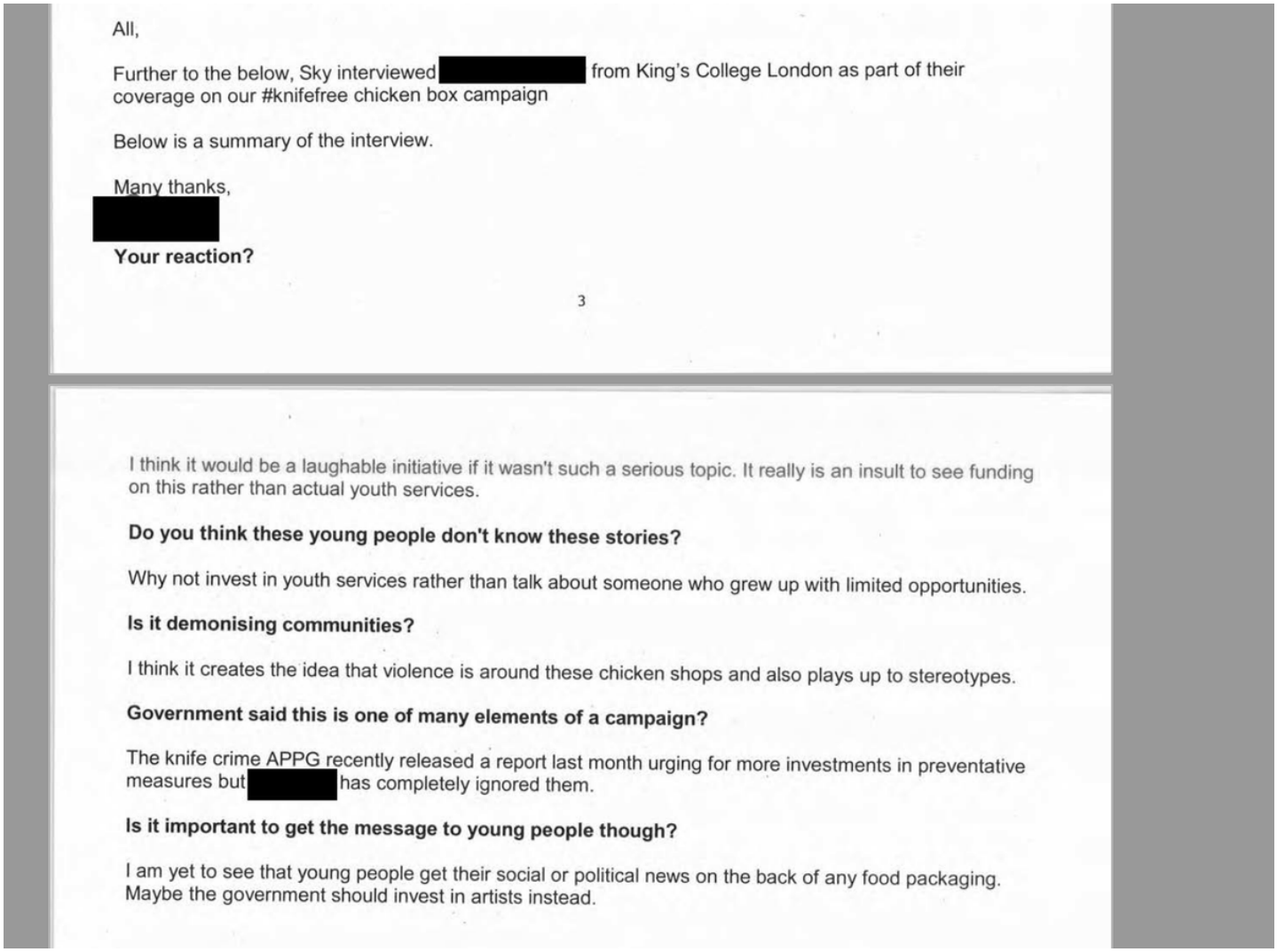
Twitter Thread by George Greenwood

George Greenwood
@GeorgeGreenwood

For some non-Covid news, and as a bit of recent political history, I've been released more than 100 pages of internal press office communications relating to the Home Office's fried chicken box saga.



All,

Further to the below, Sky interviewed [redacted] from King's College London as part of their coverage on our #knifefree chicken box campaign

Below is a summary of the interview.

Many thanks,

[redacted]

Your reaction?

3

I think it would be a laughable initiative if it wasn't such a serious topic. It really is an insult to see funding on this rather than actual youth services.

Do you think these young people don't know these stories?

Why not invest in youth services rather than talk about someone who grew up with limited opportunities.

Is it demonising communities?

I think it creates the idea that violence is around these chicken shops and also plays up to stereotypes.

Government said this is one of many elements of a campaign?

The knife crime APPG recently released a report last month urging for more investments in preventative measures but [redacted] has completely ignored them.

Is it important to get the message to young people though?

I am yet to see that young people get their social or political news on the back of any food packaging. Maybe the government should invest in artists instead.

You may remember back in heady 2019 that there was an uproar after the government provided takeaway boxes with anti-knife crime messages to chicken shops around the country.

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 14 August 2019 19:19
To: [redacted]
Cc:
Subject: Re: Press Office evening note

[redacted]

Just flagging that [redacted] has also tweeted about the chicken boxes. Can't copy and paste the link from my phone for some reason.

Since [redacted] tweeted our tweet has started to get lots of negative engagements, albeit still low (circa 200) at the moment.

[redacted]

The campaign faced an immediate backlash, with critics questioning why fried chicken shops — stereotypically associated with young black communities — were being targeted by the Home Office for this campaign against knife crime.

All,

Further to the below, [redacted] a former Met Police chief superintendent, was interviewed on the Victoria Derbyshire Show about the #knifefree campaign.

Please see a summary of his comments. A Home Office statement was carried in full.

Press Office has worked on lines in response to the criticism we are receiving, which is currently up for clearance. We are also speaking to stakeholders to see if they are available to talk to the media today.

We will update this chain with any further coverage.

Many thanks,

[redacted] **said:**

"I think it's very patronising, it stereotypes people. This initiative seeks to target chicken shops because the assumption is that is where black people go.

"We've seen promises around 20,000 police officers and stop and search powers, but what we really need is detailed policy which puts the community at the heart.

"I think there is a racial element, and the Government needs to revisit this decision.

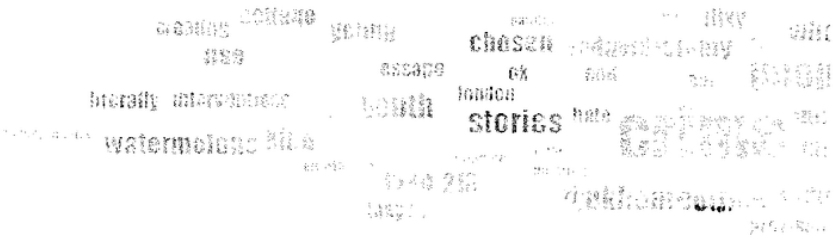
"Why didn't they go to a fish and chip shop instead?

The emails I've been released show that privately, officials admitted that the outcry risked angering the communities the campaign was trying to reach out to.

Twitter is driving criticism of the #KF campaign with a political audience attacking the government, conservatives and in some instances civil servants for being out of touch with communities and being institutionally racist.

Between the 13-15 Aug there was a spike with c.700 posts and c.5k engagements. The #Knifefree Pulsar tracker hasn't captured everything to have an accurate volume number but volumes are focused around [redacted] tweets.

Word Cloud – terms like #knifefree, chicken and boxes removed to show wider context around key terms:



Initial review is that there is criticism of funding communication solutions to tackle deep rooted social problems that have been worsened under austerity. Terms like poverty, and cuts to youth services are very prevalent.

- In order to combat the narrative from a comms perspective focusing messaging on policy intervention work with partners and advocates may be helpful in highlighted that the campaign is tied to a deeper initiative rather than a shallow solution.

The issue of the boxes publicising racist stereotypes with the use of chicken boxes will be harder to combat, are we using other takeaway box styles?

- Showing the insight that informed the creation will help internally but unsure what can be done publicly against this currently other than highlighting the targeting of other fast food restaurants not using chicken boxes. This theme of institutional racism and an out of touch approach that demonises communities will potentially enrage many in the audience we are trying to build trust with.

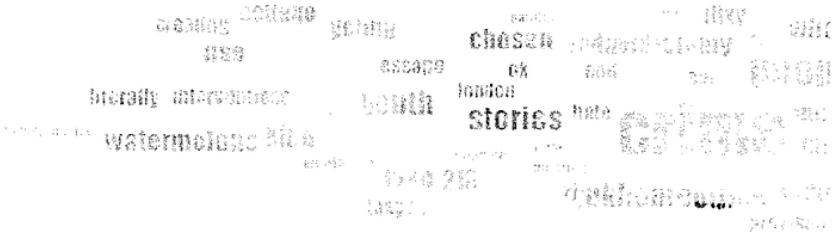
A third criticism is that the boxes are a low impact channel to reach those thinking of carrying a knife or who are prone to violence – this is low volume.

A briefing prepared by a Home Office official highlighted that they were “unsure what could be done publicly” to rebuff the criticism, and that the campaign’s focus on chicken boxes had created a perception that the campaign had “publicised racist stereotypes”.

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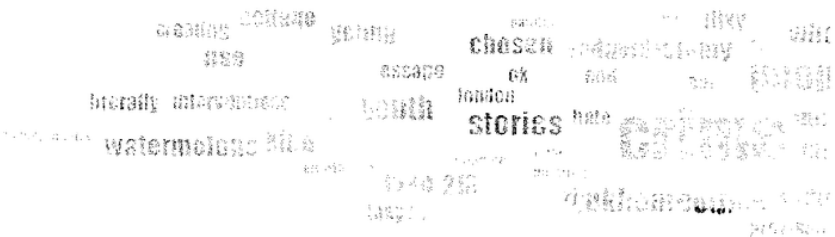
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"This theme of institutional racism and an out of touch approach that demonises communities will potentially enrage many of the communities we are trying to build trust with," the official said.

Twitter is driving criticism of the #KF campaign with a political audience attacking the government, conservatives and in some instances civil servants for being out of touch with communities and being institutionally racist.

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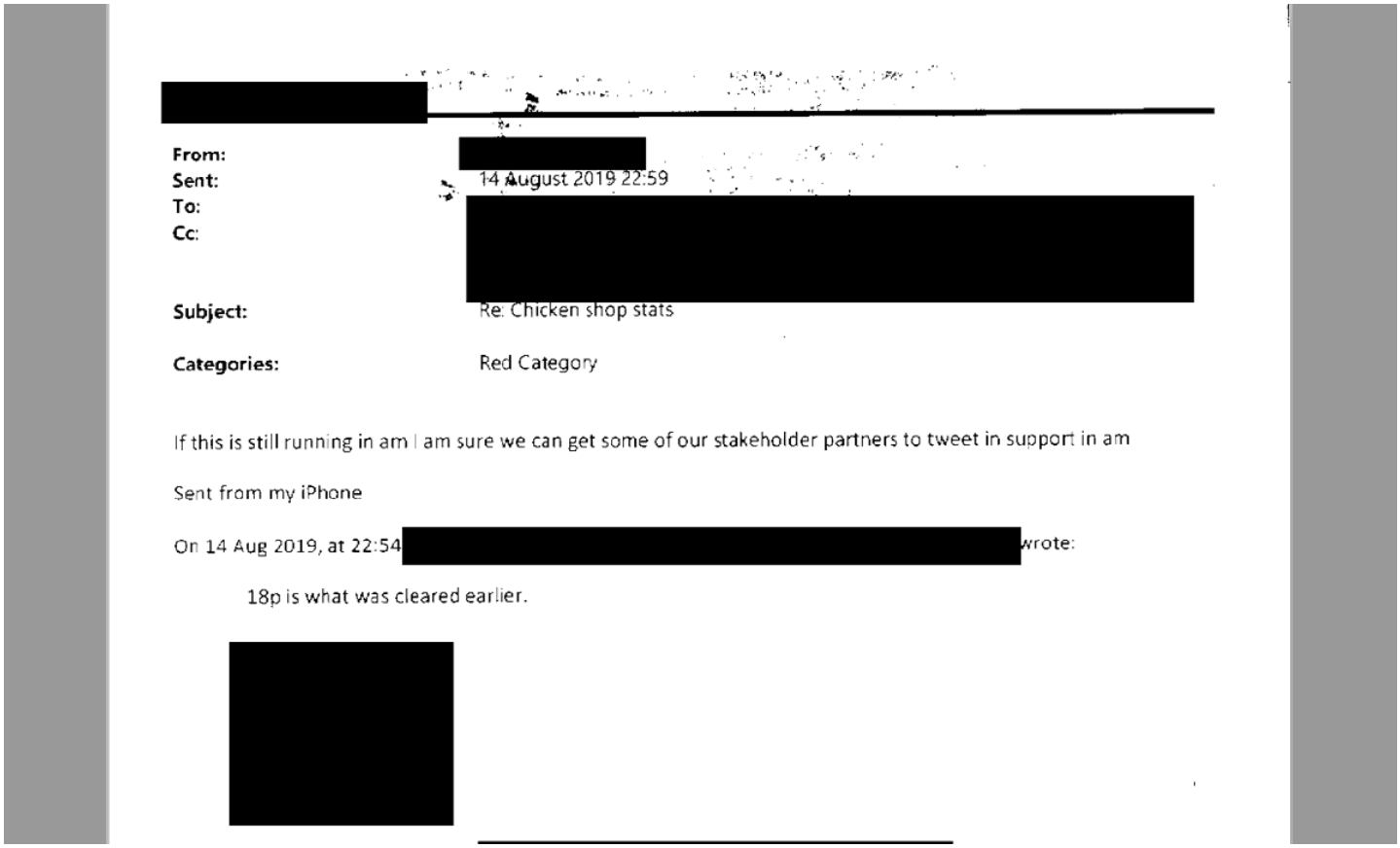
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A third criticism is that the boxes are a low impact channel to reach those thinking of carrying a knife or who are prone to violence – this is low volume.

Instead of the Home Office considering the criticism, it appeared to double down, rather than exploring what had gone wrong with the messaging, with many emails flying in the wake of @DavidLammy tweeting concerns about the campaign.



[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 14 August 2019 22:59
To:
Cc: [redacted]

Subject: Re: Chicken shop stats

Categories: Red Category

If this is still running in am I am sure we can get some of our stakeholder partners to tweet in support in am

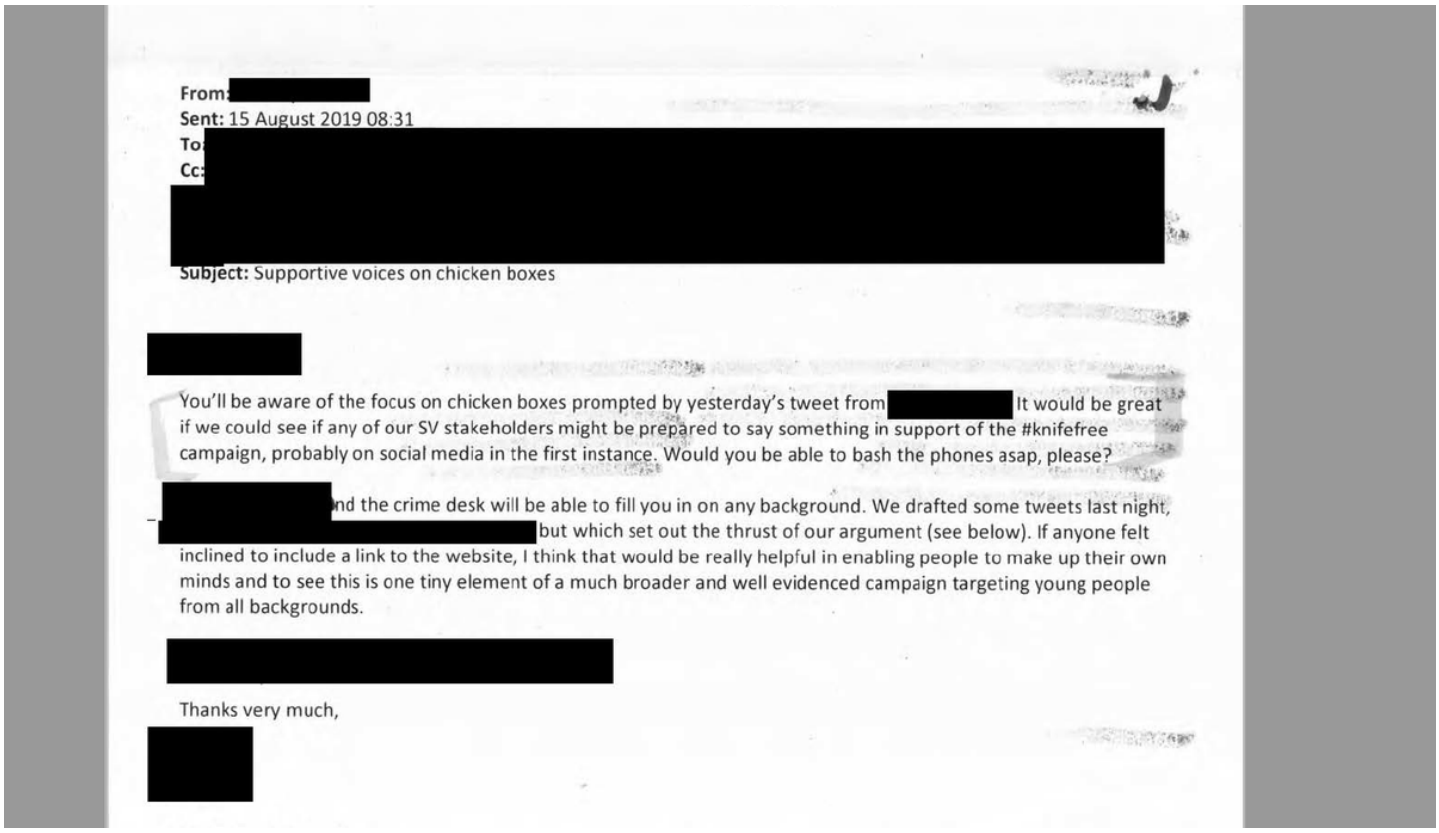
Sent from my iPhone

On 14 Aug 2019, at 22:54 [redacted] wrote:

18p is what was cleared earlier.

[redacted]

The department's press team faced the task of finding voices to support the department's position as outrage exploded across social media by "bashing the phones".



From: [redacted]
Sent: 15 August 2019 08:31
To: [redacted]
Cc:

Subject: Supportive voices on chicken boxes

[redacted]

You'll be aware of the focus on chicken boxes prompted by yesterday's tweet from [redacted] It would be great if we could see if any of our SV stakeholders might be prepared to say something in support of the #knifefree campaign, probably on social media in the first instance. Would you be able to bash the phones asap, please?

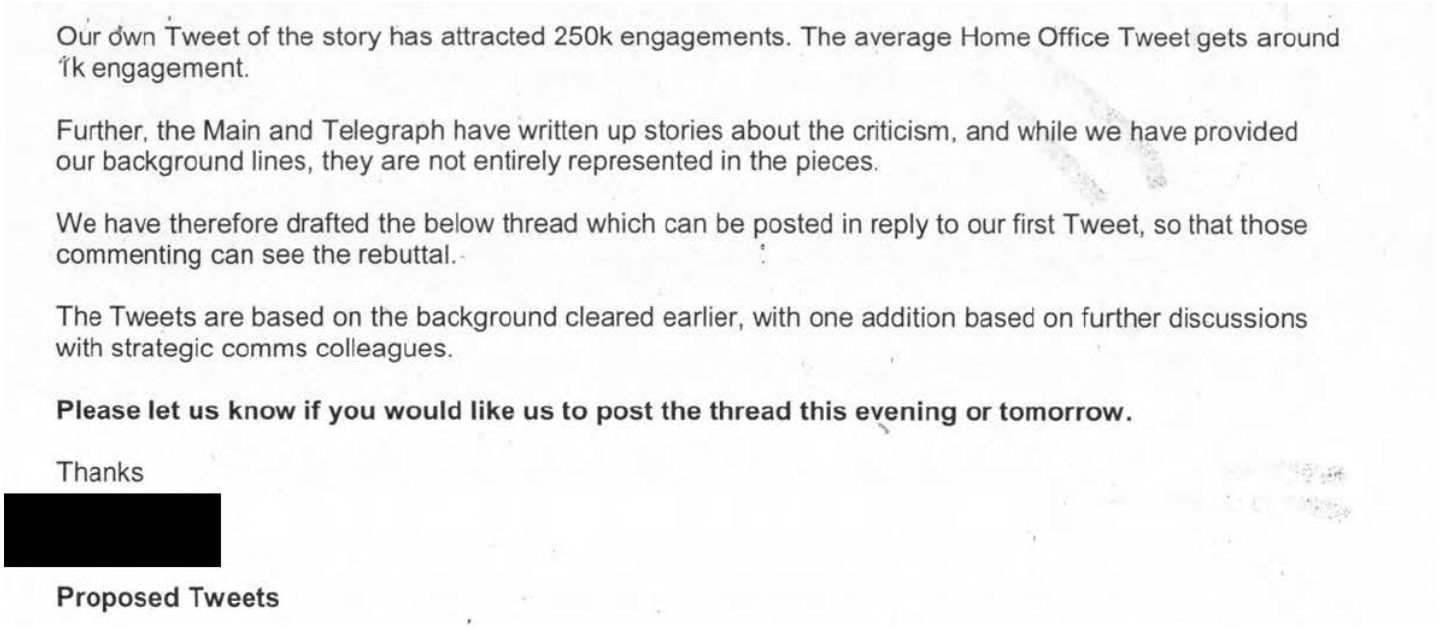
[redacted] and the crime desk will be able to fill you in on any background. We drafted some tweets last night, [redacted] but which set out the thrust of our argument (see below). If anyone felt inclined to include a link to the website, I think that would be really helpful in enabling people to make up their own minds and to see this is one tiny element of a much broader and well evidenced campaign targeting young people from all backgrounds.

[redacted]

Thanks very much,

[redacted]

Other emails complained that centre-right publications such as the Mail and Telegraph “have written up stories about the criticism, and while we have provided our background lines, that they are not entirely represented in the pieces”.



Our own Tweet of the story has attracted 250k engagements. The average Home Office Tweet gets around 1k engagement.

Further, the Main and Telegraph have written up stories about the criticism, and while we have provided our background lines, they are not entirely represented in the pieces.

We have therefore drafted the below thread which can be posted in reply to our first Tweet, so that those commenting can see the rebuttal.

The Tweets are based on the background cleared earlier, with one addition based on further discussions with strategic comms colleagues.

Please let us know if you would like us to post the thread this evening or tomorrow.

Thanks

[redacted]

Proposed Tweets

Despite initially being the public face of the policy, Kit Malthouse, then minister of State for Crime and Policing, was shielded from media contact.

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 15 August 2019 16:53
To: [redacted]
Cc:

Subject: [redacted] Policing Minister visit and interview with ITV London for #knifefree chicken boxes

Categories: Red Category

Cleared by: [redacted]

For your information, given the circumstances today we are planning to decline all bids that we have received for the Policing Minister to speak on the #knifefree chicken boxes.

Our External Affairs team have secured two supportive voices who are happy to speak to broadcast media on the 6 and 10 o'clock news tonight about the #knifefree campaign.

The first is [redacted] Rap Club, a project that engages with at risk children in schools. He is a #knifefree advocate and has worked with the Home Office on the campaign. [redacted]

The second is [redacted] Only Cowards Carry Weapons Awareness, a charity that aims to teach young children about the realities of knife crime. She founded the charity [redacted]

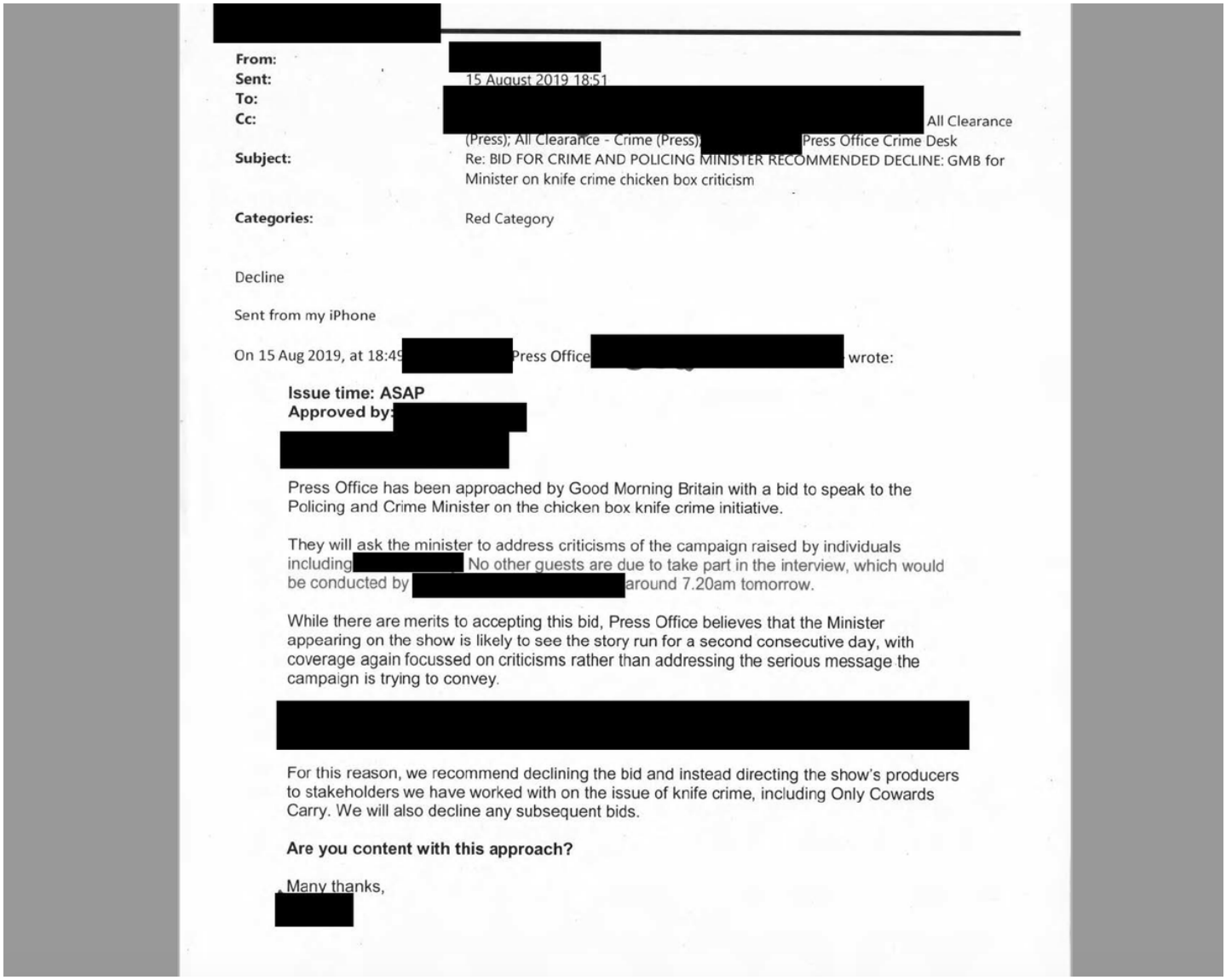
Both have made clear that they support the #knifefree campaign and the initiative to put the #knifefree campaign on chicken boxes, and that they disagree with [redacted] tweet that they are racist. We will make clear that these people are not speaking on behalf of the Home Office, and that they are not able to speak about Home Office policy.

Unless you raise any concerns, we will decline all bids and offer up these two individuals as independent voices who are prepared to discuss the #knifefree campaign.

Thanks

[redacted]

"Given the circumstances today, we are planning to decline all bids that we have received for the Policing Minister to speak on the #knifefree chicken boxes", the emails state, with a staffer agreeing with the decision with a one word response, "decline".



From: [redacted]
Sent: 15 August 2019 18:51
To: [redacted]
Cc: [redacted] All Clearance (Press); All Clearance - Crime (Press); [redacted] Press Office Crime Desk
Subject: Re: BID FOR CRIME AND POLICING MINISTER RECOMMENDED DECLINE: GMB for Minister on knife crime chicken box criticism

Categories: Red Category

Decline

Sent from my iPhone

On 15 Aug 2019, at 18:49 [redacted] Press Office [redacted] wrote:

Issue time: ASAP
Approved by: [redacted]

Press Office has been approached by Good Morning Britain with a bid to speak to the Policing and Crime Minister on the chicken box knife crime initiative.

They will ask the minister to address criticisms of the campaign raised by individuals including [redacted] No other guests are due to take part in the interview, which would be conducted by [redacted] around 7.20am tomorrow.

While there are merits to accepting this bid, Press Office believes that the Minister appearing on the show is likely to see the story run for a second consecutive day, with coverage again focussed on criticisms rather than addressing the serious message the campaign is trying to convey.

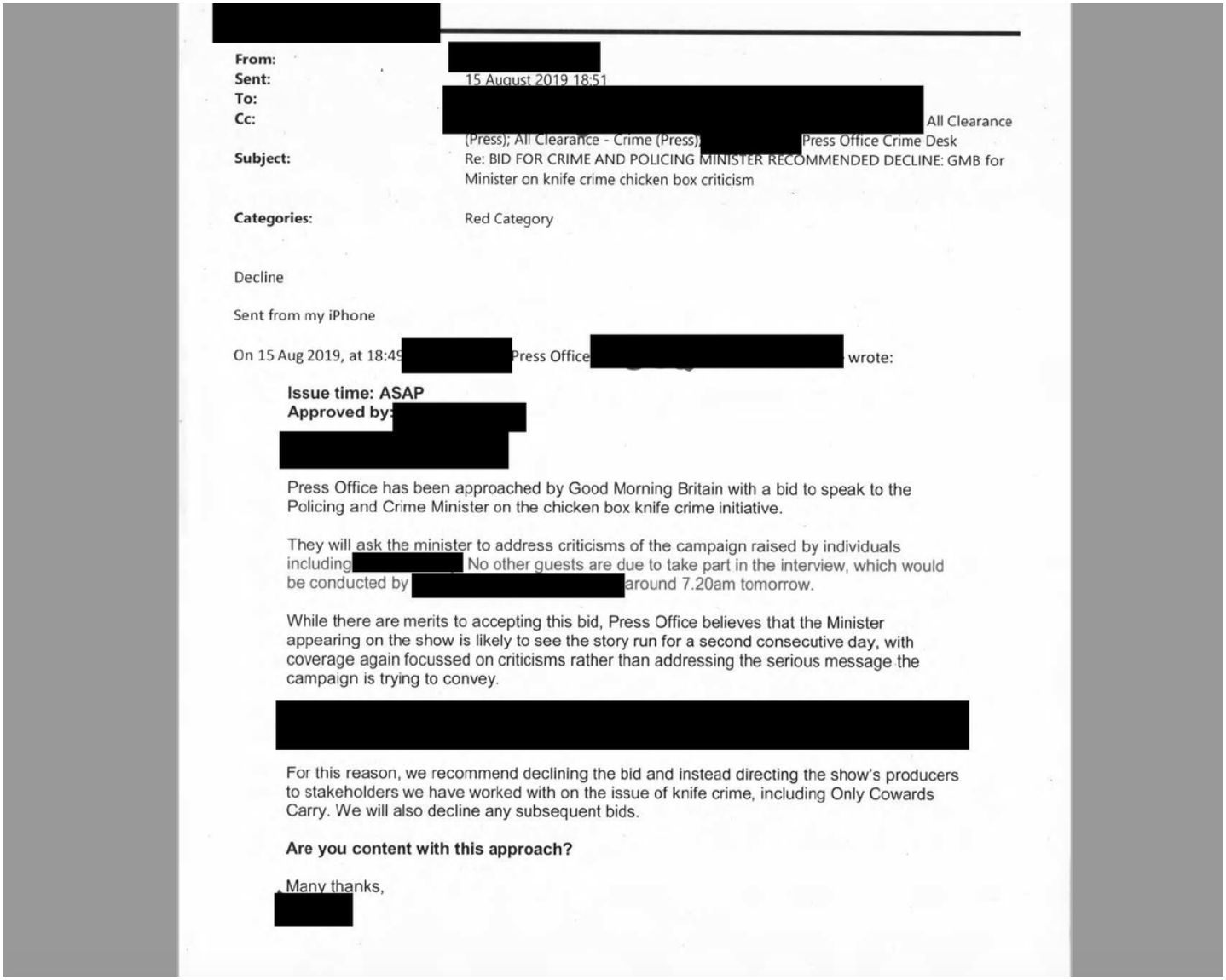
[redacted]

For this reason, we recommend declining the bid and instead directing the show's producers to stakeholders we have worked with on the issue of knife crime, including Only Cowards Carry. We will also decline any subsequent bids.

Are you content with this approach?

Many thanks,
[redacted]

A bid from #GoodMorningBritain was refused on the grounds that it would likely “see the story run for a second consecutive day, with coverage again focussed on the criticisms rather than addressing the serious messages the campaign is trying to convey.”



[redacted]

From: [redacted]
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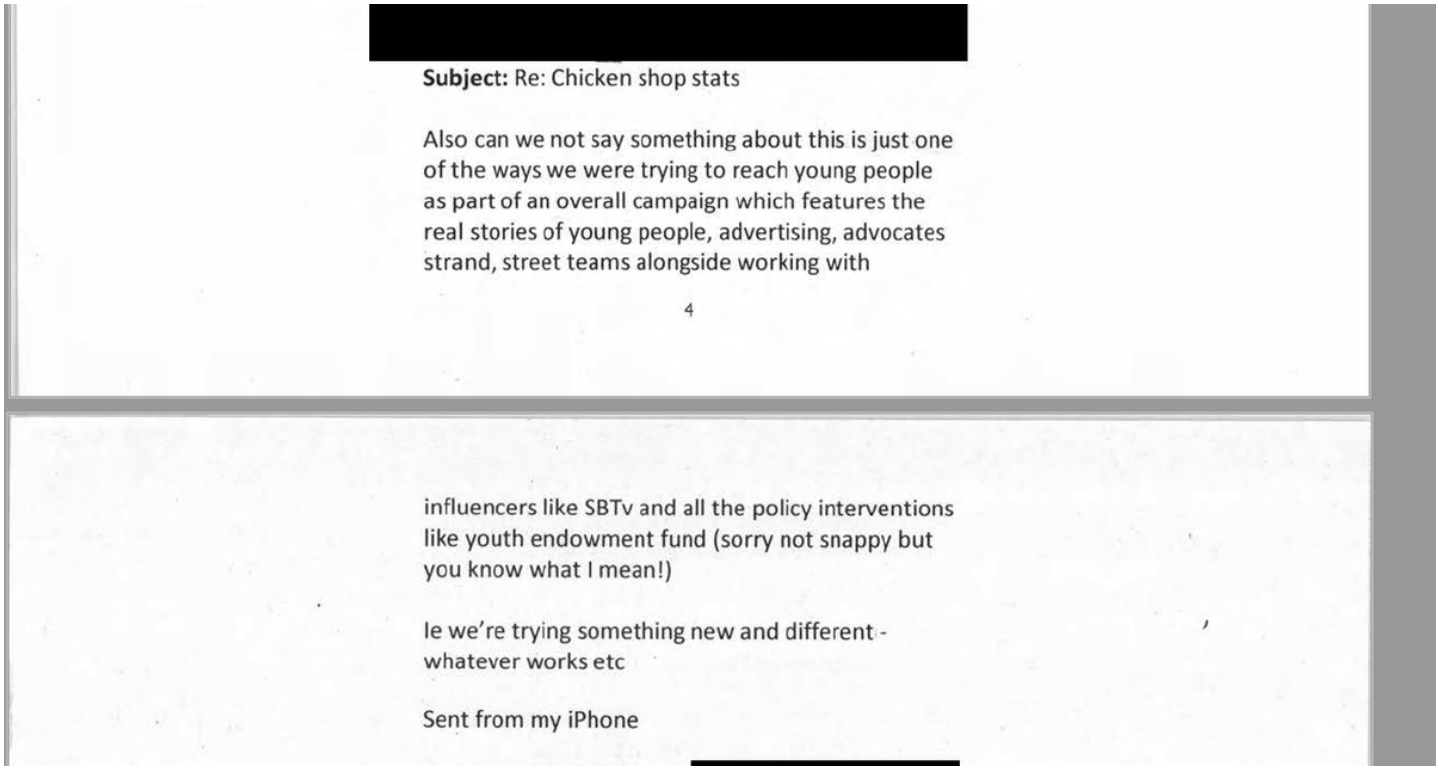
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Are you content with this approach?

Many thanks,
[redacted]

Among discussions of how to handle the issue, one damage-limitation proposal was to expand messaging to cover all fast food sites.



Subject: Re: Chicken shop stats

Also can we not say something about this is just one of the ways we were trying to reach young people as part of an overall campaign which features the real stories of young people, advertising, advocates strand, street teams alongside working with

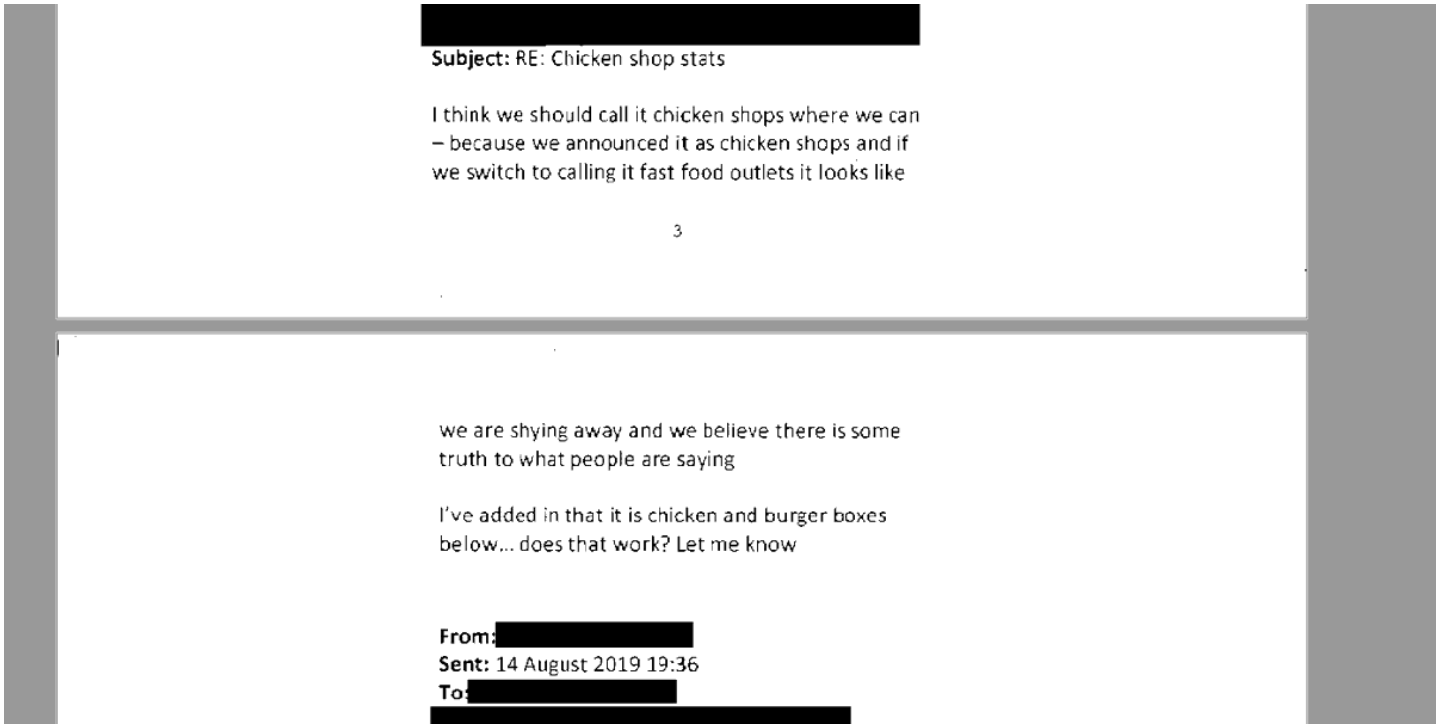
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influencers like SBTv and all the policy interventions like youth endowment fund (sorry not snappy but you know what I mean!)

Ie we're trying something new and different - whatever works etc

Sent from my iPhone

One staffer said that "I think we should call it chicken shops where we can, because we announced it as chicken shops, and if we switch to calling it fast food outlets it looks like we are shying away and we believe there is some truth in what people are saying."



Subject: RE: Chicken shop stats

I think we should call it chicken shops where we can – because we announced it as chicken shops and if we switch to calling it fast food outlets it looks like

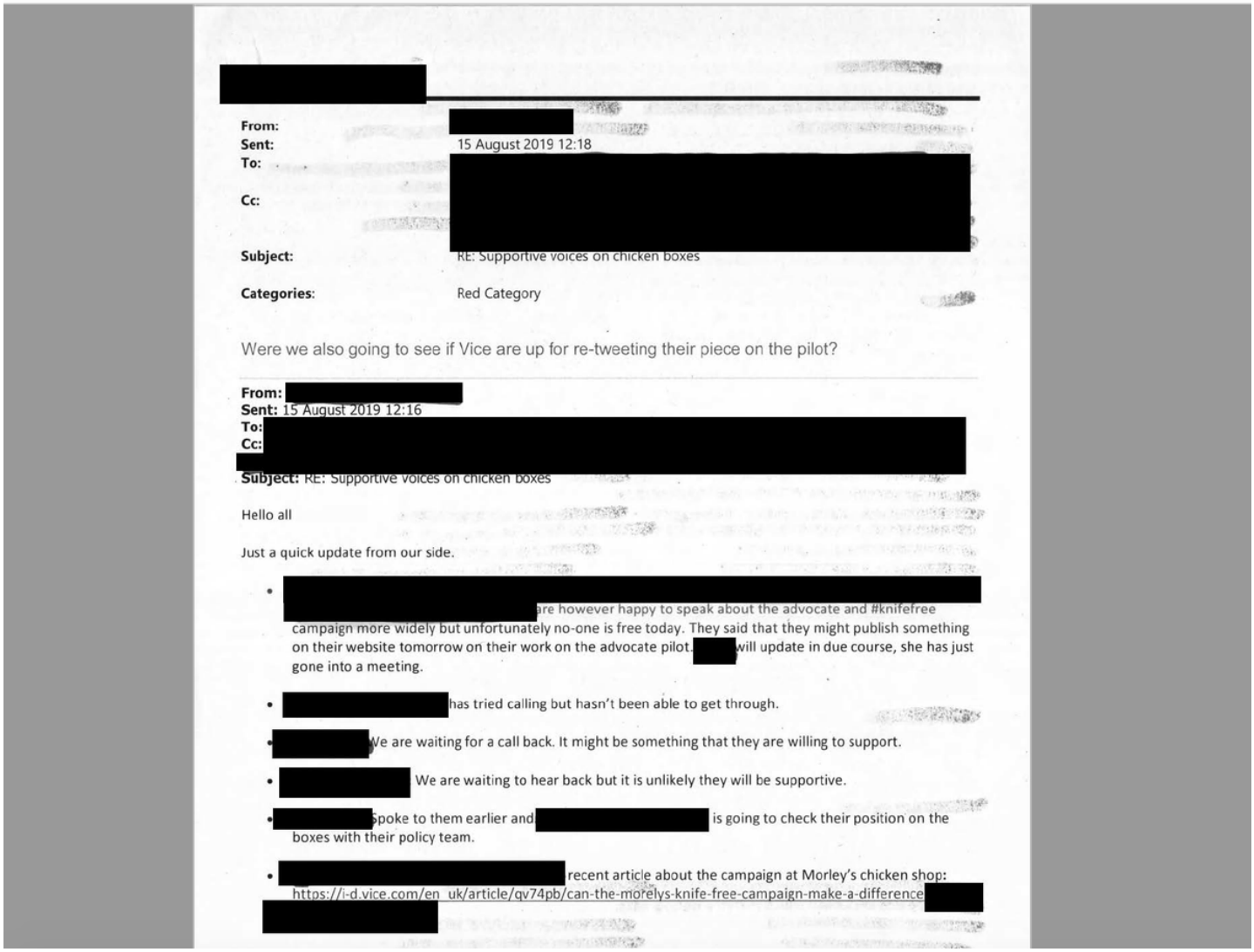
3

we are shying away and we believe there is some truth to what people are saying

I've added in that it is chicken and burger boxes below... does that work? Let me know

From:
Sent: 14 August 2019 19:36
To:

Another solution suggested was asking if Vice News would tweet in support of the Home Office's policy, since covered a previous version of the #KnifeFree project.



From: [redacted]
Sent: 15 August 2019 12:18
To: [redacted]
Cc:
Subject: RE: Supportive voices on chicken boxes
Categories: Red Category

Were we also going to see if Vice are up for re-tweeting their piece on the pilot?

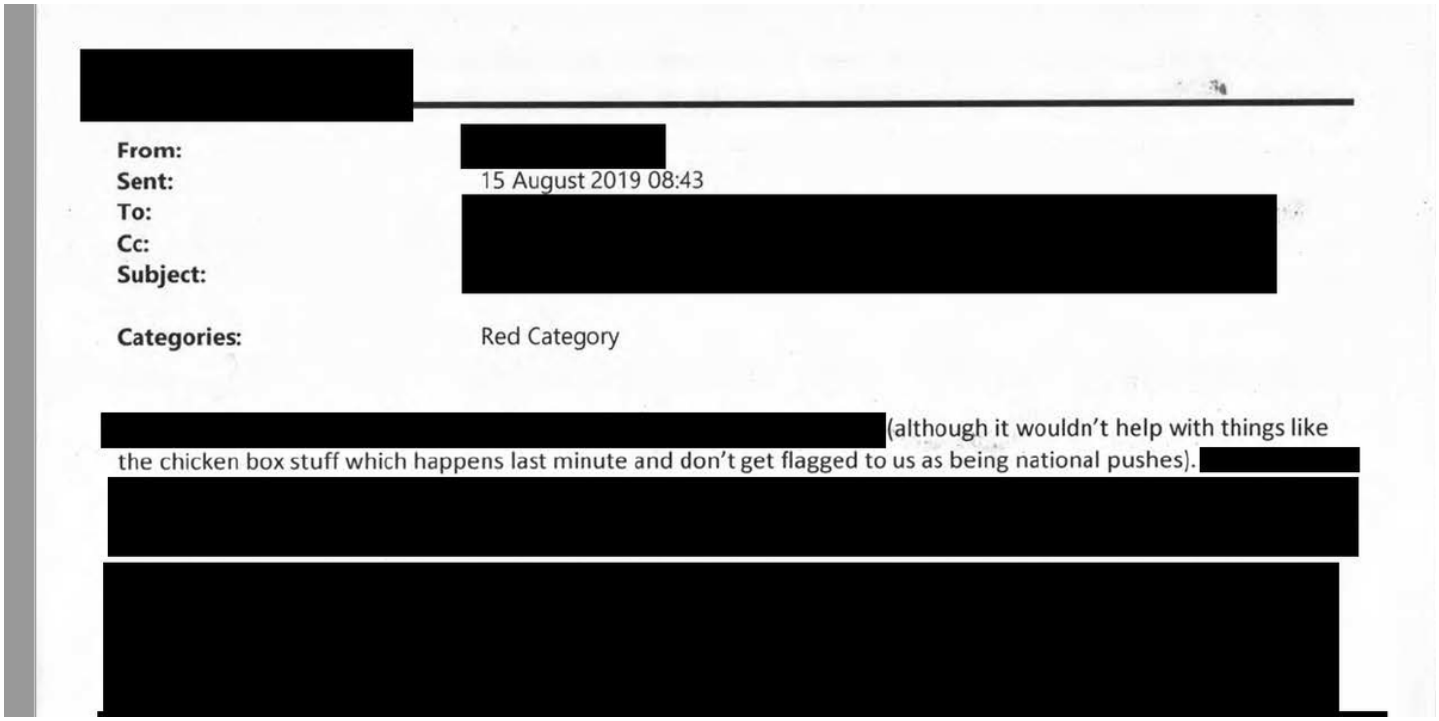
From: [redacted]
Sent: 15 August 2019 12:16
To: [redacted]
Cc:
Subject: RE: Supportive voices on chicken boxes

Hello all

Just a quick update from our side.

- [redacted] are however happy to speak about the advocate and #knifefree campaign more widely but unfortunately no-one is free today. They said that they might publish something on their website tomorrow on their work on the advocate pilot. [redacted] will update in due course, she has just gone into a meeting.
- [redacted] has tried calling but hasn't been able to get through.
- [redacted] We are waiting for a call back. It might be something that they are willing to support.
- [redacted] We are waiting to hear back but it is unlikely they will be supportive.
- [redacted] Spoke to them earlier and [redacted] is going to check their position on the boxes with their policy team.
- [redacted] recent article about the campaign at Morley's chicken shop: https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/qv74pb/can-the-morelys-knife-free-campaign-make-a-difference [redacted]

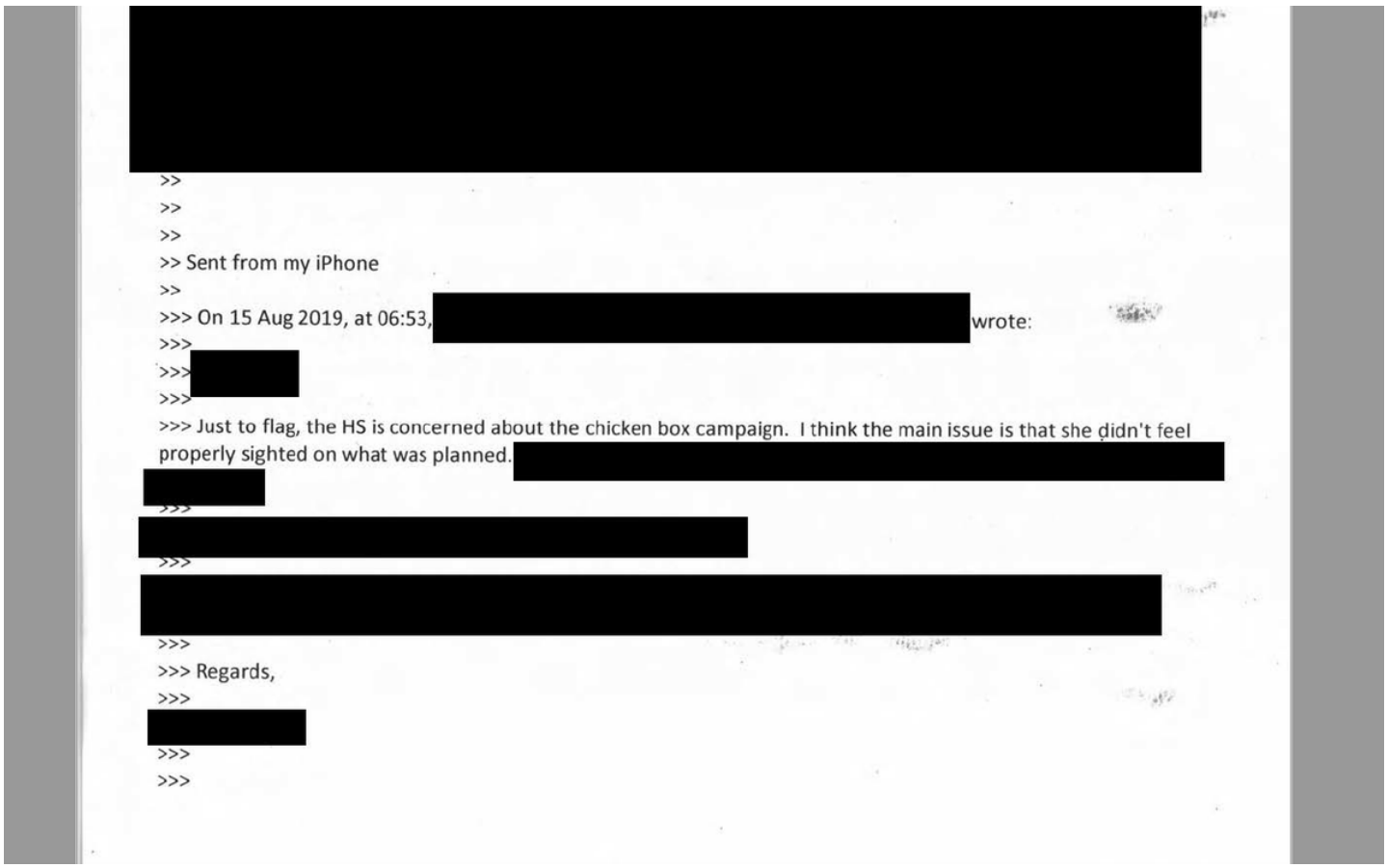
Staff from Home Secretary Priti Patel's office complained about being side swiped by the campaign.



From: [redacted]
Sent: 15 August 2019 08:43
To: [redacted]
Cc:
Subject:
Categories: Red Category

[redacted] (although it wouldn't help with things like the chicken box stuff which happens last minute and don't get flagged to us as being national pushes). [redacted]

“Just to flag, the HS (Home Secretary) is concerned about the chicken box campaign. I think the main issue is she didn’t feel properly signed on what was planned”. Another email complained that that chicken box stuff wasn’t flagged to her team as “a national push”.



>>
>>
>>
>> Sent from my iPhone
>>
>>> On 15 Aug 2019, at 06:53, [redacted] wrote:
>>>
>>> [redacted]
>>>
>>> Just to flag, the HS is concerned about the chicken box campaign. I think the main issue is that she didn't feel properly sighted on what was planned. [redacted]
>>>
>>> [redacted]
>>>
>>> [redacted]
>>>
>>> Regards,
>>>
>>> [redacted]
>>>
>>>

The debacle raised sufficient concerns that press office staff appeared to check whether there were any chicken shops along the route in Peckham Ms Patel would be taking on a patrol with the Met Police later that week, to avoid a ‘gotcha’ photograph opportunity.



Sent: 15 August 2019 12:43
To: [redacted]
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: RE: Met Police patrol visit - Tuesday 20 August

Hi [redacted]

[redacted] has clarified that it is not to visit a chicken shop it is to check whether there are chicken shops on the route the HS will be taking.

[redacted]

From: [redacted]
Sent: 15 August 2019 12:12
To: [redacted]
Cc: [redacted] Press Office SMT; HSVisits; Press Office Police and Fire Desk
Subject: Met Police patrol visit - Tuesday 20 August

Thanks [redacted] we spoke.

I have updated the timings in the attached, and cc'in the policing press desk.

[redacted]

1

A Home Office spokesperson said: “The #knifefree campaign was one element of a previous strategy to steer young people away from serious violence. Activity in fast food outlets was supported by evidence that gangs offer fast food to children to lure them into dealing drugs.”

This took the Home Office a year and an ICO complaint to release, as part of ongoing issues with timely transparency, worsened by the pandemic.

With thanks to @imosebba for help with the thread!