

Tim Loughton MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



By email: sargeantkari@parliament.uk

26 January 2021

Dear Mr Loughton,

Thank you for your email of 22 January 2021 to Paul Gerrard, and for bringing to our attention concerns raised by your constituent, regarding the measures in place at our Ham Road store in response to COVID-19. Paul has asked me to respond on his behalf.

Here at the Co-op, we're busy staffing and stocking 2,500 of our own food stores, as well as maintaining wholesale supply to a further 5,000 independent stores. We're also the largest Funeralcare provider in the UK and we have a digital health business. Our response at every step of the way through the ongoing impact that the pandemic has had has been shaped by our unwavering commitment to the communities we serve and our 4.6m members up and down the country.

Throughout the crisis, the safety and wellbeing of all our members, customers and colleagues has been our utmost priority. As the Government's guidance on social distancing for both members of the public and for businesses has evolved, we have been continuously reviewing and adapting the measures implemented in our stores and throughout the Co-op. For instance, it was many months ago that we were able to lift the purchasing restrictions that were necessary early in the crisis. We've had great feedback about our daily hour where members, customers and their carers who need an extra helping hand are able to receive extra support when they shop in store (8am to 9am Monday – Saturday and 10am to 11am on Sundays), so that has continued.

To keep our colleagues safe, we've invested heavily in Personal Protective Equipment including hand sanitiser, gloves and face visors and masks, and installing Perspex screens at all our till points and self-service checkouts. That's in addition to encouraging safe distances in stores by limiting the number of customers in each of our stores and constantly refreshing the messaging to remind our members and customers to remember to wear a face covering and to maintain their distance at all times when they're in store. We're also providing cleaning stations for baskets and trollies with hand sanitiser for members and customers to use when they arrive at any of our stores. We continue to work closely with our frontline colleagues to ensure that they're following all the necessary guidance to keep themselves and our members and customers safe.

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1 Angel Square, Manchester, M60 0AG. Reg No 525R

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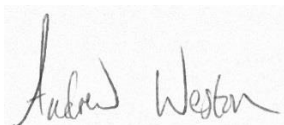
Both inside and outside our stores we are very clear that all our members and customers must wear a face mask when shopping with us, except those with an exemption. It's been many months since the introduction of this requirement for both customers and our colleagues, and so in recent weeks we've again increased significantly our in-store messaging to remind customers that they must wear a face mask unless they are exempt and it is an important way that they should play their part in helping keep others safe.

Unfortunately, the reality is that the consequences of asking our colleagues to enforce this requirement without effective support from the police are unacceptable in terms of the risk of violence and abuse that this would expose them to. We will continue to remind all our members and customers that the police have been granted powers by the Government to enforce the wearing of face masks, and of the need for them to continue to be kind and considerate to all our colleagues who are working hard to keep everybody safe.

I have spoken with the Area Manager who is responsible for our Ham Road store, and she has confirmed that there is significant signage in the entrance and displayed within the windows of the store to ensure that all our members and customers are reminded of the need to uphold social distancing when shopping in the store. I would also note that we continue to monitor the number of shoppers visiting the store at any one time, and will deploy colleagues to staff the entrance in order to limit the flow of shoppers at busy times as needed. Following the feedback provided by your constituent, however, the Area Manager has spoken with my colleagues in our Ham Road store to remind them again of the importance of upholding all of the guidance we have implemented in response to COVID-19.

I hope this note will reassure your constituent that we continue to be absolutely focused on keeping our members, customers and colleagues safe as we continue to respond to the pandemic, but should you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Weston". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Andrew Weston
Senior Campaigns & Public Affairs Manager

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