTE OF MEETING WITH GOOGLE**

**Date: 25 October 2017**

**Time: 15:00**

**Location: 1 Horse Guards Road, London**

**Present:**

* + David Skelton, UK Public Policy Manager, Google
  + Jane Ramsey (JR), Member, *Committee on Standards in Public Life*
  + Dee Goddard (DG), Secretariat, *Committee on in Public Life*
  + Ally Foat (AF), Secretariat, *Committee on in Public Life*

Jane Ramsay (JR): This meeting has been difficult to arrange with you, hasn’t it?

DS: Yes. But the difficulty has always been that we think it is important that people in California, staff, who have expertise on Jigsaw Perspective API in particular, who are important to what you are working on, can speak with you. But during the week that we were trying to arrange this there were also meetings at the UN General Assembly so there was a clash and it was difficult to finalise. I am very pleased to be here to talk to you.

Dee Goddard: We are still arranging a meeting with those representatives from Google.

JR: We will be taking an audio recording and transcript of this meeting.

The Committee would like to be able to quote you as representing Google’s position in our report in the appropriate places. We will check those with you before we publish to see they are an actual reflection of what you said.

DS: That would be fine.

JR: What do you think the responsibility is of tech companies in relation to abusive content posted online.

DS: Very happy to be engaged. The internet is a place for creativity and political engagement. But duty to act responsibility to flag abuse online and where it violates our community guidelines.

JR: Does Google believe that there additional responsibility during campaigns.

DS: Yes, we are involved with Reclaim the Internet. The internet has helped to create a vibrant political forum for debate. Where content violates our community guidelines we will remove it. We give power to candidates to flag content on their own youtube page, they can delete comments, they can turn comments off on YouTube and ensure that they can pre-approve before they go up. If YouTube commenters regularly violate our community guidelines they can have their accounts suspended.

JR: Can you talk us through the process to monitor and track movement, or what metrics you use and what targets you have for dealing with types of content (i.e. how quickly do you react?)

DS: 400 million hours of video are downloaded to YouTube every minute. One of the biggest flags last year was about Justin Bieber - people just don’t like his music. We need to differentiate something between those who just don’t like something and being offensive. We have a scheme of Trusted Flaggers in place.

JR - Are they like forum moderators.

DS will send more information about how that scheme works.

JR: Twitter using AI to identify content. Notwithstanding that method they have a particular triage process for escalation. Twitter do recognise what an ideal timeframe is and asking information from a person about whether they should suspend their account. Do you have targets for removing content?

DS: Not sure. I can provide that information.

JR: Do you know the quickest and longest timeframes?

DS: Don’t have those figures to hand and can provide.

JR: Average?

DS: Can provide.

JR: If, during an election a candidate wants something taken down, do you have figures on that type of content.

DS: We try to communicate how Parliamentary candidates can use YouTube effectively and how they can deal with content that is hateful and they regard as intimidating. Important that how they use their personal channels, for example, including flagging users, moderating comment.

JR: Figure about how many flags have been raised? Do you know if these details are kept?

DS: Will provide.

DG: Interested to find out about how you’ve reached out to the political parties and are there people in the parties who are trusted flaggers.

DS: Generally independent experts. If the political parties raised it with us we would ensure it would be looked at quickly.

When something is flagged, we will look at quickly. We do have a process to make sure that accounts are suspended and candidates do know the power and controls over their own accounts.

JR: How many candidates have used that advice?

DS: We worked with Reclaim the Internet about this - not sure whether we have the figures.

JR: How did you enhance the candidates’ awareness of your policies? Training sessions, parliamentary panels?

DS: In Germany and France we provided training. The last UK election was a snap election so slightly more difficult.

JR: Can you tell us about the education of candidates you did in France or Germany?

DS: Worked with candidates - how they could use YouTube and how they could tackle intimidation. Face to face with people from the political process. It’s important to us that people know the process that they should follow if they have concerns.

JR: What resources does Google put into removing, tracking etc?

DS: The key things are - programme of trusted flaggers as well as strong community guidelines and a system of flagging. I can get exact numbers to you.

JR: Is Google in a position to bolster its monitoring of threats during election periods?

DS: Can’t say here that we can employ more people. Can say we care deeply about and we use many resources - Jigsaw perspective and working with our trusted flaggers program.

Information about trusted flaggers to follow.

DG: As part of evidence collection for our review looking at offline and online processes for election campaigns. Allegation that Google doesn’t put sufficient resources into protecting political debate online.

DS: Not true. Have strong community guidelines that are over and above the law. We don’t want bullying or abuse, or hateful speech on our platforms. We will remove people’s accounts if they violate our community guidelines. We give powers to political candidates to have control over comments on their own pages. We understand it is important to communicate that to candidates globally as well. YouTube has provided a new platform for politicians and parliamentarians and candidates to communicate with the electorate, which many are taking up.

DG: Talking to many parliamentary candidates about their experiences last election, there was one case where a YouTube video which had hate speech about the person was found. Someone else reported it and it was after the election that it was taken down. It became a feature of the campaign. How do you respond to the concern that it shaped the debate within that campaign and took too long to remove?

DS: It was good that it was taken down and we will act as quickly as possible. I cannot talk about the specifics of that case not knowing anything else about it, but it sounds like situation suggests it took longer than it should. It is important that people know community guidelines are rigorous and that we will act.

DG: What are you doing to improve those timeframes?

DS: Expanding the program for trusted flaggers and communicating to expand knowledge of the guidelines.

DG: Can you talk in more detail about how you are expanding knowledge of the guidelines?

DS: Via the Blog and reminders on YouTube itself about how we will enforce the guidelines. We think YouTube is an important tool for good in political discourse. Those community guidelines are important to us.

DG: Do you use the Jigsaw Perspective API project to test the toxicity of debate? What are you doing on YouTube in relation to monitoring toxicity of content and on Google’s wider search engine platform?

DS: Monitoring the search engine is difficult. We change our algorithms very regularly. It is important that people know there is a feedback tool if people spot something is hateful. There is also an auto complete tool through which we make sure that hateful content in that tool is ruled out over time.

DG: How does that work?

DS: There is a very quick button to press to say “I am concerned about this autocomplete”. We will then look at it and change the algorithms where we agree that it is hateful. We are always looking to improve that.

DG: Are you looking to improve any of those techniques, and do you see it as responsibility?

DS: We agree that it is our responsibility to provide a good user experience. It all comes back to the user for us. We don’t want hateful speech to appear high on our listings. Stuff that is in our platforms will be reported where it is inconsistent with our community guidelines. Jigsaw Perspective is an example of technology used to automate this process.

DG: Beyond Jigsaw Perpsective are there any other resources of technological innovations you are using, or are you using more human-resources to drive this kind of change?

DS: We have a function called “Seach Rater Guidelines’ - individuals employed by us will look at pages and single our what they think is low quality, hate content versus high quality content. This will influence our ranking of that content using automated changes over time. They are very important and we are happy to share more information about these rankings with the Committee.

DG: Can point you information about how we are always looking to improve this process.

DS: Always looking at how AI can be used to improve the user experience and tackle hate crime.

DG: So in the medium to long term you are doing more?

DS: The improvement is continuous but does take time to take effect.

DG: The Committee has taken evidence from people that say they are the victims of intimidation or threats but they don’t report illegal online behaviour. We want to know what advice you provide to users or the police to assist them to report and follow-through this behavior with law enforcement agencies to prosecution?

DS: When the police ask information when they believe illegal content has been made we will cooperate. I will like to get back to the Committee with a full answer.

DG: That is useful to know. The Committee is interested in how you work with the recipient of this kind of intimidation or abuse and how you work with them on the user side to assist them to take the matter to police. For example, if a hate speech video is uploaded about me on YouTube and I want to report it to the police, what advice is given to me by Google/YouTube in that context?

DS: If illegal content or if the user reports we will cooperate. I will come back to the Committee about the specifics of the support we provide.

JR: Comments posted on social media can take a long time to be followed up and/attributed to an individual by law enforcement because of transnational nature of the activity.

DS: Looking to improve and data sharing between different law enforcement agencies. Google’s General Counsel, Kent Walker gave a speech on this topic. We will always look to cooperate with agencies when they approach Google about content that is illegal.

JR: How do you respond to legislation requiring illegal content to be taken down within 24 hours of being reported?

DS: As technology has improved things have been taken down more quickly. That has not required legislation. As an example, we have made great progress with Child Exploitation Material (CEM). The way in which they have been dealt with hasn’t necessitated regulation. We are also working with campaign groups like Reclaim the Internet. Regulation could create a barrier for new entrants and start-ups. We are continually committed to innovatation in order to tackle the issue.

JR: How quickly in the UK do you tackle it? Like if something is clearly illegal? Do you have percentages?

DS: No, but will come back to the Committee with these.

JR: Where material is clearly illegal, what percentage do you take down within 24 hours and how long does the remaining take?

DS: Didn’t need legislation for specific agreements around CEM, Copyright and Terrorism.

YouTube has a set of processes that ensure that videos that violate copyright or that only the the originator is allowed to share should be demonetised? That has come from innovation rather than regulation.

JR: How quickly does that come down?

DS: Don’t know, very very quickly.

JR: Is there a target for these removes?

DS: For CEM and Copyright, they will come down very quickly because they are identifiable.

JR: One on copyright, is it publicly written down what Google will consider copyright violation is and what isn’t?

DS: Yes, in Community Guidelines and it has been taken down by Google. You will often see YouTube channels where the content has been removed and it makes clear it is because it violates copyright agreements.

JR: To take a different example that might be more complex, what about bomb making, say an instructional video, is that determined for UK users through an agreement with the Home Office, or legislature, and if so, how did you come to that agreement?

DS: No. We do this by being clear on what the problem is and working with experts and industry to understand where the line is and what the options are to counter it.

JR: Are there experts in individual sovereign states or a global consortium?

DS: Depends on the issue. Always deal with parliamentarians in individual states also.

JR: To return to the copyright example, say in Japan. Copyright means one thing in Japan and another here.

DS: Not an expert on copyright or Japan but we worked across multiple countries.

JR: Who in Google has the power to say that we don’t want regulation and we have a working agreement? Who leads/ deals with that from Google’s point of view?

DS: That is a difficult question.

JR: Who would deal with it here? We will report to the PM and public and make recommendations. Say we were to say that Google and the UK Government should urgently negotiate an agreement on parliamentary candidates being intimidated. Would it be here? America? You?

DS: Very hard to say which individual within Google would take it up. I imagine the policy team would be heavily engaged. The Head of Policy has just gone on maternity leave so the Acting Head of Policy presently is Katie O’Donovan. I hope we can arrange for her to speak with you in coming weeks.

DG: A further question about demonetisation: the advertisement revenue from some videos has been removed with inappropriate and presumably hateful content. How do you identify?

DS: Using our network of trusted flaggers.

DG: So all of it is because of flaggers.

DS: Flagging system is such an important part of identifying which content is against the Guidelines and also the way of policing the grey area.

DG: So everything in YouTube is monetised, then flagged and demonetised.

DS: I will send you further information to clarify what the process is for this.

DG: If there are other ways of countering the hateful content on YouTube, the Committee would be grateful to understand what they are and accurately reflect these in any comments we made in our report.

DG: We’ve been asking all of the social media companies about whether you are a platform and whether you are a publish and how you see that discussion and debate and where Google and YouTube stand on that spectrum. Do you have any comment?

DS: Google is not a publisher. We are an index of the web. The role of a publisher is to edit traditional content in the way of a newspaper and TV. Google is a platform and index of content and news. Platform for other people to innovate and be creative on YouTube. In those circumstances we would never been regarded as a publisher. There are different kinds of platforms, obviously, but we do not provide original content.

JR: Would you be receptive to come together with political parties to discuss a way forward to combat online abuse and intimidation.

DS: Of course. Want the internet to be as creative and inclusive as possible. We want to ensure that harmful and intimidatory content is removed. Intimidation online is something we take seriously and have no time for, as set out on community guidelines. YouTubers will have their accounts suspended if they post that type of content.

JR: How many breaches for suspension?

DS: It depends on the circumstances, but some are done straight away if very serious.

JR: How?

DG/DS: IP address tracking mostly.

All: Thank you for meeting. Agreed on the further points and statistics to be provided by DS to JR and the Committee and to arrange a further meeting with others at Google as soon as is mutually convenient.

CSPL Secretariat

25 October 2017