

'Age of laissez faire could soon be over for web firms'

TELEGRAPH CAMPAIGN

Duty of care



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the new rules would be enforced, and by whom; and the penalties firms would face.

Ms Longfield, who commissioned the work from privacy and media experts Schillings, said sanctions for breaching the duty of care would be modelled on the massive fines firms face for breaking data protection laws.

This could be up to four per cent of annual turnover – \$2 billion, based on Facebook revenues – but Ms Longfield said there should be reputational as well as financial penalties. “That means posting information about the breach on their platform for all users to see, including details of the complaint, the size of their fine and what action they will be taking to correct their mistake,” she writes in today’s *Telegraph*.

Tom Watson, Labour’s deputy leader, will also commit his party to introducing a statutory duty of care, appointing a regulator who could, as in Germany, prosecute firms that failed to take down illegal material within 24 hours.

The Daily Telegraph is campaigning for a statutory duty of care to protect children from online harms. Yesterday, Jackie Doyle-Price, the suicide prevention minister, said US social media bosses should be held responsible for the content on their platforms and raised the possibility they could be arrested and prosecuted if they failed to rein in online harms. She said the firms should legally be treated as publishers and held to account for their content.

Ms Longfield’s 12-clause Bill would cover social media and messaging platforms, with harm defined as any “detrimental impact” on physical, mental, psychological, educational or emotional well-being of children. Harmful content included bullying, abuse, hate speech, threatening or violent behaviour, encouraging suicide or self-harm, identity theft, design likely to cause addictions, encouraging unhealthy body image and sexual content that was not educational, scientific or artistic.

Ms James said social media companies had enjoyed a “laissez faire environment” that had allowed them to put profit before the safety of users.”

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