

# Home Affairs Committee

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Katy Minshall  
Head of UK Public Policy  
Twitter UK  
20 Air Street  
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1 December 2021

Dear Ms Minshall,

Thank you for your letter on 29 September 2021. However, your response fails to address some of the concerns that we have raised.

## **Rules and enforcement: Mr Sunder Katwala's Twitter thread**

The Committee asked you to review the statements reported to Twitter by Sunder Katwala, who subsequently posted a thread about it. In your letter you refer to those statements as "hypothetical". As a result, you did not review the statements because hypothetical Tweets "are generally not an accurate representation of how rules are enforced".

It is clear from Mr Katwala's Twitter thread, and the related comments, that the statements he supplied to you were indicative examples of racist abuse. He also reported several actual examples of racist Tweets. Indeed, in response to one comment, Mr Katwala provided screenshots of clearly racist posts and comments from Twitter users, which can be found [here](#). These disgraceful examples argue that a football player cannot be English because of their ethnicity, despite being born and raised in England.

Nevertheless, Twitter responded that those examples were deemed not to breach its hateful conduct policy. The statements Mr Katwala referred to are obviously racist. It is deeply concerning that Twitter cannot, at the very least, accept that. Instead, it seeks to pursue a hollow argument that the Tweets are "hypothetical" in order to avoid providing a substantive response. The Committee takes a very dim view of this.

- Please can you therefore explain the rationale behind the decision that the Tweets reported by Mr Katwala do not violate Twitter's hateful conduct policy?

## **Rules and enforcement: reporting of racist abuse**

Evidence taken from the panel of former footballers and the PFA indicated to us that, in many instances, where the players have reported racist content, Twitter has failed to remove it on the grounds that the content does not violate its hateful conduct policy.

Twitter's failure to respond in a supportive way to players who have been victims of racist abuse is particularly jarring when compared to the platform's response after this Committee directly

submitted instances of racist content.<sup>1</sup> This gives the impression that Twitter does not take reporting by victims seriously, and that it takes influential groups such as a parliamentary committee to intervene before action is taken. This is very concerning as it suggests that victims of racist abuse are being ignored, which in turn encourages the normalisation of racism on your platform.

In addition, the evidence we heard highlighted that, when racist content is reported, Twitter can (and does) conclude that it does not violate its hateful conduct policy, therefore allowing the offending content to remain online. The failure of Twitter to determine clearly racist content as violating its hateful conduct policy suggests that the policy is not fit for purpose.

The discretionary language of this policy is concerning; to state that “You *may* not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people... [emphasis added]” suggests that there may be circumstances when this is, in fact, permissible. A zero-tolerance policy on hateful conduct should be in place.

In your letter you also referenced examples of the application of this policy in relation to protected characteristics, like race and ethnicity. These examples focus on the incitement of fear and the incitement of others to act in a hateful manner. This aspect of the policy is also problematic. For example, the posting of an emoji in a racist way may not incite fear or incite others to act in a racist manner, but it is nonetheless racist. However, under Twitter’s policy, this could be viewed as non-violative. It should not require the incitement of fear or the incitement of others to harass or discriminate a person for a post or comment to qualify as racist.

In our view, Twitter’s policies leave major gaps through which overtly racist language and emojis can, and do, fall. This in turn bolsters racist sentiment and attitudes. It is clear that your company’s hate speech policies are failing to protect users.

- Please explain how Twitter’s policies can catch racist content, particularly if the context does not incite fear and/or incite others to harass or discriminate the subject of the abuse.

We note that a review of these policies is currently under way. We welcome this review and look forward to receiving an update in 2022.

- Please update the Committee on the outcome of this review as soon as practicable.
- In the meantime, please explain the extent of the review and provide us with its terms of reference.
- Will the review address the above concerns?
- How often are Twitter’s hate policies reviewed and who is involved in the review?

### **Signify research**

In your letter you state that Signify reported 1772 Tweets to Twitter. However, this is not the final figure reported by Signify; the final figure is 1781 Tweets.<sup>2</sup>

- Please explain this discrepancy and the outcomes for these additional nine Tweets.

You state that 69% of what Signify reported predated a number of changes that Twitter has made.

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<sup>1</sup> [Letter of 13 July 2021](#)

<sup>2</sup> PFA, [Online Abuse – AI Research Study: Season 2020/21](#)

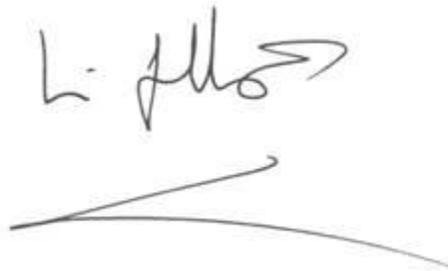
- Please specify these changes and what impact they have on the reporting outcomes of these posts?

We also note what you describe as a “discrepancy” between Twitter’s definition of abuse and the definition used by Signify in its research (which applied FA Rule E3(2)) towards a player or a member of their family), and that you have invited Signify to meet.

- We would be grateful for an update on the outcome of your dialogue with Signify on this issue.

Please respond by 16 December 2021.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Loughton', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

**Tim Loughton MP**  
**Acting Chair of the Home Affairs Committee**