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Dear Harriet,

Thank you for your letter of 20 July regarding the allegations of exploitation in the textile industry in Leicester. We are deeply concerned by the appalling reports of illegal and unsafe working conditions and welcome all intelligence on this issue.

A multi-agency taskforce, led by the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, is responding to the very serious recent allegations. If evidence of wrongdoing and illegal exploitation comes to light, we will ensure the perpetrators face the full force of the law. As part of its drive to make Britain's workplaces secure, the Health and Safety Executive ramped up its spot inspections in Leicester. Some enforcement action is being taken in relation to social distancing arrangements and cleaning regimes.

The Government is committed to cracking down on any employer abusing employment law. We continue work to create a new Single Enforcement Body. This will provide a clearer route for workers to raise a complaint and get support, enable more coordinated action and the use of pooled intelligence to better target enforcement. As part of this work, we will consider the powers of the new body in light of the activity in Leicester.

It is also crucial that brands play their part in addressing modern slavery risks within their own supply chains. Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 established the UK as the first country in the world to require businesses to report on how they are tackling modern slavery in their organisation and supply chains. Following an Independent Review, the Home Office has committed to create a new service where organisations publish their modern slavery statements, making scrutiny of their plans easier. This is due to launch in early 2021. The Home Office have also consulted on a range of proposals to further strengthen the legislation, including extending the reporting requirement to large public bodies, introducing mandatory reporting topics and new enforcement measures.

Please be assured that we are continuing to monitor developments in Leicester and to consider appropriate measures to tackle this issue.

THE RT HON ALOK SHARMA MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy