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Exploitation in heart of the England

A gangmaster who was supplying workers to high profile bread, chocolate and salad companies had his licence revoked by the Gangmasters Licensing Authority.

The gangmaster's appeal against the GLA decision was dismissed after failing 7 licensing standards including 3 critical failures.

Mr Robert Taylor, Director of Morantus Ltd who trade as 247 Staff in Burton on Trent, supplied workers to British Bakeries, Thorntons and Florette in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire.

British Bakeries produce one third of the UK's daily bread under household names such as Hovis, Mothers Pride and Nimble.

Thorntons produce confectionary and chocolate including Easter eggs.

Florette are one of Europe's fastest growing producers of prepared salads.

Mr Taylor forced migrant workers to live in run down and cramped houses whilst paying over the odds for the privilege, as a condition of finding them work.

GLA officers found:

- A room measuring 2.8 x 3.8 metres housed three adults, two children and a baby on a double mattress, single mattress and a child seat
- electricity or gas certificates for the accommodation provided were not shown to the tenants. For the 19 properties used to house the workers, only three certificates could be provided to the GLA
- the gangmaster withheld money from the workers and forced them to sign standing orders under threats of not receiving any work
- the workers were paid less than the national minimum wage after deductions were made for accommodation, which were over £24 per worker more than the legal maximum

- the workers were not free to leave their employment without a penalty. If they left their jobs before their 12 month tenancy agreement was up they would need to pay the remaining rent in full
- workers not allowed to find alternative accommodation even if a notice period was given. If they wanted to keep their jobs they had to use and pay for the accommodation provided
- the workers had not given their consent for transport costs to be deducted from their wages and had no idea how much would be taken
- workers were charged for the protective equipment needed to carry out their job, despite previous warnings from the GLA

Morantus Ltd trading as 247 Staff is the 49th gangmaster to have their licence taken away by the GLA and had a revocation points score of 122, which is four times more than the critical score of 30 needed to revoke a licence.

Chairman of the GLA, Paul Whitehouse, said this week:

“I’m determined to take action to stop the worker abuse that has infested the flexible labour market. Any group of workers who are dependent on consumer demand for a weekly job should at least expect to receive the minimum wage and the protection of UK law. ”

“The GLA is cracking down on illegal work practices to protect workers from the abuse of rogue gangmasters”.

“Yet again we see that the food on our plates on dinner tables across the UK could be there at the expense of exploited workers.”

More than 1,100 gangmasters are now licensed to operate legally in the UK and the GLA has uncovered worker exploitation and illegal activity that led to the revocation of 49 licences.

Notes to editors

1. The Gangmasters Licensing Authority was set up to curb the exploitation of workers in the agriculture, horticulture, shellfish gathering and associated processing and packaging industries. It was set up following the death of 23 Chinese cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay in 2004.

The majority of workers involved in these industries come from countries such as: Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, India, Pakistan and Portugal.

2. There are currently 1181 gangmasters licensed by the GLA
3. A gangmaster is an individual or business who:
 - supplies labour to agriculture, horticulture, shellfish gathering and food processing and packaging
 - uses labour to provide a service in the regulated sector, eg harvesting or gathering agricultural produce
 - uses labour to gather shellfish.

To be granted a GLA licence all businesses must meet the GLA licensing standards and the principle authority of the business must meet 'Fit or Proper' person criteria. Cross government checks are made on all licence applications.

4. It has been an offence to supply labour to the GLA regulated sectors since 1 October 2006, with the maximum penalty being ten years imprisonment and an unlimited fine.
5. All licences that are revoked have the right of appeal including licences revoked with immediate effect.
6. Copies of any appeal decisions can be obtained from the appeals secretariat Gangmasters Licensing Appeals, Defra, Electra Way, Crewe, Cheshire CW1 6GJ Telephone: 01270 754231, E-mail: gangmasters.appeals@defra.gsi.gov.uk
7. Ian Livsey Chief Executive of the GLA is available for interview.

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