



**LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL
LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
THE RT. HON. JACOB REES-MOGG M.P.**



Julian Knight Esq M.P.,
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

Our Ref: JRM/NMP2090
7 January 2021

Thank you for your letter of 21 December. My office also shared your letter with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

I note your view that the recommendations relating to the Joint Committee are novel and may not be necessary in this instance. However, like you I believe there is a need to continue to scrutinise the work of the government in relation to these important issues and I think that a form of post-legislative scrutiny, focussing on the implementation of the Bill after it has achieved Royal Assent, could be of significant value.

The other Business Managers and I are of the view that this scrutiny can be arranged through current Standing Orders and that it should not require legislation, nor extraordinary powers, to achieve. As recently discussed with the Secretary of State, I hope that officials from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport will soon be engaging with the Business Managers' offices to that end.

Regarding the format and structure of any such committee, this will need to be discussed with the other Business Managers and the Secretary of State to find a solution which works best within the framework of existing provisions in Standing Orders. I will be in touch once we have clarity on how the government would like to take this forward.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

With every good wish,



JULIAN KNIGHT

Member of Parliament for Solihull

Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP
Leader of the House of Commons
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS



16 December 2021

Dear Jacob

RE: Recommendations from the Joint Committee on the Online Safety Bill

I am writing to you today as a Minister in Government with an interest in digital and online safety with respect to the recommendations that were published in the report from the Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill released earlier this week.

As you may be aware, the Committee has recommended that a Joint Committee now be established as *"a solution to the lack of transparency and perceived lack of oversight and parliamentary scrutiny of the Secretary of State and OFCOM"*.

As Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, I am concerned about the unprecedented and unnecessary powers that would be granted to the proposed Joint Committee should the recommendations be approved. Indeed, I am unaware of any other Joint Committee in Parliament with these powers, that in my view are both novel and contentious.

Specifically, with respect to the statutory duties and responsibilities relating to illegal content, I feel a Joint Committee would effectively limit the powers of the Secretary of State. *"The Secretary of State's powers to designate content relating to an offence as priority illegal content should be (...) restricted to exceptional circumstances, and only after consultation with the Joint Committee"*. Likewise, additions to the list of legal but harmful content via statutory instruments would entail a report from the Joint Committee, followed by approval of both Houses.

I hope you would agree with me that in actual fact, these powers granted to the Joint Committee would in effect create an added layer of bureaucracy in situations that may be costly to people's lives. As well as this, I also believe that consideration needs to be given to the cost to the taxpayer from a public interest perspective. The responsibilities proposed in the recommendations for the Joint Committee are activities that can be undertaken by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee. Therefore, it is wrong for Parliament to spend in excess of £500,000 on this.

Furthermore, the precedent set by the introduction of these powers on the face of the Bill could remove the ability of any future opposition to hold the government to account. Through this process it would be possible to hive off powers to an appointed joint committee, as this proposal does from the Home Secretary, thereby creating a dangerous precedent that could be used by future governments to avoid proper scrutiny. This proposed committee confuses the roles of the executive and legislature.

C'ont

The same aim of consensus on, what is undeniably an extremely sensitive and complex piece of legislation, can be achieved via an on going sub-committee within the current system informed by elected select committee chairs, and with representatives from both the Lords and Commons.

Should you wish to meet with me in the new year to discuss these recommendations in further detail, I would certainly be happy to meet you in person.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julian Knight', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Julian Knight
Member of Parliament for Solihull
Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee