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The All- Party Parliamentary Group for Cleaning & Hygiene and The Lack of Government response to meet with the industry

I write in relation to The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Cleaning & Hygiene and the work that has been undertaken by The BCC as the APPG secretariat.

It is almost a year since the APPG was set up and whilst we have seen traction in the Apprenticeship Levy/Tailblazer group, we have not seen the same level of commitment and drive in relation to the main areas of concern and strategy that we had commenced upon. If you recall these were as follows:

- *Protection and recognition of the role of cleaning and hygiene operatives and personnel as being in an essential and key occupation. The recognition of the role of cleaning and hygiene in the fight against Covid-19 and all other forms of contagion which are detrimental to the health and well-being of UK citizens is vital. Therefore, given the job is vital all cleaning and hygiene staff should & must be considered key and essential workers*
- *Recognition that cleaning and hygiene is both critical and essential in restoring the confidence of the nation in returning to work and normality, thus aiding the UK economy to recover.*
- *Qualified and professional cleaning and hygiene is and remains a skill in its own right which requires specialist, trained staff. It is not simply an add-on to someone's day job. If cleaning and hygiene is not carried out by professionally trained staff, it will potentially compromise the fight against, and the recovery from, Covid-19. Surely, we must all unreservedly accept that the myth that cleaning is an unskilled industry has been removed forever in the face of Covid-19? The fact is that it remains a highly skilled requirement which has never been truly recognised. We are committed to the adoption and recognition of universal training and accreditation in cleaning and hygiene across the UK.*
- *Promotion of the real Living Wage on the basis that a fair day's work merits a fair day's pay and is a recognition of training and skills achieved.*
- *Advocacy of best practice in mental health and mental health awareness as part of employee care and well-being both in and outside of the workplace, as a reflection that the cleaning and hygiene industry which is very much a people industry.*

Additionally, we had added the huge concern over resource within the UK and given the rise in infection with the Omicron variant, as well as the significant loss of staff, it has arguably become everyone's number one concern.

Therefore, just prior to Christmas, we held a virtual meeting with members of the APPG and were frankly shocked to be told that:

- The use of the APPG to bring attention to the resourcing issues was not a good idea as there “were so many other industry sectors in the same boat who were lobbying government”. The assumption therefore must be that we are not as important as other sectors, which we are simply not prepared to accept.
- We should highlight three other areas to the APPG for them to take forward as lobbying projects. Therefore, we will give the APPG the following three areas in which to work-
 - *Protection and recognition of the role of cleaning and hygiene operatives and personnel as being in an essential and key occupation.*
 - *Recognition that cleaning and hygiene is both critical and essential in restoring the confidence of the nation in returning to work and normality, thus aiding the UK economy to recover.*
 - *Being fully committed to the adoption and recognition of the Apprenticeship Levy as a universal training and accreditation in cleaning and hygiene across the UK.*
 - Additionally, we intend to try and commit the APPG to timescales within which to work and whilst this may prove extremely difficult, we are doing so with our eyes wide open.
- We were advised that, despite adaptations being made for HGV Drivers, Fruit Pickers and Poultry Workers, the government would not give any leeway in relation to the Immigration Act or in temporary visas as it would be “political suicide”. Therefore, once again and despite the fact that our services will assist people in having a hygienic confidence in going into buildings and in doing so will undoubtedly assist in the economy returning to a semblance of normality, we again are not seen as important.
- Finally, and worse of all was the assertion that the industry remained one that was seen as “low skilled” and one that employed “cheap foreign labour”.

Frankly we should be offended by the above and given that we pay staff on the National Minimum Wage which is set by Government (albeit that many pay significantly more than the NLW rate and indeed in many cases also pay more than the Real Living Wage) and are subject to robust Right to Work checks and balances, it is simply wrong to in any way try to maintain the myth of ‘cheap foreign labour’ and we must not allow this to continue.

We can only do so as a collective and therefore given that we all suffer from the same problem, I write in the hope that the BCC can count on your full support, endorsement, and involvement.

It is clear that we will not get the support or lobbying opportunities via the APPG and therefore we intend to take action with three separate approaches.

1. We will formally request that the APPG pick up and lobby on the three named concerns above.
2. In relation to the resource issues and concerns, we intend to organise a mainstream media campaign which will pull no punches in relation to (a) the issues (b) our concerns for the public, our clients, health and welfare and (c) we will seek to discuss, produce and agree both a short-term strategy to get over the immediate concerns whilst planning a long-term strategy with Government involvement to highlight and produce an image of an industry that is-

- A £55 billion per annum concern.
- One that employs 1.5 million people.
- A service that has a direct effect on the health and welfare of the public.
- An industry in which innovation, sustainability, science and employment skills are vast, vital and has a clear development path.
- An industry that will always need people and is no longer a 'Mrs/Mr Mop' concern.
- An industry that touches every single person, every single day and finally....
- A service that our teams have delivered quietly, efficiently, bravely and in a very skilled manner across the pandemic, a fact that must never be forgotten!

The Government will want to know what the industry is doing to assist and modernise itself, and it is only right that they do so. Therefore, we need to have our thoughts and strategic approach in place before sitting down with them.

That means the involvement of all and that will not change.

Therefore, we intend to speak with a number of larger employers within the next few weeks and also to arrange a strategic gathering of Association Chairman in to ascertain if we can reach a base point from which the industry can develop its approach.

I hope that you will firstly wish to be involved and secondly agree with the approach and need for increased action.

Before closing, I would also ask if you would mind e-mailing the answers to the questions below to Simon Hollingbery compsec@britishcleaningcouncil.org by February 1st 2022

- 1- What was your vacancy percentage prior to the current resource issue?
- 2- What is your vacancy percentage today and has it decreased/increased?
- 3- What is your view on staff burning out based on overtime/cover?
- 4- Do you believe you are losing foreign national operatives and if so, what is percentage decrease?
- 5- Ironically, has your staff establishment been reduced further by staff being absent through infection or illness and if so, do you have a percentage figure?
- 6- Do you pay in excess of National Living Wage/The Real Living Wage- please advise?

This is already a very professional industry, and we are surrounded by good, skilled and professional people. It would appear that the Government feel differently but for reasons of political expediency and not for reasons of knowledge or health.

To make a change, we must be a collective force and we must also agree that our teams deserve full support both in the now and for the future.

My apologies for the length of the note but thank you for taking the trouble to read the contents and I look forward to receiving your response and in the industry taking the action that will assist our teams, our clients, their staff and by definition our country.

Your Sincerely

Jim Melvin

Chairman, British Cleaning Council