

From Gillian Merron MP  
Minister of State

15 SEP 2009



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Dear Richard,

14 SEP 2009

Thank you for your letter of 3 September to Andy Burnham on behalf of a number of your constituents about tobacco legislation. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

The *Consultation on the future of tobacco control* closed on 8 September 2008, having received almost 100,000 responses.

The consultation focused on four main areas:

- reducing smoking rates and health inequalities caused by smoking;
- protecting children and young people from smoking;
- supporting smokers to quit; and
- helping those who find it difficult to quit.

It also included possible further regulation of the display of tobacco at the point of sale, access to tobacco from vending machines, and tobacco packaging.

On 9 December 2008 a report summarising responses to the consultation was published on the Department of Health website at [www.dh.gov.uk/tobacco](http://www.dh.gov.uk/tobacco). The Secretary of State also made a written Ministerial Statement to the House of Commons outlining proposed tobacco legislation to be taken forward in the next Parliamentary session. This is available at [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk), by following the links to Written Ministerial Statements on 9 December.

The Health Bill, introduced to Parliament on 15 January 2009, seeks to remove display of tobacco products at the point of sale, which will help to protect children and young people from the marketing of tobacco products and the harm caused by smoking. It also contains powers to restrict the sale of cigarettes from vending machines, which are one of the most common and easily accessible sources of cigarettes for young people.

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Vending machines are used by children because they are self-service, so often there is no opportunity for anyone to check their age. Regulations under the Health Bill will ensure there is contact between the customer and a member of staff, effectively banning self-service.

Should underage sales remain a problem after two years of regulation we will move to ban vending machines altogether. Further consultations on the details of regulations relating to vending machines will be forthcoming later this year.

Whilst we have had some significant successes in recent years in reducing the prevalence of smoking and the numbers of deaths from smoking related diseases, there is still no room for complacency. With over 80,000 deaths a year in England, smoking remains the biggest single cause of preventable deaths and the biggest single cause of health inequalities.

That is why it is important that we take forward legislation to protect children and young people and to support those who want to quit. We are committed to publishing a new tobacco control strategy by the end of the year outlining future actions to be taken in tobacco control.

I hope this is helpful.

*Yours sincerely,  
Gillian.*

**GILLIAN MERRON**