

Helen Dickinson
CEO, British Retail Consortium
By email



Our ref: 610Dickinson
Tuesday 21 April 2020

Dear Ms Dickinson,

Equality and human rights considerations in access to food and essentials

I hope that you and your colleagues and families are safe and well.

I would like to offer my profound thanks to the British Retail Consortium and all essential retailers and their staff, who are operating under extremely challenging conditions at this unprecedented time. As a society, we are all immensely grateful for the work of your sector and particularly the contributions of frontline staff, of which I am sure you are justifiably proud.

I'm writing to draw your attention to the particular issues faced by disabled people and people in vulnerable situations at this time of crisis and to ask for the support of the British Retail Consortium in championing equality and human rights through retail practices.

We welcome the Government's emergency scheme, which entitles 1.5 million people at the greatest risk from Coronavirus to food parcels and priority online deliveries. However, we are concerned that a large number of disabled people in the UK, who fall outside this high-risk group, face additional barriers to shopping and require reasonable adjustments to enable them to buy essentials

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such as food and medicine.

In a survey of disabled people's experiences during the Coronavirus outbreak coordinated by the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers, 45 percent of respondents stated that supermarkets had responded poorly or very poorly to their needs. A key issue raised was the availability of online deliveries and priority shopping slots for those outside the high-risk group. Those impacted include people with visual impairments, chronic pain conditions and some mental health conditions. These groups rely heavily on online services, in-store assistance and support from family and friends, and risk being isolated and unable to shop for essentials.

Other areas flagged to us where reasonable adjustments should be considered include issues posed by long-queues, changes to policies on accompanied shopping, changes to store layouts which can present particular issues for autistic people, and inaccessible websites and telephone helplines.

In addition to the specific needs of disabled people, it is also important for retailers to consider the needs of carers and those living in unsafe households, who may require flexibility around one-person shopping policies. In this time of crisis, it is more important than ever that our frontline services consider the needs of all those whose personal circumstances place them in vulnerable situations.

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I know that you will share my concerns and that the BRC will want to ensure that the needs of every customer are met at this most difficult of times. I am writing you ask you to contact your members as a matter of urgency and highlight the need to respond with compassion, flexibility and understanding to meet the needs of disabled people and ensure that no customer is forgotten about.

I would be delighted to offer the expertise of my organisation to support you in this work and would be very happy to discuss with you at your earliest convenience.

I hope that we can work together to protect the rights of people in the most vulnerable situations and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Rebecca Hilsenrath

Chief Executive

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