



Office of The Rt Hon. Liam Byrne MP
Houses of Parliament
London
SW1A0AA

By email only to: byrnel@parliament.uk

3 November 2023

Dear Mr Byrne,

Congratulations on your election to Chair of the Business and Trade select committee.

As you will be aware, in September and October this year over 400 Wilko stores and two distribution centres closed. Tens of thousands of workers, many of them GMB members, lost their jobs. The loss of Wilko was devastating for the workforce, but also for communities around the country losing a reliable retailer during a cost of living crisis.

But the true tragedy of Wilko is that its decline could have been avoided. The business should have thrived in a bargain retail sector that is otherwise strong and growing. But instead, warnings about its viability were ignored, while millions of pounds were siphoned out of the business in dividends.

While some Wilko stores were bought, jobs were not protected, meaning that failures to save the business have resulted in the redundancy of thousands of loyal workers across the country.

Months later, the Wilko workforce still do not have the answers they need and deserve from management. Lessons must be learned from Wilko, not only to protect the jobs and livelihoods of the future, but also to protect highstreets across the country from further decline.

To that end, I am writing to ask that you and the committee hold a special session on Wilko to hold management to account on these clear failings and ensure lessons for the future are learned.

In particular, I would ask that the committee look at:

- Whether management ignored warnings and advice to remain true to the Wilko customer base as a genuine family values, bargain retailer.

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- Whether management were advised as early as 2022 that a CVA would be needed to renegotiate rents but was not acted upon.
- Whether the pensions regulation should use its statutory powers to compel the Wilkinson family to plug the Wilko defined benefit pension scheme. The scheme is in a £50m deficit while the Wilkinson family have extracted £9m in dividends since 2019.

We believe Lisa Wilkinson, the family director at the helm of Wilko in the lead up to and during its collapse should be called to answer questions and held to account over the collapse of this once great family business.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Houghton', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Nadine Houghton

National Officer, GMB