



Department for  
Digital, Culture,  
Media & Sport

Freedom of Information Team  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport  
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Tel: 020 7211 6111

[www.gov.uk/dcms](http://www.gov.uk/dcms)

FOI2022/01822

19 July 2022

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your correspondence of 7 February, in which you made the following request for information:

***a) How many pieces of social media content the DCMS Counter Disinformation Cell recommended be removed by social media companies in 2021?***

***b) With reference to part (a) how many of these content removal recommendations resulted in enforcement action by social media companies?***

We have dealt with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). I apologise for the delay in replying. I can confirm that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) does have information within scope of your request. However, we consider the information requested to be exempt under section 36(2)(c) (prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs) of the Act because its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs.

In order to apply the exemption at section 36 the department is obliged to receive the 'reasonable opinion' of a 'qualified person', in this case a minister of the crown. I can confirm that the department did seek, and obtain this 'reasonable opinion'. Furthermore, section 36 is a qualified exemption and the department needs to consider the public interest test. I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours disclosing or withholding the information and have set out these arguments below.

In favour of releasing the information, we recognise there is a general public interest in government transparency. We recognise that greater transparency makes the government more accountable to the electorate and increases trust. We also recognise the current heightened public interest in the issue of disinformation.

In favour of withholding the information we considered that there is a strong public interest in ensuring public affairs are conducted effectively. In particular we consider the release of information would undermine the CDU's effectiveness by providing insight into the scope and scale of CDU capabilities which could allow malign disinformation actors to tailor their tactics to evade our monitoring capabilities.



After careful consideration, we do not feel the public interest is greater than the interest in withholding this information.

Yours sincerely,

Freedom of Information Team  
**Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport**

### **Complaints and comments**

As is customary in our replies, I should explain that if you are dissatisfied with any aspect of our response to your request for information, and/or wish to appeal against information being withheld from you, please send full details within two calendar months of the date of this response to: [foi@dcms.gov.uk](mailto:foi@dcms.gov.uk). You have the right to ask the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to investigate any aspect of your complaint. Please note that the ICO is likely to expect internal complaints procedures to have been exhausted before beginning an investigation.



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FOI2022/11345

17 October 2022

Dear 

Thank you for your correspondence of 5 September, in which you made the following request for information:

- **Copies of the Cross Whitehall Weekly Counter Disinformation Reports from April, May and June 2021.**
- **Copies of all Vaccine Mis/Disinformation Narrative reports/similar produced by the Counter Disinformation Unit in July and August 2021.**

We have dealt with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). We can confirm that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) does have information within scope of your request.

However, this information is exempt under Section 36(2)(c) (Prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs) of the Act, because its disclosure would, prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs. In order to apply Section 36, the Department is obliged to receive the 'reasonable opinion' of a 'qualified person', in this case a Minister of the Crown. We can confirm that the Department did seek, and obtain, this 'reasonable opinion'. Section 36 is a qualified exemption and the Department needs to consider the public interest test. We have considered whether the balance of public interest favours disclosing or withholding the information and have set out these arguments below.

In favour of releasing the information, we recognise there is a general public interest in government transparency, and that the reports requested would provide an insight into the Department's processes in tackling mis- and disinformation. We recognise that this greater transparency makes the government more accountable to the electorate and increases trust.

In favour of withholding the information, we consider that there is a public interest in maintaining the effective conduct of public affairs. We believe that the release of this information would be prejudicial to the work of the Counter Disinformation Unit (CDU), as it would provide insights that could be exploited by malign actors to enable them to more effectively spread harmful disinformation.



In particular, the “Cross Whitehall Weekly Counter Disinformation Reports” provides an overview of the key harmful disinformation themes observed that week, and the “Vaccine Mis/Disinformation Narrative Reports” provides a summary of harmful disinformation anti-vaccination narratives.

As such, both of these reports also contain information on the categories of risk that the Department has an ongoing concern about, as well as insights into methods of disseminating disinformation which continue to inform the CDU’s operational response to existing disinformation risks, including the ongoing response to Russian disinformation. Disclosing the information held in these reports would risk giving malign actors insights into the government’s approach to tackling disinformation. Malign actors could subsequently exploit this information, such as by tailoring the content they produce so it evades the categories of risk we are concerned about or by utilising the methods disseminating disinformation, to continue spreading harmful mis- and disinformation online.

Therefore, after careful consideration, we do not feel that the public interest is greater than the interest in withholding this information.

In the context of COVID-19, the purpose of the CDU was to provide a comprehensive picture of the extent, scope, and the reach of harmful mis- and disinformation. When responding to an acute information incident, such as the harmful disinformation anti-vaccination campaigns, it is this proactive monitoring for harmful narratives and understanding of overall trends that form the basis of the reports produced by the CDU, which are used to help inform the Department’s operational response.

The CDU makes every effort to be as transparent as possible about how it operates without compromising its capabilities, and is accountable to Parliament. The CDU is stood up with the express agreement of Ministers, who answer questions about the CDU in Parliament, including at Select Committee hearings.

Yours sincerely,  
Freedom of Information Team  
**Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport**

### **Complaints and comments**

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FOI2022/02671

22 June 2022

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your correspondence of 17 February, in which you made the following request for information:

***I am writing to request the following information under the Freedom of Information Act, relating to the DCMS Disinformation & Misinformation Unit [also known as the DCMS Counter Disinformation Cell], specifically:***

***- Copies of any contract, information sharing agreement, agreement, memorandum of understanding or similar between DCMS and any of Facebook (and its subsidiaries), Twitter and YouTube in relation to the Disinformation & Misinformation Unit's "trusted flagger" status***

***- A copy of all correspondence between the DCMS Disinformation & Misinformation Unit and Facebook (and its subsidiaries), Twitter and YouTube dated Wednesday 16th December 2020.***

We have dealt with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). I apologise for the delay in responding to you. I can confirm that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) does have information within scope of your request.

However, we consider this information to be exempt under section 36(2)(c) (prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs) of the Act because its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs.

In order to apply the exemption at section 36 the department is obliged to receive the 'reasonable opinion' of a 'qualified person', in this case a minister of the crown. I can confirm that the department did seek, and obtain this 'reasonable opinion'. Furthermore, section 36 is a qualified exemption and the department needs to consider the public interest test. I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours disclosing or withholding the information and have set out these arguments below.

In favour of releasing the information, we recognise there is a general public interest in government transparency. We recognise that greater transparency makes the government

more accountable to the electorate and increases trust. We also recognise the current heightened public interest in the issue of disinformation.

In favour of withholding the information we considered that there is a strong public interest in preserving a 'safe space' around ministers and government officials so that they can communicate with confidence, including with external third parties. In particular, we consider release of the information would have a negative impact on our relationship with social media platforms. It could risk effective information sharing and data critical to our work. In addition, we consider the release of information would undermine the CDU's effectiveness by providing insight into the scope and scale of CDU capabilities which could allow malign disinformation actors to tailor their tactics to evade our monitoring capabilities.

After careful consideration, we do not feel the public interest is greater than the interest in withholding this information.

Yours sincerely,

Freedom of Information Team  
**Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport**

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