



Gangmasters Licensing Authority

PRESS RELEASE

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DJ Houghton Ltd – ‘worst UK gangmaster ever’

A Kent gangmaster - who exposed dozens of migrant workers to some of the most extreme exploitation ever experienced by the GLA - has withdrawn its appeal against the decision to revoke its licence.

Directors at DJ Houghton Catching Services maintained they were blameless for the poor practice unearthed at their company and appealed against the decision to take away their licence in June last year.

They repeatedly stated in the local press that the company would fight to clear its name in the appeal court, get the company's licence reinstated and resume trading as soon as possible.

However, the business – based in Wheelers Lane, Linton, Maidstone – has now withdrawn its appeal and accepted the GLA's revocation decision.

GLA Chief Executive Paul Broadbent said: “The treatment of workers in this case was horrific. It's a shocking example of an utter disregard for the welfare of workers.

“The exploitation of the workers was prolonged and disgraceful by anyone's standards. Their working conditions were unsanitary, unreasonable and wholly unacceptable. They were vulnerable people who were severely over-worked and grossly underpaid.”

Employees as young as 17-years-old were forced to work for days at a time in filthy conditions without a bed, a shower or proper food.

They grafted through the nights and were forced to sleep through the days on a minibus as they were driven from the south east to jobs as far away as Penzance, in Cornwall, Cumbria and even into Scotland.

In one instance, a driver was paid for being out for 133 hours in a week, yet the employees stuck on his minibus ‘at work’ for the same period received payment only for the number of chickens they caught.

The company's GLA licence was revoked on 30 October 2012 following a high-profile operation. They appealed the revocation decision in June last year.

Added Mr Broadbent: “The directors of DJ Houghton have been pleading their innocence for months, complaining to the local press and their MP about how the GLA has deprived them from earning an ‘honest living’. The fact is that these workers were treated like slaves.

“Despite their repeated protestations, this company has now made a U-turn and accepted our revocation decision, which is not surprising as our scoring system rated them as the worst UK gangmaster ever.”

The company failed 18 separate licensing standards – enough for its licence to be revoked more than 10 times over.

A full list of the standards failed is set out in the editor’s notes below.

ENDS

Press release issued by GLA Communications and Information Officer Paul Fearn. For more information contact 0115 959 7069 or email communications@gla.gsi.gov.uk.

Notes to editors

The GLA Penalty point system

Each failed licensing standard results in penalty points similar to those given on a driving licence. A licence may be revoked when a total of 30 points is reached or exceeded. Breaches of critical standards result in a 30 point penalty. Breaches of non-critical standards accrue eight penalty points.

The GLA assessed DJ Houghton Ltd as having recorded a total of **320 points** – the highest score in the authority’s history.

Licensing Standards failed by DJ Houghton

- Licensing Standard 1.1 – that the licence holder, Principal Authority (“PA”) and any person named or specified in the licence acts in a fit and proper manner at all times
(Critical – **30 points**)
- Licensing Standard 2.1 – PAYE, National Insurance (“NI”) and VAT
(Critical - **30 points**)
- Licensing Standard 2.2 – Paying wages in accordance with National Minimum Wage
(Critical – **30 points**)

- Licensing Standard 2.3 – Wages and benefits
(Non-critical – **8 points**)
- Licensing Standard 2.4 – Payslips
(Non-critical – **8 points**)
- Licensing Standard 3.1 – Physical and Mental Mistreatment and threats to workers
(Critical – **30 points**)
- Licensing Standard 3.3 – Withholding Wages
(Critical – **30 points**)
- Licensing Standard 4.1 – Quality of Accommodation
(Critical – **30 points**)
- Licensing Standard 4.3 – Workers Provided with Travel or Required to Live Away From Home
(Non-critical – **8 points**)
- Licensing Standard 5.1 – Rest Periods, Breaks and Annual Leave
(Non-critical – **8 points**)
- Licensing Standard 5.2 – Working Hours
(Non-critical – **8 points**)
- Licensing Standard 5.6 – Disciplinary and Grievance matters
(Non-critical – **8 points**)
- Licensing Standard 6.2 – Health and Safety Instruction and Training
(Non-critical – **8 points**)
- Licensing Standard 6.3 – Safety at Work
(Non-critical – **8 points**)
- Licensing Standard 7.1 – Job-Finding Fees
(Critical – **30 points**)
- Licensing Standard 7.3 – Worker Terms and Conditions
(Non-critical – **8 points**)
- Licensing Standard 7.4 – Labour user arrangements
(Non-critical – **8 points**)
- Licensing Standard 8.1 – Using a sub-contractor and / or other labour provider
(Critical – **30 points**)

Other Notes

1. The GLA operates throughout the UK and is a Non Departmental Public Body.
2. The authority was formed in 2005 in the wake of the Morecambe Bay cockle picking disaster when 23 Chinese workers drowned on the sands.
3. The GLA licences companies that supply labour (gangmasters) to agriculture, horticulture, food processing and packaging and shellfish gathering.
4. Its main strategic priorities are to prevent worker exploitation, protect vulnerable people and tackle unlicensed and criminal activity.
5. Under the Gangmasters Licensing Act (2004) it is illegal both to operate as, or employ the services of, an unlicensed gangmaster.

www.gla.defra.gov.uk