## Equality and Human Rights Commission: Investigating and tackling labour rights abuses and improving access to remedy

## Background

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) is a statutory body established under the Equality Act 2006. It operates as an independent body to protect and promote equality and human rights in Great Britain.

The event will examine the Commission’s approach to investigating human rights impacts in the UK’s food processing sector and in the cleaning industry. Critically, it will explore collaborative approaches to developing practical, cost effective solutions to the domestic labour rights abuses we found in those sectors.

## Objective

## The objective is to enable to business, government and civil society representatives to appreciate the value of effective impact assessment and a multi-stakeholder approach to improving working practices in both a manufacturing and a service sector. Participants will have an opportunity to question the panel about the challenges for stakeholders and the business improvements.

## Format and audience:

The event will feature presentations from each of the three speakers followed by an open forum discussion. This will provide an opportunity for government, business and civil society representatives to examine the challenges and impacts and to explore scope for transferring this approach to other sectors and national contexts.

## Panel:

Chair:

* Dr Karen Jochelson, Director (Employment and Economy), Equality & Human Rights Commission

Speakers:

* Frances Goodwin, Head of Ethical Trading (Group Procurement and UK Food), Tesco
* Simon Parry, Food and Drink Manufacture Sector, Health and Safety Executive
* Alice Teague, Programme Head (Employment and Economy), Equality & Human Rights Commission

## Recruitment and employment in the meat and poultry processing sector

The food and drink manufacturing industry is the largest manufacturing sector in the UK. The meat and poultry sector is a significant part of this, employing 67,500 people at that time.

In 2010, the Commission carried out a wide-ranging inquiry into recruitment and employment practices in the sector. It revealed serious allegations of ill-treatment and discrimination against agency workers, and pregnant women in particular. It also highlighted tensions between different nationalities in the sector.

A taskforce was set up by the Commission following the 2010 Inquiry. It worked with processing firms, labour providers, supermarkets and other regulators to ensure that all workers are treated fairly and has helped the meat and poultry processing industry bring about marked improvements in the way workers are treated. For example, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) developed revised guidance for inspectors and instigated a proactive inspection programme to these meat & poultry processing premises. Tesco, other UK supermarkets, the British Meat Processing Association, British Poultry Council and Association of Labour Providers adopted a set of management practices and key performance indicators to improve working practices across the whole sector.

## Employment practices in the cleaning sector

In September 2013, the Commission launched a further project to examine employment practices in the cleaning sector to understand how employers comply with their equality obligations in the work place and respect human rights.

The cleaning industry employs an estimated 446,000 people, is predominantly female, and has a higher than average number of ethnic minority, migrant and older workers.

The Commission looked at the experience of workers in relation to: equality and non-discrimination at work; pay, including equal pay between women and men; access to redress; rest and leisure ; privacy; a safe working environment ; freedom of association; participation in collective bargaining; and abolition of forced labour

The Commission’s findings were published in August 2014. It found that workers did not always feel they were afforded the same dignity and respect as others in the workplace; that they lacked access to redress for pay and other grievances, and that outsourcing practices often had a negative impact on employment practices, affecting pay and the intensity of work. The report contains recommendations to support the sector to improve working practices.

A new sector taskforce is bringing together cleaning firms, public and private organisations that outsource their cleaning services, trade bodies, trade unions, and government. It has a year to identify and implement cost effective, practical solution and will be supported by three working groups with a focus on responsible procurement, improved dignity and respect for workers, and employment obligations and workers’ rights.

Tesco, the UK’s largest retailer, and the HSE, a non- departmental public body and the UK’s national health & safety regulator, have been influential members of both taskforces. HSE's mission is to ensure that risks to people’s health and safety from work activities are properly controlled. This means reducing risks and protecting people at work by providing advice and guidance on how to comply with the law, inspecting workplaces, investigating accidents and complaints and taking enforcement action where necessary.