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20th November 2025

Dear Noble Lords

I wish to express my gratitude for the important and constructive debate on the National Health Service (Procurement, Slavery and Human Trafficking) Regulations 2025 held on Monday 10th November 2025.

I am also thankful for your valuable contributions, and I remain pleased that this matter continues to benefit from *ad aeternum* cross-party support. I am writing to provide further detail on the points raised during the debate.

As outlined, the government remains resolutely committed to eradicating modern slavery from NHS supply chains. The regulations laid under section 12ZC of the National Health Service Act 2006 establish a clear legal duty on public bodies to assess and mitigate modern slavery risks when procuring goods and services for the NHS in England. This represents a landmark step in aligning ethical procurement with statutory enforcement.

Lord Scriven raised a specific question regarding the publication of updated guidance. As I stressed, the updated draft guidance on tackling modern slavery in NHS procurement was published on 17th October 2025, and the Explanatory Memorandum has been updated to include a link to this guidance.

Many of the questions raised during the debate concerned the relevance and proportionality of the reasonable steps required. The updated guidance sets out a range of tools to support the mitigation of risks.

The interplay between central policy and the regulations

Lord Scriven also enquired about the interplay between existing policy requirements and the new statutory instrument.

PPN 009: Tackling modern slavery in government supply chains provides central guidance on identifying and managing modern slavery risks in government supply chains. It applies to “in scope organisations”, including NHS bodies, when awarding

public contracts for goods and services covered by the Procurement Act 2023. However, PPN 009 does not directly apply to local authorities or healthcare services covered by the Health Care Services (Provider Selection Regime) Regulations 2023.

The new regulations apply to any public body procuring goods or services for the NHS in England, including local authorities and central purchasing bodies, and cover all goods and services, including healthcare services.

Regulations were necessary as Section 12ZC(1) of the NHS Act 2006 requires the Secretary of State to make regulations with the intention of eradicating modern slavery in the NHS. The regulations and supporting guidance have been carefully drafted to complement existing policies.

Implementation and Support

We recognise the scale and complexity of NHS procurement and are committed to supporting public bodies through implementation. To ensure consistency in risk assessment, a national tool is available within the health system's e-procurement system. Updated guidance provides clear suggestions on reasonable steps, with a focus on those contracts identified as higher risk for modern slavery. Training modules are available via the Government Commercial College and CIPS Ethical Procurement platform, with further learning resources being developed and rolled out across the NHS.

The risk assessment tools, training modules and learning resources will be centrally funded.

The regulations apply to local authorities when procuring certain services, and we are also mindful of the potential impact on these public bodies. Local authorities have a duty to improve the health of populations in their areas. It is important to recognise the existing hard work of local authorities in achieving high standards in ethical procurement. The regulations result in a small addition to this ongoing effort and will not come at a significant cost. Local authorities are supportive of the regulations and have been engaged through consultation and Local Government Association events.

Impact on suppliers, including SMEs and VCSEs

The regulations do not impose any direct duties on suppliers.

Public bodies must act proportionately in relation to the assessed risk. While we cannot ignore any level of slavery in supply chains, the statutory guidance suggests reasonable steps without imposing unnecessary burdens on suppliers. Our approach prioritises positive, proactive and collaborative engagement with suppliers to foster transparency. We are working across the system to ensure that procurement design supports supplier diversity and avoids unnecessary barriers to participation.

Monitoring and Enforcement

Compliance may be monitored by contracting authorities using existing NHS eProcurement systems, with real-time data available to commercial teams. Public bodies are empowered to exclude suppliers or terminate contracts where modern slavery risks identified and not addressed, provided this does not negatively affect victims. It is vital that all victims of slavery receive appropriate support.

The lawfulness of decisions may be subject to judicial review, ensuring accountability.

Consultation

Lord Scriven also enquired about the extent of consultation with small businesses.

The Department of Health and Social Care held five public webinars, with over 550 representatives registered from across the supply chain and conducted a public online consultation between 21st November 2024 and 13th February 2025. The [consultation outcome and government response](#) was published on 5th June 2025.

The response includes data on the number of consultation responses by stakeholder group including 11 suppliers (among them SMEs and VCSEs), 6 trade associations, 1 trade union and 3 community interest groups.

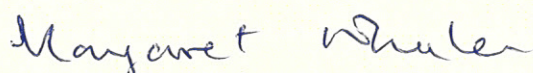
NHS England and DHSC Merger

Following the Prime Minister's announcement in March that NHS England would be brought back into **the Department of Health and Social Care**, I can confirm that DHSC will assume responsibility for issuing guidance, ensuring there is no period of uncertainty or inconsistency.

Next Steps

We are grateful for the cross-party support received during the Grand Committee debate and will continue to engage with stakeholders as we refine our plans for implementation.

I hope you find this letter helpful. I will also place a copy in the House library.



Baroness Wheeler

Captain of the King's Bodyguard of the Yeomen of the Guard Household
Deputy Chief Whip