



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

25th October 2023

Dear Meg Hillier MP,

Please see below a short summary of the case of my constituent Joe Nihill, which I hope will be useful for your committee's work in preparedness for online safety regulation.

Joe Nihill, a 23-year-old former Army cadet from Whinmoor in my constituency, tragically took his own life after accessing an interactive website pushing harmful suicide-related content.

Joe had sadly struggled with his mental health and found his way on to an interactive website pushing harmful suicide-related content, including the promotion of suicide, the encouragement of suicide and the provision of methods of, and substances of suicide and the discouragement of seeking mental health and peer and family support.

Joe was one of the cases examined in the BBC story this week showing that the failure of British authorities to act on multiple official warnings about the dangerous suicide promoting website has contributed to 50 deaths in the UK.

In the note that Joe left to his family before taking his own life, he asked for action to shut down the site that he had accessed.

Joe's mother Catherine and his sister-in-law Melanie have bravely been running a campaign, including with the Samaritans, to ensure that what happened to Joe does not happen to other families. They put forward a change.org petition calling for the closure of websites containing harmful suicide related content which has now been signed by over 7,000 people and engaged with the Online Safety Bill as an opportunity to achieve this.

As Joe's case shows, vulnerable people are not limited to those under 18 years of age. Harmful suicide and self-harm content can be accessed by over-18s.

Between 2011 and 2015, 151 people who died by suicide were known to have visited websites that encouraged suicide or shared information about methods of harm, and 82% of those people were over 25.

The website Joe accessed and the BBC report investigated this week is still online and I understand openly declaring it will not comply with the Online Safety Bill.

As the Samaritans and others have called for, we need the Government to engage with people with lived experience of suicide and self-harm, to ensure that the new legislation makes things better and ensures that the internet is as safe as possible for vulnerable people of all ages.

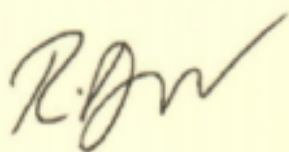
Joe's family welcomed the fact that the Bill creates a new communications offence of encouraging or assisting self-harm and makes such content a further priority for action.

However, the Government must now commit to a review of the legislation to ensure that it has met the objective of making our country the safest place in the world in which to go online.

We must also see confirmation of when the consultation on the new offence of encouraging or assisting self-harm will take place.

If you would like any further information on Joe's case, please get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'R. Burgon', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Richard Burgon MP