

P-04-630 Facebook Regulations for Looked After Children – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 06.05.15

Response to letter from Minister for Health and Social Services

Although I appreciate the benefits of computers and internet use amongst children and that digital literacy is vital there are a large number of organisations raising concerns about Facebook and other social media risks.

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety gives a comprehensive list of the dangers/risks faced by children but the “Good Practice Guidance for the providers of social networking and other user-interactive services” like other guidance is not legally binding.

When individuals set up Facebook accounts, they are asked to certify that they are 13 or over by entering a date of birth. If the date of birth shows them to be younger they are prevented from continuing.

Facebook maintain added protections and security settings for teens (age 13-17) that ensure their timelines and posts don't show up in public search results

On 26 April 2012 BBC News reported that the UK Children's Minister Tim Loughton had said that “Parents are helping their children to set up under-age profiles on social networking site Facebook”

The Local Authority as corporate parents, foster carers, social workers and others responsible for the care of looked after children have a duty to act as a responsible and conscientious parent but they are knowingly allowing vulnerable children as young as 9 to be set up on Facebook and access other social media.

Since 2009 concerns relating to a 9 years old child were raised verbally and in writing with the Local Authority, Social Services and with the Independent Reviewing Officer at Statutory six monthly Reviews.

Failure to address concerns is not acceptable.

In 2013 a fully documented folder was sent to the Local Authority which included details of (one of the child's friends) a 34 year old faceless man posing as a 17 year old, who was arrested, jailed for 2½ years and was to be registered with the Police as a sex offender for life

It is of considerable concern that because the child's age had been falsified that this man could have been talking to a 9 years old child.

2013 the account was deactivated/deleted.

2013 to 2015 the child now a teenager has two other accounts – one of which again shows the child to be 5 years older than actual age which means that the child's

timelines and posts would show up on public search results and would be eligible to receive adult material.

I note that consultation on the first set of draft regulations and codes of practice has taken place and that consultation of the next set of draft regulations and codes of practice will take place in May which will include Part 6 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act concerned with looked after and accommodated children.

I hope that the Petitions Committee and Minister will consider that the concerns raised in the e-Petition are valid child protection issues and will take on board my concerns and put in place regulations and/or update the "IRO Handbook: Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children"

Christine Williams
5 May 2015