

Covid witness statement M9/R9R/BRC

Helen Dickinson, CEO of the British Retail Consortium

PD

Signed: 20 May 2025

Part A: Introduction to the British Retail Consortium ('BRC')

The British Retail Consortium (BRC)

1. The BRC is the leading trade association for UK retail, representing over 200 major retailers and thousands of smaller, independent retailers, through our trade association members. The BRC's primary purpose is to make a positive difference to the retail industry and the customers it serves, both today and in the future. We work to build the reputation of the retail industry, drive change, develop exceptional retail leaders, and influence government policy to ensure that retail businesses thrive and consumers benefit.
2. The BRC operates UK-wide, covering England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. We have people across all the devolved nations and they liaise directly with the respective devolved governments under Scottish Retail Consortium (SRC), Welsh Retail Consortium (WRC) and the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium (NIRC).
3. I am the Chief Executive and have been in role for over 10 years. We employ around 55 people, including four who cover the devolved nations.

Nature of Retail

4. **Number and Kinds of Retail Businesses:** There are approximately 300,000 retail businesses operating in the UK. These businesses range from large multinational corporations to small independent shops. The sector is diverse, encompassing various types of businesses, including supermarkets, department stores, specialty stores, online retailers, convenience stores and thousands of small independent businesses.
5. **Number of people Working in Retail:** Retail is the UK's largest private sector employer, providing around 3 million direct jobs and an additional 2.7 million jobs in the supply chain.

6. **Makeup of People Working in Retail:** The workforce is diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, nationality, and age. Women make up 56% of the workforce, with representation at both store and head-office levels. Ethnic minority representation has been increasing, with 12% of board-level leaders and 9% of executive committee members coming from ethnic minority backgrounds. The workforce also includes a mix of nationalities and age groups, reflecting the inclusive nature of retail. And the vast majority work for the larger retail businesses.
7. **Nature of Employment Relationships:** Retail offers a variety of employment opportunities, including full-time, part-time, and temporary. A significant proportion of retail workers are employed on part-time or flexible contracts, which provide the flexibility to work around other commitments, like caring for a family.
8. **Level of Pay for Workers in Retail in the UK:** The latest official data in October 2024 shows retail pay growth was 8.5% compared to the national average of 7%. Retailers have also been able to raise wages as productivity improves, with retail productivity growing faster than the national average post pandemic and as a result of the National Living Wage increases and companies investing in pay.
9. **Contribution of the Retail Industry to the UK Economy:** Retail contributes approximately 5% to the UK's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provides significant employment opportunities, particularly at entry level and part-time local flexible jobs. The industry contributes over £100 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) and invests over £17 billion annually in communities, colleagues, and customer offerings.
10. **Comparison of Different Sub-Sectors of the Retail Industry:** The sector is diverse, with various sub-sectors including supermarkets, department stores, specialist or single category stores, online retailers, and convenience stores. Each has its unique characteristics and challenges. For example, supermarkets and department stores often have larger physical footprints and higher operational costs, while online retailers benefit from lower fixed overheads but higher variable costs related to logistics, delivery and returns. The vast majority of retailers now operate both stores and online.
11. **Significant Differences or Similarities Between the Retail Industries in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland and across different regions of respective countries:** The different regions of the UK share many similarities, such as the types of businesses and employment patterns. However, there are regional differences in terms of economic conditions, consumer behaviour, and government policies (most notably across the devolved nations). For example, there are slightly more shops in Scotland as towns and communities are more geographically spread and they are slightly smaller than say in England.

Part B: The BRC During the Pandemic

Work BRC Engaged in Facilitated to Inform the Government's Economic Response:

12. The BRC played a crucial role in informing the government's economic response to the pandemic. We engaged in numerous activities, including:

- **Correspondence and Meetings:** The BRC engaged on and raised several concerns about economic support and interventions with the government. This included input into what support was needed, helping government define unclear eligibility criteria, and the need for better communication.
- **Economic Support and Interventions:** The BRC worked closely with ministers and officials in BEIS, DHSC, HM Treasury, the Cabinet Office, wider government, and the devolved administrations to feed into plans on loan and grant schemes, the furlough scheme, business rates relief, relaxation of store opening hours and delivery hours to warehouses, suspension of parts of the Competition Act, regulations and guidance on social distancing, data use for assisting the vulnerable, relaxation of delivery rules, and provision of free test kits for employee testing.
- **Other Interventions:** There were many other interventions which were not economic support but had an economic impact on the industry. The most significant for retail was closing down of what were deemed "non-essential" shops. This happened before definitions of what constituted "essential" or "non-essential" were clearly laid out and were slightly different across each of the devolved nations. We engaged extensively on this and on ensuring warehouses for all retail business were able to stay open and online deliveries still able to be fulfilled. This was granular operational detail which governments were not accustomed to dealing with. Eg was click & collect allowed in a closed shop, how many people were allowed in a van when 2m distancing was in place, communications on re-opening, and so on.
- **Member Engagement** – As the BRC was in regular communication with governments across all four nations we acted as an interface with our members, sharing information about upcoming government actions, and in an advisory role, hosting weekly CEO calls, calls across other communities within our members eg property teams on issues relating to business rates relief or late rent, operations teams on restrictions, HR on colleague safety, communications for consistency of messaging. The input we received often informed discussions and decisions by governments.

- **Working with others:** We were also able to use our position to support government wider interventions like social distancing in workplaces. We worked with USDAW, one of the main unions in retail to prepare guidance on social distancing in warehouses which we then evolved to cover stores. This guidance was then used as input by governments as they later sought to develop standard guidance for all workplaces. We worked with USDAW and Ministers on communications to the public about considerate shopping.

Usual Nature of the Relationship Between BRC and UK Government and Devolved Administrations on Economic Issues:

13. The BRC has a well-established relationship with the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations on economic issues. This relationship typically involves:
 - **Regular Engagement:** The BRC/SRC/WRC/NIRC regularly engage with government officials and Ministers to discuss economic policies and their impact on retail. This includes meetings, roundtables, input into consultations, participation in myriad government working groups, and providing evidence to inform policy decisions.
 - **Advocacy and Lobbying:** The BRC advocates for the interests of the retail industry, lobbying for favourable policies and interventions that support the industry's ability to invest.

Changes in the Nature of the Relationship During the Pandemic:

14. During the pandemic, the nature of the relationship between the BRC and the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations changed significantly:
 - **Increased Collaboration:** The BRC worked more closely with government officials to address urgent needs of retail. This included rapid implementation of measures such as extended store hours, relaxation of delivery rules, and provision of free test kits for employee testing.
 - **Speed of response:** Government decision making speeded up. Problem solving mentality.
 - **Enhanced Communication:** The BRC had easier access to officials, which brought considerable advantages in terms of quickly implementing initiatives and providing guidance on areas such as data use to assist the vulnerable. This was valuable to both sides enabling sharing of insight from retailers into governments and vice versa.

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

15. Despite the increased collaboration, some challenges arose, such as the lack of coordinated policy-making and differing restrictions across the four home nation governments as the pandemic wore on (for example the definitions of what was deemed essential and non-essential were different, the dates of re-openings were also often different). The BRC highlighted the need for consistency of approach among the four nations to improve business planning and messaging to staff and customers. We also often noted a disconnect between central decision making in No 10 (which was often closely guarded) and the Department for Business. Often the practicalities of implementation had not been thought through before an announcement was made and therefore the business implications often needed to be reverse engineered.

Consultation on Specific Interventions UK:

16. The BRC regularly engaged with the UK Government, including HMT, and Devolved Governments on the design of key economic interventions during the pandemic. However this was predominantly in raising concerns, questions or improvement once proposals were tabled, consultations issued, plans announced or highlighting issues that required intervention. I would not say were directly involved in first round discussions about the design. For example, we would often hear first about specific new restrictions from Government press conferences e.g. on click and collect services in Scotland or new food-to-go restrictions.
17. The main areas covered the **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)/Loan Schemes/Business Rates Relief/Rent arrears debt enforcement/grants and Statutory Sick Pay.**
18. We had ongoing engagement with officials and Ministers in HM Treasury and the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, pressing them for comprehensive Business Rates relief for retailers. This was needed not only to support business who had to close but for that were deemed “essential” to open who needed the rates savings to fund PPE, plexiglas screens, barriers, tape on floors etc to enforce social distancing requirements.
19. We also engaged closely with officials in the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and in the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and others to secure the lease forfeiture moratoria and the series of extensions and ban on evictions across the four nations of the UK.
20. Working with officials in the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, we pressed for the introduction of support for Trade Credit Insurance which

culminated in the introduction of the Trade Credit Reinsurance Scheme to support retail supply chains.

21. We had extensive engagement with officials in HM Treasury during the development and introduction of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, providing views on their proposed approach and facilitating engagement with representatives from across the industry to enable them to set out their priorities. While the scheme provided much-needed support to businesses, we believed that it should have been targeted towards businesses on the basis of need rather than applying universally. This would have ensured that the support was directed to those businesses that were most affected by the pandemic and in dire need of financial assistance.
22. **Loans to Businesses:** We also expressed opinions on loans to businesses, including the Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBLs), Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS), and the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBILS). They should have been targeted by sector or other filters rather than being made available universally. This would have ensured that the support was directed to those sectors that were most affected by the pandemic and in need of financial assistance.
23. On **Self Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS)/Uplifts to universal credit/Eat Out to Help Out/Changes to the insolvency rules**, we didn't have any involvement as they were less relevant to retail.

Monitoring Economic Interventions UK:

24. The BRC was regularly feeding back on economic and wider interventions that had an economic impact. Examples included regularly feeding back on rent moratoria which required various extensions during the pandemic, or on experience on the ground on reopening, on implementing social distancing. We participated in very regular calls with government – for example in Scotland almost daily initially – and fed back on trading conditions using our data plus anecdotal member feedback on policy announcements.

Nature of Relationships with HMT, other Government Departments, and Local Government:

25. The BRC had a generally effective working relationship with all the relevant government departments. We had less direct engagement with Local Authorities.

BRC Commissioned Work to Inform Economic response:

26. As previously noted the BRC's main role was as part of the two way communication between government and industry. We did not as I recall commission work beyond seeking insight from across our membership to assess need or response to particular

interventions. Our work was often more urgent, in the moment responding to rapidly changing circumstances and a sequence of ever evolving requirements. It focused on problem solving.

Consultation on Specific Interventions Devolved Nations:

27. Across the devolved nations it was more often a case of the team monitoring developments across other parts of the UK and follow up where there were inconsistencies. Eg on Non-Domestic Rates Relief; the SRC team was asking for the rates waiver and reliefs on offer in other parts of the UK, as well as the different iterations of the Covid support grants etc. The rates waiver in Scotland for 2 years was substantial and much needed, but in the years since England and Wales have provided continuing temporary rates relief for small and medium sized retail premises whilst Scotland and NI have not.
28. Covid support grants were forthcoming from the devolved administrations, however the second iteration of the grant scheme in Scotland was slightly less generous (75%) for second and subsequent stores compared to what was on offer in England for example.
29. One frustration from Wales was the cap placed subsequently on stores eligible for rates relief, which meant regardless of trading conditions any store with a rateable value in excess of £500k was ultimately ineligible for rates relief.
30. Support like the **Local Government Hardship Fund; Third Sector Covid-19 Fund and Newly Self-Employed Support Scheme** were less relevant. Our focus concentrated on those most relevant to retail.
31. The most significant to retail was the business rates relief. The relief provided across the devolved nations was substantial and much needed, however as the pandemic wore on governments began to flex and alter the regimes and eligibility for rates reliefs and grants, which added to a growing complexity in the approaches taken across the UK and came on top of a growing complexity in terms of Covid operating restrictions e.g. at one point large furniture stores could open in Northern Ireland but not Scotland, shopping centres in Scotland closed for longer, garden centres in Wales opened earlier than in Scotland etc.
32. We were very pro-active in reaching out to the three devolved governments on what the industry thought they should and should not do, whether that was on financial support or trading restrictions, through the various engagement opportunities we had and created. Sometimes we got to contribute to thinking directly and sometimes we suggested ideas which were later taken up. For example, in Northern Ireland our plea was to provide consistency on easements on lorry drivers hours as had been implemented in Great Britain. On many occasions we would be sighted on

implementation issues – what worked or what didn't - in other parts of the UK and were able to rely those to officials/Ministers in the other UK home nations as they mulled how to implement a given policy.

Monitoring: Devolved:

33. Much of the thrust of our engagement was focusing on what ought to be done or which shouldn't be done at the start of the policy process, whether regulatory easements to help shops and retail warehouses respond to changing consumer needs – e.g. removal of the carrier bag charge for home deliveries of food – or financial support for retailers, or the introduction of new or changing Covid restrictions. As part of our regular dialogue with the Devolved Administrations we provided very regular feedback on what was or was not working, in order to improve the ability of retailers to implement government policy but also to make things as simple and as easy to understand for consumers as possible.

Correspondence

34. See Annex A for a list of advice or other correspondence between the BRC and the UK Government and the devolved governments related to the economic response to the pandemic.

Part C: the Economic Impact of the Pandemic on the Retail

35. The economic impact on the retail industry has been profound, affecting both businesses and workers in various ways.

Economic Impact on Retail Businesses:

36. **Revenue Losses and Store Closures:** The pandemic led to significant revenue losses for many retail businesses, particularly those selling non-essential goods. The determination of what was deemed essential and non-essential was a very profound one for the industry and caused many competition concerns. Overall though, lockdowns and restrictions forced many stores to close, resulting in an estimated £30 billion in lost sales for non-food retail stores (see **Annex C** for the calculation). Long-established retailers such as Debenhams and Arcadia fell by the wayside ie the already weaker business were less likely to survive.
37. **Shift to Online Sales:** The pandemic accelerated the shift to online sales. For example, online penetration for non-food items increased from 25-26% pre-pandemic to around 34% post pandemic with the vast majority of all non-food items being purchased online during the various lockdowns. This shift required significant investment in online infrastructure and logistics, which had both positive and negative economic impacts. While it created new jobs in logistics and delivery, it also led to the closure of physical stores and the loss of associated jobs.
38. **Increased Costs:** Retailers faced increased costs due to the need for safety measures, such as social distancing and personal protective equipment. Additionally, the return of full business rates liability and the end of rent moratoriums added financial pressure.
39. **Government Support:** Government support schemes, such as business rates relief, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), and corporate financing facilities, were essential in helping retailers survive.

Economic Impact on Retail Workers:

40. **Job Losses:** The retail industry experienced job losses, with an estimated 143,000 jobs lost between December 2019 and December 2022.
41. **Violence and Abuse:** The pandemic saw a rise in violence and abuse against retail workers, with incidents almost doubling from pre-pandemic levels. This included racial and sexual abuse, physical assault, and threats with weapons.
42. **Insecure Employment:** Many retail workers were employed on part-time or flexible contracts, which provided flexibility but also led to concerns about insecure employment.

Neutral or Positive Economic Impacts within Retail:

43. **Supermarkets and Online Retailers:** Certain parts of the retail industry experienced neutral or positive economic impacts as a result of the pandemic. Supermarkets and online retailers saw increased demand, as consumers shifted to online shopping and stockpiled essential goods. For example, online home delivery sales for supermarkets increased threefold during the pandemic, albeit this often required costly extra safety practices, vehicles and drivers. This shift required these businesses (and other retailers who sold online but also had shops) to rapidly scale up their online operations and logistics capabilities.
44. **Increased investment in digital:** The shift to online required many businesses to invest in technology, website development and wider digital transformation. Many were able to do more in months things that would have taken years. This was a common theme of agility and resilience which featured heavily in retail conversations at the time.
45. **Home and Technology Products:** There was a significant increase in sales of home and technology products, as people adapted to working from home. Items such as coffee machines and computing equipment saw a spike in sales.

Wider Impacts as a Result of Retail Challenges:

46. **Town Centres and High Streets:** The shift towards hybrid working led to a decrease in shopper footfall and an increase in vacant shop premises.
47. **The loss of weaker players:** Long-established retailers such as Debenhams and Arcadia fell by the wayside during the pandemic. These closures resulted in significant job losses and had a negative impact on high streets across the UK.

Comparison with Other Industries:

48. The retail industry was uniquely impacted by the pandemic compared to other industries. While sectors such as hospitality and travel also faced significant challenges, the retail industry had to navigate the dual pressures of maintaining physical stores and expanding online operations. The competitive, low-margin nature of the retail business made it particularly vulnerable to the economic shocks of the pandemic.

Part D: Analysis and Reflections

49. My overarching reflection is whether sufficient thought went into the strategic rationale for the very nature of the economic response. As noted above the closure of parts of retail had implications across the industry. Was it the most appropriate economic response to do that and provide support for the affected businesses (with the strengths and weaknesses of that as noted throughout my statement). For retail, if part of retail was safe to open, why wasn't it all? Other markets took different approaches. The US supported consumers rather than businesses, Sweden kept most of the economy "open". I raise this more as a question for the inquiry as it covers so much more than one industry's perspective and I am sure people across our membership would all have a potentially different view.
50. More specifically, in the context of the strategy taken to the economic response, it had several strengths and notable weaknesses and challenges that would need to be addressed should the same strategic response be considered in the future.

Strengths:

51. **Rapid Implementation of Economic Support Measures:** The UK Government and the devolved nations quickly implemented various support measures to help businesses and workers during the pandemic. This included the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), business rates relief, and grants to businesses. These measures provided much-needed financial support to retailers, helping many to survive the initial impact of the pandemic.
52. **Collaboration and Communication:** The BRC worked closely with government officials to address the urgent needs of the retail industry. This included rapid implementation of measures such as extended store hours, relaxation of delivery rules, and provision of free test kits for employee testing. The BRC had easier access to officials, which brought considerable advantages in terms of quickly implementing initiatives and providing guidance on areas such as data use to assist the vulnerable.
53. **Support for Online Transition:** The pandemic accelerated the shift to online sales, and the government keeping online retail open (which we engaged directly with the Government on) enabled retailers adapt to this change.

Weaknesses:

54. **Lack of Coordinated Policy-Making:** The BRC highlighted the lack of coordinated policy-making and restrictions across the four home nation governments. This inconsistency made it challenging for cross UK businesses to plan and communicate effectively with staff and customers.

55. **Lack of “off the shelf” Support Packages:** Everything needed to be created from scratch.
56. **State Aid Limits often unclear:** Various of the support measures were subject to state aid but often support was announced without clarity about applicability. For example it took us a number of weeks to clarify that it did not apply to business rates relief leaving businesses uncertain of what support they would receive.
57. **Frequent Poor Coordination between National Public Messaging and Practicalities of implementation of changes/measures: Examples included social distancing requirements or mask wearing.** Often the practicalities of implementation in retail settings had not been thought through before the announcement, leaving retail colleagues in the front line dealing with a frustrated public.
58. **Unclear and uncoordinated mechanisms for engagement with Government:** It took a number of weeks before various forum and lines of communication were set up.
59. **Lack of early clarity on competition law relaxation:** Panic buying took hold before the national lockdowns and it took a few weeks before there was clarity of what could be discussed. Once clarified this helped government as well retailers on dealing with issues eg ensuring vulnerable got access to food.

Universal vs Targeted Economic Interventions:

60. **Strengths and Weaknesses of Targeted Economic Interventions:** The BRC has identified several strengths and weaknesses of targeted economic interventions:

Strengths:

61. **Effective Allocation of Resources:** Targeted interventions ensure that resources are allocated to those businesses and sectors that are most in need of support. This helps to maximize the impact of the support and ensures that it is directed to where it is needed most.
62. **Addressing Specific Needs:** Targeted interventions can address the specific needs of different sectors and businesses. For example, the retail sector faced unique challenges during the pandemic, and targeted support could have addressed these challenges more effectively.

Weaknesses:

63. **Complexity and Administrative Burden:** Targeted interventions can be more complex to implement and administer. This can create additional administrative burdens for both businesses and government agencies.

64. **Potential for Inequity:** Targeted interventions can create potential for inequity, as some businesses or sectors may receive more support than others. This can lead to perceptions of unfairness and create tensions between different sectors and businesses.
65. Overall, while the BRC acknowledges the strengths of targeted economic interventions, we also recognise the challenges and potential weaknesses associated with such an approach.

Recommendations

66. **Better Co-ordination Across the Devolved Nations:** Greater consistency would support cross UK businesses to plan and communicate effectively with staff and customers.
67. **Maintaining a menu of regulatory Easements and Support Schemes:** The BRC favours the UK Government and Devolved Administrations permanently maintaining a menu of regulatory easements and support schemes that can be quickly deployed in any future pandemic or comparable event. The BRC believes that having a predefined set of measures will enable a more rapid and effective response to future crises. Some specific easements and support schemes that the BRC considers should be included are:
- a. **Relaxation of Delivery Curfews and Driver Hours:** To ensure the continuous supply of essential goods.
 - b. **Proactive Relaxation of Regulations:** Including clear data protection guidelines to facilitate effective crisis management. Details of particular data protection issues which emerged are set out in **Annex D**.
 - c. **Framework for Loan Schemes, Grants, Business Rates Waivers, and Employment Support:** Such as furlough schemes that can be activated quickly during future crises.
68. **Clear and Consistent Guidelines:** On what is deemed "essential" and "non-essential" to avoid major competition issues.
69. **Improved Communication and Public Messaging:** The government should enhance communication with firms and consumers prior to lockdowns and restrictions to prevent over/panic buying and ensure clear, consistent messaging. Collaboration with media outlets and industry players through trade bodies is crucial to avoid negative public perception and misinformation. The impact of poor public messaging on panic buying was significant, and better coordination could have mitigated this.
70. **Defining Parameters of Relaxation of Competition Legislation:** The relaxation of competition legislation by the UK Government during the pandemic had a significant

economic impact on retail. The relaxation allowed businesses to collaborate more effectively without fear of legal repercussions, ensuring the continuity of food supply and other essential goods. The parameters of what should be and should not be permitted should be defined so that a framework can be referenced in the future.

71. **Using of Trade Bodies Effectively:** Government should make better use of key contacts within relevant trade bodies in consumer-facing sectors, such as the BRC and others. This would streamline communication during emergencies and enable the quick setup of consultative forums to coordinate policy and communications. Frameworks and processes for regular review and contingency planning should be established, using trade associations for effective policy setting and communication with businesses.

Annex A: Government correspondence

- 20 March 2020: [Letter](#) to Chancellor Sunak re CBIL CFF (Ref: HD/01 - INQ000612830)
- 23 March 2020: [Letter](#) to Mel Stride re Select Committee (Ref: HD/02 - INQ000612841)
- 27 March 2020: [Letter](#) to Chancellor Sunak re financial lifeline for retailers (Ref: HD/03 - INQ000612852)
- 30 March 2020: [Letter](#) to Alok Sharma re operation of online retailer (Ref: HD/04 - INQ000612853)
- March 2020: [SRC letter](#) to Scottish Government on easements and business rates (Ref: HD/05 - INQ000612854)
- 17 April 2020: [Letter](#) to Chancellor Sunak re FCGS(Ref: HD/06 - INQ000612855)
- 20 April 2020: [Letter](#) to Alok Sharma re phased opening (Ref: HD/07 - INQ000612856)
- 20 June 2020: [Letter](#) to Chancellor Sunak re representations ahead of Covid summer 2020 fiscal event (Ref: HD/08 - INQ000612857)
- 30 June 2020: [Letter](#) to Minister Scully re Leicester lockdown(Ref: HD/09 - INQ000612858)
- August 2020: SRC [submission](#) to Review of Scotland's Town Centre Action Plan (Ref: HD/10 - INQ000612831)
- 28 September 2020: [Letter](#) to Chancellor Sunak re postponement of Budget (Ref: HD/11 - INQ000612832)
- 16 October 2020: [Letter](#) to Minister Scully re support for BRC Christmas Shopping campaign (Ref: HD/12 - INQ000612833)
- October 2020: SRC [submission](#) on recommendations for the Scottish Budget (Ref: HD/13 - INQ000612834)
- 30 October 2020: [Letter](#) to Minister Scully re 3 tier restrictions (Ref: HD/14 - INQ000612835)
- 20 November 2020: [Letter](#) to Minister Shapps re what is Government doing to clear backlog of containers at ports (Ref: HD/15 - INQ000612836)
- 20 November 2020: [Letter](#) to Darren Jones BEIS committee re enquiry (Ref: HD/16 - INQ000612837)
- 2 December 2020: [Letter](#) to Mark Harper re covid recovery group (Ref: HD/17 - INQ000612838)

- December 2020: SRC [submission](#) to Scottish Government advisory group on economic recovery (Ref: HD/18 - INQ000612839)
- 15 January 2021: [Letter](#) to Secretary of State Kwarteng re Local Authority guidance on the January 2021 lockdown Business Support Package (Ref: HD/19 - INQ000612840)
- 4 February 2021: [CEO letter](#) to PM Johnson re standalone offence (shares Crime Survey stats and contextualises rise in incidents due to pandemic) (Ref: HD/20 - INQ000612842)
- 25 March 2021: [Letter](#) to Secretary of State Jenrick re relaxation of delivery enforcement restrictions (Ref: HD/21 - INQ000612843)
- 5 May 2021: [Letter](#) to Secretary of State Jenrick re BRC response to consultation on Commercial Rents and Covid-19 (Ref: HD/22 - INQ000612844)
- 1 July 2021: [Letter](#) to Secretary of State Jenrick, inviting him to a CEO call on rents and the moratoria on debt enforcement during the pandemic (Ref: HD/23 - INQ000612845)
- 22 July 2021: [Letter](#) to Health Secretary Javid re impact of self-isolation requests (Ref: HD/24 - INQ000612846)
- 26 August 2021: [Letter](#) to Secretary of State Buckland re use of County Court Judgments by landlords during the debt enforcement moratoria (Ref: HD/25 - INQ000612847)
- 30 September 2021: [Joint letter](#) with UKH to Secretary of State Kwarteng (Secretary of State Gove copied) re arbitration process for Covid-related rent arrears (Ref: HD/26 - INQ000612848)
- 2 November 2021: [Letter](#) to Secretary of State Javid, invite to join Food CEO call to discuss upcoming Covid- and obesity-related measures (Ref: HD/27 - INQ000612849)
- November 2021: SRC [submission](#) to Scottish Government consultation on extending restrictions (Ref: HD/28 - INQ000612850)
- 17 December 2021: [Letter](#) to Secretary of State Kwarteng (Chancellor, CDL, Health Secretary and Minister Scully copied re Covid Plan C / Omicron variant) (Ref: HD/29 - INQ000612851)

Annex B: Table identifying responses to each Rule 9 question

Question Number (from Inquiry Request)	Has question been answered in statement?	If yes, what is the paragraph reference?	If not, why not?
A Intro to BRC			
1 Overview of BRC	Yes	1-3	
2 Retail across UK	Yes	4-10	
3 Retail across regions	Yes	11	
B BRC in pandemic			
4 BRC work	Yes	12, 14	
5 BRC usual work	Yes	13	
6 Copies of correspondence	Yes	34	
7 Consultation on design	Yes	16-23	
8 Consultation on implementation	Yes	16-23	
9 Monitoring interventions	Yes	24	
10 Devolved consultation on design	Yes	27-32	
11 Devolved consultation on implem	Yes	27-32	
12 Devolved consultation on monitoring	Yes	33	
13 Relationships	Yes	25	
14 Commissioned work	Yes	26	
C Impact of pandemic			
15 Economic impact	Yes	35-42	
16 Wider economic impact	Yes	46-47	
17 Neutral or positive implications	Yes	43-45	
18 Individual experiences	No		Our role is as a trade body for companies so N/a
D Analysis and Reflections			
19 List of reviews	No		None undertaken
20 Strengths & weaknesses of response		51-59	
21 Strengths & weaknesses of design		51-59	
22 Universal v targeted		60-65	
23 Menu of easements		67	
24 Relaxation of Competition legislation		70	
25 Strengths & weaknesses of engagement with BRC and others		71	
26 Recommendations		66-71	

ANNEX C: Lost store sales assessment

Lockdowns and restrictions forced many stores to close, resulting in an estimated £30 billion in lost sales for non-food retail stores.

The BRC used the ONS Retail Sales Index - Pounds Data, comparing sales for "predominantly non-food stores" (volumes, non-seasonally adjusted) in the lockdown periods and the same months the year before (or last "normal" year). This showed non-food sales were over £30bn lower during the lockdowns than they were the year before.

BACKGROUND CALCULATIONS:

2020 Mar	- £3.37 bn	
2020 Apr	-£7.68 bn	Lockdown 1
2020 May	-£5.70 bn	
2020 Jun	-£3.09 bn	
2020 Nov	- £1.37 bn *	Lockdown 2
2020 Dec	- £1.47 bn *	
2021 Jan	- £3.27 bn **	Tier 4 and Lockdown 3
2021 Feb	-£2.88 bn	
2021 March	- £2.51 bn ***	
TOTAL	- £33.34 bn	All Lockdowns

*Due to the Black Friday being in the December ONS month in 2019, the BRC instead compared with 2018 (and "ordinary" November/December month).

**Due to Jan being 5 weeks in 2020, the BRC instead compared with Jan 2019 as a "normal" January

*** Due to Mar 2020 being the first lockdown, the BRC instead compared to Mar 2019 as a "normal" March

Annex D: Data Protection Issues – Detail

The issue for BRC Members was the desire in the public health emergency to serve effectively the needs of the most vulnerable who needed to stay at home or whose requests for deliveries of essential items needed to be expedited. This required the development, maintenance and distribution to those needing to act of lists identifying older and other vulnerable people so that orders, deliveries and access to stores could be prioritised. As this involved lists of personal sensitive information, the data protection requirements would seem to require such lists to be protected with additional measures, if allowed at all.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) made it clear that their approach in the circumstances would be pragmatic enforcement taking into account the public health challenge – while nevertheless expecting a high degree of confidentiality and protection for the lists. This enabled the vulnerable to be serviced not least in the early days and weeks of the pandemic during lockdown.

A secondary consideration was the potential invasion of personal privacy in thermal imaging for the purposes of detecting those who may have had the virus – by assessing heightened temperatures. Again this was placed by the ICO within their overall approach of reacting to a public health emergency. An ICO statement was placed on the BRC website but has since been deleted.

Elizabeth Denham, then ICO Commissioner, made an assessment of the ICO pragmatic approach. This accords with our understanding at the time and subsequently. It explains in far greater detail the process adopted. <https://ico.org.uk/media2/migrated/4019157/covid-19-report.pdf#page5> (pages 5-9)

There is also a summary of the ICO statement at the time by Simmins and Simmons <https://www.simmons-simmons.com/en/publications/ckc36ana4dl5u0a791bq20efj/ico-releases-statement-on-regulatory-approach-during-covid-19>

Unfortunately the actual ICO statement seems to have been removed from its website.

The BRC believes that the pragmatic approach to enforcement without any need to change the actual regulations is the best approach – provided it is effectively communicated and there is a clear end point that is also effectively communicated with sufficient notice.