Re: Hate crime and its violent consequences inquiry

I am writing with regard to your Committee’s inquiry into hate crime and its violent consequences. This is an important and timely inquiry and we welcome the strong line that the Home Affairs Select Committee has taken on this issue.

We followed with interest your evidence session with Twitter, Google and Facebook and the role they play in monitoring and responding to hate crime online. The Committee’s Terms of Reference state that hate crime can be motivated by disability, gender identity, race, religion or faith and sexual orientation. However, we would also like to bring to your attention, and ask your Committee to consider, the impact malicious communications can have on its victims and communities.

Under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 (MCA) is it illegal in England and Wales to send or deliver letters or other articles for the purpose of causing distress or anxiety. It also applies to electronic communications.

Those involved in lawful hunting, as regulated by the Hunting Act 2004, are often subjected to malicious communications online. Abusive and threatening comments are repeatedly posted on the Facebook page; ‘Ban Hunting with Dogs’.

Following the death of well-known show jumper and hunter, Sue Webb, earlier this month, posts appeared online stating things like “hope she died painfully” and “ALL lives matter... apart from upper class scum/peados/animal abusers/murderers. One less stuck up twat then!” The comments posted are sickening and no doubt grossly offensive to all who knew and loved her. The comments were online for several days before Facebook eventually removed them. Examples of these comments are contained in Appendix 1.

Since then, further comments have been published on the page relating to a blessing of the Chiddingfold, Leconfield and Cowdray Hunt by the Reverend John Bundock. The comments were posted on Friday 17 March and at the time of writing have not been taken down. We believe that the comments go beyond simply being abusive to being extremely threatening, with one simply saying, “Kill him”. Examples of these comments are contained in Appendix 2.

We have reported this page to Facebook and asked for it to be closed. We believe these posts breach new social media guidelines published by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) last autumn. The comments made in relation to the late Sue Webb breach Category 4 of the guidelines, “Communications which are grossly offensive, indecent, obscene or false” and that the comments made in relation to Reverend John Bundock breached Category 1 of the guidelines, relating to “credible threats”. At the time of writing no action has been taken by Facebook.

We believe it is important that your Committee also considers malicious communications in this inquiry. With the growth of social media over the past few years there have been many occasions where hunt members and supporters have been subject to outrageous abuse online and we believe this must stop. Nobody should be subject to violence or intimidation online.

If it would be useful to submit written evidence to the inquiry or to arrange a meeting to discuss this issue further then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Tim Bonner
Chief Executive
Appendix 1

Posted on ‘Ban Hunting with Dogs’ Facebook page on 7 March 2017

Ann Ross
Karma, may it come to all who kill mercilessly for no good reason.
37 minutes ago • Like • 2 • Reply

Armes Amanda
Never mind at least it wasn't a fox
36 minutes ago • Like • Reply

Scott Adam Hicks
Haha good!!! Hope she died painfully! 😂😂😂😂😂
33 minutes ago • Like • Reply

Richie Duprey
😊😊
33 minutes ago • Like • Reply

Pietro Di Meglio
Can you dig it? Sucka!
32 minutes ago • Like • Reply

Alan N Dvs
I hope the horse is OK! good job she broke its fall
31 minutes ago • Like • 2 • Reply

Write a comment...
Appendix 2

Posted on ‘Ban Hunting with Dogs’ Facebook page on 16 March 2017

Hans Zeilstra
Kill him
4 hours ago · Like · Reply

Penny Crouch
My blessing for him...May he die in agony and rot in hell
4 hours ago · Like · 1 · Reply

Robin Hunt
What a F***ing moron. He’s condoning murder.
3 hours ago · Edited · Like · Reply

Michael Owen
Hard to believe, impossible to accept, typifies the multi standards of the church, floundering without any direction, preaching whatever suits the situation! ..'Keep the faith'! ..
3 hours ago · Like · 1 · Reply

David Welsh
You're too polite father f@%!ng ar