

Candidate enquiry – October 2020

I attended the Tesco store at Eastville in Bristol where I witnessed more than 30 shoppers not wearing face masks (that was about 25% of those shopping at that time). Most of them could not be described as ‘young people’.

When I raised the matter with the deputy store manager he told me that Tesco had held discussions with the police at which it was decided that enforcement of the relevant regulations was a police matter and that Tesco and its staff would not take any enforcement action. He also, I believe mistakenly as a matter of law, told me that Tesco had no power to prevent people entering the store.

I wish to know, therefore, whether either the Chief Constable or the Police and Crime Commissioner have held/attended a meeting with the representatives of Tesco, and if so whether it was agreed that the police would enforce the mask wearing regulations at the Eastville store or any other Tesco supermarket, for that matter. Similarly, are either the Chief Constable or the Commissioner aware of any such discussions at either national or regional levels?

PCC Election Board response

On the issues you raise I can provide some assurances from the Constabulary which may assist. I can also confirm that the PCC has not had direct conversations with Tesco locally or nationally. The Chief did write to the security director of Tesco in March 2020. This correspondence was not about a particular store or about facemasks. The Chief did set out that the Constabulary aren't able to provide dedicated resources at set times, but are reviewing patrol plans to pay passing attention to key retailers in the force area noting the busiest times. The Chief also reassured that there would be a robust policing response to any criminal offences committed at stores or against retail employees.

It is for the shops to manage their stores and for the police to support if shops have a particularly difficult customer or situation. In those circumstances the expectation is that they will call 101 or 999 in an emergency. These calls will be assessed for threat, risk and harm and a unit dispatched as and when necessary.

I believe that supermarket chains made their own decisions regarding enforcement of facemasks and the majority, if not all, have the stance that they will not challenge due to not wanting to create issues and having no way of proving if someone has a medical / MH condition or not that means they don't need to wear a mask. Larger stores may have their own security and as they are private properties I understand that they can refuse entry.

The Constabulary have reported back to me that they have not had any breach of COVID19 calls/reports from the Tesco store you reference in your enquiry. Officers patrol in and around that area, but they will not go into stores unless required to do so. Constabulary have made a note of the concerns raised and will endeavour to build this location into their patrols.

The Constabulary, with the PCC's support, has recently launched Operation Hydrogen, which will provide greater capacity to support covid enforcement issues when they arise including at particular problem premises. This will be intelligence and partnership led. The Government has granted approx. £680,000 to our force to fund this activity, as part of a national initiative to help police forces tackle the pandemic. This will involve increased overtime to officers and PCSOs to create extra capacity. The money will also be used to fund electric bikes for these officers when on patrol and additional police cars in a distinctive livery.