

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Responsible Business Minutes for Meeting on Tackling Modern Slavery

Monday 27 April 2026, 4-5pm

Location: Committee Room 2A, House of Lords

Present:

APPG Officers: Dame Harriett Baldwin MP (Co-Chair), Martin Wrigley MP (Co-Chair)

Business in the Community (Secretariat): Gail Greengross (Creative and External Affairs Director), Hannah Tankard (Head of Content, Research and Engagement), Polly Dacam (Senior Public Affairs and Media Officer)

Speakers: Nick Herbert, Project and Partnerships Lead, Human Trafficking Foundation; Eleanor Lyons, Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner; Aisha Aswani, Senior Human Rights and Ethical Trading Manager, the Co-operative

Additional Parliamentary attendees: Lord Brennan; Baroness Winterton of Doncaster; Parliamentary Assistants of Marie Rimmer MP, Martin Wrigley MP, and Dame Harriett Baldwin MP

Additional non-Parliamentary attendees: 15 additional attendees representing the APPG for Responsible Business's Corporate Member companies and others, including Associated British Foods, Arden Strategies, B Corp, Convatec, Henry Boot, Pool Reinsurance, Thales UK, and The Learning Nuggets Company.

1. Welcome from Dame Harriett Baldwin MP

- Noted that exploitation continues across UK and global supply chains and that the current approaches taken to tackle modern slavery remain imperfect.
- Highlighted that there are an estimated 19,000 potential victims of human trafficking and forced labour in the UK, and many more are affected globally.
- Emphasised the need for a realistic and proportionate response that improves economic systems while recognising business realities.
- Noted that this is an important and topical issue for the APPG for Responsible Business because some APPG for Responsible Business corporate members required Co-Chairs to sign a modern slavery agreement, but that stronger and more effective measures than this need to be put in place beyond existing reporting requirements.
- Introduced the panel of speakers.

2. Nick Herbert, Project and Partnerships Lead, Human Trafficking Foundation

- Outlined the work of the Human Trafficking Foundation, which grew out of the APPG on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery and brings together NGOs, government, faith groups, policymakers, and businesses to coordinate action

against modern slavery, recognising that a whole-system, multi-agency approach is required.

- Explained that modern slavery is an umbrella term covering forms of exploitation including forced labour and sexual exploitation for profit or personal gain, and that it is present in the UK as well as globally.
- Stressed that while the UK was once seen as a global leader with the Modern Slavery Act of 2015, there has been insufficient enforcement and accountability.
- Welcomed recent reports from the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and called for renewed political leadership on this issue, noting that comparable legislation now exists in the EU and US.
- Emphasised the importance of remembering the human stories behind supply chains, including exploitation in clothing manufacturing, fishing, and agriculture.

3. Eleanor Lyons, Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

- Reflected that when the Modern Slavery Act was passed in 2015, the UK was widely regarded as world-leading, but since then the number of identified victims has increased year on year, with UK national now the largest proportion of victims and labour exploitation the most common form of modern slavery.
- Stated that while the Act was broadly fit for purpose at its introduction, its supply chain provisions are now ineffective and have become more of a tick-box exercise.
- Highlighted a lack of enforcement powers and political focus, allowing modern slavery to slip out of boardrooms and operational priorities.
- Warned that the UK risks falling behind international partners, particularly in the EU and the US, which both now have mandatory human rights due diligence regimes and import bans on goods made through forced labour, meaning that without equivalent measures, the UK could become a dumping ground for unethical products.
- Shared that polling as part of the *Strengthening the UK's Forced Labour and Human Rights Legislative Framework* report shows that around 80% of consumers support stronger laws and mandatory due diligence, a position also supported by many responsible businesses seeking a level playing field.
- Outlined proposals for new legislation including a duty to prevent harm across entire value chains, backed by penalties and enforcement for non-compliance to hold them to account, and protection for businesses taking all of the reasonable steps.
- Expressed hope for progress in the next parliamentary session, but highlighted that uncertainty still remains around whether this will still be included in the King's Speech.

4. Aisha Aswani, Senior Human Rights and Ethical Trading Manager, The Co-operative

- Described the Co-operative's long-standing commitment to tackling modern slavery and noted the recent publication of the Co-op's 10th Modern Slavery Statement.

- Reiterated the Co-op's support for mandatory due diligence and its role in supporting the original Modern Slavery Act.
- Outlined the Co-op's five-pillar approach:
 1. **Enabling transparency and innovation:** creating an environment where suppliers are supported to be open about risks without fear of losing contracts.
 2. **Embedding ethical trade in core processes:** including long-term contracts and responsible purchasing practices.
 3. **Building supplier capability and resilience:** through supplier forums and partnerships in key sourcing countries.
 4. **Risk mitigation:** focusing on priority risk areas and collaboration across sectors.
 5. **Empowering workers and enabling livelihoods:** including gender empowerment programmes.
- Stressed the importance of acknowledging the complexity of modern slavery, addressing root concerns, and creating enabling legislation rather than relying solely on media pressure or reactive action.

5. Questions and reflections

Dame Harriett Baldwin MP – How can consumers avoid purchasing goods linked to modern slavery?

Eleanor Lyons: Noted that while consumers do wish to do the right thing, supply chains lack transparency and the burden must sit with businesses. There is no single indicator, such as price, that guarantees ethical production. There is a Modern Slavery Helpline and consumers should report immediate danger if they witness anything.

Baroness Rosie Winterton – What are the ministerial responses and the potential for legislative change through the King's Speech?

Eleanor Lyons: Confirmed that the Department for Business and Trade has completed a Responsible Business Conduct Review and there is ministerial support for this, including from Jess Phillips MP, but the timelines for when legislative reforms might come into play remain unclear.

Baroness Rosie Winterton – Does the Government need to respond to your proposal?

Eleanor Lyons: Acknowledged that they do need to respond to it. Noted that the Home Secretary already has powers to issue injunctions under the Modern Slavery Act, but these have never been used, leaving enforcement weak.

Baroness Rosie Winterton – Are injunctions issued to stop trading?

Eleanor Lyons: Noted that they are not to stop trading but to force companies to prepare and publish a modern slavery statement. If other countries are banning goods

produced through modern slavery, the UK will be one of the only countries with no import bans, so would become a dumping ground for unethical products.

Baroness Rosie Winterton – Could we implement an ID card system?

Eleanor Lyons: Explained that we have looked at how ID cards can be used to stop people from falling through the gaps, especially children. Modern slavery is a safeguarding and human rights issue, not a 'back door' to the UK.

Nick Herbert: Stressed the importance of having some clear registry of work in the UK – migrant workers are worried that if they complain about their working conditions they will be removed from the country. The Fair Work Agency need to ensure that all of these workers are treated fairly. There is a need for safe reporting mechanisms, particularly in food supply chains.

Martin Wrigley MP – Why has modern slavery fallen from the public view since the passing of the Modern Slavery Act in 2015? What can we do to get the issue back into the public eye?

Nick Herbert: Stressed that everyone needs to be talking about this issue. It needs to be spoken about in communities, on TV, and in the news. Politicians need to be asking questions in Parliament about it.

Aisha Aswani: Highlighted that the retail sector is under a lot of scrutiny surrounding this. It is difficult to talk about these issues due to the politics surrounding them, but response to these issues needs to be happening across a wide range of sectors, not just for media attention. Consumers expect retailers like Co-op to be on top of this.

Eleanor Lyons: Noted that 11 years ago, we separated modern slavery and human trafficking from immigration and did not conflate the two issues. Now, modern slavery, human trafficking, and organised immigration are put under the same bracket. The narrative has merged issues that do not belong together into one and this is one of her biggest challenges as the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. We have gone backwards in our understanding of the issue. Expressed concerns that this regression might be reflected in the King's Speech.

Lord Brennan – Proposed a coordinated anti-slavery programme, including education, international collaboration, and a national anti-slavery day to maintain momentum.

Eleanor Lyons: Acknowledged that there is always more to be done so expressed an appreciation for this idea and agreed that we do need to push ourselves to go further.

Aisha Aswani: Reinforced the point that people want to do the right thing but there is a lack of capacity for this. We need to be clear about the root cause of the issues.

6. Closing address from Martin Wrigley MP

- Closed the meeting and thanked the speakers for their contributions.
- Confirmed that the APPG will collate key points from the discussion to write to Jess Phillips MP with constructive recommendations to support effective government action while enabling responsible businesses to remain a force for good.

7. Further questions and final reflections

Dame Harriett Baldwin MP – Who would you like to see the Home Secretary put an injunction on?

Eleanor Lyons: Referenced Shein and Temu as examples of companies where concerns have been raised due to pricing and supply chain risks, noting the need to remain impartial in her role. Offered to share anonymised case studies to bring the human impact of modern slavery to life.

Appendix

Members of the APPG for Responsible Business

The APPG for Responsible Business currently has 22 Parliamentary members:

- Dame Harriett Baldwin MP
- Lord Bassam
- Chirs Bloore MP
- Elsie Blundell MP
- Lord Blunkett
- Lord Bourne
- Baroness Bowles of Berkhamsted
- Lord Brennan
- Wendy Chamberlain MP
- Baroness Coussins
- Alison Griffiths MP
- Lord Haskel
- John Milne MP
- Iqbal Mohamed MP
- Lord Newby
- Baroness Sater
- Greg Smith MP
- Jamie Stone MP
- Baroness Valentine
- Valerie Vaz MP
- Martin Wrigley MP
- Viscount Younger of Leckie

**All-Party Parliamentary Group
for Responsible Business**



The APPG for Responsible Business currently has 19 corporate members:

- AB InBev
- Associated British Foods
- AWE
- Cemex
- CMS Cameron McKenna
- Consilient Health
- Convatec
- Coventry Building Society
- Henry Boot
- Home Instead
- Minority Supplier Development UK
- Novus Solutions
- Orbit Group
- Pool Reinsurance
- Thales UK
- The Learning Nuggets Company
- Watches of Switzerland
- White & Case
- Zurich Insurance