

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences](#), HC 609

Tuesday 21 Mar 2017

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Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); James Berry; Mr David Burrowes; Byron Davies; Nusrat Ghani; Mr Ranil Jayawardena; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Naz Shah; Mr David Winnick.

Questions 630-747

Witnesses

[I](#): Rt Hon Lindsay Hoyle MP, Chair, Consultative Panel on Parliamentary Security, and Eric Hepburn, Director of Security, Parliament.

[II](#): Sarah Newton MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Vulnerability, Safeguarding and Countering Extremism, Home Office, and Robert Buckland QC MP, Solicitor General, Attorney General's Office.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [The Government](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Lindsay Hoyle MP, Chair, Consultative Panel on Parliamentary Security, and Eric Hepburn, Director of Security, Parliament.

Q630 **Chair:** I welcome Mr Deputy Speaker and Mr Hepburn to our evidence session. Thank you for coming to give evidence.

The Select Committee started this inquiry into hate crime after Jo Cox was murdered, so most of the evidence we have heard has been about hate crime and extremism across the country and its impact. Given where this inquiry started—with the murder of an MP and an attack on democracy itself—we are keen to hear from you about the level of threats to MPs for doing their job and the way in which Parliament is responding to that.

Mr Hoyle, can I start with you? You have been an MP for very many years. In your experience as an MP and from what you have seen in the evidence you have taken, do you think the threats have increased, and what form do they now take?

Mr Hoyle: That is absolutely right. I came here in in 1997, and social media wasn't there in the way that we know it. The fact is that most constituents either came to a surgery or contacted you by letter or phone. Now the whole game has changed, and the fact is that we are more exposed than we ever expected to be previously. '97 and where we are now are light years apart. The fact is that there are people out there who feel we are there to be attacked. We have seen the number of attacks increasing against Members.

All MPs are vulnerable. If they speak in the Chamber on a certain subject and people do not agree with them, they think that is a free-for-all to come in and encourage others against that particular MP's comments. We can break it down even further. All MPs, I believe, are vulnerable to abuse, attack and threat, but women MPs are more so. That is the one thing I have picked up since I have taken over this job. Then you can break that down even further to ethnic minority MPs and, in particular, ethnic minority women MPs, who have suffered more abuse than other MPs on the evidence we have gathered so far.

That is where I think the whole thing has changed. It is the fact that people out there think, "I can get away with this." The keyboard warrior in the middle of the night feels it is acceptable to encourage and inflame other people to come on board. That is how it grows from someone who passes on their comments and views. We then get the fixated person who takes up that issue. That is where I think we are vulnerable; that is where it is difficult.

Each week, the numbers grow and the evidence continues to grow. We haven't bottomed out by any means. That is why I am pleased to have

Eric with me, the head of security. Eric can back that up, if he wants, to show that it is not just me as an MP saying that; actually, the head of security can back that up as well.

Eric Hepburn: Thank you very much for the invitation. I have been here for six months as head of security for Parliament. I was here just after Project Safe was launched, which is the security measures we now have in place for Members of Parliament.

What I have observed is that the level of online abuse, which Mr Hoyle has talked about, has grown in volume. We encourage all Members to report it. I suspect that, before we encouraged people to do that, they were just keeping it to themselves in the vast majority of cases. I suspect it has always been out there; I just think it is growing now.

What happens is Members report it to us and we will now do investigations. We are very pleased that we have taken some of the cases through to the courts and that people have been prosecuted because of it. I do feel, however, that we are at the tail end of quite a torrent that is going over the internet. We are the ones clearing up at the end, rather than looking right at the start at how we set the threshold as to what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.

Q631 **Chair:** Would you explain that point a bit further? What do you mean by that?

Eric Hepburn: Of course. When Members report one-line abuse to us, we say to them, "No abuse is acceptable—zero tolerance. Please come and talk to us, register the case and we will look at it." We find that Members are doing that, but effectively we are at the end of that chain. The abuse has already gone on to social media. It is already out there and Members are reacting to that. From my perspective, it would be better if we could say at the front end of what acceptable behaviour online is, so that we stop the abuse as far as we can in the first place.

Q632 **Chair:** We are going to ask you detailed questions about online abuse. Can I ask you first about the physical threat to MPs? What is your assessment of that? Has that increased over the last 20 years?

Eric Hepburn: On physical attacks, Jo Cox's tragic murder on 16 June was the wake-up call that we all got. In terms of Members' security, within Parliament itself we are in a very good position. We have put the right mitigations in place, so that when Members of Parliament are here, that is fine.

When Members go back to the constituency, there is a security package or set of measures that we put in place in constituency offices, constituency homes and the London addresses. That is based on advice we received from the Home Office, who assessed the threat and said, "Actually, these are the measures that you need to have in place." We are rolling those out at the moment. They are not all rolled out yet, but we are making good progress. I believe that once we have those measures in place, that is a good basic set of measures to keep people safe as much as we can.



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Remember, when people are out and about in their constituency—either in constituency surgeries or out and about seeing their constituents—they are to a large extent on their own. I think that is where the real vulnerability sits.

Q633 Chair: Do you have information or an assessment of the number of MPs of who have been threatened in their constituencies?

Mr Hoyle: To pick up on what Eric has said, previously—it is quite crucial—MPs did not share the information. We are now gathering that information so that is why the picture is growing. We do know the threat, and it is not just a threat to Members. It is threats to the staff who spend five days a week in the frontline office, with people who come with mental health problems, people who become fixated and people who become abusive.

Not only do we have that threat, but we have to remember the staff who we have a duty of care for, who are also under the same threat, and with families. So it is not just about looking after Members; it is about spreading that to make sure that we look after the people who are involved in helping to provide the service that we have been elected to provide. We cannot let people stop MPs delivering the service that we wish to give to our constituents. We have got to recognise that yes, it has increased—so how do we deal with it and how do we stop it? Zero tolerance is our first way of dealing with it and that is where we've got to be. When the problem is here in Parliament, it is much easier to deal with. It is making sure that all the police forces out there are connected and plugged in to supporting Members of Parliament to carry out their duties, making sure that there is the response that is needed to ensure we feel safe and that our constituents who come to see us also feel safe—for example, when they are in and somebody decides to come with abuse or whatever.

We have a whole thing that we want to protect against. It is protecting the Member, the Member's staff, the Member's families and other constituents as well from the abuse that can take place. Of course, there have been physical attacks—not just in the tragic murder of Jo Cox on 16 June. That is the one thing I will never get over; I never, ever want to receive a phone call from the Clerk of the House to tell me that a Member of Parliament has been murdered on the streets of our country. I have to say that I never want that to happen. I will do everything I can to ensure that MPs are protected and supported. We know that attacks have taken place on members of staff, as well as threats and physical attacks against MPs. We are aware of it, we are collating it and we are keeping the records for it.

Eric Hepburn: Surveys have been done and statistics collected. In a 5Live survey recently, one third of the UK's 195 female MPs at the time were asked, and the overwhelming majority said they had received online and verbal abuse, and one third of the MPs had considered quitting as a result. Two thirds said they actually felt less safe following the murder of Jo Cox. If you then start to think about a survey done by ITV News Anglia, 72% of



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MPs in the Anglia region felt threatened, or had been threatened, by physical violence. It is those sorts of figures that we look at. I think it gives you just the tip of the iceberg.

Q634 Chair: Have you done an assessment of all MPs across the country on the number who have—either themselves, their staff or their families—faced an actual threat within their constituency, where there has been an assessed threat within the constituency? I want to come online issues as well, but I am just interested if you have figures for the number of MPs for whom the police or Parliament have assessed some form of threat in their constituencies?

Mr Hoyle: Chair, I am holding a form that all MPs have had. It is out there now. We have had a very good response, and that will fill in all of the details that we require. We will be happy to show not the individuals but the actual numbers involved. That is coming back now, and that should soon be collated; we have collated parts of it. It gives you a go at the full facts and statistics to back it up.

I say to Members here: please, have you all filled it in? If not, please do so in order to give us the right information to answer the questions clearly.

Q635 Chair: When do you think that will be available? When will you have that ready?

Mr Hoyle: We have some statistics now that we can let you have, but I would like to say two weeks' time.

Chair: That would be very helpful.

Mr Hoyle: We will ensure that you get those numbers.

Q636 Chair: On the nature of the online abuse that you have seen as well, is your assessment that that is also continuing to escalate? Mr Hepburn, I was not sure if you had said we were at the tail end of it?

Eric Hepburn: I do not think we are at the tail end at all. I think it is getting more publicity now and people are more aware of it, but no, I think it is at a high level. In my assessment, it will go up from that.

Q637 Chair: We have had high-profile cases in which people have spoken out. For example, Diane Abbott bravely spoke about the appalling and unacceptable abuse that she has had. Can you tell us a bit more about your assessment of the way in which women MPs are receiving higher levels of abuse or more targeted abuse, and also how black and minority ethnic MPs are getting more abuse?

Mr Hoyle: I have sat down with certain MPs who have had problems and issues, which have mainly come via social media. I recognised that it targets, as I said at the beginning, certain women MPs who seem to be more vulnerable than others. Ethnic minority MPs certainly seem to have had the worst of both worlds, because this is coming at them from two sides. You could have, maybe, extremists on the one side and the right

wing on the other, so they get two types of attack; it comes from two sides of the argument.

We know that if an MP speaks in Parliament on an emotive subject, they go right up, in social media terms, and they then become under threat overnight because of something that is said in the House. You can see the immediate response. Rather than waiting for that to happen, what can we do to protect them? We know that there are certain vulnerable MPs, so what we need to do—we are going to advertise this—is have embedded people in the House of Commons who will look at social media and also at certain targeted MPs.

Also, when we have an emotive subject in the House, and know that a person will have spoken on something that we know that certain people respond to in a certain way—it could be veiled women, abortion, badgers or whatever—we should already be looking at social media within the House to warn MPs that stuff is going out there. We should ask, “Are you aware of this particular person or group that might be targeting you?”, not to frighten the MP, but to make sure that they know that there is somebody on their side, and somebody looking after them. In the same way, if the MP picks up on it, they feed it back into the organisation and it can be looked at. It is about putting in an added layer of protection.

We have spoken to other countries, and legislation is one way of dealing with social media. We know that that would happen in, say, Pakistan, but it will take serious legislation to protect Members. We also know that other Parliaments have looked at having embedded people who look at social media to get a picture of what is happening and which MPs have been targeted. It is about trying to replicate that in the best way possible to ensure that there is another tool to support MPs.

Q638 Chair: Do you agree that it is an important part of our democracy that we all, as MPs, live in our constituencies, work among the people we represent on a daily basis, and go to different events all the time without having to fear for our safety or having to fear threats? It is immensely important to try to continue that, rather than ending up with people being separated from, instead of embedded in, democracy.

Mr Hoyle: What I am frightened of is that we will become virtual MPs. That will be the last thing that any of us wants. We are elected to serve our constituents, not only in London but in our constituencies. The fact is that if we cannot carry out the job, we have lost democracy. Democracy has to be protected. You cannot put a price on democracy; democracy must continue. We have to make sure that MPs have the support and back up, and we have got to be able to carry out the duties that our constituents elect us to carry out. That is not only voting and speaking on their behalf, but being seen and listening to them at surgeries. Maybe we will change the way we do surgeries, but the bottom line is that I believe that the face of politics is that Member of Parliament, in that constituency, who leads from the front. In the end, if we cannot carry that out, we have lost. We must not lose whatever happens. Our constituents matter, and



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carrying out my duties as the Member of Parliament for Chorley is so important to me, in the same way as it is to all of us.

Q639 Nusrat Ghani: Mr Hoyle, you have mentioned that the number of victims increases on a scale. If you are a female parliamentarian, you are more likely to be a victim. If you are a female parliamentarian who is Asian or from any other minority, you are more likely to be a victim. I would challenge you to go further; I would say that if you were a female, Asian or black, and Muslim, you are even more likely to be a victim. Is that a trend that has been represented to you by parliamentarians in the House?

Mr Hoyle: Absolutely, but we also have female Jewish MPs who are targeted no differently. Hatred is being portrayed in exactly the same way. It is much broader. They really do face the worst of all of it. I would say, yes, we know that that is the case. Of course we take it on board, and that is the starting point: the one who is most likely to be under attack and vulnerable. It is about looking at that number, which is not the greatest; we have 650 MPs.

We cannot monitor all 650, but what we can do is narrow it down to where the target is the most. As I said, we can do that, and we can know what debates are coming up in Parliament that might inflame things against an MP whom you might not expect to be targeted, because of what they have said. Of course we can pick out—tragically, as this should not be the case—the tick-boxes; Muslim and women MPs are No. 1, along with Jewish female and male MPs. That is a good starting point for determining who gets the worst of it, but I am saying that it is not acceptable. We should do whatever we can do to ensure that there is support for those MPs, so that they can carry out their duties in the same way as the rest of us. That is how we will know that we have succeeded in protecting MPs at the level that is required.

Q640 Nusrat Ghani: Only 30% of the House is made up of women at the moment, and the figure for BMEs is just over 6%. Obviously, we want the House to reflect the country that we live in. If you were a young woman, a young woman of colour, a Muslim woman of colour or a Jewish woman, why would you want to enter politics today if all you read about, unfortunately, is the threat that parliamentarians face, especially female parliamentarians?

Mr Hoyle: A very good question. The danger is that we flip back to where we were, where we have white or grey middle-aged MPs. As you look at me, I am ticking myself as that box. Male and stale is what we need to get away from; we have to reflect society. We have to reassure people that though it is not the easiest job in the world, it is a great job. We are very lucky to be Members of Parliament.

I want to make sure that everyone has an equal chance of being an MP, and that nothing puts them off becoming an MP. Whoever you are, we all should have the same ability to be an MP. There should be no fear in there. If people feel that they do not want to do this job, we will have



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failed. I want everybody to have the chance to do that job, and there should be no barriers. What I am saying is that we have to get the security right; we have to get the protection right.

The flip side to that is to make sure that constituency parties also pick the right person for the job, which is way beyond my remit. From my point of view, it is about dealing with the security angle. I want you to tell me if we are not getting it right; I want you to tell me where the problems are. That is the way to deal with it.

Q641 Nusrat Ghani: I want to raise one more question before I get on to that. You have mentioned more than once how particular debates can trigger more hate crimes. Surely it is completely perverse for a parliamentarian to know that if they do their job, enter the Chamber and talk about a particular issue, they will face more threats. Surely it is undermining democracy.

Mr Hoyle: First, it does undermine democracy; I am very clear on that. It could be a debate on badgers. As we know, there is nothing more emotive than animal rights and welfare for setting hatred up, from both sides of the argument. We have seen that taken to an extreme, where MPs have been threatened not only with violence, but with death threats. The level completely changes depending on the subject: it is not a one-size-fits-all—far from it. We have got to be able to move very quickly to whatever the subject is that will inflame a certain part of society to such an extreme that threats will come in. It is those threats that we have to take seriously.

We know where the base starts from, but what we don't know is which subject. You can guess what will happen, but you are not quite sure which MP it will be. It is whichever MP speaks to that part of society that doesn't want to hear what that MP said. What they forget is that we reflect what we feel constituents need to hear, and what we believe. What we can't be is silenced by people out there.

Q642 Nusrat Ghani: Mr Hepburn, you mentioned that if people had issues with their social media, they could report it to you.

Eric Hepburn: Correct.

Q643 Nusrat Ghani: We have had a number of social media companies in front of us, directly. We have reported incidents of hate crime, and they have not been able to take that content down immediately, so what confidence should I have that you can remove that hate crime, or that I should identify the perpetrator of the hate crime?

Eric Hepburn: We certainly work very closely with the social media companies. We have flagged content up to them, and we have also advised Members to flag up to them content that they consider to be unacceptable and that should be taken down. We have had a number of such cases. I think the question you are asking is: do they react quickly and sensibly enough? We thought that this Committee's recent evidence

on that was very questioning. I think there is a lot more they could do on that to be helpful.

Q644 **Nusrat Ghani:** So they are not doing enough now?

Eric Hepburn: I think there is more they could do.

Q645 **Nusrat Ghani:** If they are not doing enough now, is it undermining the safety of parliamentarians?

Eric Hepburn: That is a conclusion I could probably draw, yes.

Mr Hoyle: I would go further and say that of course it is an attack on democracy. That is the one thing we can't accept. That is why you're doing the report; that is why I welcome the report, and why we were so pleased to be able to give evidence today.

Of course, yes, we have sat down with social media groups. I genuinely believe that they have a corporate responsibility. They must realise that they cannot allow this to continue. Shareholders are important to them, but we are talking about the lives of people here, and the future of democracy. We cannot allow it to be destroyed without them taking responsibility for what they allow to go on their platforms.

What I would say is: please, let's whip together to bring them into line and get them into a sensible place. What they believe is, "We have this line. If that is crossed, then we are done", but it is where we draw the line that is important to us. It is about drawing the line in the right place, not what they believe is the right place. If we have to put legislation through the House, so be it. I would have hoped that corporate responsibility would have led to a common-sense approach, so that you wouldn't have had to do that report. You have had to do that report because there are real failings out there; we all recognise that. Of course, we are working together to try to get the best we can.

I would say that so far, when we have asked for things to be taken down, they have been taken down immediately. I would prefer that those things had never been put up in the first place.

Q646 **Nusrat Ghani:** Mr Hoyle, to clarify what you have just said, you believe that if they are incapable of taking down content within an appropriate time period, we should legislate to make them take down content or to fine them.

Mr Hoyle: If there is a line that needs to be drawn—it is not for me to draw this; it is for everybody to look at—and that is not being responded to, it may be that we would have to take legislation. I believe there is a corporate responsibility out there that recognises that they also have a part to play. That would be the extreme, and hopefully we will never have to go to the extreme, because common sense should prevail. I believe that these companies will use common sense and will work with us, rather than against us. If they do work against us, we will have to take other actions.

Q647 **Nusrat Ghani:** Mr Hepburn, you mentioned the security available in



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Parliament, but parliamentarians I have spoken to, and who have responded to surveys, are not really nervous about the security in Parliament; it is out and about in their constituencies.

Eric Hepburn: That is correct.

Q648 **Nusrat Ghani:** MPs work quite late in the evenings; there are normally events quite late. MPs work at weekends, so you cannot always have a member of staff with you. You have already alluded to the fact that MPs spend time by themselves in their constituencies, working. The feedback I have had from female MPs when I let them know that this inquiry was taking place this afternoon was that they feel the advice that is given is wholly inadequate to how MPs work in their constituencies.

For example, we do not have drivers; we drive ourselves. We go to meetings and we have no idea who is going to be there. There is no secure exit, no secure entry. You can somehow gauge how many people might be there and how long the meeting might last. Meetings take place up to 10 o'clock at night, and on Saturdays and Sundays. What would your response be to parliamentarians who feel that you have been irresponsible in the advice you have delivered, because it just focuses on Westminster and not on the work MPs do in their constituencies?

Eric Hepburn: In terms of taking security advice, we go to the experts. The experts in this field are the Home Office, which works with the police and the National Counter Terrorism Security Office. They then work with a company called by Secure by Design, which is authorised by Government and by Parliament to be the people who design the security packages. We go to them, we identify the threat, we work with them on that, and they come up with a package of measures that we implement. That is the package we run with. We also make sure that the package is looked at every 12 months. It was first launched in January 2016, and we have just completed a review of that set of measures, ready for the coming year.

Against the threat that is levied or reported against MPs, we believe that the package, and the advice that we receive in it, is satisfactory. However, if a Member of Parliament feels that they have an enhanced risk, we can send a local police officer round to assess that additional risk. The package or the measures are associated with the constituency office, the constituency home and the London address. However, there are other bits we could look at on a case-by-case basis if, as I say, there were additional risks associated with that Member.

Q649 **Nusrat Ghani:** I want to make it clear for the record that you are mentioning packages, but this does not provide additional physical support for a parliamentarian as they go about their business at 10 o'clock at night on a Thursday or Friday—or a Saturday or Sunday.

Mr Hoyle: Let me see if I can help with that. In fairness to Eric, he's been here six months. First of all, I come back to the form. How many round here have filled it in? I suspect not many of us. The other thing is that we sent out a letter, giving advice: if you are attending a public meeting, maybe don't use the car; get a taxi. Make sure you know where the



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entrances and exits are, and if you feel you are vulnerable at that particular meeting, make sure somebody is there. If you feel there is a threat at the meeting, let the police know, and make sure they know in advance before you go. So we have sent out advice on what to do—I don't want to get too far into that advice—but we will reiterate that, and we will send that advice out again. I am concerned that, for one reason or another, it does not always get to the Member. What I would say is: let's try again. I take on board the issue of the advice sent out on what protection and support is out there, when you are away from Westminster. I will reassure you that that will go back out to you, and I will make sure that every Member gets that again.

Q650 Nusrat Ghani: A number of MPs have expressed concern about their family's security. Unfortunately, details about someone's family home or children can be put on social media or shared online. What support or succour can we give parliamentarians with a family who are nervous about the security of their partner and children?

Mr Hoyle: I can give an example. A Member of Parliament came to see me and said they were very concerned, as their children had ended up on social media. They said they should not be there, and there was a threat to their family. It was a very difficult problem, so straight away we got on to social media, and it was taken down instantly. We can act and we can respond. As soon as I knew, I got on to it, and it was dealt with. That is what we are there for, and that is why we have people embedded in Parliament to do that for us. As I say, never ever let that happen: make sure you inform Eric and others, so they can deal with it straight away. It has happened—it should not have happened—but it was dealt with instantly. I want to reassure you that it can be dealt with immediately.

Q651 Nusrat Ghani: Mr Hepburn, do you think that MPs will have to undertake a risk assessment as candidates before they become MPs, not only for their security, but for the security of their family?

Eric Hepburn: On getting advice to Members and prospective Members, I suspect that in due course we will be better at advising them that this is the environment. On managing a social media profile, it is not just the Members: as you rightly say, it is family and friends as well. It is about making sure that everyone understands the risks that are being run, and making sure that only the details that Members really want to put online go online. That is the advice we give.

Q652 Mr Jayawardena: My Deputy Speaker, may I thank you for the commitments that you have made today, and indeed for all the work and engagement that you have led with Members since the sad murder of Jo Cox? You and Mr Hepburn are absolutely right that it is not just us—it is also our families. To that end, I should like to ask about three main points, and I may come back and ask further questions. First, on home addresses—Mr Hepburn will be aware of this—this is a cross-party issue that affects all of us. In 2009—a long time ago—the Political Parties and Elections Act was introduced and removed the home addresses of all candidates from ballot papers. However, MPs' addresses can easily be



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found on company documentation if they are company directors or on the electoral roll, unless a police superintendent has declared that their address should be withdrawn. What is being done about that?

Eric Hepburn: We recently talked to Companies House about this, because we were similarly concerned that if a Member's name was on the Companies House register, their details were public. We are told that the address that is required for the register is a communications address only. It does not have to be the MP's home address, or even their constituency office; it could be the address of an accountant or similar. You can use any address as long as it is a communications address. My advice is not to use your home address; do not give out those sorts of details, because they will be made public. Find an alternative address that is suitable for Companies House and its correspondence.

Q653 Mr Jayawardena: It is interesting that you say that. Perhaps further conversations are necessary, because Companies House has advised other Members of Parliament that specific letters from police—very like the case for the electoral roll—have to be obtained for those details to be withdrawn from the public register. Perhaps further discussions need to be undertaken with Members who have experienced those things. Again, this is a cross-party issue that affects many Members.

Secondly, yes, we are looking at hate crime and at social media, but we are also looking at older technologies such as email, which can be used against us. It is not just hate crime in the sense that we have discussed: fixated loners use email against us for other reasons. When people set up fake email addresses to impersonate Members of Parliament, the police cannot do anything, so our reputations and names can be used against us without our even knowing. Anyone can go on to Google, Yahoo or anywhere, register an email address and start signing letters as Ranil Jayawardena, Member of Parliament for North East Hampshire. It is not a crime to do so. Let me be clear: I am not criticising the dedication of the police or the work that they are trying to do, but is it time we reconsidered the security risks of the impersonating of MPs? That is also to the detriment of our democracy, which Mr Hoyle said must be foremost in our minds.

Mr Hoyle: You are absolutely right. Going back to your other point, I think protecting MPs' addresses is very important. The only problem is, I can protect my address, but if you go into the village and ask anybody who knows me, it'll be, "Second right, turn left, right again and that's the MP's house". We can never think that we're safe, and the longer you are there, the more they know where you live, and the knowledge grows.

But you are right: we should not have people impersonating a Member of Parliament. It can also skew an election, and that interferes with democracy. I do take those points on board, and we need to reflect on them, come back to them and have further discussions. The last thing we need is people impersonating MPs. I thought that it could be stopped. If you're telling me that there are things we need to look at, let us take that away and see what we can do about it.



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Q654 **Mr Jayawardena:** Thank you for that commitment again. I wonder whether you could add to that, Mr Hepburn. The Chairman has talked about the way in which we have approached Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and highlighted their failings. You have outlined how you've approached those companies to get them to take down material. Have you got relationships with Yahoo and Google to get them to close down fake email accounts and obtain IP addresses where possible so that that can be reported to the police?

Eric Hepburn: We have good relationships with both those companies. We have good account managers and, within the regulations and laws that we are allowed to act within, we will do that. On the particular question of obtaining IP addresses, I am afraid that I don't know.

Q655 **Mr Jayawardena:** My last area of questioning is on the harassment of Members. In the areas of harassment, violence and abuse where further action can be taken, can either of you shed any light on the success that Members have had in prosecuting or having the Crown prosecute individuals?

Mr Hoyle: There are people in jail at this moment.

Q656 **Mr Jayawardena:** Are there cases that have not been successfully prosecuted? If so, is that a legal issue or another matter entirely?

Mr Hoyle: Like everything, as you know, the CPS would look at a case to say, "That's below the bar" or "That's above the bar". That is beyond our control. I would like the bar to be lowered to take more cases to remind people that it is not acceptable. Cases have led to people serving prison sentences. We know that certain MPs continue to get harassed. It comes back to what I said earlier about certain MPs being targeted more than others. We take that very seriously, the police have taken it very seriously, and the prosecutions have been very successful so far.

Eric Hepburn: To add to that, we encourage all Members to report all the incidents. Only by having the information and the facts can we build the case up, and that then leads to the prosecutions.

Q657 **Mr Jayawardena:** Are there specific pieces of legislation that you think need to be reviewed?

Mr Hoyle: I do not want to get into the political field of deciding what we need to review. I genuinely believe that social media is a new way people are using. I think that we ought to reflect on that, and that it should be reviewed sooner rather than later. When Ministers come in later, they may want to add to that.

Mr Jayawardena: Thank you for all those answers. Perhaps I could also, through you, Mr Hepburn, thank all the staff who work very hard to keep us safe.

Eric Hepburn: Thank you very much.

Q658 **Byron Davies:** I would like to add my voice to that and say thank you very much to both of you for what you are doing, and particularly to you,



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Mr Deputy Speaker, for what you are doing to ensure that democracy remains at the forefront of all this.

Mr Hepburn, you mentioned the Home Office. You get advice from Home Office experts. That does not inspire much confidence in me, and I will tell you why. We have talked about the events that we all attend and the fact that we spend weekends visiting different places. One of the things that we do of course is drive around in our vehicles. You know as well as I do that there are many scams with the DVLA for obtaining details from registrations. What work have you done in that area?

Eric Hepburn: I have not done any work on the DVLA car area. It is something we can certainly look at it if it is a real issue for us; I am very happy to do that.

Q659 **Byron Davies:** It is for me, actually; I don't know about my colleagues. We use our vehicle to drive around in. It is very easy, as you are aware, to pick up a newspaper these days and find people who have had their details obtained by various means through the DVLA. It is quite easy to block numbers. I just wondered whether you would look at that.

Eric Hepburn: I am very happy to take it away, but we haven't looked at it so far.

Q660 **Byron Davies:** Going back to the issue of London addresses, can I just tell you a personal experience that disappoints me greatly? I was asked by my local force, probably about last summer, to supply details of my London address for security reasons, which I did. I have since been asked three times by the Metropolitan police for details of my London address, which I have supplied. I spoke to the superintendent who runs it the other day, and who I think is here running security issues regarding these addresses, and he couldn't give me an explanation as to why I have been asked four times for that. My concern is where those details have gone to.

Eric Hepburn: The answer would be that the police would like to put on their systems that they know who an address relates to—an MP or not.

Q661 **Byron Davies:** I recognise that, but four times? Where have those details gone to? You can see that I have no great faith in the system at the moment.

Mr Hoyle: You are absolutely correct. If that information was given, why was it not transferred and that was the end of it? You have quite rightly just brought that to our attention, and we can take that on board. We need to check with the local force and ask, after they gathered the information, whether they did not send it through and whether they sat on the information while this happened. We also need to find out why it took the Met four times, and whether it has been recognised that your address has been flagged in London. You have quite rightly raised that with us. We can take that on board and we will certainly come back to you on that particular detail.

Q662 **Byron Davies:** Okay. One of the issues that the superintendent



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mentioned to me was resourcing; he said they were short of resources. Who supplies the resources for this?

Mr Hoyle: Which part?

Byron Davies: For the security department here within Westminster.

Mr Hoyle: The House pays it via IPSA, which contributes to making sure that happens. People are paid for who work within the estate in order to deliver that. That is funded.

Q663 **Byron Davies:** Are they well resourced, do you think?

Mr Hoyle: If there is a weakness within resources, we will certainly ensure that that is filled. If need be, we will certainly go back to ensure that, if money is needed, we will put the case to get that addressed. We believe we are filling the gaps very quickly, but it is not apparent where the gaps are. What I do not want to do is put people in for the sake of it and waste money. We have to make sure that the right resources are going into the right places. It is so far, so good, but we have to make sure that we continue to get that right. I always thank Eric and all the team who are looking after Members. They work very hard and are very dedicated. If they say they need some extra resources, we will certainly look at that straight away.

Q664 **Chair:** A couple of final follow-up questions. We talked about online abuse earlier. Can you just confirm that you agree that a robust debate on social media as a way of holding MPs to account can be a very good thing and part of us having a vibrant democracy? Do you also agree that there is a difference between that kind of robust debate, when we will all have all kinds of angry disagreements, and the sorts of threats or racist and targeted abuse that we have seen, which is unacceptable?

Mr Hoyle: I totally agree; absolutely. We want a robust debate, but it has to carry on in a respectful way. The last thing we want is MPs having headless corpses sent through. The attacks and the abuse, whether racial or homophobic, is totally unacceptable. To have robust debate is good for democracy. Once you step outside that, that is the barrier—no more, that is enough. That is when zero tolerance must step in.

Q665 **Chair:** On racist abuse and threats that cross the line, can you and do you follow up with some of the social media companies about this? For example, when we took evidence from Twitter, James Berry raised cases of anti-Semitic abuse aimed at an MP that is still online, despite the fact that Twitter has accepted that it is against its community standards. It has been used in a court case as well, but it is still there. Do you do follow-up activity to ensure that, for particular MPs who are known to have been targets, the social media companies do what they are supposed to do and remove that kind of abuse?

Eric Hepburn: It would be an ongoing case. Yes, we would seek to follow up with the social media companies.

Mr Hoyle: That is why we want the embedded people in there: in order to check that what we are told is being done is done.

Q666 **Chair:** Could we go back to the issue of physical threats? Jo Cox was murdered by a far-right extremist. Would you agree that that is terrorism?

Mr Hoyle: There is a case there. Eric may take a different view, but my view is that it was the extreme right wing. That became apparent afterwards, so we can put the picture together around that. What I would say is that whether it is somebody from the right wing or a fixated person who may carry out the same threat or act of violence, it is totally not acceptable and we have got to stop it. Of course, I am very worried both about the right wing and the extreme left wing. Wherever that threat comes from, we have to take it seriously and protect the Member from it. With hatred, whether extreme right or extreme left, we must make sure that we put in place the best protection for that Member that we can. That is what we are charged to deliver.

Q667 **Chair:** And you would apply that to the kind of Islamist extremism and the motivation for the attack on Stephen Timms as well.

Mr Hoyle: Absolutely, and to threats to a number of women MPs out there. A lot of others are continually getting those threats, and we do not stand by and allow it to happen. We put other measures in place and there are other ways of dealing with it, which we do. I do not want to go into those—you would not expect me to—but we take them seriously. There is additional support to certain MPs when it is required, and that has happened instantly.

Chair: Thank you for your evidence today. We look forward to the further evidence from those individual cases, when you have it, and the results of the survey.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you and I were elected together 20 years ago today. I do not think that either of us would ever have imagined that we would be holding this inquiry in the light of the murder of one of our colleagues.

Mr Hoyle: Absolutely. It seems a long time ago that you were kicking that ball at Castleford to kick off that first game of rugby league when we first got elected, but that is the nature of how things have changed.

Thank you for allowing us to give evidence to your Committee. I would also like to put on record our thanks to the staff who we employ in this House to protect our Members.

Chair: It is heartbreaking that we have to have this inquiry at all, but thank you very much for the work that you are doing.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Sarah Newton MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Vulnerability, Safeguarding and Countering Extremism, Home Office, and Robert Buckland QC MP, Solicitor General, Attorney General's Office.



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Q668 **Chair:** I welcome the second panel before us today: the Solicitor General and Ms Newton, the Home Office Minister. We want to continue to ask you questions as part of our hate crime inquiry. May I start—I ask both of you to respond to this—by asking about National Action, which is a proscribed organisation? It was proscribed in part for promoting and encouraging acts of terrorism, including encouraging terrorist activity after Jo Cox’s murder, and to try to prevent it from spreading its poisonous propaganda. You will be aware of media reports that National Action members are gathering and organising under different names now. Is that the kind of thing you would expect the police to monitor and take action on?

Sarah Newton: You raise an incredibly serious point to start us off. It has been proscribed as a terrorist organisation. Tackling extreme right-wing views is a key part of our hate crime strategy, which we launched in July. Clearly, we would expect action to be taken against that organisation or any organisation that is peddling such vile, extreme and totally abhorrent right-wing views.

Q669 **Chair:** We have raised with YouTube some National Action videos and have asked for them to be removed. I have here another National Action video, still live on YouTube. Has the Home Office asked YouTube to remove National Action videos and propaganda?

Sarah Newton: Absolutely. We have a special unit that is set up to look online and find this material, and, when it is found, to go to wherever it is and ask for it to be taken down. I am aware that there are still two sites where people could access this material. They are hosted overseas, and that is the issue—that they are hosted in overseas countries. They have been approached. They have been asked to take it down and have refused. It is my understanding—I have seen this for myself—that when you actually put that organisation into your search engine, and the website pops up, if you try to open it up and look at the images, a screen comes up saying, “Not available.” That is a filtering regime that we have put in place to prevent people in the UK from seeing this stuff. Now, if you have evidence of that not working, of course I want to see it and of course I will take it up with that unit, to see what more we need to do.

Q670 **Chair:** I think that is the theory. A week ago, all we did was a search on YouTube of National Action—an organisation that was proscribed by the Government several months ago, specifically to prevent it from recruiting people to this kind of vile extremism—and there was a whole series of videos live on YouTube at that time, with just a very simple search to come up with them. That screen did go up by the following day, as a result of the particular ones that we reported to Google; however, a whole series of others, which we had not individually reported but which also came up with the same National Action search, had not been taken down.

I wrote to Google on Friday. A few more have since been taken down, but I have another one up on the screen here now where that has not happened. Are you expecting that the Home Office or the police or the



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Select Committee are going to have to do these searches, or do you think it is about time, frankly, that Google did its own search using its own fantastic search engines to find this stuff and stop it being available for people to see?

Sarah Newton: I totally agree with you. I totally agree with you. We have guidance in place. We have agreements in place. We have voluntary codes that everybody has signed up to. It is time for them to deliver.

Robert Buckland: We have the hate crime action plan, which commits providers such as Google to taking down illegal content within 24 hours. That is an agreement, and we expect those agreements to be honoured. Frankly, if not, why not?

Q671 **Chair:** So it is for them to take things down once you or other people have reported it to them, but what about them taking some responsibility for banned organisations—for terrorist organisations or for child abuse? Do you think they should take some responsibility to actually search things out themselves?

Robert Buckland: You know that when an organisation is proscribed, consequences follow. Their activities are unlawful, and that is a very serious step to take by any Government. It is based on very clear evidence about activity that is clearly contrary to the criminal law. That is why this Government acted in the way that we did. So we expect those consequences to follow, and we expect to be supported by organisations such as Google and other social media networks.

Chairman, you asked about this organisation breaking off and masquerading in other forms. It is certainly our hope and expectation as Ministers that the security authorities and those responsible for our safety are keeping a very close eye on the situation when it comes to extreme far-right activity. It is a growing problem. When you look at the figures with regard to referrals to Prevent and Channel, a growing percentage of referrals are now of far-right extremism, as opposed to some of the more familiar streams of extremism that we have been debating for some years.

Q672 **Chair:** I want to come on to ask you a bit more about far-right extremism, but just to conclude on the issue of Google, I am still not clear about what you expect them to do. Given that the National Action videos are recruitment videos and are doing exactly the kind of thing that has been banned, would you agree that Google are effectively aiding and abetting an illegal organisation and illegal activity by continuing to show these very easily available videos?

Sarah Newton: They are certainly not doing what they said they would do. They clearly agreed with us that this is absolutely wrong, and that they wouldn't provide a platform for terrorist or extremist organisations. They agreed that within 24 hours of anybody finding it, they would take it down. What they need to do is to get on and do what they said they are going to do.

Q673 **Chair:** But I am asking for one step further than that. I am not simply



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asking about what happens if we or somebody else finds another one and has to report it individually to them. Do you think they also have a responsibility to proactively search not for everything, but at least for terrorist organisations that have been banned by the Government or for online child abuse, for example? Facebook and Twitter told us that they took proactive action on child abuse and terrorism. Google told us that they did not.

Robert Buckland: This is important, Chair. You know from your experience in the Home Office that those activities are underpinned by criminal legislation. In particular, section 2 of the Terrorism Act 2006 created an offence of the dissemination of terrorist material, either intentionally—we would not say that the social media platforms are doing it intentionally—or recklessly. I think the criminal law is there as a clear boundary beyond which people should not stray. While Sarah Newton is absolutely right to talk about expecting these organisations to step up to the plate, in terms of the arrangements and agreements we have with them, ultimately the criminal law is there to be enforced if things do not work.

Q674 **Chair:** Can I ask you, then, to look at whether Google's continued inability to remove this material, despite it having been raised with them repeatedly, is in any way against the criminal law? Google said that they are now taking on a series of additional staff. They said: "We'll be hiring significant numbers of people...to increase our capacity to review questionable content for advertising". They have done that in response to losing some advertising revenue from Marks and Spencer and others. Would you agree that if they are capable of doing that in response to the loss of advertising revenue, and are taking on extra staff in order to do that, they ought, given how rich they are as a company, to have the capacity to take on a few extra staff to pursue terrorist or criminal activity online as well?

Sarah Newton: Yes, absolutely. They need to listen to their customers. At the end of the day, they are a consumer business. Clearly, their customers are highly dissatisfied with their action. They are losing hundreds of millions of pounds of advertising revenue. The Government is not advertising with them. We put it on hold. They need to clean up their act; otherwise, they are going to be out of business. Clearly, they can find the resources to meet the needs of their customers. Their customers do not want to be associated with the hateful and vile types of material that you are talking about.

Q675 **Chair:** You said in your response to the Intelligence and Security Committee's inquiry into the terrible murder of Lee Rigby that you are working with companies to produce industry standards for identifying, removing and referring terrorist activity. The hate crime strategy that you published seems to refer only to having a ministerial seminar on this. I am hoping it includes more than that and that you have made more progress than that. Can you tell us what progress you have made in getting those standards agreed?



Sarah Newton: Yes. We have got the Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit. A huge amount of work goes on between the National Crime Agency and specialist officers to look at making sure that everybody understands what the laws are and what is acceptable by educating people and training them up.

If I may, I will tell you about a new thing that we have recently set up as a demonstrator site—MOPAC is hosting it, but it is a national online referral hub for hate crime. It is a partnership between police—there are additional resources and the Government are putting in some £420,000—working with the industry. The whole purpose of it is to look at how we can more intelligently look at the data, find the sites and the information online and go searching for that proactively. We are using a lot of the lessons we have learnt from a lot of very successful work on CSE online to make sure we are using all the tools and the latest technology to really bear down on this. Those are two particular actions we have taken.

Robert Buckland: From the CPS's point of view, there is a lot of work going on with regard to refreshing guidelines on the way that social media cases are prosecuted and understanding the clear link to hate crime. Recently, the DPP met representatives from Twitter and Google to discuss the revised social media guidelines. It is very important that prosecutors feel confident in being able to build an evidential base for their cases. In the past that has frankly been difficult, but the direct communications we are now having with the platforms mean that it should be a more straightforward exercise. That is vital if victims are to have any confidence in the criminal justice process.

We also find that a lot of on-street offending often reflects what is going on online. There is quite a strong influence now, and that is being readily understood by not just prosecutors but police. There is a lot of detailed work going on to fill the aspirations of the strategy.

Q676 **Chair:** I am sure you would agree that a lot of the things we discuss in terms of online hatred and abuse are not a matter for the criminal law, the Government or police, but might still be an issue of responsibility for social media companies. When it comes to illegal activities—terrorism, online child abuse and so on—and whether illegal material is being removed, do you think it is time to look at the kind of approach that Germany is now looking at about whether there should be fines on social media companies if they do not remove illegal material fast enough?

Sarah Newton: Tackling this issue is a key priority for the Government, and everything is under review. As you say, it is draft legislation in Germany; once we get a hold of that draft legislation, we will look at it very carefully. We will do absolutely everything we can to keep people safe.

Robert Buckland: I think it is important that we look carefully at the German example. What I am chary about doing is giving these companies too much power to determine what is and is not acceptable. We want to avoid unforeseen consequences, but as Sarah says we need to look very



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carefully at that framework of legislation and, yes, adopt it if it none of the alternatives are working.

Q677 Tim Loughton: Welcome, Ministers. I think this is the first time you have been in front of our Committee, Mr Buckland. I seemed to be in front of your previous Committees on many occasions before you became a Minister, so this is my opportunity to get my own back. The Chair has spoken about developments in the last week or so. All of a sudden social media companies are in the news and having to appear, in certain cases, slightly contrite and take the situation seriously. That is probably a result of the publicity about the problem that this Committee has helped to deliver, and the response of their revenue streams—advertisers—hitting them in the pocket, but in no way does it seem to be a result of Government action, threats of action or honouring action plans as Minister Buckland put it. Is it right that that should have been the catalyst for this situation?

Robert Buckland: I take your point, Mr Loughton. It has been said, but I do think that publicity is the best form of disinfectant—it is a well-worn cliché. I do not think it would be right to say that the Government have been supine or inactive on all this. The agreement that we reached with the Googles and Facebooks was not just national, but has international consequences in terms of the 24-hour notification. While I pay tribute to the work of the Committee and others in highlighting the failures we have seen, we have made a considerable amount of progress—certainly from the era that I remember, when we were coming to grips with social media as prosecutors. We found, first, a lack of co-operation with the prosecuting authorities, and secondly denials by these organisations, in front of Committees like this, that they had any real responsibility—other than the fact that they were search engines, and were therefore not responsible for what was being published online. We have moved a long way. Yes, a lot more needs to be done, but Government is playing its part as much as Members of this House are in getting that message across and getting the change we need.

Q678 Tim Loughton: Okay, but frankly, as the Chair has pointed out—there have been numerous examples from members of this Committee—it is a voluntary agreement on takedown in 24 hours, but you're lucky if it's 24 months in some cases. Things have been pointed out by this Committee that were clearly bordering on illegal or certainly against the codes of those social media companies, but they remain on those sites, having been challenged. If I went to my local newsagent and paid the newsagent to put up a sign that said, "Mrs Miggins of 1 Acacia Avenue, Penge, is a filthy Jew bitch"—a phrase that has frequently appeared on social media—I would expect a good chance of being prosecuted, along with the newsagent, potentially, as an accessory. If I were to do that on social media, it would seem that the consequences are negligible. Can that be right, under the law of the land?

Robert Buckland: It is not right, but we have seen some recent examples where that sort of behaviour online has been successfully prosecuted. Indeed, one of the complainants was one of our colleagues.



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Luciana Berger, the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree, made a complaint. Joshua Bonehill-Paine was prosecuted as a result of his unlawful and criminal activity, and he received a sentence of two years' imprisonment. I was glad to note that the High Court judge who sentenced that case made remarks about the deterrent effect of a maximum sentence in a case of that severity. It is vital that the courts send the message out clearly to perpetrators that just because they are sitting in a room far away from the public, it does not mean they do not come within the remit of the law. Online or offline, that sort of racist, intimidatory behaviour will be dealt with, and dealt with properly.

Q679 Tim Loughton: Of course, our colleagues gave private testimony to this Committee for our anti-Semitism report, and what we were told was absolutely shocking. It is gratifying that those prosecutions have taken place. The trouble is, they are the exception rather than the rule.

I want to come back to a point that Minister Newton made about exploring the possibilities of technology. In terms of the proactiveness or lack of proactiveness of social media companies, I was quite alarmed when we had the woefully weak evidence from Twitter last week, which was equally excited by the prospect of being able to explore potential technology solutions to preventing this sort of stuff in the future. Twitter has been going for many years. For many years, other internet-based platforms have had automatic rejections if you try to post various things on them. They can recognise phrases, including the one I just mentioned. If I tried to sell an ivory object on eBay, that would automatically be vetoed. Those technology solutions have been there for many years, but the social media platforms have failed to use them, and now the Government are talking about possibly looking at technology solutions.

Should we not be more proactive? The Government have been very proactive in terms of illegal immigration. If I employ someone who turns out to be an illegal immigrant, it is not a defence for me to say, "I didn't realise." I could get a fine of up to £20,000, and similarly if I were a landlord. Why should we not have the same sort of proactive and robust deterrence when it comes to posting unacceptable stuff on social media?

Sarah Newton: I think we should. You gave some good examples of where the Government is really proactive. I should also say that child sexual exploitation online is an area where we have worked really well with industry. One child being sexually abused online and one image being available is one too many, but it is really pleasing to see the very low percentage of any material that is generated in the UK now. Our law and our partnership working with the industry has driven real change. We look at all sorts of clever technology to spot images and take down images en masse. That is the conversation we are having now, to say, "You managed to do it for that. We now also need to apply that learning and those systems and use artificial intelligence to do this." We are really saying to them, "It's time that you draw those lessons and start applying them to these areas".

Q680 Tim Loughton: But that proves my point, doesn't it? Google was one of



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those in the lead on child sexual exploitation images, using technology to detect flesh, for example. That was thorough to the extent that people complained they were unable to post pictures of their own babies on social media because they got caught up in it. That has been available for some years, yet we are now having conversations, and it appears that social media companies were not proactively prepared to pick up and run with the technology and solutions that were there. That suggests an awful lot of foot-dragging and that the Government have not been there to kick some backsides. So what about one solution, which again we discussed with the social media companies, whereby you have to give full disclosure of who the person is behind a Facebook page, a website or a Twitter account? It would not be publicly available but absolutely you would have to sign up and give your identity to the social media host so that if you transcended the law or their regulations and were taken down, you could not then automatically pop up with a different anonymous address. Is that something the Government would be prepared, potentially, to legislate on?

Sarah Newton: Mr Loughton, I can absolutely assure you that the Government have not been sleeping on their watch. If you think about one of the first actions of the new Home Secretary in July, it was to publish this very hate crime action plan, which committed us to a whole series of actions that we have been moving on with pace. I absolutely agree with you that the companies themselves could be and should be doing more. In the time it is going to take us to legislate, they could be dealing with the problem, and I want them to get on and do it. They need to do this for their customers.

Q681 **Tim Loughton:** But they are not getting on and doing it.

Sarah Newton: We are not leaving anything off the table. Google was called in to speak to Downing Street. They have been really read the riot act, and told that they need to step up, come back to Downing Street and explain exactly what they are going to do and in what time period. We are considering all options.

Q682 **Tim Loughton:** But Minister, with respect, the action plan says, "You should take something down in 24 hours, and if you don't we will summon you into Downing Street, and if you still don't, we will summon you back". Where is the action bit of the action plan that results in their taking it seriously and doing something about it, preferably proactively? As I said at the beginning, the only thing that seems to be moving them is the threat of being hit in the pocket by the advertisers, and not the action of Government.

Sarah Newton: I agree that the action of the advertisers and the potential loss of hundreds of millions of dollars of income is certainly focusing their minds and is very helpful. If they want to stay in business they are going to have to respond very quickly, and they will be able to do that much more quickly than waiting for our legislation. But we are considering all options, and we will really value the contribution of this

Committee and your recommendations, and we will take action—nothing is ruled out.

Q683 Tim Loughton: Can I make one final point on a slightly separate issue on which, Minister, you have shown a good deal of sympathy? It is disability and learning disability hate crime and the charity Dimensions UK, which I think we both met. Can you give assurances that that is absolutely not an add-on, that it will be considered with as much seriousness as the measures the Government are looking at to do with other forms of hate crime, terrorism and extremism?

Sarah Newton: Yes, I can absolutely give you that assurance. Having met people who are affected by this, I know that it is absolutely horrendous. We are in detailed discussions about more we can do. It is a clear manifesto commitment to review the law around hate crime and see what we can do, so we are absolutely prepared to take action. I think that Robert is taking even more action as we speak—he will probably update you.

Robert Buckland: Since I took office as Solicitor General, disability hate crime has been one of my priorities. I have felt that for too long it has been the poor relation—I think we have used that phrase. I know that Mr Burrowes has understood that very well, for example. I am glad to report that there has been an increase in prosecutions in the last year—a 41% increase—but we are still looking at hundreds of prosecutions rather than thousands, which is what is happening in other strands of hate crime. What has impressed me from my meetings with disability groups is third-party reporting and the power that that gives people with disability to have the confidence to go to speak to trusted third parties who can then help and support them when it comes to police complaints. I think that transforms the scene. The more we can see that deployed, the better I think it will be in terms of the number of complaints that come forward. I am personally very committed to making sure that disability hate crime takes its place as an equal part of the protected characteristics that underpin hate crime legislation in England and Wales.

Q684 Mr Jayawardena: Ms Newton, the Home Secretary described National Action as a “racist, anti-Semitic and homophobic organisation”. It is proscribed, but is proscribing a group really the most effective way to prevent any terrorist activity or, indeed, hate crime?

Sarah Newton: I think it is absolutely essential. It sends out a very clear message about what is not acceptable in our country. I think it is really important, but it is not the only thing that we need to do. I think we need to do a lot of things, starting with young people themselves. We invest a lot of money, as do the Department for Education and DCLG, in looking at what more we can do to enable teachers, youth workers and people working with young people to explain our shared values and what the boundaries in our country are, and to prevent young people—perhaps vulnerable young people—from being groomed by organisations to take up extremist and terrorist views.



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That work that we do in schools and communities is very important as part of the Building a Stronger Britain Together campaign that we have in the Home Office. The DCLG also works to make sure that people feel secure in their communities, are well integrated in their communities and are therefore not prone to being groomed in these appalling ideologies.

Q685 Mr Jayawardena: Is there a danger that proscribing groups—or, perhaps, proscribing too many groups—makes it harder to identify their members or associates, in that it makes it more shady and more underground?

Sarah Newton: No, I think it is really important to send out those really clear messages and establish those boundaries. Of course, what you are quite rightly raising is the challenge of the opportunity that social media presents for people to organise. It can be an incredibly positive thing to enable people to come together and create online communities, and to get really positive change and campaign for very positive things. Equally, it can be used by those with criminal intentions, so we always have to be vigilant. As I say, we have this counter-terrorism internet referral unit. We have people who are highly trained, who scour the internet to look for these groups and then take appropriate action.

Q686 Mr Jayawardena: As it happens, I agree with you that it is right to proscribe these organisations, and I agree that it is important that the Government send out a very clear signal that these sort of views and statements are totally unacceptable. It is also very good to hear about the seriousness with which the Government treat this. What more will the Government do in the upcoming White Paper to tackle this agenda?

Sarah Newton: We also look at disruption, which is very important, and at counter-narrative. Those are very important things that we do online as well. In terms of legislation, are you referring to counter-terrorism legislation? As we have said before, we will consult very widely if we decide to take any action.

Q687 Mr Jayawardena: As a small side-point, given the plan to change names—organisations simply change their names to try to get around legislation—you have been very clear that, just for the record, the Home Office will make sure that any attempt to circumvent legislation through such measures will be dealt with very swiftly, to make sure that no proscribed organisation is simply able to get out of it through a loophole.

Sarah Newton: No, you are absolutely right. We will be absolutely vigilant about the people who were known members of those organisations to see if they pop up somewhere else in some other organisation. We will be keeping a very careful eye.

Q688 Mr Jayawardena: Mr Buckland, I was intrigued by what you said as Solicitor General about YouTube potentially being reckless in its activities. Can I just be clear: are you saying that it is possible for not just the user to be liable and wrong in their actions, but also the platform?

Robert Buckland: I think so. First, the Terrorism Act includes bodies corporate, so the word “person” can mean a company, and there are



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different types of transmission, including transmitting contents electronically, distributing or circulating terrorist publications, providing a service to others that enables them to obtain, read, listen or look, and acquiring it by means of a gift, sale or loan. I think the legislation is clear. As I have said, it is very much my hope and expectation that these organisations will indeed come to heel and obey the law, but the law is there and it will be enforced if necessary.

Q689 Mr Jayawardena: What assurances have you demanded from YouTube that the instances that affected the Government will not happen again? Clearly, the Government has had to withdraw its advertising because it has been displayed alongside totally inappropriate, illegal content.

Robert Buckland: I think the Government's actions are a very eloquent expression of its attitude to this sort of practice, but they are accompanied by a number of important meetings. I mentioned the Director of Public Prosecutions having met these providers in the past to talk about how prosecution should work, and the Government wastes no opportunity in using these meetings as a way of expressing our commitment to making sure that the law of the land is complied with and that no individual or company is above or beyond the law.

Mr Jayawardena: Thank you.

Q690 Chair: Have you asked for your money back on the advertising?

Robert Buckland: Well, I am sure that Sarah Newton and I would agree that these discussions are ongoing. The full fallout of the Government's decision—indeed, it is not just the Government; it is a whole host of other organisations. I am sure we will continue to make representations, and Google, frankly, are having to learn the hard way when it comes to the importance of not just being corporately responsible but obeying the law.

Q691 Chair: Does that mean you have asked for your money back but you can't tell us how they have responded, or you don't know whether you have asked for the money back because it wasn't your Department that was paying for the advertising?

Sarah Newton: We are not going to give a running commentary on conversations between the Cabinet Office and Google. These are conversations that are going on very seriously between the Cabinet Office and Google.

Chair: We look forward to a further update from the Cabinet Office.

Q692 Mr Burrowes: When were the Government collectively aware of their adverts being found alongside extremist content?

Sarah Newton: Again, I'm not entirely sure. I know that Google went to visit the Cabinet Office on Monday.

Q693 Mr Burrowes: I appreciate that, and it was alongside others withdrawing their own adverts, but we had an action plan eight months ago that asked the question, "If not, why not?" That question is part of that action



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plan. Where are the teeth? We now see that, up to last week, money talked. Was this advert available before last week? I presume it probably was. Why haven't the Government's teeth been bared? I know No. 10's teeth have been bared on this, but where are the teeth in this action plan? Why didn't the Government take action before following suit behind a queue of well-known companies?

Robert Buckland: I understand exactly your point, Mr Burrowes, but, again, it would perhaps be misleading to think that the Government just published its action plan and then folded its arms and said, "There we are—we're done." There has been ongoing work with the providers to deal, for example, with the demotion of sites, via algorithms, that promote hate and criminality. Those discussions and negotiations have been ongoing since the plan was developed.

Q694 **Mr Burrowes:** Can I ask specifically whether you can provide us with the information about when the Government first knew that their adverts appeared alongside extremist content?

Sarah Newton: I am sure we can come back to you. We wouldn't want to mislead you in any way, so let's go back and find out exactly when, and then we can write to you.

Mr Burrowes: You mentioned that advertising revenues were on hold. Have you pressed the pause button or the stop button? Have you put a stop to that revenue stream, or is it just on pause until you have got certain conditions satisfied?

Sarah Newton: It is very much on pause, because the work that we do to target messages, particularly to vulnerable groups of young people to keep them safe online and prevent them from being groomed into gangs or exploited online, is really important. We run some extremely effective campaigns, such as "Disrespect NoBody", which is award winning and well known to be really successful. I wouldn't want to not advertise, but we need to make sure going forward that we vet in advance everywhere that we are going to advertise. That is something that I will be absolutely determined to do. Every campaign that we consider, we need to pre-vet exactly where we are going to place the media to satisfy ourselves. But we will only make those decisions after we have had a proper response from Google.

Q695 **Mr Winnick:** I was thinking a moment ago, when you were both asked about getting money back, that if any of my constituents were alleged to have claimed more than £10 or £20 in social security benefits, they would be asked very clearly to pay the money back, or else.

Let us come through what occurred last week. When was it actually decided by the Cabinet Office to withdraw the advertising from social media for the reasons which are known?

Sarah Newton: As far as I am aware, as soon as the information became available about what was happening, they took that decision. As I have



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already committed to do, Mr Winnick, we will write to the Committee, because I do not want to mislead you at all as to the exact information that you want.

Q696 **Mr Winnick:** Yes. I am just wondering whether it was before or after the meeting of the Home Affairs Committee last week.

Sarah Newton: As I say, it is very important that the Committee has accurate information, and I will make sure that we give you that information.

Q697 **Mr Winnick:** I appreciate that, but you are obviously the Home Office Minister involved. I thought you would already know, but I won't press that.

Could you tell me when it was last decided to withdraw advertising from the social media companies? Or was last week a one-off?

Sarah Newton: I can honestly say that I really don't know. Not in the time since I have been a Minister, which is a very short space of time—since May. Not in my time. Again, I would be very happy to research and give you an answer.

Q698 **Mr Winnick:** That is appreciated. Is that not surprising? Bearing in mind the sort of hate propaganda, racist propaganda, sexually exploitative comments—I think there would be loads in the House of Commons, regardless of party affiliation—that have appeared persistently on a regular basis on the three main social media companies, when you are asked when such action of withdrawing advertising was previously taken, you say you don't know and are going to let us know accordingly in writing. But wouldn't one have thought that previous action had been taken?

Sarah Newton: You raise a range of very harmful activities there. If you look at child sexual exploitation, there is clear law there and clear action that we take. We are world leading in our attitude to preventing images of children being sexually exploited online. What we have done in the UK is world leading. We set up a global alliance, because the vast majority of images that do appear in the UK now are from sites overseas, on platforms that we cannot control. This is a global, technological problem that we are wrestling with. So we put in huge amounts of action and investment to prevent that harm. What you are talking about here in terms of hate crime is different. I utterly agree with you and the Committee that we need to see the companies tackling, with as much determination and as much pace as they have done on child sexual exploitation online, these hateful images that we are seeing.

Q699 **Mr Winnick:** But, Minister, bearing in mind your and your predecessors' responsibility—I am not sure I should put particular responsibility on yourself—and the major responsibility of the Home Office, regardless of other Departments, in countering extremism and the rest, are there officials in the Home Office who have a regular responsibility to check what is happening on social media with racist and hate propaganda in general, as you have just stated? They report to you and to the Home



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Secretary to say, "This has occurred", and so on and so forth. Is that happening?

Sarah Newton: Yes. There is a counter-terrorism team and a hate crime team and, clearly, we have got the "Hate crime action plan", which was published only in July. They work very closely with law enforcement and, indeed, with the companies themselves. We have a very clear plan of action which we are working on with them, so it is—

Q700 **Mr Winnick:** I am sorry to interrupt, Minister, but while all this has been going on in social media, millions of pounds—literally, millions of pounds—of public money has been given to the media companies to advertise no doubt very worthwhile Government projects. While you have mentioned this investigation by the Home Office or how looking into these matters is done on a regular basis, at the same time over a long period public money has been spent along the lines that I just mentioned.

Sarah Newton: Yes—

Mr Winnick: Only last week was action taken. I find it incomprehensible.

Sarah Newton: When the issues came to light, action was taken immediately.

Q701 **Mr Winnick:** Solicitor General, may I follow up some of the questions that Mr Loughton and Mr Burrowes asked you? If some of this material appeared in any of the newspapers, whether national or local, it would be illegal, wouldn't it?

Robert Buckland: You are quite right, Mr Winnick, and there should be no distinction between online and offline publication.

Q702 **Mr Winnick:** Last week, when we took evidence from witnesses from the social media companies, we showed them some of the stuff that had appeared—Muslims praying and dogs behind them, the most vile anti-Semitic filth that one could imagine, and other things. You say, Mr Buckland, that if any of that appeared in newspapers, it would be illegal. If it is illegal—fortunately, it is, and very much so—so why should it be different for the social media companies?

Robert Buckland: I have agreed with you, Mr Winnick. There should not be any difference. What has happened over the years is that there has been a perception that, somehow, these things are too difficult to deal with. That is changing—the work that has been done by the CPS, working with the Twitters and the Googles of this world, to improve the way in which crimes are investigated, and the accessibility to the police and investigating authorities of material online, mean that these cases are now more straightforward, that prosecutions will occur, and that we will track people down even if they hide behind the cloak of anonymity.

Q703 **Mr Winnick:** In reply to the Chair, you were somewhat hesitant as Solicitor General—no doubt speaking on behalf more of the Government than of yourself—about what the German Government are doing. The German Government, which given the history of Germany is



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understandable, seem to be more effective and more determined to take action than the UK Government.

Robert Buckland: If I may say so, Mr Winnick, you are quite right to talk about historical context. While Germany now is a vibrant, wonderful democracy that is a very close partner of ours in the world, we have to remember that each nation will have particular circumstances and a history that has to be understood. I was a bit chary because I do not want to give too much power to organisations that have already assumed huge power in our lives. Social media did not exist 10 years ago, and now look at the influence they have, particularly in the lives of our young people. While I am saying that a lot of it can be an influence for good and a power for good, there are consequences and unforeseen issues that mean we need to take great care before moving down a road that, while it might bring greater regulation, might end up, ironically, giving these organisations even more power to determine what is right and what is wrong.

Q704 **Mr Winnick:** But it is being considered.

Robert Buckland: Yes, indeed. We are ruling nothing out. We will consider all these proposals very carefully. Indeed, the work of this Committee will help inform the Government's response to the Law Commission recommendations from 2014 that you will be familiar with.

Q705 **Mr Winnick:** As the Minister with responsibility for dealing with extremism, do you tell the companies—the private sector—that they are helping disseminate the sort of material that I and other colleagues have just been describing by advertising it? I know it is their decision at the end of the day, and they will have to decide whether it is legal or otherwise, but do you feel a responsibility, Minister, to say to these social media companies—household names—that by advertising they are in fact helping spread the sort of extremist poison that they should be deploring like the rest of us?

Sarah Newton: I don't hesitate in giving very direct feedback when I meet our stakeholders, but they are part of the solution as much as they are part of the problem. We have to work with them. We are dealing with fast-changing, global, technological phenomena. We are moving to situations in which harm can be done on file-sharing websites; it is not even on YouTube. There will be direct streaming straight on to people's mobile phones. This is a problem that we have to solve. The industry, Government and civil society—all of us—have to be part of the solution. Much as I wish that they would just get on and use the powers and their resources to make the changes, we are not ruling out anything, including having to compel them to take some of these actions.

Q706 **Mr Winnick:** The possibility of legislation is not being ruled out, if they are not willing to abide by what we expect them to do.

Sarah Newton: No, it is not being ruled out, but you know as well as I do that by the time we have legislated in this place, they could have solved the problem. I would rather they just got on and did it now.



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Q707 Mr Winnick: Minister, legislation can be made within 24 hours, as you are perfectly aware. We must not find excuses for delay.

Sarah Newton: There is no excuse here, but I think we all understand that this area is far from straightforward. I have said that it needs a global response. While we can control with our own laws in our own country, we would have to take ETJ on a lot of measures or come to global agreements. The UK participates in the cyber hate crime working group in Silicon Valley, the EU Commission's internet hate crime group and the international hate crime group. There is a huge global effort here, because these are global organisations. Each country has its own laws. We have world-leading laws and attitudes towards this, but we are only going to tackle this if we work with the industry and partners all around the globe.

Q708 Chair: Are you suggesting that the German legislation might not be effective because of jurisdiction issues?

Sarah Newton: I think it is something that we absolutely have to look at. I am keen to look at the German legislation—we both are—because if each country legislates in isolation, it will not be as impactful as a global response or having some of the major markets of the world, like ourselves and Germany, working together on it. Hence the reason why the UK plays such a leading role in all sorts of international bodies.

Q709 Chair: Mr Buckland, can you clarify the point you were making about not wanting to give social media companies more power? They already have community standards that they implement to variable degrees. They already have considerable power to remove things, if they so choose. In what way would legislation requiring them to remove illegal content somehow give them more power?

Robert Buckland: What I am trying to get at is the potential unforeseen consequences. When we draft legislation, definitions are very important, and they can be clarified by the statute themselves. Often, you would want to have a non-exhaustive list of the types of activity or content that would fall outwith the law, but by the very dint of having a non-exhaustive list, experience will then develop. We will see an evolving situation whereby certain items will perhaps be deemed to be outwith the law. I would rather this place was the ultimate arbiter of what we would deem to be lawful and unlawful. As a Parliament, I think we have to reflect the changing morals and views of our society. But it is for us, the elected representatives, to take the ultimate lead. That is why I am a bit wary about—

Q710 Chair: Do you believe that you cannot design legislation in a way that simply requires them to take down material that is illegal, as established by other legislation that has been passed by Parliament?

Robert Buckland: That is one way of doing it, to minimise the concern I have, but I am worried that legislation might not be sufficiently flexible to take into account the changes we see. The internet, as Sarah Newton has said, is a constantly evolving phenomenon. Things that we could not have imagined and frankly we thought had disappeared from discourse are now



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popping up on the internet. You are I are of the same generation, and what we thought was off limits is suddenly coming back, almost into the mainstream. You therefore need to be fleet of foot and flexible enough to deal with these changes. That is where, with respect, sometimes legislation can be a little bit clunky and not necessarily able to keep up to speed.

Those are the issues we need to look at carefully before we come to a final view about whether the German model is indeed the right one for us. Of course, Germany itself is only just embarking down this road. Let us keep a very close eye on what our friends are doing there. I am sure that this Committee will come up with some sensible proposals that we will want to look at very carefully, to build a system that is fit not just for the next five years but for the next generation.

Q711 Nusrat Ghani: I want to move on to Islamophobia and intra-Muslim hate crime. I will throw out some statistics that you are probably already aware of. The London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime said that Islamophobic offences had seen the biggest increase of any hate crime strand in the last 12 months, with a 65% rise in recorded offences. The Department for Communities and Local Government notes in the breakdown of religious hate crimes that anti-Muslim hate crime is at 56%. Do you think that the rise is down to people being aware of where to go to register incidents, or is there actually a spike in Islamophobic hate crime?

Sarah Newton: You raise a really important point. The data that you have just talked about is reported crime, and I think it shows an increase because we have started to collect the data, having introduced the different religious characteristics. We have put a lot of effort into educating people about what is a hate crime and providing support for third-party reporting organisations such as Tell MAMA so that people feel confident in coming forward.

I meet a lot of voluntary groups—I am sure you have taken evidence from them—and people were suffering in silence because they did not realise that they would be taken seriously if they came forward to the police. They did not know that these were hate crimes. It is really good that people feel more confident, and that they are more confident of the reaction that they will get from the police. We are seeing more prosecutions, and indeed more convictions.

When we see recorded crime going up in this area, we think that is a good thing, because we know that this is going on, and that there is a gap between the prevalence and the recording. We want to close that gap, we want to support victims and help them deal with their complaints, and we want to send a very strong message to society that this is not acceptable.

Q712 Nusrat Ghani: Are you aware of whether all police forces are monitoring and recording religion-based hate crime, and Islamophobia in particular?

Sarah Newton: Islam is one of the religions that they do record. Also, to help the Committee, I will reiterate the point Robert Buckland made:



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crimes that happen in the real world are taken just as seriously as crimes online, so if the police are recording hate incidents or hate crimes, they will record them whether they are in the online space or in the real world. This is very important.

If you think back to the Macpherson inquiry into the killing of Stephen Lawrence, a key recommendation was that we must record incidents, because that gives us really good information on what is happening in communities, so that we can not only have a criminal justice response but target resources into communities, so that we can build up more tolerant, integrated communities. It is very important from all those points of view.

Q713 Nusrat Ghani: We have taken evidence on anti-Semitism, and we also undertook an inquiry on the rise of far-right extremism. Earlier on, we took evidence on hate crimes that are committed against parliamentarians. There seems to be a thread: if you are a woman, you are more likely to be a victim. Evidence suggests that female Muslims are more likely to be victims of Islamophobic hate crime. How confident are you that the police are effective in not only recording these crimes, but addressing them?

Sarah Newton: We have been doing a lot of work with the College of Policing, looking at making sure that police officers have been well trained and have the tools that they need to understand what the crimes are and how to go about reporting them.

Let me assure you that HMIC will undertake an inspection of police forces in their handling of hate crime. That work will begin at the end of this year or the beginning of next year, and the scoping work is going on now. We will have an objective inspection of each force area. We will be able to see for ourselves who is doing a good job and if there are other areas that need improvement, and then we can obviously support those police forces.

Q714 Nusrat Ghani: Will there be particular training to look at Islamophobia, and victims when they are women?

Sarah Newton: That is part of the training that they will get on hate crime, but of course it is part of our VAWG strategy, which is a well understood, well recognised and highly regarded framework for supporting women and girls. We also see it as a core part of our VAWG strategy as well, so that police officers are well trained to support women, and to enable women to come forward when they are victims of any sort of crime.

Q715 Nusrat Ghani: Minister, may I just draw your attention to the report, "Faith Matters"? It is a Tell MAMA project that looked at intra-Muslim hate crime, and it also noted that hate crimes against the Ahmadi community grew from nine to 29 incidents over a 12-month period. Could you share with us what work is being done to support minority faiths within minority faiths?

Sarah Newton: That is a really good point. The work that we're doing with Tell MAMA and third-party organisations is absolutely critical. We



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have a range of third-sector partners that have real expertise in working with particular minorities, whether that is the Roma or the LGBT community. That is important work, which the Home Office funds, but it is also related to work that we do in education and in the Department for Communities and Local Government.

We are making sure that teachers, youth workers, and parents and guardians have good information to help young people to be resilient, to understand what is right and what is wrong, how to report crimes or incidents against them, and how to get the support they need. We are taking a very integrated, holistic approach.

Q716 Nusrat Ghani: And there is absolutely no tolerance for intolerance for perpetrators of hate crime, even when they are within communities that themselves might be victims of hate crime?

Sarah Newton: No. You are absolutely right to say that there is no place in our society for any type of hatred towards somebody, based on their race or their faith.

Q717 Nusrat Ghani: I have another question for you, Minister. Professor Goodwin told us that the Government's working group on anti-Muslim hatred was set up as "a symbolic way of gesturing to British Muslims that their grievances were being taken seriously", and that it was not given sufficient resources. What practical change to policy has the working group achieved?

Sarah Newton: I spend a lot of time listening to different groups, and we feed all their ideas into our mainstream policy development, whether it is on hate crime, VAWG or crime prevention. We want to make sure that the particular needs and concerns of that community are fed into all the policy areas that we are responsible for.

Q718 Nusrat Ghani: To be clear, is Islamophobic hate crime now recorded as a separate strand within hate crime, so that it can be recognised up and down the country and quantified?

Sarah Newton: Yes. Each of the faiths are recorded, so it could be Christianity, it could be Jewish people, or if you are a Sikh or a Muslim. Each faith is now recorded.

Q719 Nusrat Ghani: On social media, which isn't always the best way to gauge actual statistics, there is some evidence to suggest that ex-Muslims—Muslims who have given up their Islamic faith—can become victims of hate crime. Secular values underpin human rights, so what support and resources are there to support ex-Muslims who might become victims in a community when they are surrounded by Muslims who feel uncomfortable about them giving up their faith?

Sarah Newton: That must be a very tough thing for people to do. There are a range of third-sector organisations that we support. There are telephone help lines, there are reporting mechanisms, and people can be signposted to support groups.

Nusrat Ghani: Thank you.

Q720 Stuart C. McDonald: Can I turn again to far-right extremism? In earlier sessions, we have heard a little criticism of the Government's counter-extremism strategy. Some have said that it does not properly understand far-right extremism, perhaps focusing too much on neo-Nazism. There has also been criticism that the Home Office has not engaged properly with social science experts in the field. What analysis do the Government undertake of far-right extremism? Do you accept the criticism that there has not been enough interaction with expert analysts in the field?

Sarah Newton: The extreme right was a clear feature of the hate crime strategy that we published in July. I cannot comment on what happened years ago, but I can tell you that we take this extremely seriously. We have monitoring teams in the Home Office that constantly look at intelligence in this area so that we have the best evidence we can get about its prevalence and nature. We work with a range of external stakeholders, including academics and people doing research, to build up our understanding.

There is a broader question that we are exploring about the vulnerability of certain individuals who are more likely to be groomed into a whole range of activities harmful to themselves. We are beginning to understand that there are a lot more links between people who could be groomed into joining a gang and those who could be groomed into joining an extreme organisation. It is about looking at the underlying vulnerabilities, especially of young people, that make them more susceptible to being groomed into various activities. That is a lot of ongoing work that we are doing.

Q721 Stuart C. McDonald: That is helpful, but Professor Matthew Goodwin told us that there has been almost zero interaction by the Home Office with social science experts in assessing and enhancing understanding of the far right. You are rejecting that. Can you tell us what academics the Home Office has been interacting with, or do you want to write to us?

Sarah Newton: We have a chief scientific adviser at the Home Office. His responsibility is not just the sort of science that you might imagine related to drugs and which drugs we should be taking action against; it also relates to social science. He has a lot of engagement with academics. Can I tell you whether he has met Professor Goodwin? No, I cannot, but there is a lot of stakeholder engagement in all the work we do. We are very evidence-based in our policy making. Whenever we develop policy, we have public consultations. We have stakeholder forums for all our policy areas, including NGOs, professionals and academics. It is just a core feature of everything we do.

Perhaps to give you absolute satisfaction in an answer, I could write to you with the actual engagement in this particular policy area. Perhaps that would give you the answers you want. It underlines everything we do.

Q722 Stuart C. McDonald: It has also been reported recently that the number of neo-Nazi linked referrals to Prevent has actually overtaken cases



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involving Islamist extremism in some parts of the United Kingdom. How does the Home Office respond in terms of resources or particular policies or actions to tackle far-right radicalisation in these specific areas? Does it adjust its resourcing?

Sarah Newton: That is a really good point. Do we match our resource to the threat? Yes, we do. When we set out our overall strategies and plans, of course, if we see risks and threats emerging in a particular area, we will reallocate resources to those areas. We have a lot of intelligence, and we look at it every month. We are always assessing whether we have the right resource behind it.

To give you a really practical example, we were talking about the emerging threat of child sexual exploitation. We have virtually doubled the operational capacity of CEOP to make sure that it had the resources. We put in experts from GCHQ. They have more kit and more people. If we see this emerging threat, then we take action.

Q723 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Are you able to give me a practical example of how the Government have responded to the rise of far-right extremism in particular areas of the UK, for example?

Sarah Newton: That central unit will be picking that information up, and so will the local police forces. We will share data between those forces to make sure that there is enough response, in terms of pursuing those perpetrators and bringing them to justice if necessary. Alongside that, we use those data to look at how we can intervene in those communities and see what is going on in those communities where there is this tension and these issues are arising. From there, we will deploy other budgets. For example, the work that we are doing on Building a Stronger Britain Together through our network of community organisers, or work that the DCLG funds on hate crime.

We will look at a united response to a particular community that is facing particular challenges. For example, we have had conversations with police forces in Rotherham. Off the back of all of the well-known problems with child sexual exploitation, Rotherham has been under threat from the extreme right; there has been a whole series of demonstrations there. I went up and visited the police in Rotherham to see if they had the resources to deal with that from a police point of view. I met with the local MP, Sarah Champion, to make sure that the community has the resources it needs to look at a more community-level response. We are very hands on in looking at the analysis and going into communities to see what more we can do.

Stuart C. McDonald: Thank you for that.

Q724 **Chair:** How much funding actually goes into that?

Sarah Newton: I don't have the number off the top of my head, but where we see that threat we will find money to respond to it. If you want me to write to you and give you those examples, I would be very happy to.



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Q725 Chair: I think that would be quite useful. To be honest, it sounds like lots of warm words about everybody working together and lots of community partnerships and working and so on. However, unless there are significant resources to actually help that activity take place, at a time when local councils are facing huge budget cuts, I am slightly concerned that this isn't actually delivering in practice.

Sarah Newton: I could rifle through my pack; I am sure that I will have been helpfully provided with a number. I can give you the details of the funding that is sent through DCLG and the Home Office funding specifically to address hate crime at a community level and all of the Building a Stronger Britain Together work that we do in funding community organisers. I would be very happy to do that.

Q726 Chair: Isn't the reality that the funding, even just for preventing Islamist extremism, is actually very low—even in terms of the joint funding between the Home Office and DCLG?

Sarah Newton: As far as we can see from looking at the scale of the threat, we have the resources that we need to do the job. As I said, it is constantly under review. You will know from your time in the Home Office that it is a very fleet-of-foot organisation that is constantly looking for emerging threats and that has really good expertise in mapping emerging threats and looking at data. I think we can align resources. We allocate and move resources around. If we felt that we didn't have enough money to tackle this, we would put more money into it.

Q727 Chair: Sadly, the evidence on the prevention of Islamist extremism has actually been the reverse; there has been a lot of evidence that there is inadequate community prevention work taking place. I am therefore very sceptical that there is enough resource, in terms of dealing with the far-right extremist threat and so on, given what I know has happened in practice to other Prevent budgets.

Sarah Newton: Well, as my colleague said, we look forward to receiving your report on the findings from your inquiry. We are leaving nothing off the table in terms of what more we need to do to counter hatred and extremism in our country. I will very much welcome your findings, and if there is more we need to do, you can be assured that we will be looking at it very carefully.

Q728 Chair: Certainly having some of the facts about what is actually being funded, and also how many people each of those projects reach in practice, would be extremely helpful. Sorry, I interrupted Stuart McDonald.

Robert Buckland: Mr McDonald, I was just going to try to help to fill in some of these points by reminding the Committee that, in conjunction with the hate crime strategy, there was £2.4 million of funding for the protection of places of worship. That will deal a lot with the consequences of far-right extremism. There is also a programme of hate crime community demonstrations projects that I think is attracting funding of about £300,000 a year. That involves bids being made by relevant



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communities to deliver the aims of the Government's plan for tackling hate crime. Last year was the first year of the scheme. Further funding rounds have been received, and nine projects were awarded funding. We can provide you with more information about the outcome of those particular projects.

Sarah Newton: One of those is the East European Resource Centre. We are funding that work with the Polish, Lithuanian and Roma communities. A lot of the hatred that they are experiencing is from the extreme right. I have met with the team of people working on that, and it is a really good programme of community engagement to make sure that people know how to report, how to be safe and what support is available to them. That is just one of those demonstration projects. We will write to you with a lot of information about what we are practically doing.

Q729 **Stuart C. McDonald:** That's very useful; thank you. The more examples you can provide us with, the better. What you just said brings us on to the next topic, which is the issue of under-reporting. You touched on that earlier. As we have heard, sometimes there is under-reporting because of a fear the police will not take a report seriously, but at other times it is because of a lack of awareness about hate crime, particularly among the Roma community, the transgender community or disabled people. You gave one example of how you have tried to increase reporting and awareness among East European communities. Can you give other examples of how you try to tackle this more generally and the resources that have been put into it?

Sarah Newton: Absolutely. There is the overall reporting that you can do through True Vision, but what is really important is to work with organisations that are well known and well trusted, particularly in minority areas. We work with the alliance for Travellers and fund it to make sure that they have information and material that they can share with that particular group of people, so that they know how to report hate crime and are supported. Galop is another organisation that we support. It works particularly with the LGBT community. We have mentioned Tell MAMA. There is a whole range of organisations that we fund. My colleague mentioned hate crime demonstrator sites. We have funded nine projects, but there will be more funding for more projects. As those come forward and we are able to promote what is going on, we will expect more organisations to engage, and we will be able to fund even more organisations.

Q730 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Again, any further examples you can give the Committee would be appreciated.

Robert Buckland: I would be able to help with some more information about that. I am glad to say that the CPS has been working very hard, particularly with the Roma and Traveller communities. They held a national scrutiny panel back in mid-December to talk about hate crime and, in particular, engaging with the community. That is now resulting in an action plan being developed to address the issue of barriers to reporting, so that public confidence within the communities can be



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improved. DCLG announced in January £375,000 of new funding to further encourage the reporting and prevention of hate crime, particularly looking at race and faith groups. The Traveller Movement, which is a charity that aims to improve reporting rates for hate crime against the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, is going to receive £50,000 of that £375,000.

Q731 Stuart C. McDonald: Thank you. You mentioned the importance of data. Is there anything more we need to do to be a little bit more sophisticated in disaggregating the numbers, or is the Home Office pretty happy with where it's at, in terms of recording?

Sarah Newton: We are never ever complacent. There are always new data sources we look at to see if they can add more valuable information, so that we have a better understanding of prevalence and more information that enables the police and other groups to take action. We are never complacent at all. Working with people in communities will give us lots of good information about what more we need to do.

I mentioned right at the beginning of the meeting that one of the things we are funding is an online hate crime hub. It will be launched with MOPAC on 24 April. It is up and running now. That is a proof of concept investment, to create a national hub to look at what more information and data there are and what more we can do to enable the prosecution, detection and reporting of and education about hate crime. That is a significant sum of money; it is just over £420,000, with a firm idea in our mind that once we have done this proof of concept and proven how it is going to work, we will be able to spend more money on that and build on it.

Q732 Mr Burrowes: Are some strands of hate crime against certain groups more serious than others?

Robert Buckland: Well, you have to look at it from the point of view of the victim. For the victim, the consequences are very serious, so I think it would be wrong for the law to somehow create a hierarchy of hate crimes in discriminating between the protected characteristics. It is far better to look at it in terms of what the crime is. Obviously, some types of crime will be more serious than others, but I do not think that it would be right to elevate one characteristic above another.

Q733 Mr Burrowes: You mentioned the phrase "hierarchy of hate crime", which is the very accusation that organisations including the Equality and Human Rights Commission lay at the door of statutes. Mr Buckland, you have experience of legislation as a barrister, as a judge and as Solicitor General. The overall question is whether there is any need for an overarching single piece of legislation on hate crime, given that we now have different Acts, such as the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Criminal Justice Act 2003, that have different offences for different strands of hate crime that have come to the attention of Parliament, which has led to different sentencing options for courts. Do we not already have a hierarchy of hate crime in our legislation?



Robert Buckland: Tempting though it is for me to race ahead and say that we should develop a unified statute, I think we first need to take stock of the penumbra of crimes—very often very serious crimes—that are committed against people with one of the protected characteristics, but that do not fulfil the classic criterion of hate crime. For example, I will be dealing next week with a very serious assault in which the victims were part of the LGBT community. It is not classically a hate crime in terms of what we know from the legislation; none the less, it is an important issue in which the question of the sentencing uplift will be a live part of the debate.

As you know, one of the sad reflections of recent times has been the fact that the sentencing uplift available under the Criminal Justice Act—either under section 145 for race and religious aggravation or under section 146 for aggravation based on disability or sexuality—has not been used that much. There are evidential problems with it: the court has to be satisfied to the criminal standard that the offence has demonstrated either hostility based on one of the five protected characteristics or an aggravation because of the perpetrator's motivation. That is sometimes very difficult evidentially, but I am glad to see that in the last couple of years there has been an increase in use of the sentencing uplift. I believe that that is because prosecutors have become better trained and judges are much more aware of the powers they have. We are now seeing these provisions being used better. Why do I cite that? Well, it is an example of the existing law and the existing framework being used more effectively. I think we still have work to do to enforce the existing law before we charge ahead and create yet more legislation.

I am not ruling out the possibility of legislation. The Law Commission's recommendations were interesting in the respect that they presented two options. The first was that the Government should conduct a wholesale review, which is of course our manifesto commitment that we will deliver. Failing that, the second option, which it did not regard as its preferred option, was for the Government to legislate in the way that you perhaps describe. I am in active discussion with my colleagues in the Ministry of Justice, who, of course, lead on this; I can assure you that our manifesto commitment will be honoured.

Q734 **Mr Burrowes:** Finally, you will know, in terms of management of legislation, that these things do not easily come round, although we often have criminal justice legislation. The Prisons and Courts Bill has already had its Second Reading. Is this not the moment for looking at whether we need legislation?

Robert Buckland: Tempting though it is for that debate to happen at the Committee or Report stage of the latest Bill, I think it is actually the work of this Committee, together with Government, that can prepare the ground in a more effective way, so that we can have a review or go down the legislative route in a more considered way. I am sounding a little cautious and asking people to think about unforeseen consequences but I think that in this area legislating in haste would not be the best way forward.



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Mr Burrowes: Fair enough. Lay down the challenge to us.

Q735 **Naz Shah:** I apologise that I came late; I was speaking in a debate that was, interestingly enough, on the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I have come from that to this, and there are a couple of questions I have for you. One of them is from the evidence that was presented to the Home Affairs Committee by Averroes, a think-tank. I would just like to read something of what they have given us. They have said that "laws prohibiting hate speech against religion have too many exemptions and the burden of proving the intent to stir up religious hatred is too high, particularly when compared to laws prohibiting hate speech against race or ethnicity". They go on to state: "In the context of growing Islamophobia it is striking that much of the vile vitriol aimed at Muslims is perfectly permissible under the law". They believe that it should be considered unacceptable for hatred to be directed towards individuals based on their identity, whether it be racial or religious. I would just like your views on that.

Robert Buckland: First of all, thank you very much Ms Shah for raising that issue. It is, indeed, right to observe the fact that the test under the law for incitement to religious hatred is different from that for racial hatred, but I am sure that you remember the high profile debate at the time of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 under the last Labour Government about how the line was to be drawn between proper expressions of freedom of speech about religion and its effects on society, and the need to protect those of us who profess a religion and a faith. I think that the balance that was struck by the then Government was, indeed, the right one, whereby offences in which there is clear intent should be prosecuted and fall without the law, but that there needs to be a balance struck to allow a space within which we can have vigorous debate about religious faith.

I do not make any apology for that distinction. I think it was the right one, but of course it does not end there when it comes to Islamophobia. Religion is one of the five protected characteristics that the law recognises and which will, as I have already said, be an aggravating factor when it comes to sentencing uplifts in a whole range of different offences, for examples crimes of serious assault against people that might be motivated by hostility towards religion or, indeed, demonstrating hostility at the time of the assault. So although it is right to look carefully at the tests within the Public Order Act as amended, that is not the whole picture. There are whole swathes of criminal law, for example the Malicious Communications Act and the Communications Act 2003, whereby the fact that perpetrators are acting in a hostile way to people just because they are Muslim or because they have a particular faith allows the police and the CPS to intervene and prosecute where there is evidence.

Q736 **Naz Shah:** In light of what you have just said, the fact is that the CPS in the last nine years prosecuted only five cases, with four convictions. Two example cases provided by the CPS were not of Islamophobia or religious hatred, one related to Bilal Ahmad, who encouraged copy-cat attacks on MPs following the stabbing of Stephen Timms, and the other to a group of



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Sikh men who sought to entrap Muslim men attempting to seduce Sikh girls, so surely they cannot be fit for purpose in that department, can they?

Robert Buckland: I do not think it is so much the fault of the law, and it is not a question of fault. Perhaps what has happened over the years is that there has not been that sense of confidence, that people can come forward and have their complaints dealt with seriously. I want the message to go out loud and clear that those days are gone, and should be gone, and that whichever part of society you are from, whichever community you are from, if you have been the victim, or indeed perceive yourself to have been the victim, of a hate crime, your complaint will be dealt with properly and seriously. More than that, you will get support through the system if you are a complainant or a victim of crime.

The work that the CPS has been doing to improve the experience of complainants is bearing fruit. I do not pretend that we are anywhere near where we should be, but it is encouraging to note that the number of prosecutions continues to rise and the number of referrals to the police on hate crime continues to rise, yet in our society, reported incidents of hate crime continue to fall. There is still a gap between the 222,000 reported incidents of hate crime and about 62,000 police referrals. That is still too big, and that will, I am sure, include a large number of people in the Muslim community, but I think the direction that we are going in is the right one. That is not me being complacent; that is me actually trying to spur people on to improve those reporting and prosecution rates.

Q737 **Naz Shah:** You have just cited the lack of confidence. Minister Newton, what is your Department doing to increase confidence in communities?

Sarah Newton: We are doing work with a range of community organisations themselves. I am really pleased that you yourself came along to one of our stakeholder engagement meetings really quite recently. The key is to work at the grassroots in communities where people are, see how they are affected and build up those trusting relationships with the Home Office and law enforcement so that people feel confident. Investing in those third-party organisations is critical. We do that directly by funding organisations on hate crime, enabling more reporting and more education and letting people know exactly what their rights are, all the way through to work that we do on community integration through "Building a Stronger Britain".

Very importantly, the decision that we have made to have compulsory PSHE and SRE in schools is really going to help, so that every child, in an age appropriate way, understands our shared values, understands what is right and wrong and is told what help is available to them. If somebody is suffering and they do not know who to turn to in their community, they will know from that education they have had at school that help is available, what the law is and where to turn. So I think we are approaching it holistically, from young people through to supporting community groups.



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Q738 Given the evidence we have heard about the state of the country in terms of hate crime and the facts that we have before us, if we get to the stage where communities are empowered and they have lots of confidence, will the police be capable, or are they being overstretched in dealing with hate crime? There has been a huge rise. We heard from Twitter, Facebook and Google last week about the amount of that kind of crime on those platforms—cybercrime and hate crime. It is online and offline. Have our police been overstretched in terms of dealing with all this?

Sarah Newton: We work very closely with our colleagues in the police force, and for each of the policy areas we have a police lead. We also have police and crime commissioners who take a lead on each of the strands of the work of the Home Office. We are thoroughly engaged with them. We all monitor patterns of recorded crime to make sure that they have the tools that they need to do that work. Certainly, in my conversations, a lack of resource has not been raised with me, but I can reassure you that we are not at all complacent. If there are emerging threats and we need to change resources, we do that. We are always looking at the data.

In terms of the spikes you mentioned, we saw post the referendum a 41% increase in reporting of hate crime, but it is reassuring to see how that has fallen away to almost pre-referendum levels. When we look at the data, our understanding is that most of this increased recording is because people are more confident about coming forward. As Robert Buckland has said, if we look at the data overall, we are still a very tolerant society. If you actually look at the experience that people have—the best evidence we have from the crime survey is that it is going down. We must not lose sight of that.

Q739 Naz Shah: You have half answered my next question, which was going to be about that spike following the EU referendum. You have said that you feel there is increased confidence and greater awareness of hate crime, but do you think that spike also resulted from people following widespread media coverage? Was there an actual rise, or was it just because people were more aware of it?

Sarah Newton: From the data we have, it is impossible to tell. I am sure it is a mixture, but there was a huge amount of publicity about hate crime, which I think actually encouraged people to know that it was a crime and gave them information about where to report it. Since then, we have had our annual hate crime awareness week, as always, and, as I say, we have been doing a lot of work with third-party organisations to encourage third-party reporting. There has been and there continues to be a big effort to make sure people know what their rights are, how to report it and how to get help. We will continue to do that.

Q740 Naz Shah: Finally, North Yorkshire police recently announced that it would follow Nottinghamshire police's example and recognise misogynistic incidents as hate crime. Is there a case for recognising misogyny as a hate crime strand nationally?

Sarah Newton: I met with Sue Fish, the chief constable of Nottinghamshire, who led that really good work, and I discussed with her



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in detail the experience they went through as a force. She makes a really compelling case about how beneficial reporting misogyny was to their police. I was particularly struck by what she said about the change it created within the police force itself. It opened up conversations about conscious and unconscious bias. It really improved the police force's understanding and made the community a lot more confident about coming forward. They had many more women coming forward to report all sorts of crimes. They felt that they would not have done so if they had not sent out such a strong message. Their learning from that was, rather than a flag for misogyny, it would be better to look at gender. As we all believe firmly in human rights legislation, we want to see men and women treated equally.

My understanding is that the other forces that are following on from Nottinghamshire are recording gender—whether it is a woman or a man who is affected. The way the legislation is set up, it is very much for the police to choose what sort of hate crimes or instances of hate they record. I think about seven forces are now doing this. Sue made it clear to me that they were not seeking legislation. They don't think there is a need for a change in the law. They think that the very fact of reporting is a really powerful tool for them to use as a force to send out that extra reassurance to the communities that women will be taken seriously if they come forward to report crimes.

Q741 Naz Shah: That raises a slight concern for me. We have got seven forces using it, and it is good practice, but if we do not need legislation—the forces can use the existing legislation—surely all 43 forces should be using it. We have to make that case.

Sarah Newton: We don't tell the police what to do. They are operationally independent. The National Police Chiefs Council is a very powerful body, as is the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. What tends to happen is what happened in that situation. You have a chief constable who has done some really innovative work and shares it with colleagues; then it rolls out across the country. I am sure that when more forces see and understand the benefit of what has been achieved in Nottinghamshire and those other force areas, they will pick up on that good practice.

Q742 Naz Shah: It still feels like if I live in one force area somebody will be prosecuted, but if I live in another force area I could be the victim of misogyny and not get the fair justice I deserve as a woman.

Sarah Newton: Gender is not one of the protected characteristics, so it wouldn't be about prosecution. This is so useful because it is about recording and giving that information. Remember that we have a very well-developed and well-regarded VAWG strategy, so, without being at all complacent—we do really good work in our country—the police are well trained in how to respond appropriately to women who come forward as victims of crime. As part of that strategy, we regularly do inspections and work with the police on continuously improving their response. As I say,



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we are not at all complacent, but that is something we have been making good progress on.

Q743 Naz Shah: I am going to have to push you one last time on this very subject. Can we not ask all forces to make it compulsory to record gender crime?

Sarah Newton: No, that is not how we operate. How we operate is as I described. The police chiefs themselves will decide whether they want to do that in their force area.

Q744 Chair: That is not how you choose to operate. You have made a choice to do so. What is the reason for your choice to do so?

Sarah Newton: I think the police, working with the police and crime commissioners in their communities, are best placed to make those decisions.

Q745 Chair: There is some further factual information that it would be useful to have from you. I am grateful for your time this afternoon. We have heard your information about those community prevention programmes that you referred to, and also the number of people who are being reached in practice. I am sure that some of those programmes are great, but they may be reaching only a small number of people. Similarly, we would like to hear about the number of children actually being reached by some of the programmes that you have for schools. I know that there is some very good work, but that can be in a minority of schools or may reach only a minority of children within those schools.

On Government advertising, could you write to us with the information about when you were made aware of the advertising on extremist sites or linked to extremist videos, what the Government's advertising strategy was—you clearly have the ability to ask that things are not linked to certain material online—the sums that have been paid and what is happening about getting that money returned.

Ms Newton, you said at the beginning that you had asked Google to remove National Action videos. Could you confirm when that request went to them, and whether any further checks were made before we raised it with them last week? Could you confirm that by early next week if possible, because I think this is factual information that you should have and should be able to get us by the beginning of next week.

Mr Buckland, can I clarify something that you said earlier as well? I think you quoted the Terrorism Act 2006 when you said there is an offence of recklessly disseminating this material and that the law is there to be enforced. Do you think that Google is breaking the law by continuing to host these materials from National Action that are clearly illegal?

Robert Buckland: I would have to be careful; one would need to look at the evidence in a particular instance. I have made my point. The law is there. It is a clear boundary and, frankly, if this behaviour meets the criteria for recklessness, it could potentially lead to an investigation. I think it would be wrong of me to come to a firm conclusion without more

information, but I hope I have made the point as clearly as I can that the criminal law is there and will be used if appropriate.

Q746 Chair: It would be useful to clarify exactly what the Government's position on this is. We have heard from Ms Newton that Google were asked to remove these illegal National Action videos some time ago; we don't know precisely when. We know that, as of Monday of last week when the Committee went through and put evidence to Google, there were obviously a series of those illegal National Action videos that were still live on their site and had not been removed. We then asked them to remove further sites—some they did, some they didn't. Even at the end of those requests, there are still some further National Action videos live on their sites.

You are saying, in theory, that there is legislation that may be being breached. Presumably, if that is the case, that legislation has been being breached for many months since the Government asked Google to remove that content in the first place. I think it would be very useful to clarify whether the Government are now looking at whether Google have breached the law or not—and if not, why not?

The reason I come back to this is because I think we have a sense that the Government have made a lot of very worthwhile statements on things we would all agree with about the importance of taking action against this kind of illegal activity, making sure that it is dealt with and that social media companies exercise their sense of responsibility. However, it also frankly sounds as if you've been saying the same thing for rather a long time, and it sounds a little bit wimpish compared with the impact that the pressure from advertising has had on some of these social media companies. I think we would all agree that this kind of illegal recruitment propaganda should not be there online. The question for the Government is what you are going to do to make sure that that happens.

Robert Buckland: Chairman, I hear what you say. It is not being wimpish to remind the Committee that decisions about investigation and prosecution are independent of Government, which is why I think I am right to couch my remarks carefully. I would not want to prejudice in any way any potential future investigation or proceedings. That is why I have said what I have said. But I hope I have made clear, in helping to inform the Committee, what my view of the criminal law is.

I think Google know the position they are in now. If they do not, they ought to. These are very serious matters. The Government have taken action already, and we view with the utmost concern the association of the Government—or indeed any other reputable body within our country—with the type of material we have seen in recent weeks.

Q747 Chair: Could you write to us with some further clarification about whether this is or is not being looked at, and, if it is not, what other avenues the Government are looking at to address this? Or do you yet feel it has been fully addressed?

I have one final question. Ms Newton, I asked you earlier about whether



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National Action was organising under a different name. It would be helpful if you could give any further information about whether you have been informed whether National Action members are indeed organising under other names. Also, do you think that far right extremism is increasing?

Sarah Newton: On the first question, no, I have not been informed at all. We do monitor the far right. As I said, there is a bespoke unit in the Home Office that is constantly looking at counter-terrorism, and the intelligence that I have been given is that it is not on the rise. Now, we are not at all complacent about it not being on the rise—that there is anybody in our country that holds these views is unacceptable—but actually it is not on the rise.

Chair: Thank you very much. We look forward to hearing from you with your further information and we wish you well with the work you are doing on the hate crime strategy. Thank you very much for your evidence.