

Leaked docs reveal Facebook bribed UK politicians to soften EU data protection laws

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Former Chancellor George Osborne © Reuters / Stefan Rousseau

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A senior Facebook executive cozied up to former UK chancellor George Osborne and urged him to speak out against EU data laws, a leaked internal memo has revealed, amid growing scrutiny of the tech giant.

Sheryl Sandberg, chief operating officer of Facebook, apparently saw Osborne as a sympathetic ally in the company's battle against EU legislation that could hurt its bottom line. According to an internal document [seen](#) by Computer Weekly, in 2013, Sandberg encouraged the chancellor of the exchequer to be *"even more active and vocal"* in his misgivings about the European Data Protection Directive – which would later become the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Her further request for Osborne to *“really help shape the proposals”* concerning EU data protection laws was coupled with attempts to woo the senior UK official. Sandberg, the leaked memo reveals, suggested that Osborne’s Facebook-infatuated child should visit one of the company’s offices.

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At the time, Osborne had argued that tighter data protection laws would be bad for business and serve as a disincentive for Facebook to set up shop in the EU. The memo may shed light on why Osborne was such a passionate opponent of such legislation. According to Sandberg, the chancellor told her he had *“really enjoyed”* his visit to Facebook’s hub in Austin, Texas.

Osborne, who stepped down from office in 2016 and now edits the London Evening Standard, told Computer Weekly that he doesn’t recall either of his children being invited to visit one of Facebook’s offices – and denied that such a visit occurred.

The chancellor wasn’t the only senior official targeted by Facebook. The memo also boasts that the company successfully encouraged Irish prime minister Enda Kenny to use his influence during Ireland’s presidency of the European Union to water down the Data Protection Directive.

[Also on rt.com Facebook tracks ex-employees it considers 'threats' – report](#)

Facebook was fined £500,000 (\$660,500) in October by the UK information commissioner for breaches of pre-GDPR data protection law relating to Cambridge Analytica. However, it

seems that Sandberg's lobbying efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. Under current GDPR rules, a similar breach could have set Facebook back by more than \$1 billion.

The document forms part of a previously unpublished cache of memos and emails seized by the UK government as part of an investigation into the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

A memo leaked last week from the same cache of documents revealed that Facebook planned to use its Android phone app to snoop on its customers and use their personal data for targeted advertising.