



ACS Submission – Reducing Single Use Plastics (Welsh Government)

ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government’s consultation on Reducing Single Use Plastics. ACS is a trade association, representing 33,500 local shops across the country including the Co-op, One Stop, Spar, Costcutter and thousands of independent retailers. More information on ACS is available in annex A.

ACS is committed to working with the Welsh Government on reducing plastic waste, welcoming further engagement with the Welsh Government on the delivery of their plans to reduce single use plastics to ensure that it is workable for convenience retailers. We believe that it is important that the convenience sector plays a role in promoting environmentally friendly alternatives to plastic straws, stirrers and the other items listed within the consultation. However, we would welcome clarification regarding the timeframe for the introduction of a ban on the distribution and/or sale of single use plastics in Wales. We are also asking for consideration of time frames to provide retailers with a realistic sell-through period.

While the convenience sector typically retails grocery products, an increasing number are offering food and drink to-go services with 37% of stores offering a customer operated coffee machine, 14% with a serve over coffee machine and 12% with a food-to-go concession e.g. Subway/coffee shop¹. This means some convenience retailers currently offer plastic straws and plastic drinks stirrers through these services as well as packaged for the consumer to purchase in-store. Through these services, convenience retailers will either be provided plastic straws and plastic drinks stirrers as part of their package from their café/coffee/drinks supplier (where they may also purchase the coffee, coffee cups etc.). Some convenience retailers may compile their own offer and purchase plastic straws and plastic drinks stirrers from their wholesaler. Either way, the Government’s proposals for a ban on these products must take into account the different supply chains to ensure that there is a smooth transition. For example, will the supplier be required to update their offer to exclude plastic straws and whether retailers would be allowed to source plastic-free alternatives elsewhere without breaching their suppliers’ contract.

The majority (72%) of convenience stores are run by independent retailers, which means that they do not own their supply chain². Therefore, Independent convenience retailers purchase their stock through a wholesaler or directly with the manufacturer. Where convenience retailers have own brand products, they still rely on their own brand supplier to instigate change on the packaging of products as they have limited buying power. Retailers are able to assist in providing more sustainable packaging but to a degree they are responding to consumer demand and the packaging decisions are made by the supplier.

¹ ACS Local Shop Report 2020

² ACS Local Shop Report 2020

Thus, there is limited influence that convenience retailers can have in these discussions about packaging reformulation.

Without a retailer sell-through period, the products covered by the ban may still be shops (packaged or as part of a café offer) when the ban comes into effect. This would mean that for a retailer to be compliant with the ban, they would be required to remove the products from shelves and potentially discard them. Given that the intention of the ban is to reduce plastic waste, we believe that a retailer sell through period should be built into the timeframe to ensure that any plastic waste from discarding non-compliant stock is minimal.

Please see below for ACS' response to the relevant questions in the consultation.

Question 1 - Do you support our proposal to ban each of the single use plastic items listed above? If not, please give reasons and where possible evidence to support this view.

Yes.

Question 5 – Do you believe the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in changes to the market that are currently not accounted for in our research? Please give reasons and where possible evidence to support this view.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the progress being made towards consumer use of reusable products and services in stores, for example coffee cups. This is due to the heightened consumer awareness surrounding hygiene and many retailers (both convenience and other) being advised to not allow reusable cups to be used for hot drinks and food to go options. The long-term implications of Covid-19 are unclear but this is a relevant consideration for the Welsh Government. This should not preclude the progress on the policy but must be a consideration for the implementation period and early stages of enforcement of the policy.

Question 6 – Do you agree with the exemptions we are proposing and how can we make them as clear and practicable as possible to apply? Please give reasons and where possible evidence to support this view.

We agree that exemptions will be necessary for some protected characteristics such as disability and age. We urge the Welsh Government to clearly set out in supporting guidance, alongside the secondary legislation, the definitions of exemptions. It will be challenging to communicate and accommodate these exemptions across all setting. There must be targeted communications activities to businesses most impacted and groups of customers that are exempt to encourage them to alert stores to the relevant exemptions.

We seek further clarification if the exemption referenced in the consultation “in care settings, such as hospitals and care homes” extends to convenience stores in hospitals. There are limited numbers of convenience stores in hospital settings but separate guidance and communications activities will be required.

Question 8 – Do you agree the proposed timescale for the implementation of the bans provides sufficient time for businesses of all types to adapt? Please give reasons and where possible evidence to support this view.

No. We believe that 12 month transition period would be more appropriate for the sell through of existing single use plastic products. This will take into account the additional

operational challenges and costs that retailers are currently facing from Covid. It would also allow a sufficient period for retailers to sell through existing single use plastic items. Single use plastic items are often used for 'food on the go' items. The 'food on the go' element of the convenience sector, and the hospitality sector, has been dramatically impacted by the pandemic.

ACS Covid Impact Survey 2020³ highlights food on the go categories such as 'food-to-go concessions', 'coffee' and 'bakery' as some of the most negatively impacted. These categories will be most impacted by the ban meaning the normal volumes of single use plastic items supporting them will be impacted. Furthermore, without a sufficient sell through period, the items listed in the ban may end up discarded rather than used. The sell through period should be built into the timeframes decided by the Welsh Government to ensure that any non-compliant stock is kept to a minimum.

Question 9 - Do you agree with the proposed use of Civil Sanctions?

Yes. If repeat offences take place it is important that additional fines only relate to individual premises not across an entire business. For example individual premises that are part of wider businesses should be treated separately. We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to a collaborative approach to enforcement activity: *"we are keen for enforcing authorities and those businesses affected by the bans to work together to resolve any issues voluntarily wherever possible"*.

For more information about this submission, please contact Lydia Hamilton-Rimmer, ACS Public Affairs Assistant by emailing Lydia.Hamilton-Rimmer@acs.org.uk or calling 07387262277.

³ [ACS Covid Impact Survey 2020 pg 2](#)

ABOUT ACS

The Association of Convenience Stores lobbies on behalf of over 46,000 convenience stores across mainland UK on public policy issues that affect their businesses. ACS' membership is comprised of a diverse group of retailers, from small independent family businesses running a single store to large multiple convenience retailers running thousands of stores.

Convenience stores trade in a wide variety of locations, meeting the needs of customers from all backgrounds. These locations range from city centres and high streets, suburban areas such as estates and secondary parades, rural villages and isolated areas, as well as on petrol forecourts and at travel points such as airports and train stations.



WHO WE REPRESENT

INDEPENDENT RETAILERS



ACS represents almost 19,000 independent retailers, polling them quarterly to hear their views and experiences which are used to feed in to Government policy discussions.

These stores are not affiliated to any group, and are often family businesses with low staff and property costs. Independent forecourt operators are included in this category.

SYMBOL GROUPS AND FRANCHISES



ACS represents over 14,000 retailers affiliated with symbol groups. Symbol groups like SPAR, Nisa, Costcutter, Londis, Premier and others provide independent retailers with stock agreements, wholesale deliveries, logistical support and marketing benefits.

Symbol group forecourt operators and franchise providers like One Stop are also included in this category.

MULTIPLE AND CO-OPERATIVE BUSINESSES



ACS represents over 13,000 stores that are owned by multiple and co-operative retailers. These businesses include the Co-Operative, regional co-operative societies, McColls and others.

Unlike symbol group stores, these stores are owned and run centrally by the business. Forecourt multiples and commission operated stores are included in this category.

THE CONVENIENCE SECTOR



In 2020, the total value of sales in the convenience sector was £44.7bn.

The average spend in a typical convenience store transaction is £7.46.



There are 46,955 convenience stores in mainland UK. 72% of stores are operated by independent retailers, either unaffiliated or as part of a symbol group.



The convenience sector provides flexible employment for around 412,000 people.

13% of independent/symbol stores employ family members only.



22% of shop owners work more than 60 hours per week, while 24% take no holiday throughout the year.

72% of business owners are first time investors in the sector.



Convenience stores and Post Offices poll as the two services that have the most positive impact on their local area according to consumers and local councillors.

80% of independent/symbol retailers have engaged in some form of community activity over the last year.



Between August 2019 and May 2020, the convenience sector invested over £585m in stores.

The most popular form of investment in stores is refrigeration.

OUR RESEARCH

ACS polls the views and experiences of the convenience sector regularly to provide up-to-date, robust information on the pressures being faced by retailers of all sizes and ownership types. Our research includes the following regular surveys:

ACS VOICE OF LOCAL SHOPS SURVEY

Regular quarterly survey of over 1,200 retailers, split evenly between independent retailers, symbol group retailers and forecourt retailers. The survey consists of tracker questions and a number of questions that differ each time to help inform ACS' policy work.

ACS INVESTMENT TRACKER

Regular quarterly survey of over 1,200 independent and symbol retailers which is combined with responses from multiple businesses representing over 3,000 stores.

ACS LOCAL SHOP REPORT

Annual survey of around 2,400 independent, symbol and forecourt retailers combined with responses from multiple businesses representing 6,700 stores. The Local Shop Report also draws on data from Lumina Intelligence, IGD, Nielsen and William Reed.

BESPOKE POLLING ON POLICY ISSUES

ACS conducts bespoke polling of its members on a range of policy issues, from crime and responsible retailing to low pay and taxation. This polling is conducted with retailers from all areas of the convenience sector.