



Dame Sara Thornton DBE
Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner
5th Floor, Globe House
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HOCS Reference: MIN/0007610/20

1 July 2020

Dear Dame Sara,

Thank you for your letter of 13 May, regarding support for victims of modern slavery during the Covid-19 pandemic. This Government is committed to protecting and supporting victims of modern slavery during this unprecedented situation. As I have outlined to you in previous correspondence, we have taken a number of measures to ensure we can respond flexibly and effectively to meet the needs of victims during this time. Your letter specifically mentions three issues, which I will address in turn.

Amendment to Domestic Abuse Bill

I understand the challenges that victims of modern slavery can face obtaining access to local authority housing. Victims of domestic abuse will be granted automatic priority need through the Domestic Abuse Bill to ensure victims are not forced to remain with their abuser for fear of homelessness. I appreciate that there are many parallels with victims of modern slavery, who may be fleeing a situation of exploitation and fear. My officials are in ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government on this issue to ensure victims of modern slavery have access to safe and appropriate housing, which is vital for their recovery.

Funding to support victims of modern slavery

As referred to in your letter, we are providing £1.73 million of funding for modern slavery services, as part of the £750 million package announced by the Chancellor last month for charities during Covid-19. Given the importance of ensuring this funding reaches victims quickly and provides the services necessary to respond to the pandemic, it will support the organisations who directly work with victims in the Victim Care Contract, who have been identified through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The funding will be used to enable organisations to adapt how they provide support to victims in light of the challenges posed by Covid-19. This includes ensuring the right accommodation is available, that victims can receive their financial assistance safely, that support services and therapies can be accessed remotely, and the provision of data packages, telephone and computer hardware and software.

As you point out, the £1.73 million was announced as part of a £3.8 million package for victims of modern slavery and domestic abuse. The remainder of the £3.8 million will be

directed towards domestic abuse organisations which provide a national or regional service to support victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

We recognise the important work that smaller charities, outside of the Victim Care Contract, do to provide support for victims of modern slavery. These charities will be eligible to apply for other funding streams, including the National Lottery Community Fund, and we have highlighted this opportunity recently in our weekly stakeholder newsletter. The Fund will accept short applications from organisations and will be prioritising applications from organisations that are supporting those directly or indirectly impacted by Covid-19 and are in significant financial difficulty. Further details on the application process will be released soon via the National Lottery Community Fund website.

Single Point of Contact

Thank you for your suggestion about creating a Single Point of Contact between the Home Office and the modern slavery sector, to mirror the arrangement in place between the British Red Cross and Home Office asylum teams. Last week, I spoke to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery about this proposal and have asked officials to work with the sector to put in place the most suitable mechanism to facilitate a Single Point of Contact.

We recognise the importance of regular, and informative, communication and have a number of existing arrangements in place to facilitate such engagement with stakeholders in the sector.

In collaboration with The Salvation Army, we have created a weekly newsletter, which is sent to over 1,200 stakeholders. We have found that this is a helpful and transparent way of communicating with a large audience during this uncertain time. In addition, we continue to use the Modern Slavery Strategy and Implementation Group (MSSIG) structure to engage with key NGOs. We have committed to continuing MSSIG meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic, to ensure we have this direct contact with stakeholders. We have an arrangement with MSSIG chairs that they co-ordinate feedback and questions from the sector, and we use the newsletter to address them on a weekly basis.

Officials in the Modern Slavery Unit are also in regular communication with a wider range of stakeholder organisations and are prioritising attending and contributing to meetings such as the Human Trafficking Foundation Forum to ensure timely updates are provided and that they can hear first-hand about any new and emerging challenges.

Thank you for taking the time to write to me on these issues.

Yours sincerely,



Victoria Atkins MP