11.08.2026

Dear Retailer,

As the Chief Executives of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI), Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), ASH Northern Ireland and ASH Wales, we are writing jointly to support retailers in preparing for the next stage in the implementation of the Tobacco and Vapes Act across the UK.

Retailers are on the frontline of age-of-sale and tobacco control legislation. Every day, responsible businesses help prevent underage sales and ensure the law works as Parliament intended. We know the overwhelming majority of retailers take these responsibilities seriously, and we appreciate the part you play.

The government has now published guidance to support implementation of the next phase of the Act. We encourage you and your staff to take a few minutes to read it and make sure you're ready for the changes coming into force on 29 October 2026 and 1 January 2027.

This letter summarises the key legislative changes that apply across the UK. You should also refer to guidance issued by your own government and local enforcement authorities, as there will be nation-specific arrangements.

The good news is that these changes should not create a significant burden for responsible retailers. Most businesses already have robust age verification procedures in place, and these new requirements build on those existing systems.

A reminder of changes already in force

The definition of tobacco products changed when the Act received Royal Assent to include the wording “or consumed in any other way”. There is now no ambiguity in whether heated tobacco products are subject to the same restrictions on display and promotion as other tobacco products. If you have not already taken steps to remove adverts and displays then you should take action.

From 1st October 2026

The vape excise tax will come into effect. Retailers will have till April 2027 to sell through existing stock but be mindful that selling products which entered the supply chain after the 1st October and do not have a tax stamp will be an offence. More information from HMRC here.

From 29 October 2026

- A minimum age of sale of 18 will apply to all consumer nicotine products, including nicotine pouches and additionally zero nicotine vapes. The free distribution of vapes and other consumer nicotine products will be prohibited. Guidance here.

- Vending machines selling vapes or other consumer nicotine products will be prohibited. Guidance here.

Vaping products and nicotine pouches are less harmful than smoking, and many of your customers will be using vaping products to help them quit smoking. However, these additional restrictions seek to protect children from becoming addicted to nicotine while ensuring these products remain available to adult smokers who use them to quit smoking.

From 1 January 2027

The smokefree generation law comes into force. It will become illegal to sell tobacco, herbal tobacco or cigarette papers to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009. Existing customers who can legally be sold tobacco before then will continue to be able to do so throughout their lives. In practice, this is simply an additional date-of-birth check within your existing age verification procedures. Guidance to business is here. There are also resources available from the Association of Convenience Stores which you can use in your business.

We know it is frustrating for those who comply with the law to see others who don't facing insufficient penalties. The Act also introduces Fixed Penalty Notices in England and Wales for many offences, giving Trading Standards a quicker and more proportionate enforcement option. For most offences, the penalty is £200, reduced to £100 if paid within 14 days, with payment avoiding prosecution (Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate similar penalties). Guidance here. Trading standards teams in England have also been expanded through investment from the Department of Health to support compliance with the Act.

Responsible retailers also have an important role in tackling the illicit market. If you become aware of businesses selling illicit tobacco or vapes, or selling tobacco or nicotine products illegally, we encourage you to report your concerns.

Together we all - retailers, trading standards and public health - have a role to play in improving our communities by making these changes a success. Trading Standards will continue to support businesses with advice and proportionate enforcement, while public health organisations will continue working to help those who smoke quit and prevent young people from becoming addicted to nicotine.

A future with fewer people who smoke means healthier communities, higher productivity and more money in the pockets of your customers to spend on things other than tobacco. That benefits everyone, including responsible retailers.

Thank you for your continued support. We encourage you to read the Government guidance, brief your staff and ensure you're ready for these important changes.

Yours sincerely,

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Chief Executive, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH)

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Suzanne Cass
Chief Executive, Action on Smoking and Health Wales (ASH Wales)

To report illegal sales in England: report to Trading Standards via Citizens Advice

To report illegal sales in Wales: No Ifs. No Butts

To report illegal sales in Northern Ireland: report to the local council

To report illegal sales in Scotland: Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland