Thank you for your letter of 20 December 2018 concerning Modern Slavery in UK public sector supply chains.

The Government is committed to working with its suppliers to tackle modern slavery in supply chains, as part of wider government action to tackle business compliance with the Modern Slavery Act. A systematic approach to identifying and tackling modern slavery is key to making progress and my officials are working with Home Office Modern Slavery Unit to develop policy, guidance and tools to support departments, which will be published early 2019.

This package builds on existing mechanisms in place within the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, where would-be suppliers to central government must already be excluded from bidding for public contracts if they have been convicted of modern slavery or trafficking offences. Would-be suppliers are also required to certify that they are compliant with the transparency requirements contained within the Modern Slavery Act, where relevant.

The Prime Minister announced in December 2018 that government will publish a Transparency in Supply Chains (TISC) statement annually, starting in 2019. This has the effect of extending the transparency provisions of the Modern Slavery Act without the need for legislation. My officials are working with Home Office to develop the scope, frequency and format of the statement in consultation with other Departments.

Cabinet Office does not hold a central repository of incidents of modern slavery across UK public sector supply chains. It is the responsibility of individual contracting authorities concerned to deal with such incidents along with the relevant law enforcement authorities.
The Committee should note that action taken in government procurement is one of a number of levers that must be used to tackle modern slavery, and its role should not be overstated, especially in the very many markets where government is not a major market player. The garment industry is one such example.

Government, led by the Home Office, is therefore addressing non-compliance by compiling a list of businesses in scope of the legislation and writing directly to those CEOs about their obligations. Business guidance will also be revised to better advise business on the legislation. The Home Secretary has established a 'Business Against Slavery Forum' where CEOs are brought together from a range of multinational organisations to work with Government to share experiences and galvanise action on this issue.

I hope this reassures you of the actions government has committed to taking, to tackle modern slavery in its supply chains.

Yours,

Oliver Dowden CBE MP

cc Victoria Atkins MP
Rt Hon Frank Field MP