

New measures on night time deliveries to supermarkets to support coronavirus response

The government has announced it will work with local authorities to extend the hours that deliveries can be made to supermarkets and other food retailers to help the industry respond to the coronavirus.

The new measures would mean food retailers can increase the frequency of deliveries to their stores and move stocks more quickly from warehouses across the country to replenish their shelves.

The announcement follows last week's call between the Environment Secretary and leading supermarkets, during which the industry said a relaxation of curfews would help retailers respond to the increased consumer demand for some products, namely hygiene products and a limited number of long life items.

Current rules mean that deliveries are prohibited overnight so that vehicles do not disturb residents. The government will temporarily relax the enforcement of restrictions to give greater flexibility.

These measures follow a further call between the Environment Secretary and leading representatives from across the food industry.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

We have listened to our leading supermarkets and representatives from across the industry, and we are taking action to support their preparations. By allowing night time deliveries to our supermarkets and food retailers we can free them up to move their stocks more quickly from their warehouses to their shelves.

Our retailers have well-established contingency plans in place and are taking all the necessary steps to ensure consumers have the food and supplies they need. I will continue to work closely with them over the coming days and weeks on this.

Andrew Opie, Director of Food & Sustainability at the British Retail Consortium, said:

We welcome all efforts by government to provide supermarkets with greater flexibility in the way they supply their stores. While there is plenty of stock available, the challenge for retailers has been to make sure all of it reaches shelves at the earliest opportunity. It is essential that government continues to engage on

other ways to alleviate the challenges for retailers.

The Environment Secretary held a call with representatives from across the food supply chain at 4pm today to discuss further ways to help with their preparations, and in particular to look at support for vulnerable groups who may be in isolation.

The call was productive, with the Secretary of State, retailers and food industry representatives discussing areas where further action could be taken to support the steps companies are already taking on delivery and collection services, and support vulnerable customers.

The government is also looking closely at measures to ensure supply chains continue to function as normal. The Transport Secretary stands ready to implement existing rules that allow for extensions on drivers' hours to help respond to emergency situations, as needed.

These rules would help the industry respond to any shortage of delivery drivers but would still require 45 minute breaks after four and a half hours of driving to make sure drivers are properly rested. The government would work closely with employers on any use of these rules to make sure the safety of drivers and other road users is protected.