

Written evidence submitted by The Co-op Group (END0035)

Many thanks for your email of 13 July about the Committee's current inquiry into energy drinks and children. We've set out, below, our thoughts in terms of the questions you're posing.

• Why did you decide to roll out the voluntary ban on sale of energy drinks to under 16s?

The action was undertaken following concerns raised by both our customers and members and from external organisations about the effects of energy drinks on children.

• How have you enforced the ban?

In the absence of any defined products, apart from concerns about drinks providing energy by caffeine, we placed an age restriction on all soft drinks containing 150mg or more of caffeine per litre as identified from suppliers or from product labelling (these products must legally be labelled "High caffeine content. Not recommended for children").

These products are flagged on our central pricing system with an age flag of 16 and this information flows through to our store till systems. When a flagged product is scanned at till in store (whether on a manned till or on a self-service unit) the sale is paused until a member of staff confirms that either:

- they believe from the customer's appearance that the customer is over the age of 25, or
- (where they believe the customer looks under the age of 25) they have seen identification proving to their satisfaction that the purchaser is 16 or over

We have produced customer-facing point of sale material to be displayed on shelf alongside soft drinks explaining our policy. The intention is to inform customers before they select product in the hope of reducing potential confrontation at till.

• What has been your overall, as well as your staff's, experience of enforcing the ban?

The response from store colleagues and the public has been generally supportive of our action.

• How do you monitor compliance of the ban, ensuring that all staff are enforcing it?

Store colleagues are required to undergo mandatory training on all age restricted sales and services at least twice a year. High caffeine soft drinks have now been added to that training.

Our till system allows the monitoring of the sales and refusals of all age restricted products, linked to the employee number of the serving colleague. Store managers are tasked with reviewing this data on a weekly basis and addressing any non-conformances with the colleague in question.

• Based on your experience of the voluntary ban, would you be in favour of a legal ban? If so, from which age?

We don't have a strong view on whether, or not, there should be a legal ban, beyond the voluntary action already taken by a number of retailers. However, if a legal ban were to

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be introduced, it would be important for government to be clear and precise about the scope of the restriction (in other words, what products are affected) to ensure that the controls are correctly implemented and also form a clear view about the precise restriction in terms of age, so that retailers can use existing forms of compliance checking (such as 16 or 18 where ID schemes are more available).

I hope this information is useful for the work of the Committee.

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