

Under Embargo until:  
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## RETAIL ELECTION RESPONSE – 1 WEEK TO GO

There's now one week to go until the General Election and the three main parties continue their efforts to secure the business vote. Kevin Hawkins, BRC Director General, gives the retail reaction to the promises and pledges made so far:

### **National Minimum Wage:**

"Promises on future National Minimum Wage levels are premature to say the least. Decisions on increases should reflect the economic climate and be based on the Low Pay Commissions evidence and recommendations. Above inflation increases to the minimum wage are proving very difficult for both larger and smaller retailers to absorb in today's trading conditions. Many retailers are being forced to take steps to offset some of these wage cost increases by cutting staff hours, jobs and benefits. Later this year, the LPC will be reviewing the appropriateness of its recommendation for a 6% increase in October 2006 and we will be pressing for a more realistic outcome."

### **Reducing red tape and regulation:**

"All parties have talked about cutting red tape for business and reducing the burden of regulation. While the BRC welcomes these proposals, everything will depend on whether they are fully and quickly implemented. We will continue to push for the 'less is more' principle as a sensible approach to regulation and for the full and rapid implementation of the Hampton Report."

### **Crime:**

"Pledges and promises to crack down on crime are easy to make, but which ever party is elected, these promises need to be kept. Crime affects every retailer and every community. The BRC crime survey last year, showed that crime cost the retail sector £1.96bn in 2003 and violence against staff increased substantially. Retail crime is not victimless - violence and its consequences for retail staff are of grave concern. In the 'manifesto for retail', the BRC have urged Government to take retail crime more seriously, to implement stronger penalties to deter criminals and to keep the promises they make on cutting crime. Reducing retail crime is a priority for the industry and should be a higher priority for whichever political party is elected on 6 May."

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**Health:**

“Health and nutrition are issues that will always be near the top of the election agenda, and all parties are talking about improving the health of the nation, better food labelling being one of them. Whilst this is an important tool, the new Government must also focus on educating all consumers about healthy lifestyles; including giving people clear advice about the contribution that *all* foods can make to a healthy diet as well as underlining the importance of physical activity.”

**Note to Editors:**

The British Retail Consortium is the lead trade association representing the whole range of retailers, from the large multiples and department stores through to independents, selling a wide selection of products through centre of town, out of town, rural and virtual stores.

[www.brc.org.uk](http://www.brc.org.uk)

For further information, please contact:

Kate Ison  
BRC Press Officer  
0207 854 8920  
[kate.ison@brc.org.uk](mailto:kate.ison@brc.org.uk)

Dee Crooks  
Press Officer  
0207 854 8920  
[dee.crooks@brc.org.uk](mailto:dee.crooks@brc.org.uk)