



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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From the Chair of the Committee

Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

Department for Education

Sanctuary Buildings

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9 June 2020

COVID-19 and food supply – free school meal vouchers

As part of our ongoing inquiry into Covid-19 and food supply, the EFRA Committee heard evidence from representatives of the British Retail Consortium (BRC) and Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) on Friday 5 June.

Both the BRC and ACS expressed strong disappointment over the Government's engagement with retailers during the development and the rollout of the free school meal voucher scheme. Concerns included the early absences of retailers such as Aldi, Lidl and Co-op. They noted, for example, that Co-op stores often serve remote communities without alternative provision, and that the organisation had therefore developed its own system to support families in receipt of free school meals, leading to the risk of schools being penalised for using it.

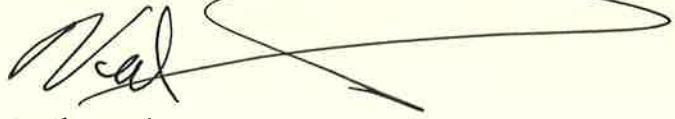
We appreciate that given the speed with which it was created a new scheme would have encountered teething problems, but the witnesses told us that the Government made incorrect assumptions about how people would access food during the pandemic and was slow to work with retailers to remedy problems.

The Committee would be grateful if you could clarify in writing, by Tuesday 23 June:

- 1) The rationale for deciding which retailers would be included in the scheme, and what assessment was made of where people using vouchers would buy their food; and
- 2) How the DfE is working with DEFRA and grocery retailers to address barriers to the rollout of the national scheme to more shops.

I am copying this letter to Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Education Committee.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil', followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line that extends to the right and then curves slightly upwards.

Neil Parish
Chair of the Committee