



Select Committee on Charities

Corrected oral evidence: Charities

Tuesday 29 November 2016

4 pm

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Members present: Baroness Pitkeathley (Chairman); Baroness Barker; Lord Bichard; Baroness Gale; Lord Harries of Pentregarth; Baroness Jenkin of Kennington; Lord Lupton; Lord Rooker; Baroness Scott of Needham Market; Baroness Stedman-Scott.

Evidence Session No. 17

Heard in Public

Questions 160 - 166

Witnesses

[I](#): Nick Pickles, UK Head of Policy, Twitter; David Skelton, Public Policy and Government Relations Manager, Google.

Examination of witnesses

Nick Pickles and David Skelton.

Q160 **The Chairman:** Good afternoon, Mr Pickles and Mr Skelton. Welcome. Thank you very much for coming in. Before we begin, I must put some things on the record. The session is open to the public, as you will know, and is being broadcast on the parliamentary website. A transcript will be taken of your evidence. You will be sent a copy of the transcript, so please check it for accuracy and advise us of any corrections. If, after the session, you feel you have not had the chance to say everything you wanted or you want to clarify something, please feel free to amplify any points you have made in writing to us. I am sure you know the form, which is that we will all take turns in asking you questions. We have three sessions to fit in this afternoon, so we will try to get through this session with as much dispatch as is commensurate with you being able to tell us what you want. You do not both have to answer all the questions if you feel that one person has given an adequate answer. Perhaps you could just introduce yourself for the record, and then we will begin with our questions.

Nick Pickles: My name is Nick Pickles. I am head of public policy for Twitter in the UK. For the purposes of this session it is worth mentioning that I am a trustee of the charity Orchestras for All.

David Skelton: My name is David Skelton. I am UK public policy manager for Google.

The Chairman: Thank you. I am going to kick off. I should also say that you do not both have to answer each question. If you feel it has been adequately answered, there is no need for repetition. What are the main reasons for charities having a strong digital presence? How can digital engagement assist charities in supporting their aims and beneficiaries?

David Skelton: It is something that matters a lot to us at Google. Through Google.org we donate more than \$100 million a year to charities. We also donate over \$1 billion in products to charities and over 200,000 volunteer hours a year among Google employees. There are many reasons why charities should and in many ways already do use digital means, one of which is that you reach more people. The best way of reaching many potential donors and potential volunteers is through digital means. Many charities do that well already, but more could be done in many cases.

Digital represents an important way of scaling, broadening out and targeting campaigns. We give our registered UK charities \$10,000 in ad words a month to help with their campaigns, which means that if you type in "animal cruelty", the RSPCA should, for example, be near the top of a Google search. That really helps them with their campaigns. Also by using things like YouTube, we have found that various charities have been able to reach younger audiences with their messages.

Using digital does not have to be expensive. Many of the best uses of digital by charities have been done cheaply. We give \$10,000 in ad-word grants a month and a lot of help, support and training for charities to use our products, and various other products, in a sensible and good way.

The Chairman: We are coming to a question about resources a bit later.

David Skelton: The fundamental point is that digital for many charities is not just a “nice to have” but a fundamental way to help them to achieve their core mission and good causes. As I said, we run Google.org, which primarily aims at giving money to charities that use technology to help good causes. A good recent example of where technology has changed the means by which several non-profit organisations and charities operate is last year’s refugee crisis. More than 1 million refugees had smartphones or mobile phones as their biggest source of information on the refugee route. We work with several charities and non-profit organisations, such as International Rescue, to ensure that there was a low-battery use and a good source of information throughout that refugee route. Several Google engineers helped with that.

I have other examples of where technology has been used for good causes in the UK. We have just given a grant to Wayfindr, which is helping at Euston station by using Bluetooth sensors to help blind people find their way around the station. We gave a grant to Raspberry Pi, which has helped 15,000 children in the UK to learn coding. Charities can use data in other ways, not just in their campaigning and looking at who their website is reaching. We have given a grant to an organisation called Centrepont, which has used data and surveys of people who used to be homeless, to use data analytics to prevent youth homelessness in future.

The Chairman: Again, we will have opportunities to hear more examples.

David Skelton: I would reiterate that being digital does not have to be expensive for charities. It can also save them money and they can be more efficient through use of things like products that use the Cloud rather than expensive IT servers.

Nick Pickles: I will not cover quite as much of the broader impact of digital. You will not be surprised to hear that Twitter is a smaller company than Google. The starting point is social media in particular, and then digital more broadly. It is an opportunity for charities to communicate with the world on whatever issue they are working on without intermediaries. Ten years ago, you might have needed to know someone at a newspaper or to be invited on television, or you might have needed an advertising budget. Now you can jump that, so it levels the playing field for small and large organisations.

The critical thing for Twitter is that it is not just about either the big fundraising campaign or the big, high-volume campaign that you focus on. It reflects the way in which communications have changed. It is about constantly educating and persuading people. Rather than spending all

your energy on an awareness week in one week of the year, you are now working every day to try to change the social conversation.

While a lot of charity work is focused on fundraising and awareness raising, there is also an opportunity for digital and social media to help drive social change, not just to raise awareness but to try to deal with some of the underlying issues. One example of that was that during the European football championship this summer the charity Kick It Out, which works on racism in football, had a campaign running called Click It Out, which was trying to deter people from engaging in abuse towards players during the tournament, as well as trying to change their behaviour offline and online to prevent the issues arising. That is a really innovative use of social media. We can talk through more examples. It is an absolute playing field leveller. Small and large charities can educate the public and engage on issues that matter to them.

Q161 Baroness Jenkin of Kennington: How can digital engagement assist charities with activities such as fundraising, volunteering and campaigning? How might they also assist them with demonstrating the impact of their work and the transparency of their spending?

David Skelton: In terms of fundraising, a really strong benefit of digital is that you can reach a bigger audience more quickly, more widely and in a more scalable way. An example is the refugee crisis. We worked with several refugee charities last year to promote refugee charities on our main home page. We matched every donation that was made. In two days, we managed to raise \$11 million for refugee charities. That can be done because digital products allow you to reach a large audience very quickly. Charities are also beginning to use innovative ways to fundraise online. UNICEF is a great example. It noticed that a lot of people who visited their Donate Now page did not end up donating, so they used various analytic tools to consider why that was happening. They used some resources from the retail sector to make sure that people who did go to the Donate Now page were encouraged to go back rather than harassed to go back. They managed to raise more than £100,000 in donations over a year because of that, and 18% of those donations were monthly donations, which meant a recurring source of income.

In terms of campaigning, the important thing is that digital allows you to target your campaigning. We have spoken to several charities, such as WaterAid and BeatBullying, which have been able to target younger people who would not normally have gone to charity websites or become engaged with charities. They have used social media and various other means, particularly YouTube, as a way of reaching that younger demographic.

As to volunteering, digital allows you to be scalable and have a message of scale. It also enables you to be local. I have spoken to several charities that have been able to keep a good database of local volunteers and campaign at the micro level. Shelter, for example, keeps a database of local housing issues, local housing needs and what people can do if they fear homelessness in a certain local authority. As well as being able to

get their message wider, it also enables charities to be very local with their message if it helps them to get their message across. Digital is important both to the big broad message but also to the local specific message.

Nick Pickles: The point about transparency is incredibly important. I am very conscious as a trustee that one of the issues that is front and centre in the charitable sector is how we make sure that we are being as transparent as possible, so that both our funders and our supporters know how we are governed and that they understand why we are undertaking certain work. Digital is a great way of doing that, because you do not have to wait now for the monthly or yearly newsletter to come. You can see that in real time. We can engage with people as events are going on.

One thing that has been a game changer in that space is the advent of live streaming. The charity that I am a trustee of was able to open Periscope, a live streaming app that Twitter runs, and broadcast its concert to the world at zero cost. They just had to a smartphone on with connectivity. Suddenly, when we have been emailing people asking them to volunteer and to sponsor people, they were able to join in to be able to be part of the event itself. That is really important.

The other thing to pick up on from David's point is the idea that suddenly it is not just charities doing the fundraising, it is individuals on behalf of the charities. If you have a social media account and you are running the London Marathon, suddenly you are part of that charity's fundraising network in a way that previously was restricted to, "Are you standing outside with a tin?", or maybe going door to door or to your friends. So you can become an ambassador for the charity yourself, which is new.

Finally, from the campaigning side, one of the issues that we tell NGOs is important is educating people about the expertise they have in their organisation. You can tell the story of members of staff, volunteers and the people whom you are helping to educate about the wider issue that you are working on, to build that wider case for social change. That is sometimes easier to do on an issue where there is popular awareness. On very difficult issues—perhaps medical illnesses that do not affect a lot of people or something that is happening in a very small part of one particular region—suddenly that issue can be broadcast to the world in real time. Again, it is about education and raising awareness, but it is also about driving social change.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth: I have a supplementary. Picking up an earlier question that is linked to this, Mr Skelton referred to allowing Google employees 2,000 hours a year, I think it was, of voluntary activity. How does that work? Do you second people to charities in order to help them to get more digitalised? How does that work?

David Skelton: We actively encourage our employees to volunteer for charities. We gave 200,000 hours last year for employees to volunteer.

Baroness Jenkin of Kennington: Was that internationally?

David Skelton: Yes, that was globally. We say to employees, "If you have a charity that means a lot to you, do go and volunteer and we will also match donations".

Lord Harries of Pentregarth: I am thinking of something with a bit more expertise than that. One of your employees might say, "I want to go and visit an old person once a week", but I am more interested in whether you second people to particular charities in order to help them get more into the digital age, for example. That is the kind of help they need, is it not?

David Skelton: Yes, we do. We have something called 20% time, where employees spend 20% of their time on their own projects, provided they have some relationship with Google. In some cases, they are spending time, rather than the charities. Several employees spent a lot of time on the refugee route last year and the year before, helping to make sure that there was connectivity. When we fund through Google.org, we will agree a set of objectives with the non-profit organisation. We will also often conduct an engineering review. We will work with the charities on their present set-up and their use of tech. There are several ways in which we will ensure that our engineers and various other experts are lending their expertise to various charities.

The Chairman: Thank you. Let us go on to Baroness Barker's question.

Q162 **Baroness Barker:** Mr Skelton, you have cited the example of a big charity—UNICEF—taking experience from the business world and applying it to its work. Are we right in our impression that the charity sector is further behind than other sectors in digital skills and expertise?

David Skelton: Some charities are doing world-leading work on the use of tech. The charities that we see at Google.org we fund slightly differently. We are taking a slightly different approach to philanthropy in that we fund in a similar way to people who would be funding tech start-ups. First, we very much focus on what we know best, which is how tech can be used for social good. Secondly, we think about an element of risk. Thirdly, we take an accelerator approach. We fund by milestones rather than by writing a single cheque. We also consider whether something is scalable. We have seen some great examples. In the UK, the St Giles Trust, for example, has produced an app that helps with the rehabilitation of prisoners. We have also done some work with Catch22 on youth unemployment. I mentioned the work on youth homelessness. Some world-leading work is being done by charities. A lot of people who work in charities are social innovators, and much of that innovation is very important.

The Lloyds Bank UK Business Digital Index, which may been mentioned as part of your evidence session, says that the charity sector still has work to do to ensure that everyone has the digital skills necessary to make the most of these opportunities. It is important for all charities to

realise that digital is a really key part of achieving their fundamental goals. We are also working with Step on Board to make sure that Google employees are encouraged to be on the boards of charities as trustees, and to encourage them to help with making sure that the charities make the most of digital opportunities. Some charities are world leading in terms of digital, but some charities need to do more. We are doing what we can to help as well.

The Chairman: Do you share that view, Mr Pickles?

Nick Pickles: That reflects the business world. Some businesses do social media very well and some businesses do not. One of the challenges—this is a change in the way charities are working—is that it is sometimes harder for larger organisations that are more hierarchical and that have staff who have been working in a certain way for a long time, to change, whereas smaller and newer organisations can embrace technology quicker. Some organisations definitely see it as a risk, so part of our work is talking to those organisations and explaining, “If you are already doing marketing, if you already speak at public events, social media is an extension of that”. It is not different. A lot of it is about building confidence and skills.

Q163 **Lord Bichard:** You have answered this question to some extent already, but I encourage you to think of other things that smaller charities might do or be encouraged to do to use digital more. It is not just a question of money, I understand: it can be a question of skills or a question of custom and practice. Are there things that you think we could all be doing or the Government could be doing to encourage smaller charities?

Nick Pickles: Social media is a great example of this. Today is Giving Tuesday, which is a hashtag campaign that involves lots of different people doing lots of different things. One thing that we can all do when we see a charity doing something, be it the Royal British Legion during November or something happening just within our community, is to share it with the world. Often, when you are working on an issue and you share it, suddenly someone else on the other side of the country, or maybe in another country, sees your issue and says, “We have the same problem. How are you solving it?” This is part of the innovation piece. Suddenly, you are connected with people who are working on the same problem but who might have a totally different solution to it. There is a big opportunity there.

There is also a big role for the charities to play that fund work, because digital offers a lot of data to measure organisations’ effectiveness and impact. As well as training charities, we have also been working with the larger funders to help them understand, when they give grants, what kind of information they can ask for, such as, “Do you have the analytics data to show over six months how many more Twitter followers you have? How many more people are watching your videos?” That kind of data allows us, in a very similar way to Google, to look at those campaigns and say, “You are doing something really innovative here”, and then share that with other organisations. The British Heart

Foundation recently ran a campaign, and every tweet had a little heart in it, so you could “heart a tweet”. It automated something to target the same proportion as the 90% of people who do not survive an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest. So 90% of the people who hearted the tweet were sent a message saying, “We are sorry you did not make it. Did you know that 90% ...?” and so on. So it was using technology for a very simple function, which was to raise awareness of their issues. There is a huge opportunity there.

David Skelton: I would reiterate that digital does not have to be expensive. Some of the best examples of the use of digital by charities I have seen are by very small charities. One example is the charity CALM—the Campaign Against Living Miserably—which does a lot about tackling suicide among young men, which has one of the best websites and the best use of social media that I have seen, yet it has only four or five full-time employees. It is not about being a massive charity to do this.

Charities have access to a lot of free resources, both from us and from other organisations. As I said, we provide \$10,000 worth of ad words a month to charities, but also things like free corporate email accounts and free analytic services. As Nick said, there is a way for them to analyse who is going to their website, how successful their campaigns are being, how they could better target their campaigns, provide a better database for their events and for their volunteering. It is also worth smaller charities thinking about what kind of volunteers they are looking for. Are they looking for volunteers with these digital skills who can help with this? Are they making the most of the free resources available? I could not reiterate more that digital does not have to be expensive.

Lord Bichard: And trustees as well, presumably.

David Skelton: Absolutely. Which is why we are encouraging Google members of staff to be trustees on charities. It is important to overcome that psychological barrier that some charities have that digital equals expensive. It absolutely does not.

The Chairman: We are getting that message from you very clearly. Thank you.

Q164 **Baroness Scott of Needham Market:** Mr Pickles, I wanted to come back to the point you made about some businesses being good and some bad. The Government have for some time had a push for small and medium-size enterprises in the private sector to upskill. Has that push been sufficiently effective, and ought they do something similar for the charity sector, or is the sort of work that you are already doing, as you have described, a better way of doing things?

Nick Pickles: I do not think we should ever say that we have enough skills and we can stop. Since I joined Twitter two and a half years ago, we have probably had more than a thousand people in the UK go through our charity training programme. We produce a handbook specifically on how charities can use Twitter. We do not just deliver them in London. We

have done them in Belfast, Glasgow, Birmingham, several in Yorkshire—that is a personal bias—and we support campaigns directly with pro bono advertising. There are skills there.

We can think differently on ways of convening. City Hall in London, for example, runs a project called Team London. It takes a number of charities, many of them very small, and partners them with a number of different industry companies. One might be HR, one might be accountancy and one might be legal. They go through a series of skill-up training sessions in different sections. We provide a social media section to that. That has been really effective. There is definitely a question of how people can convene charities more and support them in every area. One really interesting example of that is the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, which is working internationally specifically to try to skill-up charities not just in communications but in all the other areas. I know that they are working closely with DfID. There is a real opportunity there to try to work with this. As David as already said, there is often a long tail. Maybe 10 years ago, a lot of charities were big charities. Now, because of the way the internet has worked, there are many micro charities. Thinking about that long tail, there are many contact points, whether that is through their tax processes, through Gift Aid. The more support we can make available, the better.

Baroness Scott of Needham Market: Something you have just said is new and is a point that I have not heard before. Are you observing that one of the impacts of the growth of digital is more charities: that it is a growth creator in the sector?

The Chairman: In smaller charities.

Nick Pickles: Yes, in charities and in social enterprises. There was a piece in the *Evening Standard* yesterday by Rohan Silva on the start-up mentality. One charity that was working last year was Help Refugees. In a few months it was providing support to millions of people through refugee aid. One fantastic charity, called Kit Us Out, was brought to my attention last week. It raised £7,000 for Paralympic athletes from the developing world attending the Paralympics. That does not sound like a lot of money, but it meant that it could provide 2,500 items of kit. These charities are very small, very fast and very involving. As David said, they are working more like start-ups and less like charities, which move slowly.

Q165 **Baroness Stedman-Scott:** In your view, do technology firms have a responsibility to help combat digital exclusion and develop digital skills? If so, how can they best fulfil that role?

David Skelton: Both these issues mean a lot to us as a company. We announced last week, or maybe the week before, that we were providing five hours of free digital skills training for every adult in the UK who wanted it. A few years ago, we worked with charities in a campaign called Grow Your Charity Online, which we ran with the Media Trust. Some 30,000 charities went online because of that. We run something called

the Digital Garage, which kicked off last year and has been in 80 different towns, cities and villages in the UK. It has also had semi-permanence, with three or four months in Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Glasgow and now Cardiff. Hundreds of charities have been through the door. Its goal is to boost the digital skills of charities and small businesses. That has had a positive net impact with the charities that we have spoken to and the small businesses that have been through the scheme. That is very much a priority.

The announcement of five hours' free digital skills training for every UK adult is also something that we are working on with charities. We have said that we will go to 100 different towns and cities across the UK and do that online and offline. We have also been working with the Tinder Foundation, which I believe has given evidence previously, to promote digital skills among the digitally excluded. That is also really important to us.

The Chairman: Thank you. Mr Pickles, do you want to add anything?

Nick Pickles: As a company that is primarily inspired and motivated by free expression and allowing people to connect with what is happening in the world around them, we feel we have a role to play on this issue. There is a great organisation in the UK called Doteveryone, which has done a lot of thinking about how to bring people online. We supported it working on a project in south London—again, it was very start-up-like—piloting how homeless people could use internet access and how it could be used to improve their life experience. There is that question. There is the broader digital skills piece. We are a much smaller company, but we are passionate both about supporting charities that are doing that work in a train-the-trainer model and about being local.

One of the issues that we are very passionate about is not just digital skills but making sure that the technology industry draws from a much broader range of society than it currently does. One of the projects we are working on is an interfaith coding class, where we bring 10 girls from three different faith schools together to learn coding. The ambition is that it is not just about learning digital skills but about transferring that into how they work in the digital industry. There is a technical qualification available. We also work with an organisation called Code First: Girls, which looks specifically not just at younger women but at people who have qualified into non-technical careers and want to switch over. It is something that the industry is very passionate about, and hopefully our expertise and our knowledge can help others scale up those efforts.

Q166 **Lord Lupton:** This is the question we ask everybody. It is the blank sheet of paper question, although in your case it is probably a blank white border and an empty-cloud question. What one recommendation would you like to see the Committee making in relation to digital skills in this sector?

The Chairman: We limit you to one.

Nick Pickles: I genuinely had two, so I will have to pick one. One of the really big questions is: why are people not using digital? You have had two clear cases here of the potential of digital and the opportunity we think exists. We are trying to understand why people are not using it. Is it because they are uncomfortable using services where they are providing confidential information? Is it a lack of trust? Is it because of a lack of access to internet connectivity but they can use a computer? Is it a lack of digital skills to use a computer where they have internet connectivity? A lot more work can be done—the Lloyds Index has been mentioned—to understand the barriers and then build that knowledge into how we help charities. Rather than thinking about large charities being the deliverer of everything, how do you build in that small, agile, start-up way of working into the wider charity ecosystem?

David Skelton: It is important for the Government to put digital skills at the heart of the emerging industrial strategy. That should also apply to the third sector and to the charity sector. The Government have the ability to make sure that there is a step change in charities' mindset when it comes to the use of digital, and the industrial strategy is a way of achieving that.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed for coming to us this afternoon. I am sure we will be a bit inspired to hone up our own digital skills from what you have said.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth: I am beginning to feel positively antediluvian. I will sign up with PICT and get a digital presence.

The Chairman: You will have an effect on their Lordships as well as all the charities that you help. Thank you very much.