From:	FOI
To:	[redacted]
Cc:	FOI
Subject:	RE: Freedom of Information - Twitter bots - Response 170/17
Date:	14 November 2017 15:54:35
Attachments:	FW Draft Briefing note for Claire"s meeting with Leighton Andrews.pdf Handover.pdf In the News - Monday 23 October 2017.pdf In the News - Wednesday 25 October 2017.pdf Journo regulation request.pdf Leighton Andrews briefing document.pdf Leighton Andrews-meeting-briefing-2017-10-26.pdf RE Draft Briefing note for Claire"s meeting with Leighton Andrews - 2.pdf RE Draft Briefing note for Claire"s meeting with Leighton Andrews - 3.pdf RE Journo regulation request.pdf RE Thursday"s briefings for Claire 1.pdf Twitter bots.pdf Untitled.pdf

---

Dear [redacted],

Our Ref: FOI 170/17

Thank you for your email to the Electoral Commission dated **30 October 2017**.

The Commission aims to respond to requests for information promptly and has done so within the statutory timeframe of twenty working days.

Your request is in bold below followed by our response.

1) From 01 August 2017 to the day this request is processed, I would like all electronic correspondence and communications that contains the keyword "Twitter bot".

2) From 01 August 2017 to the day this request is processed, I would like all electronic correspondence and communications that contains the keyword "Twitter bots".

By 'electronic correspondence and communications', I define this as including, but not limited to, emails and their attachments, as well as PDF documents.

Our response is as follows:

We hold the information you have requested, which can be found in the attached document. I trust that this information satisfies your request. The Commission strives to be an open, transparent authority.

You may also be interested in a recent blog Bob Posner, the Electoral Commission's Director of Political Finance and Regulation & Legal Counsel, wrote about responding to the rise of digital campaigning: https://ukelectoralcommission.wordpress.com/2017/10/31/responding-to-the-rise-of-digital-campaigning/

If you are not satisfied with this response, please note that the Commission operates a review procedure, details of which can be found on the Commission website at: http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/freedom-of-information-requests/how-do-I-make-an-foi-request

Please also note that if you have exhausted all internal Commission review procedures and you are still not satisfied you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. Details of this procedure can be found on the ICO website: https://ico.org.uk/

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]
Head of External Communications

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 12:35
To: [redacted]
Subject: FW: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi [redacted],

I am going to update the briefing for Claire with the lines below from Comms.

From: Ben Wilkinson
Sent: 25 October 2017 12:29
To: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi [redacted] – I think just replace everything in the box on page 2 with what's below.

…

Ben Wilkinson
Head of External Communications
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

Twitter | **Facebook** | **Blog**



From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 12:29
To: Ben Wilkinson
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi Ben,

Here is the briefing. Want to make sure that I don't delete anything relevant.

http://skynet/dm/Functions/CommsPublicAffairs/Public Affairs/Leighton Andrews-meeting-briefing-2017-10-26.docx

Thanks.

From: Ben Wilkinson
Sent: 25 October 2017 12:22
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]



From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 12:15
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; Ben Wilkinson
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi [redacted]

Has the line on Twitter bots been agreed yet? Conscious that time is going on now.

Thanks

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 09:55
To: [redacted]; [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; Ben Wilkinson
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Thanks [redacted]

Claire is out of the office all day at meetings, but I think we should aim to get the briefing to her as soon as possible.

Ben is just confirming a line with Louise on Twitter bots. So once we have that, it should be good to go to her.

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 09:52
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; [redacted]
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi [redacted]

I have made amendments to the briefing. The only thing for you to add now is any change to the line on bots on page 2.

Did Claire say in your meeting yesterday what time she is expecting this today?

Thanks

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 24 October 2017 16:20
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; [redacted]
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi [redacted]

Craig has added some comments to the briefing for you to look at. There's also the line on Twitter bots that I'll update with you tomorrow when we have it decided.

Cheers!

[redacted]

From: Craig Westwood
Sent: 24 October 2017 16:10
To: [redacted]
Cc: Ben Wilkinson; [redacted]
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Thanks, I've made a few changes and put a couple of suggestions in for [redacted] to address.

From: [redacted]
Sent: 24 October 2017 13:29
To: Ben Wilkinson; [redacted]; Craig Westwood
Subject: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi all,

[redacted] has sent over his draft briefing for Claire's meeting and I've tidied it up a little bit.

http://skynet/dm/Functions/CommsPublicAffairs/Public Affairs/Leighton Andrews-meeting-briefing-2017-10-26.docx

[redacted]

[redacted]
Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
Advice and guidance line: [redacted]
Advice and guidance email: infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

Twitter | **Facebook** | **Blog**

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 23 October 2017 13:24
To: Ben Wilkinson
Cc: Press; Public Affairs Team; [redacted]
Subject: Handover

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Hi Ben,

A few things to flag with you and handover.

[redacted]

As I've also flagged with you, I've been asked by [redacted] at Reuters [redacted] to look into a number of issues for her. I will forward along to you the email chain with Louise. I think the only thing we may require a new statement on is the interest around 'Twitter bots'. I have copied you in to my emails with Louise. [redacted] has kindly offered to take over on this.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Any problems or queries contact me on [redacted].

Thanks,

[redacted]

[redacted]
Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission

3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

Twitter | **Facebook** | **Blog**

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 23 October 2017 12:55
To: All EC Staff - All Sites; Commissioners Protected
Subject: In the News - Monday 23 October 2017

Foreign interference and "Twitter bots"

A Buzzfeed report has "found" that "[r]esearchers have uncovered new evidence of networks of thousands of suspect Twitter bots working to influence the Brexit debate in the run-up to the EU referendum. "The findings, from researchers at City, University of London, include a network of more than 13,000 suspected bots that tweeted predominantly pro-Brexit messages before being deleted or removed from Twitter in the weeks following the vote. The research – which is published in the peer-reviewed Social Science Computer Review journal and was shared exclusively with BuzzFeed News – suggests the suspected bot accounts were eight times more likely to tweet pro-leave than pro-remain content."
In response to the article Mark Pack writes that "[b]ots are to social media rather like uncontrolled spending on direct mail. In both cases they allow the volume of what is otherwise legitimate activity to be greatly inflated by means that are highly desirable." On tackling these bots Mark suggests that Twitter users don't only think about what "Twitter or its regulators do; it's also about what you do with your own Twitter account."

[redacted]



[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

Twitter | **Facebook** | **Blog**

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 10:59
To: All EC Staff - All Sites; Commissioners Protected
Subject: In the News - Wednesday 25 October 2017

[redacted]

Twitter Bots

BuzzFeed have reported that the former head of communications for Leave.EU, the Brexit campaign backed by Nigel Farage and UKIP, has denied it used social media bots to boost its message during the EU referendum battle. The denial came after BuzzFeed News revealed on Friday that researchers at City, University of London, had discovered a network of 13,000 suspected pro-Brexit Twitter bots active at around the time of the referendum. The suspected bots had been acting to amplify pro-Brexit messages, articles, and memes – largely through retweets and links – rather than creating fake news. The bots were either deleted by their controller or removed by Twitter in the weeks following the EU referendum. The researchers were unable to establish who was behind the bot network.

Following publication of the story, attention focused on Leave.EU. Twitter users, including the Observer journalist Carole Cadwalladr, who has written multiple stories on possible attempts to influence the Brexit vote, shared a tweet from August in which Andy Wigmore, the group's former head of communications, appeared to admit it had used bots.

Given the public speculation on whether Leave.EU had been involved with the botnet the researchers discovered, BuzzFeed News asked Wigmore on Tuesday what use the campaign had made of bots, and whether any such use had been disclosed in the campaign's spending returns, as required under UK election law.

In his response, Wigmore strongly denied any use of bots by Leave.EU, and said his tweet had been "sarcasm". He continued, "You are either very very very young or a complete idiot … it's called sarcasm!!!...Get a grip.....No bots were used by any of the Leave teams and bots make Zero difference on anything - you and the likes of Carole and other anti-Trump idiots have zero understanding of technology if you honestly think any kind of bot works or can hypnotise the electorate in anyway. Next you will be telling me Elvis is alive and well and living in Croydon, David Cameron is a lizard and Nigel Farage is in fact gay."

Senior former staff of the official Vote Leave campaign told BuzzFeed News on Friday their campaign had made no use of Twitter bots, leaving open the question of who was behind the suspected botnet uncovered by the City University researchers. Damian Collins, the head of parliament's culture, media and sport committee, wrote to Twitter in the wake of BuzzFeed News' revelations to ask for more information on Brexit-related bot activity. On Tuesday the committee wrote to Facebook to ask for any information the social network has in relation to suspected Russian influence on either the Brexit vote or the general election of 2017.

Separately, Labour MP and former cabinet minister Ben Bradshaw has publicly called for a parliamentary inquiry into possible Russian influence on the Brexit vote.
Andy Wigmore's full statement to Buzzfeed can be read here. (strong language included)

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

Twitter | **Facebook** | **Blog**

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 23 October 2017 10:52
To: Louise Edwards
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: Journo regulation request

Hi Louise,

[redacted]

The journalist also asked about Buzzfeed's article on Twitter bots. I know that last week we prepared a statement* referring to potential foreign interference of this nature but as the journalist has not enquired specifically about foreign interference I think it best to not use that line. In May, Claire's letter to the Guardian regarding social media regulation was published – could we use this as info to send to the journalist about our remit?

[redacted]

[redacted]

Thanks,

[redacted]

*"The receipt of impermissible donations by registered campaigners or political parties campaigning at the EU referendum, either from the UK or overseas, would be a serious breach of the law. Anyone who believes they have evidence suggesting impropriety in campaign funding should provide it to the Commission and the police immediately."

[redacted]
Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

Twitter | **Facebook** | **Blog**

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 13:32
To: Claire Bassett
Cc: Rhydian Thomas
Subject: Leighton Andrews briefing document
Attachments: Leighton Andrews-meeting-briefing-2017-10-26.docx

Claire,

Please find attached a clean copy of the briefing document ahead of your meeting with Leighton Andrews tomorrow.

As requested, the lines on Twitter Bots have been added to p2 of the briefing.

[redacted]

Regards,

[redacted]

[redacted]
Uwch Swyddog Cyswllt Pleidiau Gwleidyddol |
Senior Political Parties Liaison Officer
Y Comisiwn Etholiadol, Cymru | The Electoral Commission, Wales
Tŷ'r Cwmnïau | Companies House
Ffordd y Goron | Crown Way
Caerdydd | Cardiff
CF14 3UZ
Ffôn | Tel: [redacted]
www.comisiwnetholiadol.org.uk | www.electoralcommission.org.uk
www.fymhleidlaisi.co.uk | www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

Rhoi pleidleiswyr yn gyntaf
Putting voters first

Twitter | Facebook | Blog

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg
We welcome correspondence in Welsh and English

Ystyriwch yr amgylchedd os gwelwch yn dda cyn argraffu'r ebost hwn
Please consider the environment before printing this email

Briefing for meeting with Leighton Andrews

Details: Thursday 26 October, 12:15
Park Plaza Hotel, Cardiff

EC attendance: Claire Bassett
Rhydian Thomas

Contents

Key messages page 2

Background

A. Leighton Andrews lecture- Facebook, Media and Democracy page 4
B. [redacted] page 6
C. [redacted] page 8
D. [redacted] page 10
E. [redacted] page 12
F. [redacted] page 14
G. [redacted] page 15

[redacted] page 16

[redacted] page 19

Key messages:

1) [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

DRAFT line on Twitter bots:

Spending limits and rules on reporting spending and donations all apply to campaigners, parties and individuals if they engage in regulated campaigning around elections and referenda. *We do not regulate the contents of campaign adverts.*

Social media provides increased scale, speed and specificity of targeting compared with traditional campaigning methods, though *the same rules on reporting spending, which we then publish, still apply*. For example, if registered parties or campaigners spend money on bots to carry out regulated campaigning on social media then any spending on them must be included in its spending return.

The Electoral Commission is continuing to look into online campaigning at elections and referendums.*The Electoral Commission has made a number of recommendations aimed at increasing transparency around online campaigning.* These include proposing that online campaign material – like its printed equivalent – should be required in law to include an imprint stating who has published it.

We and others are also thinking about whether or not the law should be amended to make campaigners report more detailed breakdowns of spending – includingbreakdowns of what they spend on different types of advertising. We commented on the pros and cons of this idea after the 2015 election, and we will continue to consider this matter carefully before we decide to make any proposals.

It is for Government, and ultimately Parliament, to determine whether what changes should be made to the law in this areas.

So you have no problem in principle with the use of 'net bots' even if they mislead the public

Our regulatory remit is around the funding of and spending by parties, non-party campaigners and referendum campaigners, not the campaigning techniques they employ. Any case for banning the use of 'net bots' in political campaigning would be a matter for Parliament to consider.

We do provide transparency for voters by publishing details of spending on a line by line basis making clear where digital campaigning, including the use of bots, has taken place.

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G. [redacted]

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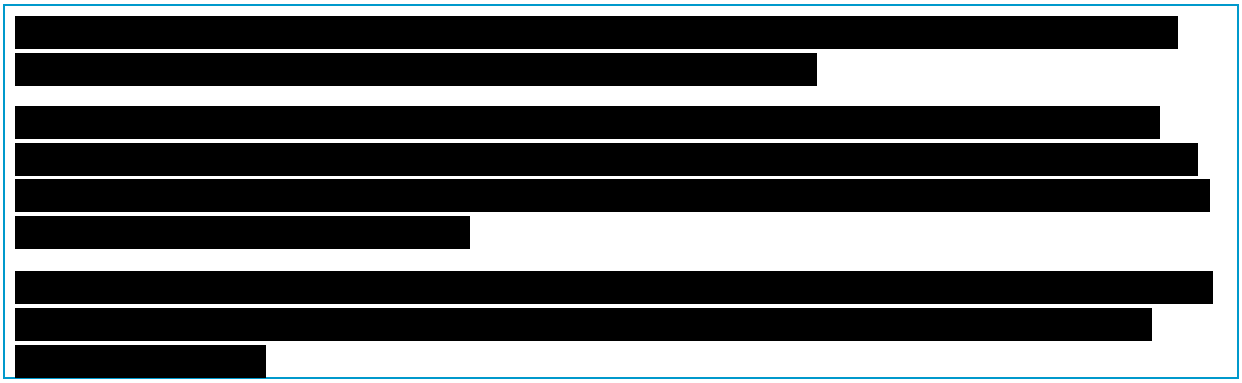
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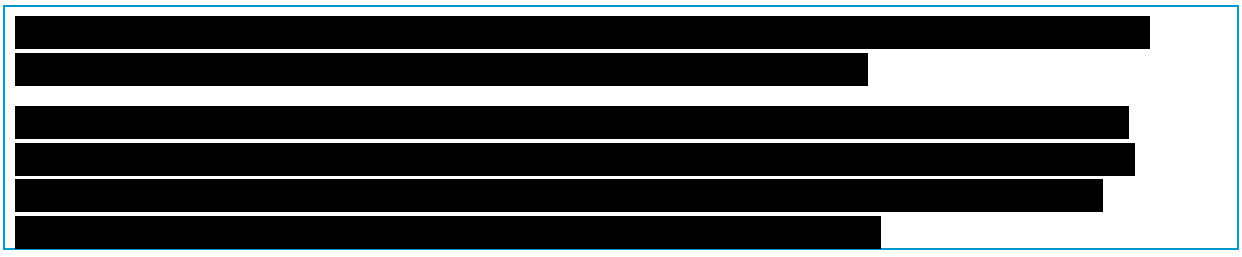
[redacted]













[redacted]

[redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted]

From: Rhydian Thomas
Sent: 25 October 2017 11:44
To: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 11:15
To: Rhydian Thomas
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

[redacted]

From: Rhydian Thomas
Sent: 25 October 2017 11:06
To: [redacted]
Subject: FW: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 09:55
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; Ben Wilkinson
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Thanks [redacted].

Claire is out of the office all day at meetings, but I think we should aim to get the briefing to her as soon as possible.

Ben is just confirming a line with Louise on Twitter bots. So once we have that, it should be good to go to her.

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 09:52
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; [redacted]
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi [redacted]

I have made amendments to the briefing. The only thing for you to add now is any change to the line on bots on page 2.

Did Claire say in your meeting yesterday what time she is expecting this today?

Thanks

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 24 October 2017 16:20
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; [redacted]
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi [redacted]

Craig has added some comments to the briefing for you to look at. There's also the line on Twitter bots that I'll update with you tomorrow when we have it decided.

Cheers!

[redacted]

From: Craig Westwood
Sent: 24 October 2017 16:10
To: [redacted]
Cc: Ben Wilkinson; [redacted]
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Thanks, I've made a few changes and put a couple of suggestions in for [redacted] to address.

From: [redacted]
Sent: 24 October 2017 13:29
To: Ben Wilkinson; [redacted]; Craig Westwood
Subject: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi all,

[redacted] has sent over his draft briefing for Claire's meeting and I've tidied it up a little bit.

http://skynet/dm/Functions/CommsPublicAffairs/Public Affairs/Leighton Andrews-meeting-briefing-2017-10-26.docx

[redacted]

[redacted]
Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
Advice and guidance line: 0333 103 1928
Advice and guidance email: infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

Twitter | **Facebook** | **Blog**

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 13:10
To: [redacted] Ben Wilkinson [redacted]
Cc: Louise Edwards; Rhydian Thomas
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Thanks to all for your assistance.

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 13:07
To: Ben Wilkinson; [redacted]
Cc: [redacted]; Louise Edwards; Rhydian Thomas
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi

I was working on part of the line in the page 2 box, whilst Ben/[redacted] were working on other parts of that box. [redacted] have given me Ben's revised text so I have now incorporated all of that into the document

[redacted]

I am popping out for lunch, hope all the above is okay

Thanks
[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 12:44
To: [redacted]
Subject: FW: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

---

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 12:23
To: Ben Wilkinson; [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Thanks Ben.

I will make the amendments and forward to Claire.

[redacted]

From: Ben Wilkinson
Sent: 25 October 2017 12:22
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

…

Ben Wilkinson
Head of External Communications
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk
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Twitter | **Facebook** | **Blog**



From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 12:15
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; Ben Wilkinson
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

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[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 25 October 2017 09:55
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; Ben Wilkinson
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

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[redacted]

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Thanks

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 24 October 2017 16:20
To: Robert Coombs
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; [redacted]
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi [redacted]

Craig has added some comments to the briefing for you to look at. There's also the line on Twitter bots that I'll update with you tomorrow when we have it decided.

Cheers!

[redacted]

From: Craig Westwood
Sent: 24 October 2017 16:10
To: [redacted]
Cc: Ben Wilkinson; [redacted]
Subject: RE: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Thanks, I've made a few changes and put a couple of suggestions in for [redacted] to address.

From: [redacted]
Sent: 24 October 2017 13:29

To: Ben Wilkinson; [redacted]; Craig Westwood
Subject: Draft Briefing note for Claire's meeting with Leighton Andrews

Hi all,

[redacted] has sent over his draft briefing for Claire's meeting and I've tidied it up a little bit.

http://skynet/dm/Functions/CommsPublicAffairs/Public Affairs/Leighton Andrews-meeting-briefing-2017-10-26.docx

[redacted]

[redacted]
Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
Advice and guidance line: 0333 103 1928
Advice and guidance email: infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

Twitter | **Facebook** | **Blog**

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 24 October 2017 09:20
To: Louise Edwards; Ben Wilkinson; [redacted]
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Journo regulation request

[redacted]

K

From: Louise Edwards
Sent: 24 October 2017 07:29
To: Ben Wilkinson; [redacted]
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Journo regulation request

Hi

[redacted]

Louise

From: Ben Wilkinson
Sent: 23 October 2017 17:43
To: [redacted] Louise Edwards
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Journo regulation request

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 23 October 2017 17:18
To: Louise Edwards; Ben Wilkinson
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Journo regulation request

Sorry, realised I never followed this up earlier in terms of a line on Twitter bots. Claire is also now after a line on this for a meeting on Thursday so this might be a good place to start for that as well. The allegation is that a study found 13,000 automated Twitter accounts (bots) that tweeted messages in support of the leave campaigns and shared/retweeted eachother. The effect was to a) create a false sense of lots of people discussing and sharing these messages and b) it pushed up these messages on Twitter's trending list, meaning more real people were likely to see the messages. This feeds in to concerns raised about 'dark' things going on without scrutiny or regulation.
I have a suggested (fairly long) line below as a starting point. I know Bob is leaning away from saying anything about whether we've received/not received evidence of things like this.

An Electoral Commission spokesperson said:

"The Commission is the regulator of political and campaign finance, and our regulatory remit is around the funding of and spending by parties, non-party campaigners and referendum campaigners. We do not regulate the contents of campaign adverts, but whether those placing the adverts have complied with the rules.

"Social media provides increased scale, speed and specificity of targeting compared with traditional campaigning methods, though the same rules still apply. Spending limits and rules on reporting spending and donations all apply to campaigners, parties and individuals if they engage in regulated campaigning around elections and referenda.

"Anyone who believes they have evidence suggesting impropriety in campaign funding should provide it to the Commission and the police immediately."

From: [redacted]
Sent: 23 October 2017 13:37
To: Louise Edwards; Ben Wilkinson
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Journo regulation request

Reuters have just published their article so this may now all be academic;
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-eu-interference/uk-says-its-democracy-is-secure-after-suggestion-of-foreign-meddling-in-brexit-idUSKBN1CS19U
However, if we do think we should have a line on twitter bots it would be good to go ahead and agree one anyway.

From: [redacted]
Sent: 23 October 2017 13:16
To: Louise Edwards
Cc: [redacted] Ben Wilkinson
Subject: RE: Journo regulation request

Thanks Louise.

I'm unfortunately going home sick, but [redacted] has (exceedingly) kindly offered to take over on this. I've put the following together. Would you mind chatting with Cary about seeing the Twitter bot article? And just in case – have a try with the link again - https://www.buzzfeed.com/jamesball/a-suspected-network-of-13000-twitter-bots-pumped-out-pro?utm_term=.bpZWyYzJ#.ixNn8YL6

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Twitter bots

The journalist also asked about Buzzfeed's article on Twitter bots. I know that last week we prepared a statement* referring to potential foreign interference of this nature but as the journalist has not enquired specifically about foreign interference I think it best to not use that line. In May, Claire's letter to the Guardian regarding social media regulation was published – could we use this as info to send to the journalist about our remit?

[redacted]

Thanks,

[redacted]

From: Louise Edwards
Sent: 23 October 2017 12:05
To: [redacted]
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Journo regulation request

[redacted]

Louise

From: [redacted]
Sent: 23 October 2017 10:52
To: Louise Edwards
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: Journo regulation request

Hi Louise,

[redacted]

Twitter bots

The journalist also asked about Buzzfeed's article on Twitter bots. I know that last week we prepared a statement* referring to potential foreign interference of this nature but as the journalist has not enquired specifically about foreign interference I think it best to not use that line. In May, Claire's letter to the Guardian

regarding social media regulation was published – could we use this as info to send to the journalist about our remit?

I can't open links at the moment because my computer is, to put it mildly, malfunctioning. If I pop round when you're around can I look at this on your screen please? Thanks.

[redacted]

Thanks,

[redacted]

*"The receipt of impermissible donations by registered campaigners or political parties campaigning at the EU referendum, either from the UK or overseas, would be a serious breach of the law. Anyone who believes they have evidence suggesting impropriety in campaign funding should provide it to the Commission and the police immediately."

[redacted]
Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk
Twitter | **Facebook** | **Blog**

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 24 October 2017 10:53
To: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Thursday's briefings for Claire

Hi [redacted]

Just to let you know, Claire has asked for a meeting this afternoon at 2pm to discuss her lines on this. She particularly wants to have a strong line on the Twitter bots thing which we're working on.

Are you going to have a draft briefing ready for 2pm? Is there anything we can help with?

Cheers,
[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 23 October 2017 13:50
To: [redacted]
Cc: Rhydian Thomas; Ben Wilkinson; Craig Westwood
Subject: Thursday's briefings for Claire

Hi [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Cheers,
[redacted]

- [redacted]

  [redacted]

- [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]
Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
Advice and guidance line: 0333 103 1928
Advice and guidance email: infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

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[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 26 October 2017 16:28
To: [redacted]
Cc:
Subject: Twitter bots

Here's the most recent version of the line on Twitter bots that I've seen, I've copied in [redacted] in case he knows more….

Are you concerned about the use of 'net bots' by campaigners in the EU referendum?

Spending limits and rules on reporting spending and donations all apply to campaigners, parties and individuals if they engage in regulated campaigning around elections and referenda. *We do not regulate the contents of campaign adverts.*

Social media provides increased scale, speed and specificity of targeting compared with traditional campaigning methods, though *the same rules on reporting spending, which we then publish, still apply*. For example, if registered parties or campaigners spend money on bots to carry out regulated campaigning on social media then any spending on them must be included in its spending return.

The Electoral Commission's inquiries into online campaigning are ongoing. *We have also made a number of recommendations aimed at increasing transparency around online campaigning*. These include proposing that online campaign material – like its printed equivalent – should by law have to include an imprint stating who has published it, and that rules around parties' and campaigners' spending returns should be modernised to insist on a clearer breakdown between different types of spending. It is for Government, and ultimately Parliament, to determine whether these recommendations should be implemented.

[redacted]
Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
Advice and guidance line: 0333 103 1928
Advice and guidance email: infoengland@electoralcommission.org.uk
electoralcommission.org.uk
yourvotematters.co.uk

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[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 23 October 2017 09:40
To: [redacted]

Foreign interference in elections

- https://www.opendemocracy.net/uk/mary-fitzgerald/brexit-dark-money-expose-triggers-mps-question-on-foreign-interference
- https://www.buzzfeed.com/amphtml/jamesball/a-suspected-network-of-13000-twitter-bots-pumped-out-pro
- https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/world/europe/russia-brexit-arron-banks.html?referer=https://t.co/3lCqGRKOpt?amp=1
- https://www.markpack.org.uk/151827/euro-referendum-twitter-bots/
- https://twitter.com/LeaveEUOfficial/status/921098901050052609?s=03
- https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/21/russia-social-media-activism-blacktivist?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Gmail
- https://twitter.com/BenPBradshaw/status/921797016933617664?s=03
- https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/21/russia-free-pass-undermine-british-democracy-vladimir-putin?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Gmail
- https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/22/facebook-google-twitter-congress-hearing-trump-russia-election?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Gmail
- http://www.pressdata.co.uk/articlepdfs/TheNat/2017/10/21/TheNat20171021010.pdf

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- [redacted]
- [redacted]

[redacted]
Communications Officer
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London EC1Y 8YZ
[redacted]
Advice and guidance line: 0333 103 1928
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