



## ACS Submission – Offensive Weapons Bill

1. ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Public Bill Committee’s call for evidence on the Offensive Weapons Bill. ACS is a trade association and represents 33,500 local shops across the UK. Our members include the Co-Op, Spar UK, Costcutter and thousands of independent retailers. For more information about ACS, please see Annex A.
2. ACS has been working closely with Home Office officials to understand the sale of products containing corrosive substances in the convenience sector. Through consultation with our members we understand that convenience retailers stock a very small range of household cleaning products and retailers actively avoid stocking products that contain corrosive substances that would exceed thresholds in Control of Poisons and Explosives Precursors Regulations 2015 in order to avoid regulatory burdens.
3. In response to the Home Office’s consultation on the ban on the sale of corrosive substances to under 18s<sup>1</sup>, we outlined our support for the introduction of a new offence preventing the sales of certain corrosive substances to under 18s. While the Bill sets out what concentration limit thresholds would determine what products would be required to have an age restriction, it is currently unclear how a retailer would determine if a product was in scope of the age restriction. Retailers will need further clarification on which products that the age restriction would apply to and we would welcome guidance both from manufacturers – who should be required to advise retailers of products caught by age restriction – and trading standards. ACS offers guidance to convenience retailers through its Primary Authority scheme with Surrey and Buckinghamshire Trading Standards. ACS’ [Preventing Underage Sales Assured Advice guide](#) includes guidance about how to enforce age restrictions including what forms of ID can be accepted<sup>2</sup>, could also be used as a way to communicate retailers’ requirements about which corrosive substances they can no longer sell.

### Tackling Violence in Retail Environments

4. At Second Reading of the Bill, David Hanson asked the Home Secretary whether he would introduce an aggravated offence of attacks on shopworkers at Committee Stage. We welcomed the Home Secretary’s response which set out that “those who may feel that they are under some threat, particularly from the kind of people who would try to buy knives of this type in the first place. If he will allow me, I will go away and think a bit more about what he has said.” We also welcomed Louise Haigh’s comments that violence against shopworkers would be explored at Committee stage.

---

<sup>1</sup> [ACS Submission: Consultation on new legislation on offensive and dangerous weapons](#)

<sup>2</sup> Valid forms of proof of age include passport, photo driving licence, Proof of Age Standards Scheme (PASS) approved proof of age cards

5. Given the scale of violence and verbal abuse against shop workers, with the Home Office suggesting that in the last year alone the number of assaults and threats committed against the wholesale and retail sector has almost tripled<sup>3</sup>, we believe that the Public Bill Committee should consider whether one of the objectives of the Offensive Weapons Bill should be to protect shopworkers from experiencing violence. We share Usdaw's concerns about the scale of violence against shopworkers and agree that there should be a specific offence for violence committed against shopworkers while they are carrying out their day to day work such as enforcing age restricted sales.
6. Incidents of violence and verbal abuse against retailers is far too common in the convenience sector. The number of violent incidents against shopworkers is increasing with the Home Office reporting that in the last year alone the number of assaults and threats committed against the wholesale and retail sector has nearly tripled from 524 incidents per 1,000 premises to 1,433 incidents per 1,000 premises<sup>4</sup>. This also supported by British Retail Consortium's latest data which suggests that the rate of reported violence with injury had doubled in the last year to 6 per 1,000 workers – equivalent to 13 individuals being injured each day<sup>5</sup>.
7. According to ACS' 2018 Crime Report, there were 13,437 incidents of violence in the convenience sector, 39% which result in injury of the staff member. There were 3,690 incidents where a weapon was used – 64% of which involved a knife, 19% with another weapon such as an axe or hammer, and 17% with a firearm including imitations. 72% of staff also reported that they have experienced verbal abuse.
8. Retailers' top concern is the impact on violence on their staff and look to find ways to prevent violence in their store by managing the triggers for violence and verbal abuse. ACS has identified that the top triggers for violence and verbal abuse in store are challenging shop thieves, enforcing an age restricted sales policy and refusing to service alcohol to intoxicated customers<sup>6</sup>. To help retailers and their staff identify and manage the triggers of violence and verbal abuse in store, ACS has developed a training animation which covers three key areas including refusing to serve customers, dealing with shop thieves, and armed robberies. The animation is available to view [here](#).
9. As stated above, convenience retailers invest significantly in ensuring that they trade responsibly and within the law. We believe that retailers and their staff should also benefit from the protection of the law through tougher sanctions for people that physically attack or abuse them as retailers and their staff are at most risk when they are enforcing the law such as when they are enforcing age restricted sales and refusing to serve intoxicated customers.
10. For example, creating a new statutory offence for assaulting a shop worker would act as an appropriate deterrent. Just as the general public is aware that assaulting a police officer is a statutory offence which carries a much tougher sentence than common assault, it could be equally effective in the retail environment. A new

---

<sup>3</sup> [Home Office: Crime against businesses: findings from the 2017 Commercial Victimization Survey](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Home Office: Crime against businesses: findings from the 2017 Commercial Victimization Survey](#)

<sup>5</sup> [BRC: 2017 Retail Crime Survey](#)

<sup>6</sup> ACS Crime Report 2018

statutory offence could also provide confidence and assurance to retailers and their staff that they have another layer of protection from violence and verbal abuse in-store.

11. ACS recently responded to the consultation on the Proposed Protection of Workers (Retail and Age Restricted Sales Etc.) (Scotland) Bill which proposes to create a new statutory offence for attacking a worker that enforces age restrictions or workers in the retail sector. Our submission is available [here](#) for reference.

**For more information about this submission, please contact Julie Byers, ACS Public Affairs Manager by emailing [Julie.Byers@acs.org.uk](mailto:Julie.Byers@acs.org.uk) or calling 01252 515001.**