



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

Secretary of State for Science, Innovation
and Technology
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

www.gov.uk/dsit

4 March 2025

Dear Ms Bewley,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this Report to Prevent Future Deaths, regarding the death of Susan Marie Karakoc. I was incredibly saddened to read about the circumstances surrounding Susan's tragic death and would like to extend my deepest condolences to her family and friends for their loss. I would like to thank you for bringing this to my attention.

Some of the key issues of concern that you raise in your report are within the remit of The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, and I understand that they have provided a separate response. As the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology I am responsible for the Online Safety Act 2023 ('the Act') and will respond to the issues raised in this report as per my department's remit. My department has been taking steps to tackle criminal activity online through the Act, which received Royal Assent in October 2023.

A service is in-scope of the Act if it allows user-generated content (for example, it has been uploaded or shared by a user of a service as opposed to uploaded or published by the site or service owner). The Act gives online platforms duties to tackle illegal content and activity on their services. Within these duties, the Act establishes certain 'priority offences'. Priority offences reflect the most serious and prevalent illegal content and activity, against which companies must take proactive measures, as well as ensuring their services are not used to facilitate or commit a priority offence.

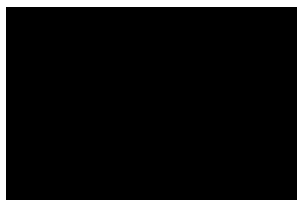
The illegal sale or supply of controlled drugs is a priority offence under the Act. This offence may be committed where a user unlawfully produces, supplies or offers to supply controlled drugs, or where a user supplies items used for administering or preparing controlled drugs. It is also a priority offence for a person to do anything which incites another to commit these drugs offences, and any content present on a service which does so is 'illegal content' under the Act. Platforms, and also search services such as Google, will therefore need to put in place systems and processes to ensure users do not encounter this illegal content via their services. They will also need to take steps relating to the design and operation of their service to reduce the risk that services facilitate these offences.

The strongest protections in the Act are for children. In-scope services that are likely to be accessed by children will have a duty to take steps to prevent children from encountering legal but nonetheless harmful content that has been designated as 'primary priority' content. This includes content that encourages, promotes, or provides instructions for self-harm, eating disorders or suicide. Search services must also minimise the risk of children encountering this content in search results or on the pages they land on when they click on them. We expect the illegal content duties to be fully in effect from Spring 2025, and the child safety duties from Summer 2025.



Ofcom is the independent regulator for the Online Safety Act. It will set out the specific steps providers can take to fulfil their duties in codes of practice. Ofcom has published the final drafts of its first codes for the illegal content duties and we anticipate these will take effect next month. The codes set out a range of cross-cutting steps that providers can take to tackle illegal drugs-related content and activity on their services. Ofcom is working with the government to implement the Act as quickly and effectively as possible.

Yours sincerely,



Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology