

Please ask for: Sir Peter Soulsby
Direct Line: 0116 454 0001
Our Ref: 2018/December/MC/PS/JW
Date: 21 December 2018



Mary Creagh MP
Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1 0AA

Dear Mary,

Environmental Audit Committee – Sustainability of the fashion industry

Thank you for your letter, and for inviting a response from Leicester to the inquiry into the sustainability of the fashion industry.

Leicester has a long and proud history of textile manufacturing and I am committed to ensuring it plays an important role in our future. We are aware that many retailers now want to source more garments from the UK, and this gives Leicester a great opportunity given the concentration and breadth of textiles manufacturing businesses we have here. With over 1,500 businesses and 10,000 textile workers, Leicester has the second largest concentration of textile manufacturers in the UK, which provides both an imperative and an opportunity to deliver positive change.

Ethical compliance throughout supply chains is an essential pre-requisite for this potential to be realised. This is a huge challenge however and requires effective partnerships between the regulators, the retailers and the manufacturers. Unlike in the food industry, enforcement powers and resources rest exclusively with national regulators rather than local authorities.

You will be aware that ethical compliance is not just an issue for Leicester, but a national one. Nevertheless, Leicester has been taking a lead in tackling this head on. We want to make sure that Leicester has the highest standards of employment; that workers are properly paid, well-trained, and work in safe environments. We want to support our factories to be the best they can, and to set an example that others can follow.

This work has included the Council delivering a series of ethical compliance workshops with local manufacturers, and providing business support to help these companies to grow.

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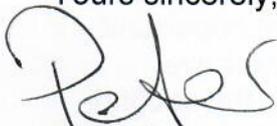
Just over a year ago I hosted a meeting of over 40 representatives from national regulators, retailers and sector bodies to discuss how ethical compliance can be maximised. This concluded that tackling exploitation in the textiles supply chain requires not only the reporting of intelligence, but also effective intelligence sharing between national regulators and the translation of this intelligence into coordinated action at the local level. Visibility of this enforcement activity was also identified as a key issue, to send out a clear message of the consequences of non-compliance.

Building on this initiative I was pleased to see that Sir David Metcalf, the Director of Labour Market Enforcement, included a specific recommendation to establish a Leicester textiles compliance pilot in the first Labour Market Enforcement Strategy 2018-19. Since then, we have been working closely with Sir David's team and the national regulators to make this happen. As well as delivering tangible and visible enforcement action, the hope is that this pilot could also provide valuable learning for other areas on how to tackle this important issue.

The four main national enforcement bodies – HMRC, Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate (EAS) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have now started to deliver the pilot in Leicester since Autumn 2018. The GLAA has been identified as the lead body, and this has already seen 27 initial raids being completed, with more in the pipeline. We also understand that intelligence is starting to come in, and national and local partners are now working closely together to make the pilot a success.

I look forward to seeing the conclusions of the Committee's inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Soulsby
City Mayor

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