

25th July 2019

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA



Dear Prime Minister,

In the first hundred days of your administration you have the opportunity, without the need for legislation, to announce policy that would make a meaningful difference to local shops, the places they trade and the communities they serve. ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores) represents 33,500 local shops across the UK including McColl's Retail, the Co-op, BP and thousands of independent retailers trading under brands such as Spar, NISA and Londis.

There are over 46,000 convenience stores serving communities, providing local, flexible employment for 365,000 people and investing £814 million in keeping their businesses relevant to changing consumer shopping habits. We host the majority of Post Offices, which are viewed by consumers as having the most positive impact on local communities.

The business rates system needs to be reformed to incentivise investment and account for the growth in online retailing. A meaningful and quick intervention to support local shops would be an extension to the existing small business rate relief scheme, allowing businesses to benefit from a third off their business rates bills beyond the next financial year. This would facilitate further investment in the growth of these businesses and their ability to increase the number of people they employ.

Cash is the lifeblood of local parades and villages, but the ability to offer free to use cash machines has been greatly diminished by the decision by big banks to cut the fees paid to operators and local shops for hosting these machines. We urge you to task the Payment Systems Regulator with reviewing the impact of cuts to interchange fees on free access to cash, making recommendations before the end of 2019. Failure to act will result in the loss of the free to use cash machine network impacting 8 million people that rely on access to cash.

Proposals for the state to regulate the location in stores of high, fat, salt and sugar products must be scrapped. These new laws will require many businesses, including local shops, coffee shops and bakeries, to refit their stores at great expense and is unlikely to have an impact on obesity levels. These regulations would also require trading standards officers across the country to visit local businesses at great expense to the taxpayer. We believe Government money would be better focused on community police to put a stop to the 10,000 incidents of violence and abuse against people working in convenience stores.

We welcome your commitment to address policing numbers at the next Spending Review, but we also need an urgent review of the Out of Court Disposals used to deal with offenders. We want to break the cycle of offending against local shops by tackling the root cause of offending, often driven by drug addiction.

We will continue to work closely with all Government departments on delivering these proposals and as a member of the Retail Sector Council. For more information please contact Edward.woodall@acs.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Lowman', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

James Lowman
Chief Executive

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