

**Supplementary written evidence submitted by James Sorene, Deputy Director  
Covid-19 Vaccine Communications, Department of Health and Social Care**

29 January 2021

Dear Julian,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in front of the Committee on 17th December. We committed to write to the Committee to provide details of how much the Government has paid social media platforms over the last 3 months for vaccine and Covid-related purposes, and to provide further information on how the Government was trying to counter the false information about vaccines. This letter follows on from that sent by Sarah Connolly earlier this month.

Work is underway to provide advice and information at every possible opportunity to those eligible for COVID-19 vaccines and anyone with questions about the vaccination process. Communications are designed to address barriers by building knowledge and understanding of Covid-19 vaccination and reassuring people about their safety and efficacy. As deployment progresses, the NHS and health services across the UK are contacting people to invite them in for vaccination appointments.

As Sarah Connolly set out in her letter to you, we work closely with partners across Government. This includes the DCMS-led Counter Disinformation Unit (CDU) and the Rapid Response Unit (RRU) which is based in the Cabinet Office. RRU regularly provides an overview of the online interest and engagement around vaccine related narratives, including mis and disinformation. Our main goal is to make sure the public has access to authoritative information about the Covid-19 vaccine so that they can make an informed choice to follow the advice of medical professionals and take the vaccine when it is offered to them. We closely monitor the main themes of vaccine hesitancy and tailor our messages to address them.

At the same time, we work closely with organisations and individuals in the private, public and voluntary sectors. We equip our partners in local government, the health and social care sector and the charity sector with the latest research and ready-made communications content which they can adapt and share across their channels. We regularly meet with charities, patient groups, social care groups and faith groups, as well as healthcare organisations and local government, to provide clear information and listen to feedback and concerns from communities across the UK. These organisations help us to counter false narratives by working closely with their communities to explain that the COVID-19 vaccines are the best way to protect people from coronavirus.

Turning to paid-for communications activity, from 1 – 31 December 2020, the Government spent £134,481.71 on social media advertising across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to promote information about the COVID-19 vaccines.

Where offered, free credits from social media platforms are being utilised to support activity which is designed to be highly agile to meet audience and vaccine deployment needs. Government has been given free advertising credits worth \$350,000 (USD) from Facebook. Facebook also directs its users to NHS and World Health Organization (WHO) sites when they search for information on vaccines. We have also been provided with in-kind support from

Twitter, where a prompt appears when someone searches for content about the Covid-19 vaccine and directs them to the NHS COVID-19 vaccine website pages.

COVID-19 Vaccine content is currently being publicised across a wide variety of channels, including digital video, radio and print and includes tailored packages for a number of under-represented communities. The Government's COVID-19 public information campaigns are coordinated by the Cabinet Office. The Cabinet Office publishes contracts valued at over £25,000, including on public information campaigns, monthly on a rolling basis as part of routine government transparency here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cabinet-office-spend-data>. This is broken down by supplier. All social media spend is carried out by Manning Gottlieb OMD, who are contracted to book media space on the Government's behalf, ensuring value for money for the taxpayer.

Yours sincerely,

James Sorene, Deputy Director Covid-19 Vaccine Communications