

## Strengthening the Online Safety Act - AMENDMENT

Moved by: Cllr Lewis Quigg

Seconded by: Cllr Dave Arnott

~~Social media giants have displayed time and again that they cannot be trusted to self-regulate, the riots across the country in recent weeks showed how dangerous misinformation can be and how quickly it can spread online.~~

We live in a world where distance and connectivity between nations and people is shrinking. Information is available 24/7 and at the swipe or push of a button. For the first time in history, human beings have access to seemingly vast amounts of information at their fingertips,

But that vast amount of information is stored with mainly private companies. We have seen how state and non-state actors are increasingly using social media to exploit weaknesses in those companies but also the data that they hold. From the vulnerability of platforms such as Tik-Tok, who are facing US Congressional hearings over a failure to protect user's data from the Chinese Communist Party to non-state actors, criminals and terrorists who use it to blackmail individuals, cause harm to children and cause harm to adults via these platforms.

Social media is increasingly a double edge sword.

Without social media, the documenting of criminality in Bangladesh, ballot rigging in Venezuela the conflicts in Ukraine, North Africa and the Middle East would have been limited to a news cycle or newspaper column. Equally we have seen how governments and media can censor and control information, which is why for many social media is the now go to platform to consume, document, and distribute news.

But again, in the United Kingdom we have seen the impact of foreign and malign influences. According to a BBC investigation, they found that a Pakistani national linked to a website called Channel3Now, had posted an article that included a false name for the perpetrator responsible for the slaughter of three young girls in Southport. The article was shared widely on social media and quickly went viral. Only after UK police had refuted the false information, was the post deleted and an apology issued. The damage however was done.

Locally, there was at least one doctored video circulating online in early August purporting to be of Aldi in Chadderton, not only was this video not filmed within the Borough of Oldham it was several years old. However, this caused a tremendous amount of community concern and even lead to Police resources being deployed to the scene.

It is urgent that we take proactive measures to enhance the safety and security of our online environment. We cannot allow malicious actors to spread misinformation online in an attempt to cause unrest and division and destruction. Equally, we must make sure that where criminality happens that existing laws are enforced by the Police and where they are outdated, that Parliament updates and amends the law. The Police must act without fear or favour and must be the only ones who police our streets and protect the public when there is the potential for harm or injury.

We must always make sure that the right to free speech and the right to exercise it is paramount. Freedom of speech is increasingly under threat, it must not be used by politicians to censor, curtail or silence their critics. The road to hell is always paved with good intentions.

The current Online Safety Act, while a significant step forward, requires strengthening to address challenges and ensure comprehensive protection for all users, particularly vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly.

This Council resolves:

- that Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council will value and protect freedom of speech.
- that Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council will never abuse the powers it has and use them against residents or elected members when they are lawfully exercising freedom of speech.
- that we recognise the Peelite principle of policing that the Police must act without fear or favour and firmly believe that the police are there to police our streets and that we will **never** accept convicted criminals policing or 'managing' our streets, vigilantism, or rioting.
- to write to the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police and the Chief Superintendent for Oldham to thank them for the work their officers did to keep **Oldhamers** residents in the Oldham Metropolitan Borough safe and violence off our streets., as well as thanking officers for the around the clock work, they do to keep our ports of entry, like Manchester Airport, safe also.
- to write to the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation & Technology to ask his Department;
  - to undertake a review of the Online Safety Act to identify areas for improvement.
  - to strengthen enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance and increase penalties for violations.
  - that HM Government will protect freedom of speech and not curtail hard won rights and freedoms.
  - to provide resources and training for parents, schools, and third sector organisations to help them protect and guide children in the digital world.
  - to ensure victims of online abuse and crimes are supported.

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