

CROSS-PARTY GROUP OF PARLIAMENTARIANS CALL TO PUT CONSUMERS AT THE HEART OF THE DEBATE TO MAXIMISE TOBACCO HARM REDUCTION OPPORTUNITIES POST-BREXIT

In this pivotal year which sees the Government review the Tobacco and Related Products Regulation, and publish a new Tobacco Control Plan to set England on track to reach the Smoke-Free 2030 goal, the Parliamentarians called for smokers and vapers to have access to, and information about, a wider range of safer, reduced-risk, nicotine products to help them quit combustible tobacco – ensuring their experiences remain front and centre of the policy debate.

LONDON – In a report released today 15/7/21, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Vaping has called upon the Government to expand existing regulations covering vaping products to a wider range of safer reduced-risk nicotine delivery systems, to help ensure that the 7 million smokers in the UK are given the best chance possible to quit using combustible tobacco.

The call follows an inquiry, in which the APPG received submissions from over 400 consumers and stakeholders. At a time when the Government is reviewing the regulations imposed on the UK by the EU's Tobacco Products Directive, the call has come for the UK to chart its own path and take a more progressive approach to tobacco harm reduction – embracing the products and the new technologies that aim to make smoking combustible cigarettes a thing of the past.

Vaping has been both popular and successful for over a decade in the UK in getting smokers to switch away from smoking to a safer alternative, but at the time where its usage is now plateauing, the Parliamentarians – which included Viscount Matt Ridley, a vocal advocate for reduced harm alternatives – have called on the Government to embrace all nicotine alternatives to cigarettes that are free from harmful combustion. The group has called for clarity and consistency across the regulations to ensure that consumers and retailers alike can continue to be protected from unintended consequences while equipping the smokers with the best range of alternatives to move away from cigarettes.

The main recommendations from the Report include:

- Extending the current regulations for vaping to other non-combustible alternatives to cigarettes, bringing the following products into an expansion of the category:
 - Nicotine pouches – which are currently largely unregulated;
 - Heated tobacco products – which are currently not afforded the same treatment as vapes; and
 - Snus – which has to-date been illegal while we were in the EU despite its significant success in Sweden in helping cut the number of smokers in the country
- Amending the rules for vapes to ensure they cater to the needs of both existing vapers and the smokers who have tried them but not stuck with them – allowing for increased tank sizes, bottle sizes and higher nicotine strengths (often the key barrier to helping heavy smokers quit).
- Allowing for sensible – and direct – communications to smokers and vapers about the products available to them, whether through inserts in cigarette packs, or via digital/online means.

The inquiry received evidence from prominent names within the tobacco harm-reduction field including Professor David Nutt, Professor Lynne Dawkins, Professor Catherine Kimber, Clive Bates and Professor Peter Hajek among others. These recommendations follow the publication of the landmark report earlier this year from the Royal College of Physicians in which the organisation also called for integrating the regulation of all reduced-risk nicotine products into a comprehensive regulatory framework.

Now that the UK has left the EU, the UK is no longer bound to the EU's Tobacco Products Directive. However, the Parliamentarians are steadfast in their belief that this is not the time to diverge and loosen the rules; it is a time to strengthen them and to ensure that they catch up with the market reality and innovation in the UK. Alongside this, the APPG reiterated their call from earlier this year for the Government to ensure that this non-combustible based position of tobacco harm reduction is also advocated for when the UK delegation attends the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Conference of the Parties 9 (FCTC COP9) meeting later this year. The World Health Organisation's (WHO) FCTC meeting is one of the first opportunities for the UK to take an independent stand at a UN forum now that it is outside the European Union. It is feared that given the WHO have openly called to ban vaping, there could be a risk that a virtual meeting could see countries pressured to adopt positions that fail to live up to one of the founding principles of the Treaty – that of harm reduction – and as a consequence millions of smokers worldwide could lose out on the benefit that non-combustible alternatives to cigarettes can bring.

Speaking at the launch of the report, Mark Pawsey, Member of Parliament for Rugby and Chair of the APPG for Vaping, said:

“Now that the UK has left the EU, we have opportunities across a number of policy areas to reassess our regulations to ensure they are both fit-for-purpose and future-proofed. New technology has led to a number of new, safer, reduced-risk alternatives to smoking being available and in order to reach our Smoke-Free 2030 goal, we need to embrace those products.”

“By putting consumers at the heart of our inquiry, the APPG heard from hundreds of former smokers who successfully quit cigarettes by using vapes or other, safer, alternatives. However, it is clear that there is a significant lack of information about these products and often there is a great deal of misinformation surrounding them. We therefore urge the Government to bring clarity and consistency to the regulations by embracing a multi-category approach to all non-combustible alternatives and allow smokers to receive information about these safer, reduced-risk, products to help them quit cigarettes for good.”

The APPG has written to the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State for Health & Social Care and Public Health Minister Jo Churchill MP, to outline the inquiry's findings and to request a meeting to discuss their recommendations.

The full report and recommendations can be found at: <https://beyondtpd.co.uk/>

This is the second of two inquiries undertaken by the APPG for Vaping this year. The assessed how best the UK should approach to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Conference of the Parties 9 later this year. The APPG for Vaping has urged the Government to take note of both of these reports to ensure the UK retains its position as world-leader on tobacco harm reduction at home and abroad.

ENDS

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Terms of reference for the inquiry:

A call for written evidence was made on 27th April 2021 and a website (<https://beyondtpd.co.uk/>) was set up to enable the submission of this written evidence. A deadline of 27th May 2021 was given for these submissions.

The call was made for a wide body of evidence from members of the public who have stopped smoking by using vapes or other reduced risk nicotine delivery systems. Alongside this, the APPG also welcomed submissions from anyone/any organisation who wanted to submit, including:

- Members of Parliament
- Charities
- Members of the Public
- Think Tanks
- Primary Healthcare Providers
- Industry Bodies
- Journalists
- Academics
- Other Relevant Stakeholders