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& Industrial Strategy

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Dear Catherine,

Thank you for your and Baroness Young's letter dated 27 May, regarding the Textiles and Fashion All Party Parliamentary Group Build Back Better and the Fashion Industry meeting. I note that you have both written to me in your positions as Co-Chairs of the APPG for Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion.

Since our response to the Environmental Audit Committee, work has continued at pace to tackle non-compliance in the Leicester garment industry. The multi-agency taskforce (Op Tacit) is continuing inspections and has now visited over 270 premises in the city. They are engaging with brands and intelligence from whistleblowers is continuing to inform activity. Appropriate enforcement action is being taken against all evidence of non-compliance.

I have also held a roundtable with the British Retail Consortium and its members to discuss the issues in Leicester and to seek their views on proposals for a licensing scheme, and for a garment trade adjudicator. In all my engagement with brands, I have made it clear that we expect them to act responsibly in relation to their supply chains and that they have a role to play in preventing exploitation.

Due to the serious nature of the allegations of non-compliance in the garment industry, it is crucial that we take an evidence-based approach to considering policy options. As well as the garment trade adjudicator idea, we have heard other proposals including licensing and increased guidance on managing supply chains. It is important that we take the time to fully consider effectiveness and implications of these options before we take action. While we understand that the adjudicator model has had some success in raising standards in the groceries sector, there are significant differences between those two industries. Therefore, we are working through the different factors that might impact on how effectively the model can be transferred.

Regarding engagement with manufacturers, the Apparel and General Merchandising Public/Private Protocol, a partnership of the enforcement agencies, retailers and manufacturers, are working together to find ways to improve standards across the sector. This work is taking a joint approach across the sector. It is important that any future policy intervention is informed by those within the industry itself and those working on the ground. Therefore, we look forward to hearing the results of this work and will use this to inform our thinking. We will seek to further engage with manufacturers directly in any future policy development.

In our response to the single enforcement body consultation which we have recently published, we have reaffirmed our commitment to continue to engage with the enforcement bodies and industry partners to strengthen our understanding of levels of non-compliance across the garment trade. This will form a basis for us to consider options that will drive up standards across the sector.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write, I hope my response is helpful to you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Scully', is centered on the page.

PAUL SCULLY MP

Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Labour Markets
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