Dear First Minister,

We are writing to express our utmost concern about the new fire breaker regulations, specifically the plan to restrict the sale of so-called non-essential products in stores, and request an urgent meeting with you and affected members. We are happy to hold that meeting at any point today or this evening, or failing that tomorrow.

To date, all discussions between your officials and industry about the firebreak has been focused on the closure of types of business premises, not products. This last-minute change in policy approach will place huge additional operational pressure on the retail sector, our store colleagues and ultimately customers.

Attempting to define, restrict and communicate the sales of non-essential products to our customers and colleagues with less than 36 hours’ notice is a near impossible task, more so with no clarity or guidance from government on what such non-essential products are. This policy will also put our colleagues in the difficult position of having to refuse the sale of certain products in store that could be a flashpoint for violence and abuse, which has spiked during this pandemic.

Stores will have to review thousands of products lines at incredibly short notice. This will also result in store layouts having to be reviewed that could undermine the safe flow of customers in store environments, the very antithesis of what your government is trying to achieve and what our members have strived to implement.

We are concerned that the restrictions of product sales will also result in consumers having to make multiple shopping trips, instead of being able to visit one store and make multiple purchases. We urge you to urgently revise this policy approach and instead work with the industry to keep essential businesses open and support non-essential businesses to use other channels to serve customers during the firebreak.

If you do go ahead with this policy, then at very least we need today the most comprehensive list possible of what can and cannot be sold, a understanding approach from enforcement bodies, and a commitment to an immediate communications campaign by the Welsh Government so that consumers are more likely to be aware of these restrictions before they visit stores.

Sincerely

Welsh Retail Consortium / Association of Convenience Stores