

# [A Harms-Based Approach to Social Media](#)

Tech companies have for far too long treated children as data to be mined rather than young people to be protected. They have let harmful content roam free on their sites from perpetuating negative body image to amplifying extreme and violent content. They have built addictive algorithms designed to keep children endlessly doom-scrolling at the expense of their mental health.

But we know that blanket bans cannot work in the digital age and we must instead look at a new standard of age-appropriate online safety online like the offline world.

That's why the Liberal Democrats are proposing a world-first film-style age-rating for online platforms, including social media. This is an approach supported by children's charities like the NSPCC.



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This would mean platforms would be required to age-gate content at an appropriate level according to a new Ofcom framework looking at the addictiveness of their platform design, the impact on children’s mental health, and the harmfulness of the content they host.

The default age would be at 16 for social media, with the onus on big tech giants to make significant changes to their platform design before they can be rated lower. For those that host harmful content such as violence and pornography, this age could be set higher than 16.

Liberal Democrats believe that the responsibility for enforcement should be on the social media giants. We would give Ofcom the power to hit profits with “business disruption orders,” making it more expensive for tech giants to break the rules while ensuring the regulator has the teeth to enforce the new age-ratings.

We think these new age-ratings will also empower parents and young people to be informed about the risks of harmful online content and features through clear guidance and an understandable framework that mirrors existing best practices.

Importantly, this model is future-proof and builds on the lessons from Australia’s social media ban. This would end the whack-a-mole approach of online safeguarding by providing a clear framework of standards for platforms. As new dangers inevitably emerge – such as unsafe chatbots, online gaming, or AI-driven harms – they can be quickly categorised and rated against clear and understandable principles of harm.

**Victoria Collins MP**

*Spokesperson for Science, Innovation and Technology*

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## **Labour Market Statistics – January 2026**

The labour market statistics were published today by the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency.

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## **Muir launches draft Strategy to protect nature for future generations**

Members of the public are to be consulted on a draft Nature Recovery Strategy to restore, manage and protect Northern Ireland's habitats for future generations.

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## **Minister publishes consultation response on Miscarriage Leave Rights**

Economy Minister, Dr Caoimhe Archibald, has published the consultation response on introducing statutory miscarriage leave and pay in Northern Ireland.

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## **New Board member appointed to the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust**

Justice Minister Naomi Long has announced the appointment of Acting Chief Superintendent Norman Haslett as a Board member of the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT).