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Dear Jan Mokrzycki,

Thank you for your letter of 12 January to the Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, enclosing a copy of a recent news release from the Federation concerning incidents of hate crime against Polish nationals in the UK in 2008.

I share your concern at these distressing incidents, which serve as a reminder of the consequences if we fail to act on our shared responsibilities to challenge racism, inaccuracies and misrepresentation wherever they occur. Communities where acts of extremism are confronted and marginalised are likely to be places where people have more confidence to build relationships with one another and to share common values instead of fearing difference and change.

We are working across Government with police forces and other local agencies to inspire confidence in the criminal justice system and in other agencies which deal with hate crime; raise the proportion of victims or witnesses of hate crime who come forward to report what they've seen; increase the proportion of hate crimes brought to justice; and improve local responses to hate crime, particularly in areas that have disproportionate numbers of cases.

The Government recognises that the scale and pace of change we have seen in recent years has had an impact in some places, and that this can be a source of concern, particularly for those who have not experienced migration before, particularly in some rural areas. Our aim is to support local people, businesses and public services to adjust to this change so that the benefits of migration are maximised for the benefit of the country as a whole.

I note the six points which you identify as a means to improve knowledge and capacity to manage the impacts of migration locally and thereby foster cohesive and integrated communities. It may be helpful, if I set out some ongoing and planned action on each of these matters.

I agree that improving the collection and dissemination of statistical information on migration trends is of vital importance. As you will be aware, migration, particularly international migration is the most difficult component of population change to estimate. While up-to-date information at local level on some A8 migrants is available through sources such as the National Insurance numbers allocated to overseas nationals and the Worker Registration Scheme, these only include migrants who register.

However, a comprehensive cross-government programme of work, led by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), is underway to improve the population and migration statistics, including those at the local level. As part of this programme, ONS is working on a package of improvements that will feed into population and migration estimates by 2010. This will include the use of timely administrative data, such as National Insurance numbers, and statistical modelling to improve the distribution of immigration, including A8 migrants, at local area level.

The Government recognises that English language skills are a key factor in assisting residents of settled communities and those coming to the UK to integrate fully and contribute to the local area, as well as to progress in life and work. Our aim is to focus English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision on those in greatest need. Migrants themselves must play their part in taking the opportunities available to learn English, both before and after entry to the UK. ESOL provision is being restructured to ensure that it is more targeted towards fostering cohesion and integration within our communities. New ESOL for Work qualifications offer shorter, work-related English programmes. These provide more flexibility and choice for employers and learners.

As you recognise, the ability to speak English also reduces the costs of providing services to migrants, as the need for interpreters and translators is minimised. While recruitment is a matter for local agencies, I agree on the value of public services having recruitment policies which reflect the diversity of their local community, with a growing body of examples of the success of such an approach in areas such as neighbourhood policing and in schools.

The Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004 introduced licensing arrangements for labour providers who supply, or in certain circumstances use, workers involved in agricultural activities, the gathering of shellfish and related food, fish and shellfish processing and packaging activities. The scope of the Act is limited to these circumstances as the problem of illegal activity by labour providers – including the exploitation of UK and migrant workers – was thought to be most prevalent in these sectors. Furthermore, some of the ground for the introduction of licensing in these sectors had already been prepared with the development by industry stakeholders (under the direction of the Ethical Trading Initiative) of a Code of Practice for labour providers. This allowed for quicker implementation of licensing than might otherwise have been the case if the scope of the Act also included other sectors.

Extending the scheme to other sectors of the economy where labour providers are active was considered last year by the Vulnerable Worker Enforcement Forum, which was chaired by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. The Forum concluded that there was no consensus among stakeholder organisations for extending the scheme beyond the food chain. Furthermore, the Forum noted that labour providers operating outside the sectors governed by licensing were already regulated by the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate (EASI). The Government therefore has no plans to bring forward proposals to extend the scope of licensing at this time. Instead, the focus will be on raising the profile of EASI among agency workers, through measures such as providing the Inspectorate with stronger investigative powers and penalties and by doubling the number of inspectors.

Further action in response to the recommendations of the Vulnerable Worker Enforcement Forum includes a sustained campaign to raise awareness and encourage reporting of abuse, the establishment of a single telephone gateway to contact enforcement bodies, closer working between enforcement agencies and non-Government organisations, such as the TUC, unions, CBI and Citizens Advice, and improved guidance to vulnerable workers about the protection available to them.

UK residents can approach a GP practice near to where they live and apply to join its list of NHS patients as either a registered patient or as a temporary resident ie where they are in an area for more than 24 hours but less than 3 months. Anyone who experiences difficulties in registering with a practice should approach the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) for advice. Where appropriate, a PCT can use its powers to assign a person to a practice's list of patients.

While there are no current plans to instigate local recruitment drives of the kind you suggest, I understand that the Department of Health is preparing a guidance document for Primary Care Trusts on increasing choice in GP registration. This will cover targeting assistance to sections of the community that might have difficulty understanding how registration works. Publications such as the Federation's *How to Live and Work in Great Britain* make an invaluable contribution to raising awareness of public services and how to access these.

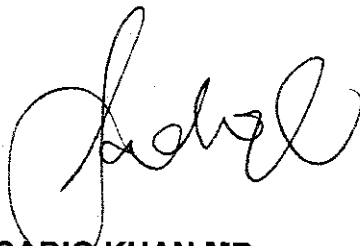
The Government is keen to promote a strong, professional and well-managed private rented sector that contributes to the vitality of the housing market. This is particularly important in the current financial climate, as more people look to the sector for accommodation. We recognise that Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are a key source of housing for significant and often vulnerable groups of people in society, and that poor quality, overcrowded accommodation can mean not just that migrants are being exploited but can also result in other pressures on the community such as excessive rubbish, parking and greater noise pollution.

The introduction of mandatory licensing in 2004 of all privately rented Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) of three or more storeys and occupied by five or more persons forming more than one household will ensure adequate management standards in those properties. We have also enabled local authorities to establish discretionary additional HMO licensing schemes to cover smaller HMOs where they have identified problems.

The recently-published independent review of the private rented sector, carried out by Julie Rugg at the Centre for Housing Policy, York University, sets out some real challenges to improve the sector and to ensure that both landlords and tenants are properly protected. We are now considering how to take these recommendations forward. Our initial response will be published in the Spring, and we will continue to consult with stakeholders on this.

I am grateful to you for setting out your proposals and hope you will be reassured that the Government is acting to address the issues you have raised. I look forward to your continuing input on policy developments over the coming months and beyond.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', written in a cursive style.

SADIQ KHAN MP