



KEEPING CHOICE ALIVE:

Measuring Cash Acceptance on the UK High Street

CASH Preferred please ♡

WE ARE A CASH FREE BUSINESS.
CARD PAYMENTS ONLY
Thank You

£5 MINIMUM CARD MACHINE PAYMENT

CASH ONLY

CASH ONLY

MINIMUM CARD PAYMENT
£ 3.00
AMEX MINIMUM £5.00

~~cash~~
card

DEBIT & CREDIT ONLY
THANKS!

We are cashless

KAPPTURE

Foreword

It's becoming more common **when you walk into a shop or cafe, to see a little chalk board next to the till saying 'card only'**. Twenty years ago it may have been 'cash only'. A decade ago, a sign like that may well have prompted a local newspaper story, but that's no longer the case today.

When I go to the shops now, I typically don't carry cash, or even a wallet, as for me the digital alternatives work perfectly well. But there are still millions of people who rely on cash in their daily lives and the Treasury Select Committee was right to highlight the risks of just watching declining cash acceptance without taking action.

That's why the Consumer Council commissioned this research. We wanted to understand high street retailers as they face payment challenges and decisions for their businesses. Why are they stopping accepting cash? Is it because their customers rarely pay using cash? Or is it more out of concern about cost, security, fraud or that their local bank branch closed? We wanted to gauge the state of cash acceptance across the country, and identify what might be done about it.

The result is a fascinating and complex story built up from the data we gathered, through which one key truth rings out: the continued value of cash on the high street. Even among businesses who have stopped accepting cash, there is a recognition of how important it is to the local high street.

The work that has been done to protect access to cash, through industry collaboration and Government-led regulation, is a strong basis for ensuring cash will continue to be available.

But the other part of the cash cycle - cash acceptance - must not be assumed or forgotten.

As businesses weigh up the payment methods they'll accept, close attention needs to be paid to supporting cash as part of that decision — giving businesses good local options to manage it and tackling the risks of crime, but also looking forwards and ensuring that digital works for everyone over time too.

I'd like to thank members of the Consumer Council for their input into this research; particularly Professor Martin Coppack and Council colleagues from PayPoint, the Post Office, and the Federation of Small Businesses. H/Advisors Cicero have been diligent in carrying out this research, making the most of their expertise.

This report will inform and shape the work being done by LINK, and others across the industry, in the interests of consumers. And having read it, whenever you see a sign about preferred payments methods at a local shop, you'll have a better understanding of what the retailer has weighed up to reach that judgement too.



JOANNA WALLACE
Chair, LINK
Consumer Council



Executive Summary

LINK's Consumer Council surveyed 1,116 high street SMEs in September 2025 to assess the cost and sustainability of cash acceptance amid rapid changes in payment habits:



COVERAGE

77% of retailers accept cash



PACE OF CHANGE

14% went cashless in the last year



WHY FIRMS GO CASHLESS

22% Fraud risk **21%** Security concerns **20%** Customer demand



COMMERCIAL VALUE OF CASH

Among accepting businesses,
46% of in person transactions are cash
55% actively encourage cash for lower fees



DECLINE & SENTIMENT

56% report a fall in cash use over two years
55% expect further decline
51% say this decline is harmful to the High Street

Recommendations

To protect the high street and ensure payment choice for all, we recommend the following:

1.

Stabilise local deposit infrastructure where retailers trade

Maintain national deposit infrastructure, ensuring retailers throughout the UK continue to have access to practical and safe cash handling through a network of banking hubs, Post Offices, and deposit-taking ATMs. As well as at Post Offices, a new deposit service partnership between PayPoint and Lloyds Bank is a helpful development, enabling Lloyds business customers to deposit cash at selected PayPoint locations and offering more local, extended-hours access to deposit facilities.

2.

A joined-up approach to tackling crime on the high street

Bring together existing national plans on retail crime and fraud into a single, clear framework for the high street. This should provide businesses with practical support to prevent theft and fraud and help staff feel safer and more confident at work.

3.

Monitor acceptance, not just access

Regularly monitor cash acceptance, building on this research, in order to implement the Treasury Committee's recommendations in their Acceptance of Cash report, tracking where cash is truly usable, not just available.

4.

Promote a balanced payment ecosystem

Continue encouraging digital inclusion alongside cash, preserving budgeting and privacy benefits for customers who prefer notes and coins. Use the National Payments Vision to drive competition and promote choice for retailers.

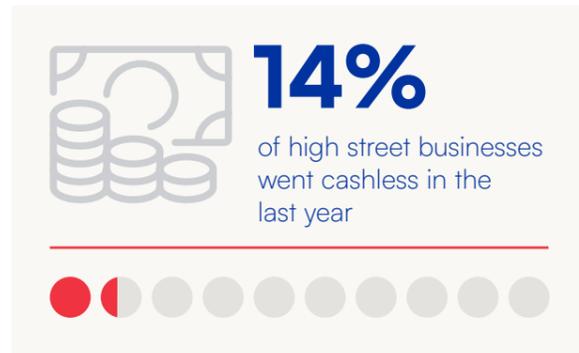
Introduction

Napoleon famously scoffed that Britain is ‘a nation of shopkeepers’. The quote was an intended slight, but is of no surprise that the British have turned it into a source of pride. Indeed, there is a pub in Leeds that bears that name.

While we have that pride in being a nation of shopkeepers, the UK high street is more than a collection of shops. It is part of the fabric of our communities. An economic anchor, an emblem of quirkiness and history and the setting for many a soap opera or drama (Open All Hours, Only Fools and Horses and many a Two Ronnies sketch — fork handles anyone?). It is where everyday life unfolds.

More recently, it has become a barometer on how well the economy is performing. These spaces remain deeply valued, particularly when they support a diverse mix of independent businesses that bring character, resilience, and services that cannot be replicated online.

Yet many of these businesses face growing challenges in meeting customer expectations around payment choice. Our survey of 1,116 high street SMEs shows that while most businesses still accept cash, maintaining this option is becoming difficult. Rising security and insurance costs, higher banking fees, reduced access to deposit facilities, and the closure of local bank branches are all placing pressure on retailers that want to continue taking cash.



As a result, **14% of high street businesses went cashless in the past year.** This represents a significant shift. For most, the decision was not driven by ideology or a desire to exclude customers, but by financial and operational pressures in an environment of tight margins and rising risk.

Despite these challenges, cash remains a vital part of the high street economy. The research shows that for many SMEs, cash continues to support financial control, reduce transaction costs, and provide a trusted and resilient payment option. Crucially, it also enables participation for customers who are digitally excluded or who rely on cash for budgeting and day-to-day spending.

In its 2025 report,¹ the Treasury Select Committee warned that without action, the UK risks creating a two-tier society, where some customers are effectively shut out of shops, cafés, and local services because they cannot pay digitally. Such exclusion harms not only individuals but also businesses, reducing footfall, weakening community ties, and undermining the diversity and resilience that sustain local economies.

This research aims to strengthen the evidence base around cash acceptance on the high street. While it confirms that the number of cashless retailers is growing, it also demonstrates that most businesses remain committed to offering payment choice, with cash retaining an important role alongside digital payments. This is encouraging, given the clear link between cash acceptance, business resilience, and financial inclusion.

There is no single solution to the challenges identified in this report. Maintaining payment choice will require coordinated action: protecting and modernising cash infrastructure, supporting innovation in payments, and addressing both financial and digital exclusion. Preserving choice is central to the long-term health of the high street. Cash continues to enable inclusion, resilience, and flexibility for businesses and consumers alike, and our mission is to ensure it remains accessible to everyone who needs it.



¹ Treasury Select Committee, Acceptance of Cash (House of Commons Sixth Report of Session 2024–25, HC 324, 30 April 2025).

About The Report

Public debate about the future of cash has largely focused on access, whether people can withdraw or deposit cash. Far less attention has been given to acceptance: whether businesses will continue to take cash once it is in people's hands. This gap matters. Access to cash is of little value if it cannot be spent locally.

Until now, there has been limited data on how high street businesses are responding to declining cash usage. Decisions about payment methods are often presented as inevitable or purely consumer-driven. Our findings challenge that assumption. For many independent retailers and service providers,

the choice to stop accepting cash is also shaped by cost pressures, security concerns and access to the right services locally.

LINK's Consumer Council surveyed 1,116 high street SMEs to address this evidence gap. The report sets out current levels of cash acceptance, examines why some businesses have gone cashless, and explores the implications for communities. It is intended to inform policymakers, industry stakeholders, and consumer groups as they consider how best to protect payment choice and avoid a two-tier high street.

Methodology

This report is based on a quantitative survey of 1,116 small and medium sized enterprises operating on UK high streets. Fieldwork was conducted in September 2025 and focused on the costs, sustainability, and future of cash acceptance.

All respondents met the following criteria:

- Worked for a micro (2–9 employees), small (10–49 employees), or medium sized enterprise (50–249 employees). Sole traders and large enterprises (250+ employees) were excluded.
- Operated from customer facing premises on a high street, defined as a commercial street in a city, town, or village. Out of town retail parks and shopping centres were excluded.
- Operated in relevant high street sectors, including independent retail, convenience stores, cafés, pubs, beauty salons, bookmakers, chemists, opticians, launderettes, shoe repair services, and Post Offices with a retail offer.

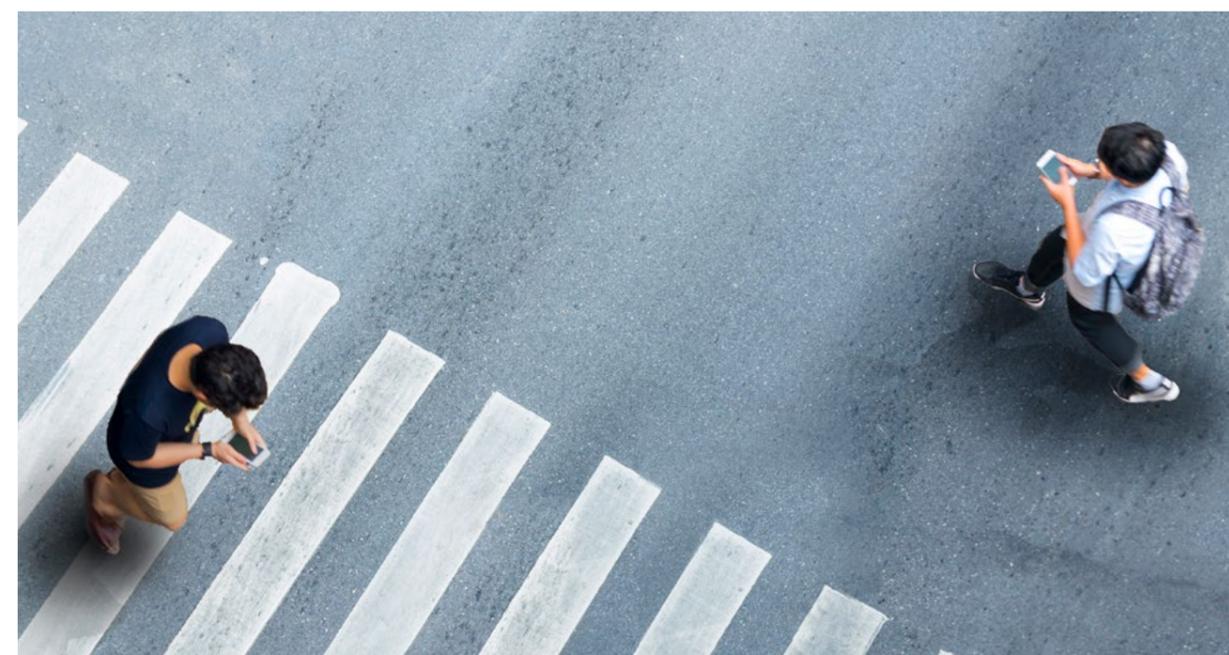
About the LINK Consumer Council

LINK's Consumer Council has for 20 years brought together consumer representatives and industry experts to scrutinise LINK's work on behalf of consumers. It has played a key role in ensuring that LINK's Financial Inclusion Programme reaches every part of the UK and has the buy-in of industry. Its work has included overseeing the development of LINK's Cash Locator, championing £5 notes at ATMs and lobbying for the introduction of counter terminals, which have transformed thousands of retailers' tills into cash machines.

The Consumer Council is focused on the interests of consumers who continue to rely on cash. The Council is confident that the fundamentals of the UK's cash infrastructure are appropriate to serve businesses and consumers. However, it has identified declining cash acceptance as a key risk to that position.

Research Partners

This research has been supported throughout by members of the Consumer Council. A particular thanks to the following organisations who have provided time, resources and insight to support the development of this work.



SECTION 1

The Way We Pay Is Changing

While there has perhaps always been a reticence from some shops to accept high denomination notes and regional variations of Sterling, this research focuses on retailers' approaches to cash in the here and now. When a shopkeeper decides whether to take cash or not, it isn't a decision they take in a vacuum. They will see the changing habits of their customers, and respond accordingly. All the evidence clearly shows that customers are voting with their smartphones and going digital.² Cash usage is on a steep and likely irreversible decline. The majority of people are now comfortable paying with cards, phones and even watches. Cash now makes up less than 10% of payments we make.³

Since 2018, transaction volumes on LINK's network have gone down by 50%. In 2025, they dropped by **8%**.⁴ For many people reading this report, that much is obvious. The technology powering those payments is convenient, secure and ubiquitous. However, the change has been rapid, and uneven.

For millions of people, paying in cash is not just a preference; it is a necessity. These people are overwhelmingly more likely to be living on a tight budget and be digitally excluded (through either poor connectivity, access to technology, lack of confidence or capability).⁵ They are also likely to be more vulnerable in some way. Without the option to pay in cash, these customers could be excluded from community life, unable to buy groceries, access essential services, or even enjoy a cup of tea with friends.

In recognition of the importance of cash for large sections of society, consumer access to cash has been a political priority. As a result of clear direction from Government and commitment across the industry, it is secure. The Financial Conduct Authority requires LINK to assess local access following bank branch closures. Alongside existing branches, the network of ATMs and post offices, coupled with new banking hubs and deposit services, is making sure that consumers and businesses can continue to manage their cash. Over 96% of people live within a reasonable distance of cash access as a result of this work.

But, as more businesses go cashless, the commercial pressure on the industry will ratchet up and the impact on the high street will continue to be felt. That is why cash acceptance in shops is a critical issue, and why it needs to be given the right attention from policymakers.



²LINK, *Tapping into trouble. What are your payment habits.* June 2025

³UK Finance, *UK Payment Markets 2025.* 2025

⁴LINK, *Cash remains a vital payment choice as £76 billion withdrawn in 2025.* 6th January 2026

⁵Payment Systems Regulator, *Barriers faced by cash-reliant consumers in using digital payments.* July 2024

Gerri Schuch, Corsham Postmaster, explained:

“

Cash gives customers more freedom. And it gives people the ability to manage their finances more effectively. Over the past three years or so, we've seen more customers using cash as a way of controlling their spending because times are more difficult.”

“

People will come in and withdraw £100 knowing that it has to last them the week. Whereas without cash they would have just tapped their card. And tapping your card means you have no control, because it's not visible and it's too easy to rack up your money. So people are relying on cash as a budgeting tool.”

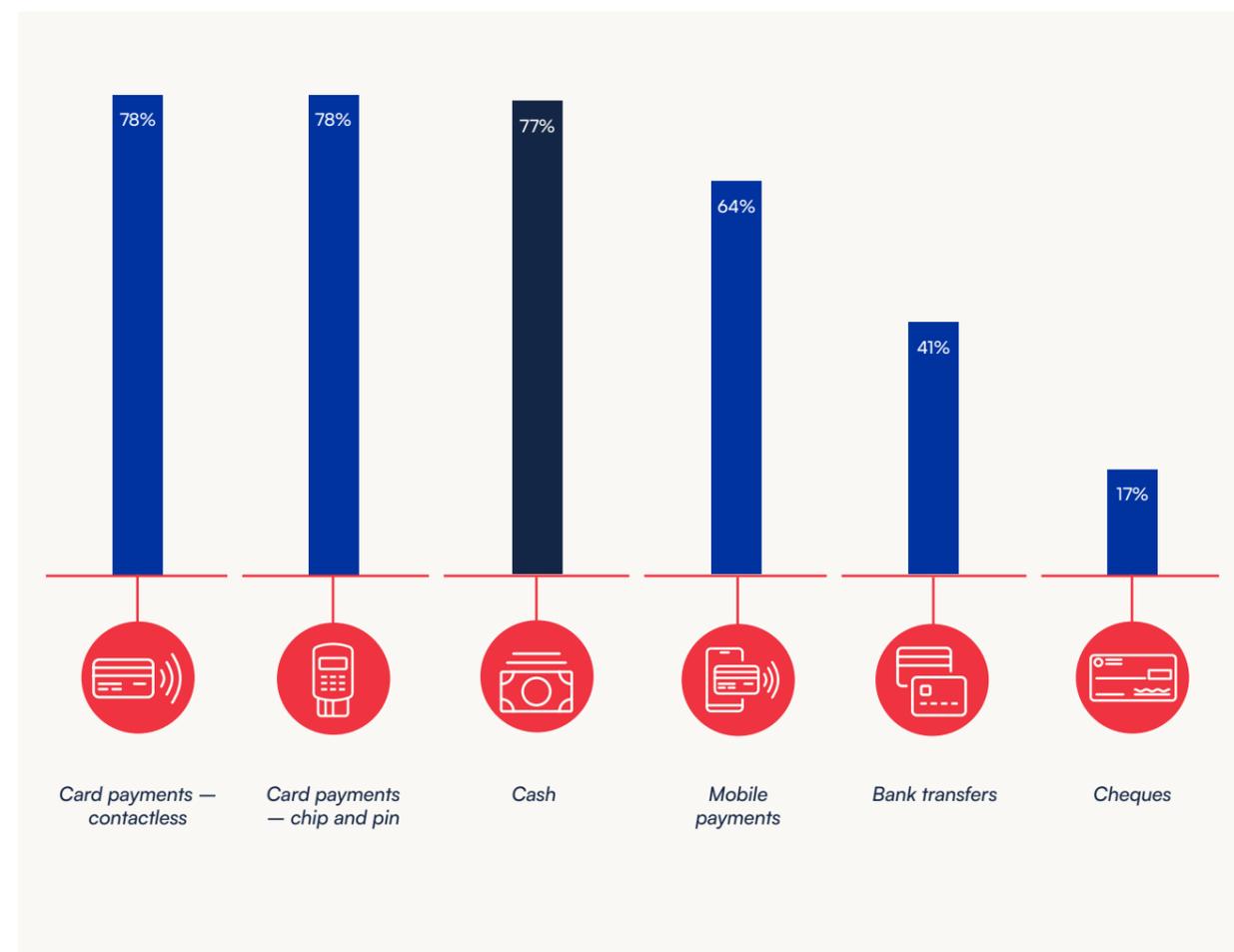


SECTION 2:

State of High Street Cash Acceptance

Although the majority of people no longer regularly carry cash,⁶ most retailers still accept it. **77% of high street businesses continue to accept cash**, demonstrating that cash remains a defining feature of the high street.

Fig 1. What forms of in-person payment methods do you currently accept?



⁶LINK, Tapping into trouble, What are your payment habits, June 2025

This figure reflects the enduring importance of cash for local economies, where personal interaction and trust underpin transactions. Independent retailers, often family-run businesses, are at the heart of this commitment. These businesses understand that cash is not just a way to pay; it is part of the customer experience, helping to foster inclusion and protect the diversity that makes our high streets unique.

However, acceptance is uneven. Urban areas lead with **80% of businesses accepting cash**, while together, **suburban, rural and coastal communities have a lower acceptance rate at 72%**. These disparities risk deepening inequalities, particularly in regions where digital infrastructure is less reliable.

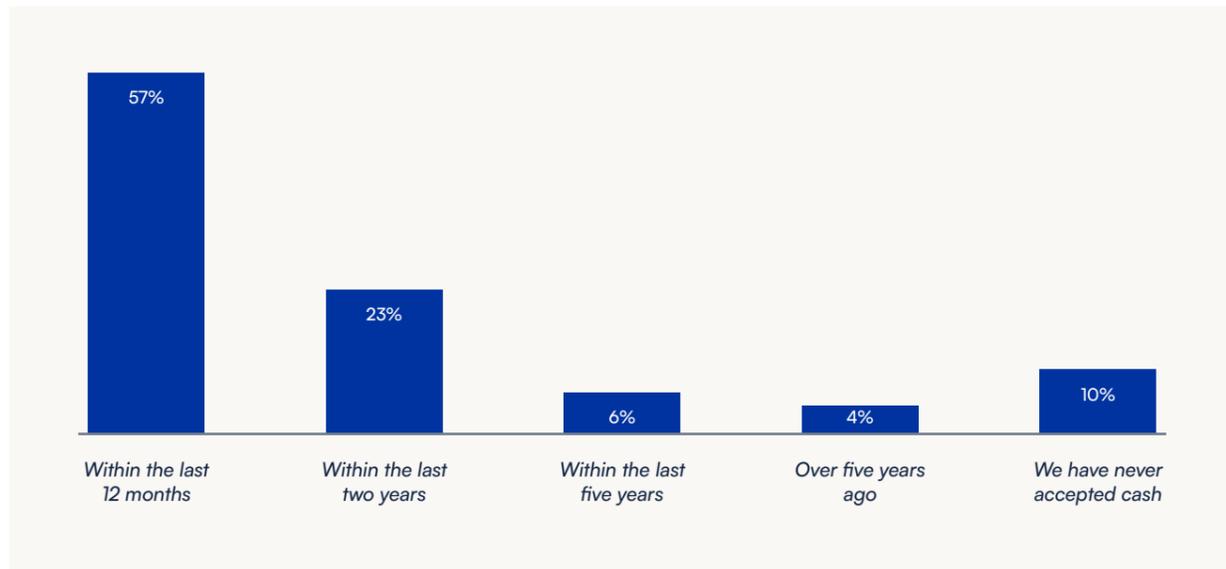
Our data shows the potential speed of change happening on the high street. Well over half (57%) of retailers not currently accepting cash stopped accepting it within the last 12 months. **This means that 14% of all UK retailers have gone cashless within the last year.**⁷

High street cash acceptance is uneven across the UK



⁷The estimate that 14% of high street retailers stopped accepting cash in the last 12 months is calculated using the total population of identified high street retailers (n = 1,116) as the denominator. Of these, 274 retailers were recorded as not accepting cash at the time of analysis, and 156 reported ceasing to accept cash within the previous 12 months. The percentage is therefore derived as 156 divided by 1,116. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Fig 2. You said that you do not accept cash — when did you stop accepting cash?



These findings echo a 2025 warning from the UK Parliament’s Treasury Select Committee that unchecked cash decline, particularly in communities where digital inclusion and access to banking services are limited, risks ushering in a **two-tier society**.⁸ In this scenario, vulnerable groups, including people in poverty, victims of domestic abuse and people with learning difficulties, face mounting barriers to everyday spending.



Sadik Al-Hassan MP:

“Cash payments tend to be used more by people on lower incomes, who often restrict expenditure and use cash as a way to budget. You can create digital competency with systems of financial education, but it is not what’s currently done in that segment of society.”

Prior to his election as an MP, Sadik Al-Hassan worked as a pharmacist, and in Parliament he plays a role in shaping debates on pharmacy policy.



⁸ Treasury Select Committee, Acceptance of Cash (House of Commons Sixth Report of Session 2024–25, HC 324, 30 April 2025)

2.1. Access to cash infrastructure

For people who rely on paying in cash, access remains widespread. Despite ongoing bank branch closures and reductions in ATM numbers, geographic access to cash remains robust. Over 96% of the population lives within a reasonable distance of a cash withdrawal and deposit point, supported by the Post Office network, LINK's access commitments, and the rollout of new banking hubs.

Protecting access to cash

There is wide agreement across industry and Government that cash access is critical across the UK even as cash usage is falling rapidly.

LINK works in the public interest to connect a reliable ATM network to every major bank and building society. It plays a key role as the Coordination Body for bank branch closures, assessing locations and making recommendations for the best solutions for each community.

This is baked into legislation through the Finance Services and Markets Act 2023 and regulatory oversight from the FCA.

LINK protects free ATMs in the most deprived and remote areas of the country, and assesses the impact of any bank branch closure on local communities, recommending improved services where necessary. As a result, more than 96% of people live within a reasonable distance of free cash withdrawals and deposits.

That network also provides a robust and reliable way for businesses to manage their cash, through the Post Office, banking hubs and a growing network of deposit machines.

Anyone concerned about access to cash in their area can contact LINK who will assess the current level of services and the needs of the local community.

However, this infrastructure is under increasing strain. Retailers continue to rely heavily on branches for cash deposits and access to change, while rural communities and vulnerable groups face heightened risk of reduced provision. Regulatory safeguards introduced through the Financial Services and Markets Act 2023 establish minimum access standards, but the long-term sustainability of the cash infrastructure remains critical. If this infrastructure is maintained, cash acceptance across the economy is likely to endure.

The Treasury Committee has made it clear: infrastructure solutions are necessary, but they are not enough on their own. There is a case for ensuring that **retailers are appropriately supported in managing the costs associated with continuing to accept cash**. This includes designating deposit facilities, working with banks to reduce the overall costs to retailers, and creating support mechanisms so that accepting cash remains a viable option and does not place undue burden on businesses, consumers, or the high street.



SECTION 3

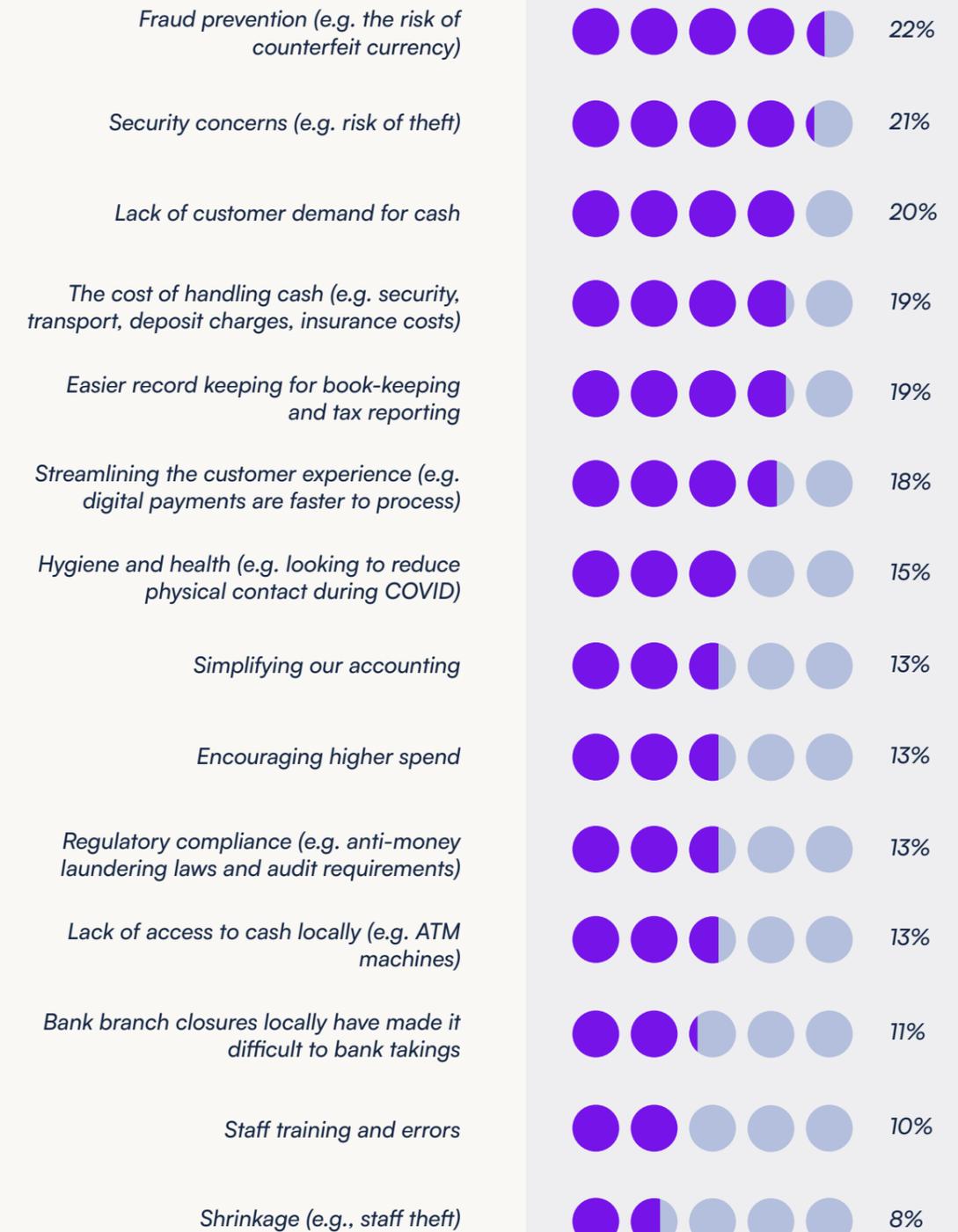
Why Shops Go Cashless

Any decision about what payment methods to accept is driven by a wide range of factors, and not taken lightly. To understand more about businesses' motivations, we asked shops that have stopped taking cash to tell us more about why.

The research indicates that, while reduced customer demand for cash is a significant factor in businesses' decision-making, the primary drivers pushing them to go cashless are fraud prevention and security concerns. In addition, accepting cash has cost implications for businesses (though the same is also true of digital payment methods), while cash infrastructure and limited access to deposit facilities also play a role.



Fig 3. For what reasons do you not accept cash?



3.1. The fear of fraud

Fraud prevention plays an important role in why firms go cashless. While the volumes of counterfeit currency are extremely small,⁹ it continues to be perceived as a real threat and, for small businesses, accepting a fake note can mean an immediate loss. Unlike card payments, which offer some protection against fraud, cash transactions place the burden entirely on the retailer. For businesses already operating on thin margins, this risk can be decisive.



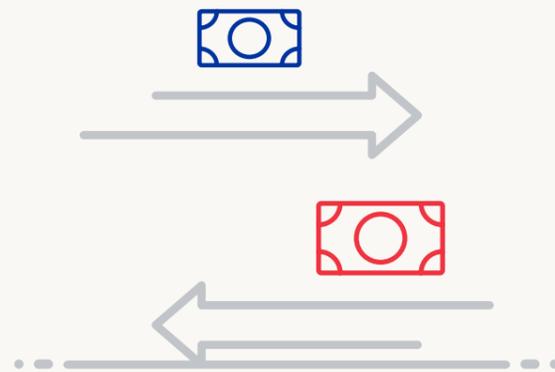
Speaking about the threat of fraud, Stefano Abis, owner of Wallisdown Pharmacy, told us:

“We do catch a few fake notes. It's not going to happen every day, but we do catch a few fake notes. The buck stops with the business when they deposit their cash.”



Geri Schuch, Corsham Postmaster, adds:

“Counterfeits are a big problem on our high street. I regularly go up and down my high street taking a counterfeit note with me, against a real note, to educate [shopkeepers] on what to look for, so that they don't fall into the trap.”



3.2. Security on the high street

Security concerns are another powerful driver for retailers going cashless. Prominent campaigns from supermarkets and convenience stores have highlighted the significant risk and widespread issues from shoplifting and violence against shopworkers. Holding cash on-site makes businesses a target for theft, and for many owners, the risk of robbery is a constant worry. Staff safety is also a consideration, particularly for late-opening venues such as pubs and restaurants. Reducing or eliminating cash can feel like a way to protect employees and reduce vulnerability.



On security concerns, a shop owner added:

“Due to the volume of cash we receive at one of our stores we wouldn't feel safe depositing this, so we get it collected by G4S.”



Manchester Pub Landlord Adam, adds:

“I've known many businesses to be broken into or held up at knife point. As cash amounts are a lot lower these days it's less likely but still a concern. Especially running a business in a Manchester suburb where it's been prevalent, like Didsbury. As opposed to the city centre where due to the people and security mass it's less likely.”



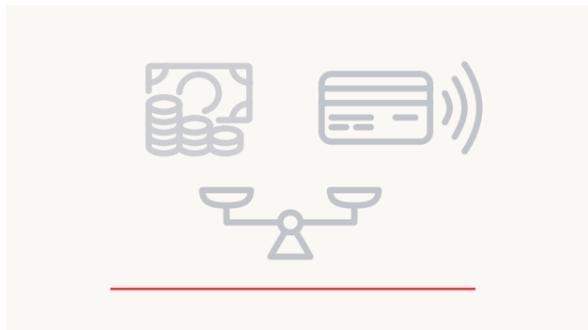
⁹ Bank of England "Counterfeit banknotes," last updated 30 June 2025.

3.3. The cost of cash

For many independent retailers, the choice to go cashless is a balancing act between managing costs and serving the community.

Handling cash is not free, just as card payments are not free either. Banking fees for deposits, insurance premiums, and the time required to manage cash all add up. For smaller retailers and hospitality venues, these costs can feel overwhelming. Every pound spent on processing payments is a pound not invested in stock, staff, or improving the customer experience.

Our research highlights the real cost challenges retailers face when accepting cash: **46% of retailers report paying over £50 per month just to handle cash deposits — with 15% paying more than £200 per month.** For businesses operating on tight margins, this may be a significant expense.



Fiona Malone, owner of Tenby Stores, adds:

“We’re charged a significant amount just to bank cash... If they genuinely want cash to remain usable everywhere, the banking system should rethink and reduce these costs, because right now they place an unnecessary burden on small businesses.”

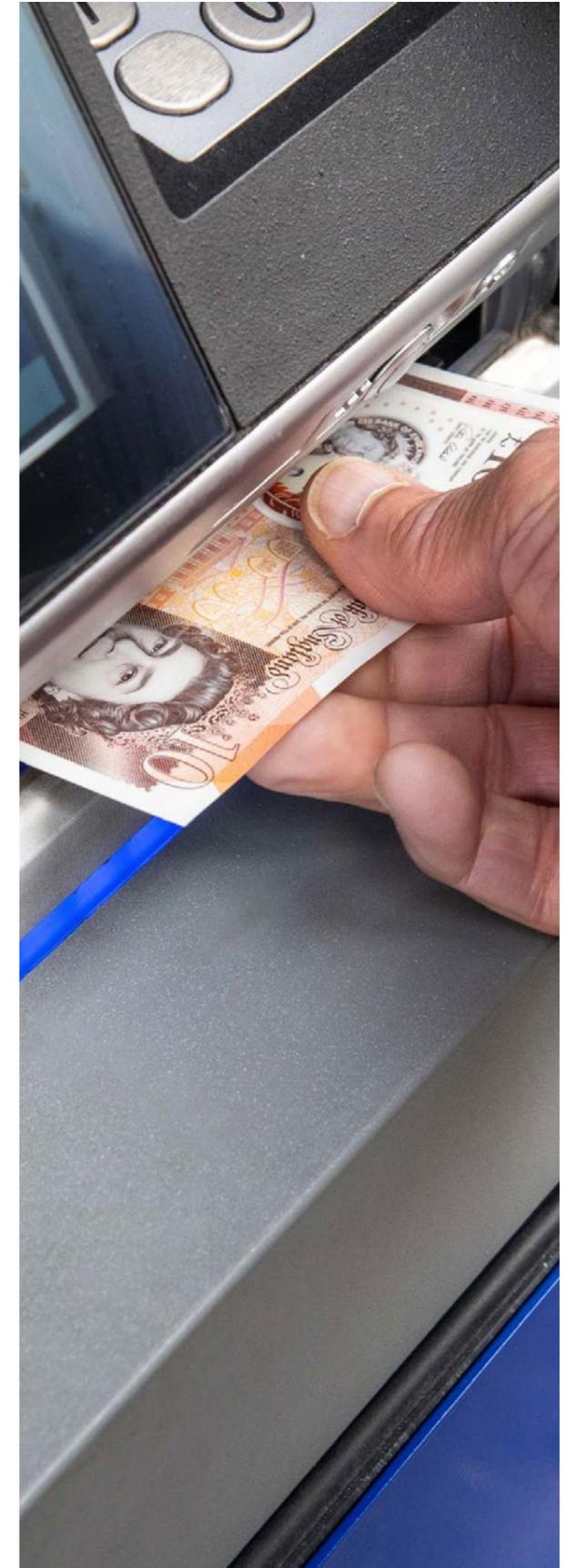


3.4. The cash deposit infrastructure

The problem is not just cost — it’s access to deposit facilities. **88% of SME businesses report frequent issues when trying to deposit cash.** Local branch closures, limited opening hours, and high demand for remaining facilities make cash handling difficult. The closure of local bank branches is the single biggest challenge, with 65% of businesses saying they prefer to deposit cash at their local branch. Yet those branches are closing.¹⁰

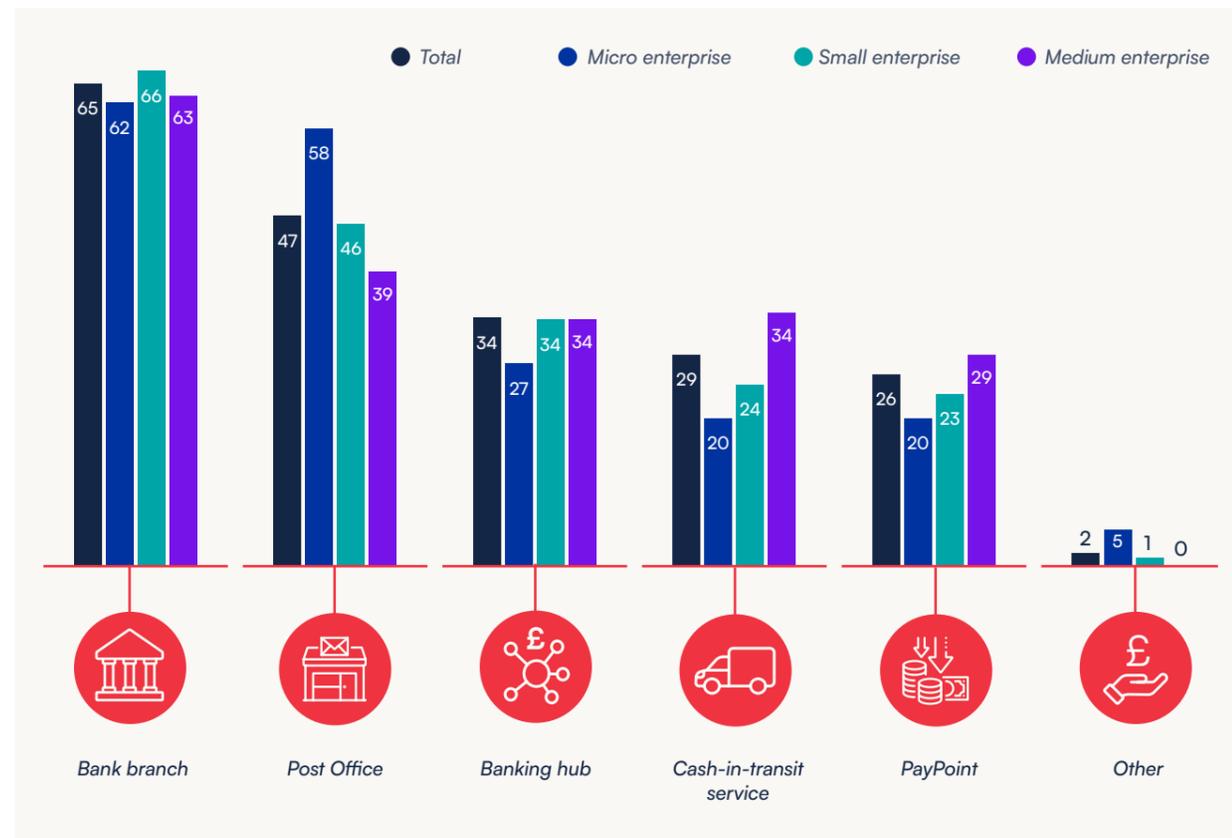
Options for cash deposit facilities:

-  Cash in transit
-  Bank branches
-  Post Offices
-  CAUK deposit machines
-  PayPoint cash deposit



¹⁰ House of Lords Library, *Closure of bank branches: Impact on rural communities*, February 2025

Fig 4: Which of the following methods do you use to deposit cash? Please answer this question with regard to the money you deposit on behalf of your business, rather than personal deposits

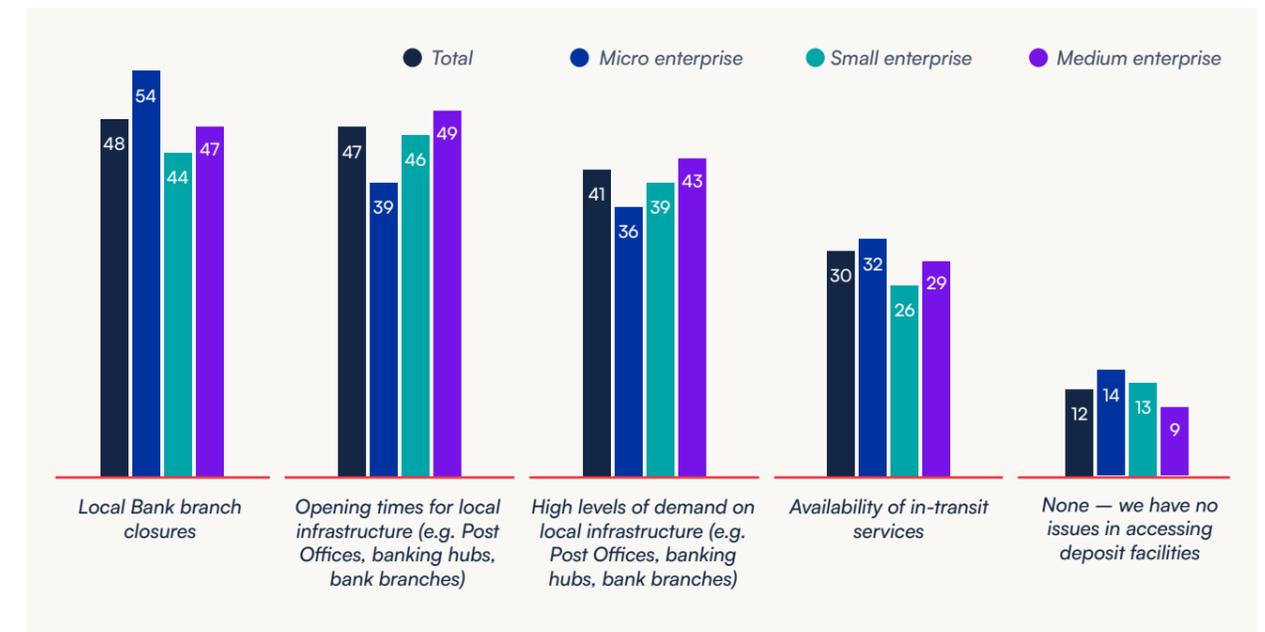


Over four-in-five retailers (82%) say they would value better access to deposit facilities, such as post offices and banking hubs — this is true regardless of whether the business currently accepts cash or not. Yet, bank branches are shrinking, leaving businesses with fewer options in the short term, while alternatives begin to take shape.

These challenges are not just operational — they affect the safety and confidence of business owners and staff. Carrying large sums of cash to distant deposit points increases the risk of theft and puts people in vulnerable situations. For many, this is a key reason why they consider going cashless.



Fig 5: Which, if any, of the following issues do you frequently face in accessing deposit facilities?



The impact is clear in stories like this from Stefano Abis of Wallisdown Pharmacy:

“About six years ago our local post office closed, along with every single banking branch in the area. So I thought, let’s see if we can get a Post Office counter in the pharmacy, and I am so glad we did because it has become critical for the businesses nearby. Before then, we deposited our cash at a bank that was just round the corner, but now we would have to go all the way to the town centre to do that. So, if it’s something that you don’t get to do often enough, you could be walking down the street carrying a bag with thousands of pounds to pay in. You wouldn’t feel safe, and it would be a nightmare.”

SECTION 4: The Enduring Value of Cash

Cash continues to anchor everyday trade on the high street. **Despite the rise in digital payments, 46% of SME in-person transactions are still cash-based.** In sectors such as independent retail, cafés and pubs, convenience stores, and laundrettes, cash usage is consistently above this average.

These figures tell an important story: cash is not a relic of the past but remains a vital part of how local businesses operate and how customers choose to pay.

Fig 6: What percentage of your in-person transactions are cash based?

IN-PERSON TRANSACTIONS



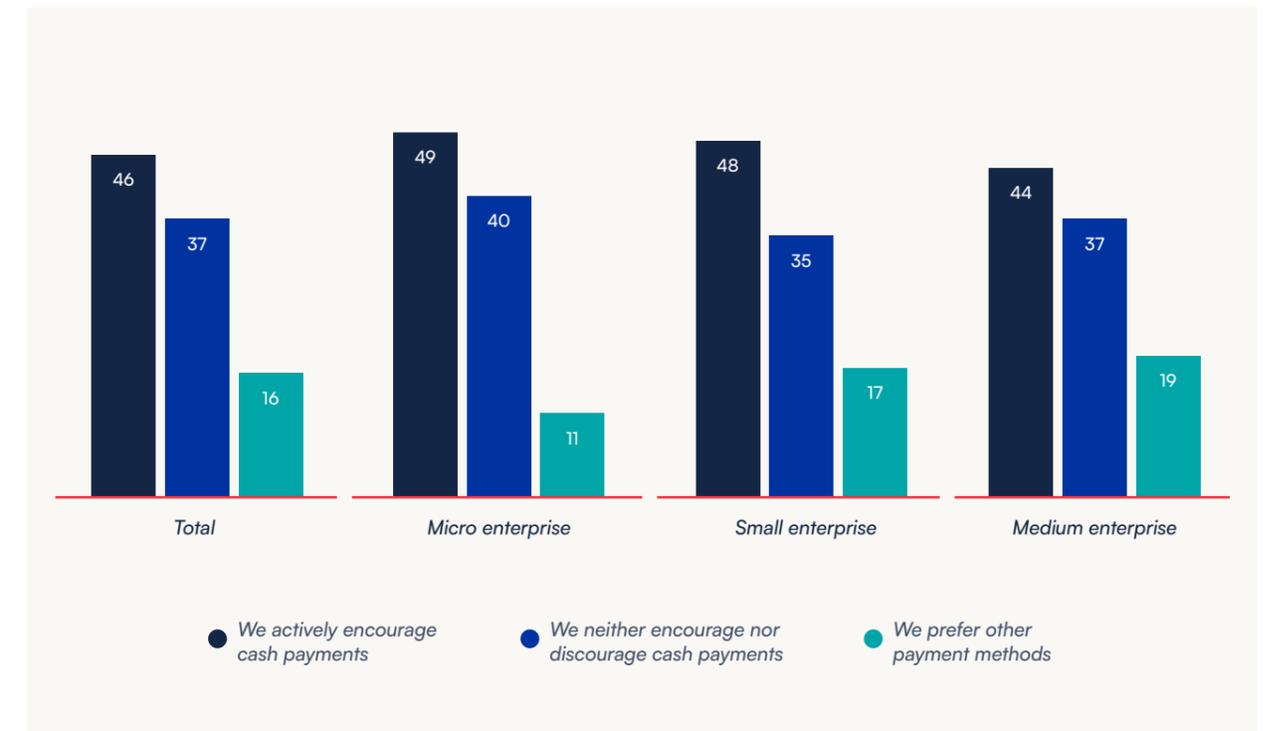
OVERALL



Adam, Landlord of The Wild Alderman in Didsbury:

“Cash is still very important to many people. Although a lot of businesses have gone cashless since COVID, we continue to have customers at our pub who want to pay in cash, including a few regulars who rely on it entirely. While, from a business management perspective, I would prefer to go cashless due to reduced administration and risk, I personally believe cash should remain an option for everyone. That’s why we make the effort to continue accepting it.”

Fig 7: As a business, how do you feel about accepting cash payments?

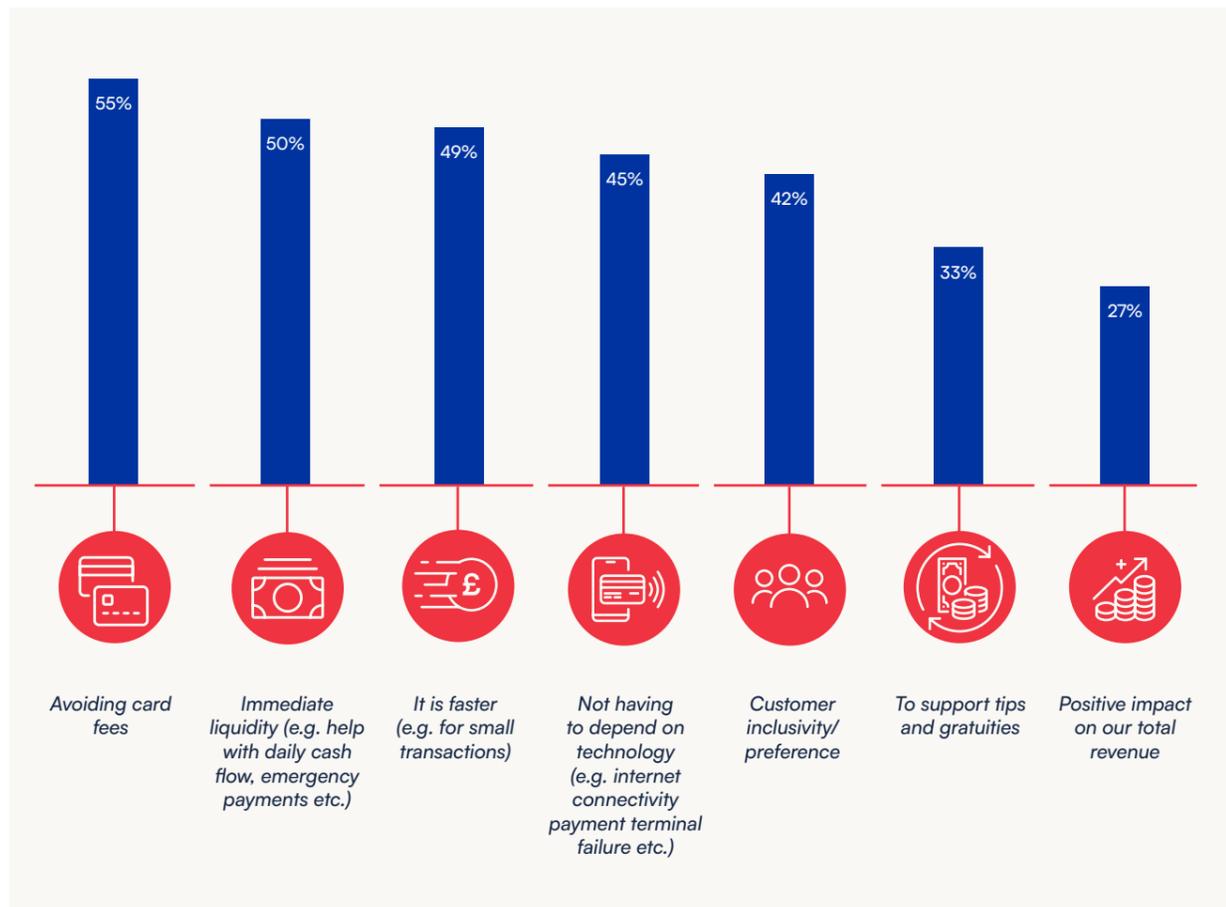


Among businesses that accept cash, nearly half (46%) actively encourage its use. This is a clear signal that cash is not just tolerated, it is valued. For many owners, cash offers practical benefits that go beyond tradition. It helps avoid card processing fees (55%), provides immediate liquidity for daily cashflow (50%), speeds up small transactions (49%), and offers resilience when technology fails (45%). In an era where connectivity issues or system outages can halt card payments, cash is a safety net for many shops and the high street as a whole.

Sadik Al-Hassan MP:

“As we go into a system where cyber-attacks and system and infrastructure seems more and more uncertain. The risks are greater without a cash backup. Although a smaller number of people pay for their prescriptions, when it comes to system failures, like the internet going down, then you have to rely on cash more than you would in other situations.”

Fig 8: What do you see as the business benefits of accepting cash?



But for many businesses, it is not just about those tangible advantages. It is also about playing their part in an inclusive and convenient high street. That matters, because the choice of how to pay supports the spontaneity and warmth of local high streets, whether that's the quick coffee on the way to work, the pint at the local pub, or the small purchases we make day to day.



Stefano Abis summed it up:

“The benefits of being able to take cash are felt all along the high street. We regularly take deposits from a variety of businesses — there's a few takeaways, a pet store, a vet, and even a local car dealership. They all know that you do get more business if you accept cash, as there are a lot of people that still prefer it. They're not the majority, but I think if I announced that I were going cashless tomorrow, I'd be doing my business a disservice.**”**



The benefits ripple beyond individual businesses. **When cash circulates locally, it strengthens community economies.**

It enables small firms to manage cashflow without waiting for card settlements and gives customers confidence that they can always pay, even if their phone battery dies or a card machine goes down.

This sentiment is echoed across the high street. **Businesses recognise that cash acceptance is not just about meeting customer needs — it is about inclusion, resilience, and choice.** In a world where digital systems can fail and costs are rising, cash remains a simple, reliable, and human way to pay. It keeps interactions personal and ensures that the high street continues to serve everyone, not just those with the latest technology.

Sadik Al-Hassan MP:

“What we don’t want to do is ostracise people who are digitally excluded, and any economic decision needs to be thought of in a way of how much is this Treasury profit and how much is reinvested back into a system for training and improving digital inclusion, all of which will help these people who are reliant on the cash economy move into a more digital space.”



International perspective — Sweden

Sweden is widely recognised as one of the most cashless societies in the world, but cash still has a role to play there. Its central bank has endorsed a legal obligation to accept cash for essential goods and has urged stronger bank support for cash services, citing cyber-attacks and power outages as reasons to keep payment systems functioning offline.¹¹



“People should always be able to pay for food, healthcare and medicines both digitally and with cash... the increasingly turbulent global situation... shows the importance of being able to make payments even when the internet is down.”

— Erik Thedéen, Governor, Riksbank



¹¹ Sveriges Riksbank, 'Introduce obligation to accept cash and strengthen banks' responsibility for cash' (press release, 18 May 2025)

SECTION 5

The Decline - and Its Impact on the High Street

Despite cash's enduring value, acceptance is under pressure. Over half (56%) of cash-accepting retailers report a decline in cash usage over the past two years, and 55% expect this trend to continue. A small but significant proportion of those currently accepting cash (4%) plan to stop accepting it altogether over the next two years. These figures point to a steady erosion of payment choice on the high street.

Fig 9: How has the percentage of your in-person transactions that are cash based changed over the last two years?

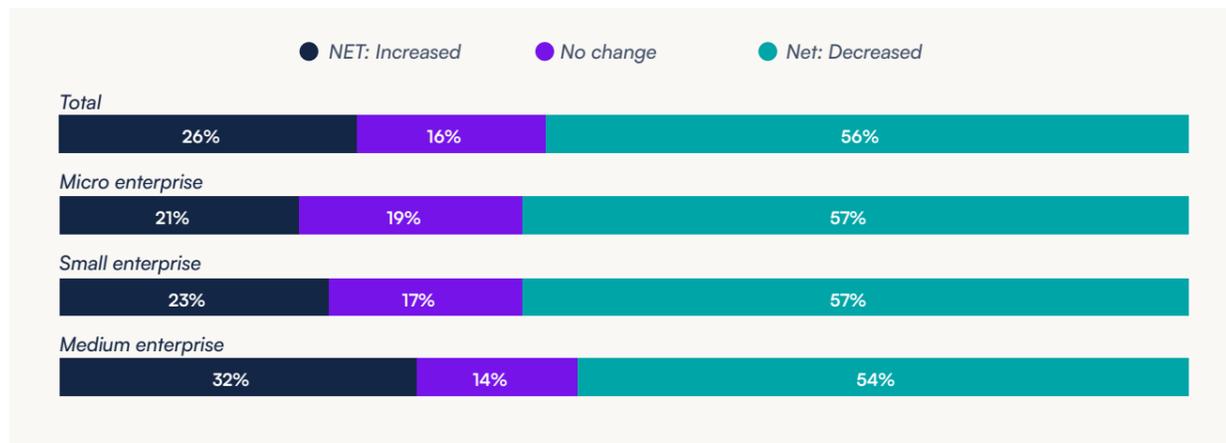
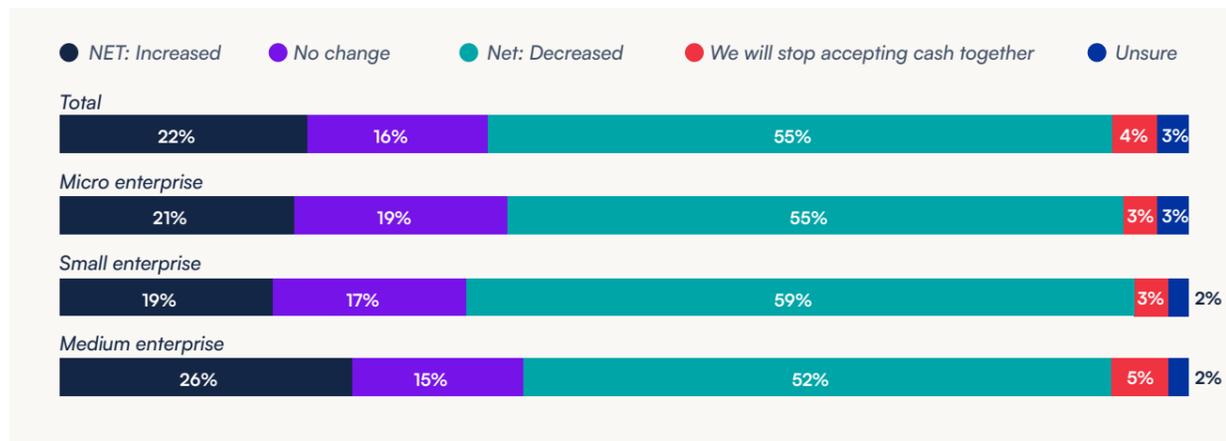
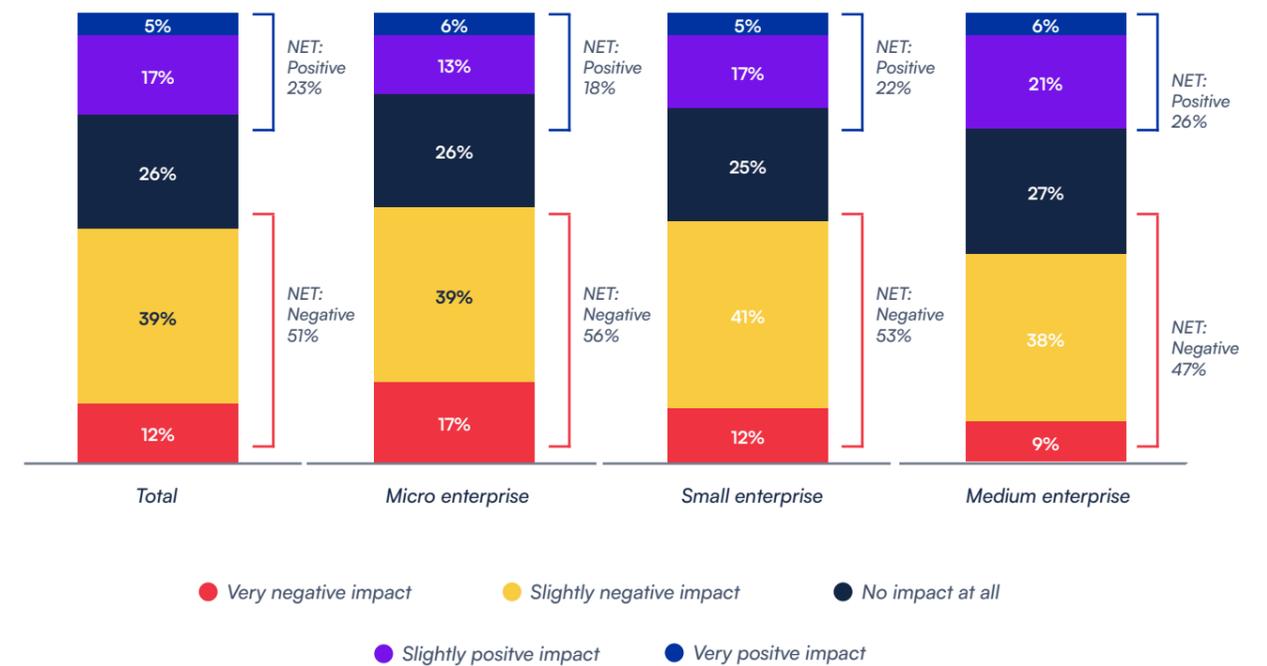


Fig 10: How do you expect the percentage of your in-person transactions that are cash based to change over the next two years?



Businesses understand what is at stake. Fewer than one in four retailers (23%) believe the decline in cash benefits the high street, while more than half (51%) see it as harmful. Micro businesses are particularly concerned. These firms often rely on traditional tills, operate on tight margins, and actively encourage cash because it supports their cashflow and avoids costly card fees. For them, the decline in cash is not just a shift in payment habits — it is a threat to their viability.

Fig 11: What impact, if any, do you think ongoing declines in cash acceptance are having on the health of the High Street?



The growing mismatch between what communities need and what businesses feel able to sustain is stark. Our research shows that without proactive measures to protect cash usage, retailers foresee a significant further decline in cash transactions over the next two years. More businesses will remove cash as a payment option altogether, not because they want to, but because they feel they have no choice.



The consequences of this decline reach far beyond individual transactions. When cash disappears, barriers rise — meaning that the high street becomes less welcoming, less accessible, and less inclusive.

SECTION 6

What Would Help — Conclusions and Recommendations

To reduce the risk of creating a two-tier society, where some customers are excluded because they cannot pay digitally, the Treasury Committee called for ongoing monitoring to track where cash is truly usable, not just available. This research from LINK's Consumer Council takes the first step in tracking high street cash acceptance, offering a clear picture of current acceptance rates, the reasons behind businesses going cashless, and the implications for communities.

The data shows that cash continues to enable inclusive commerce and preserve local character in town centres. Some 77% of retailers accept cash and 46% actively encourage cash transactions. Businesses want to offer their customers payment choice, but security concerns, rising costs, and shrinking infrastructure are accelerating a shift away from cash.

These pressures are having an impact, with 14% of businesses going cashless in the last year and many expecting further declines. This comes even though 51% of businesses believe declining cash acceptance is damaging the health of the high street. Without sustained support, the high street could be at risk of losing one of its defining qualities: openness and affordability for everyone.

National policy recognises the importance of access to cash, protecting access to deposit and withdrawal services and rolling out banking hubs. But acceptance itself remains a discretionary business choice. While there is no single policy change that will ensure cash acceptance, businesses are clear that they need more support to keep cash viable on the high street.



Across our research, the majority of retailers say they would welcome action, with the greatest emphasis on:



- **Deposit infrastructure:** A sustainable post office network, alongside banking hubs and deposit taking ATMs to make cash handling practical and safe.

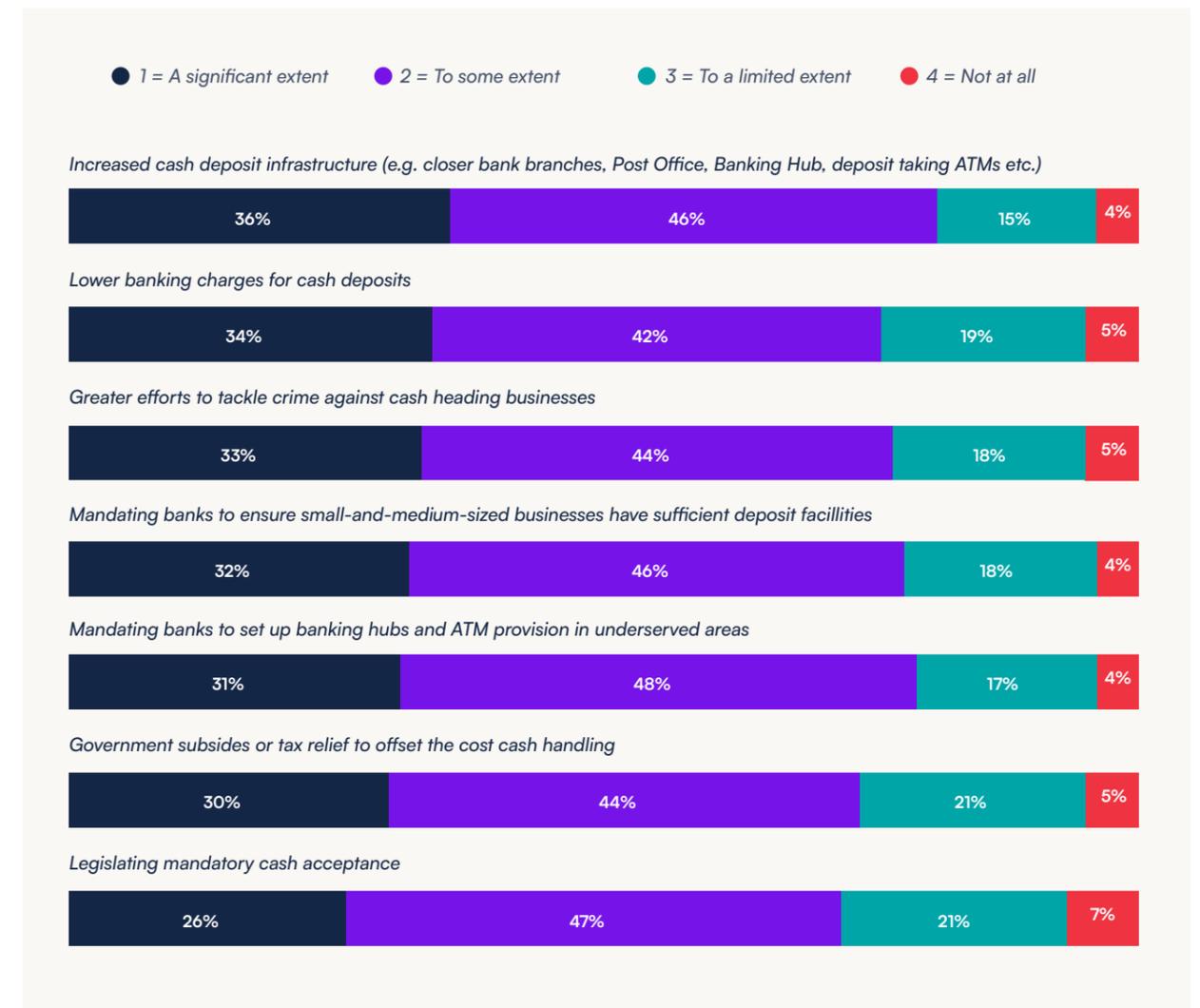


- **Banking charges for deposits:** Reducing the cost burden that currently pushes businesses toward cashless models.



- **Tackling crime:** Protecting businesses from theft and fraud linked to cash handling.

Fig 12: To what extent would you value each of the following to support cash acceptance in your business?



Furthermore, a majority (53%) of businesses support going as far as mandating cash acceptance, while over half also agree that Government should encourage digital payment adoption. This balanced view, protecting cash while promoting digital, reflects what high streets truly need: choice for customers, practical sustainability for businesses, and resilience when systems fail.

Fig 13: Do you think it would be fair and appropriate for the Government to mandate businesses to accept cash?

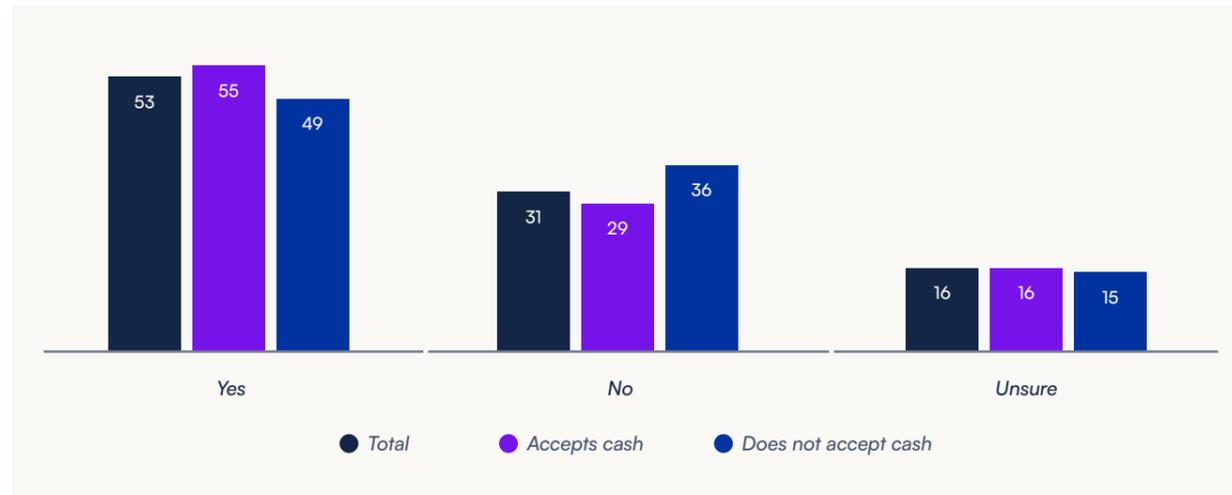
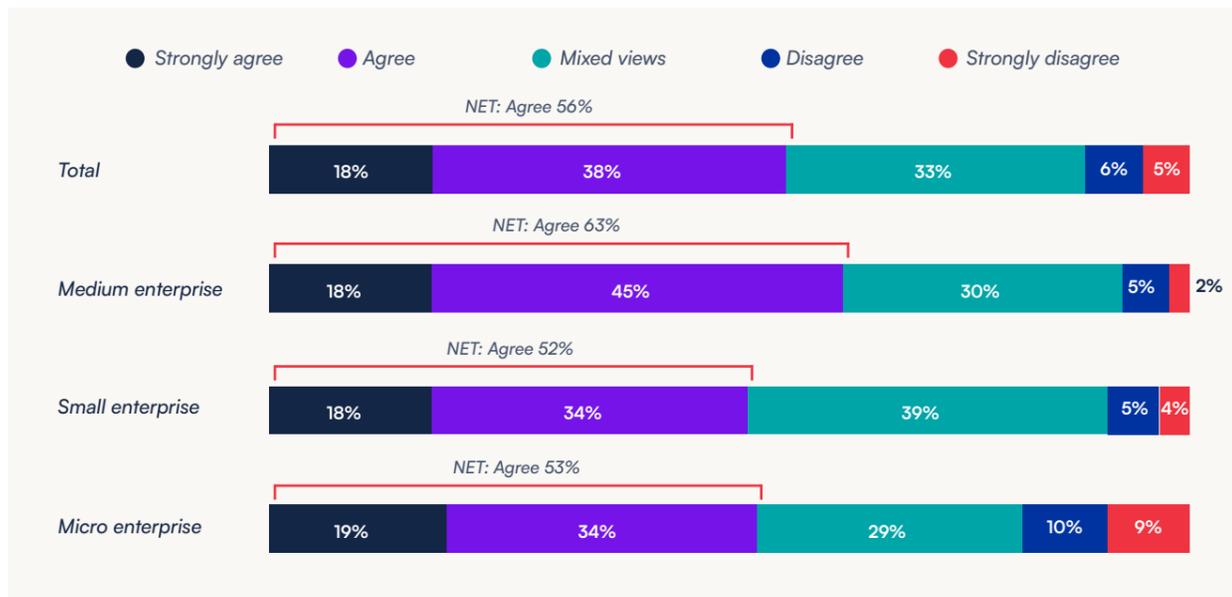


Fig 14: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Government should focus on encouraging greater numbers of people to use digital payment methods?



This is not just about payment methods. It is about people. When cash disappears, those who rely on it — whether for budgeting or out of necessity — are excluded from everyday life. And when customers are excluded, businesses suffer too. The decline in cash acceptance is not inevitable. Action now can preserve choice, inclusion, and resilience for communities and businesses alike.



Recommendations

To protect the high street and ensure payment choice for all, we recommend the following:

1. Stabilise local deposit infrastructure where retailers trade

Maintain national deposit infrastructure, ensuring retailers throughout the UK continue to have access to practical and safe cash handling through a network of banking hubs, Post Offices, and deposit-taking ATMs. As well as at Post Offices, a new deposit service partnership between PayPoint and Lloyds Bank is a helpful development, enabling Lloyds business customers to deposit cash at selected PayPoint locations and offering more local, extended-hours access to deposit facilities.

2. A joined-up approach to tackling crime on the high street

Bring together existing national plans on retail crime and fraud into a single, clear framework for the high street. This should provide businesses with practical support to prevent theft and fraud and help staff feel safer and more confident at work.

3. Monitor acceptance, not just access

Regularly monitor cash acceptance, building on this research, in order to implement the Treasury Committee's recommendations in their Acceptance of Cash report, tracking where cash is truly usable, not just available.

4. Promote a balanced payment ecosystem

Continue encouraging digital inclusion alongside cash, preserving budgeting and privacy benefits for customers who prefer notes and coins. Use the National Payments Vision to drive competition and promote choice for retailers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

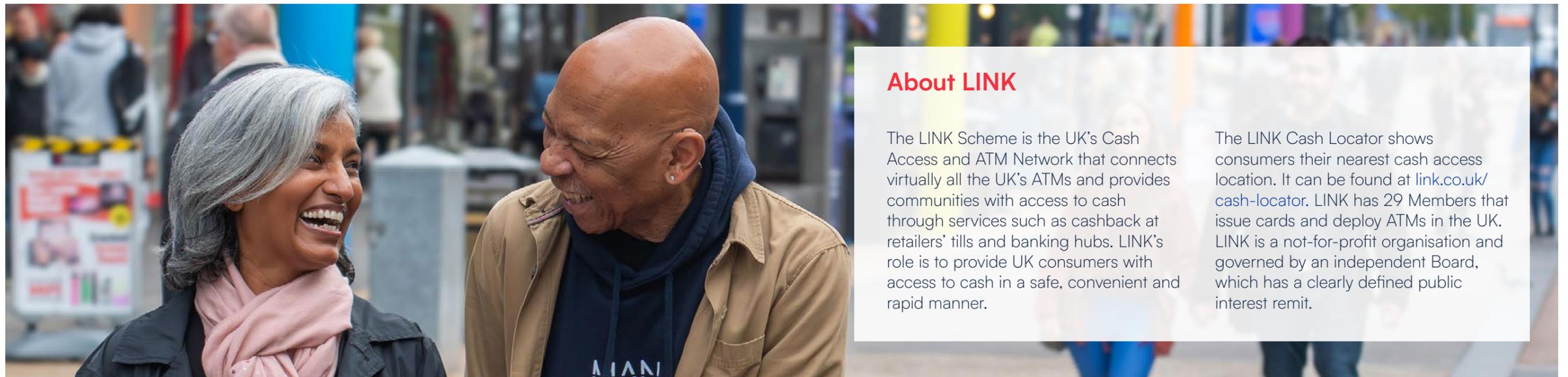
The Consumer Council is grateful to the many individuals who generously gave their time, insight, and expertise to support this research. Their guidance helped shape the direction of the work and strengthened the analysis and recommendations set out in this report.

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Their collective contribution has been invaluable in ensuring this report reflects the realities facing high street businesses and communities across the UK.



About LINK

The LINK Scheme is the UK's Cash Access and ATM Network that connects virtually all the UK's ATMs and provides communities with access to cash through services such as cashback at retailers' tills and banking hubs. LINK's role is to provide UK consumers with access to cash in a safe, convenient and rapid manner.

The LINK Cash Locator shows consumers their nearest cash access location. It can be found at link.co.uk/cash-locator. LINK has 29 Members that issue cards and deploy ATMs in the UK. LINK is a not-for-profit organisation and governed by an independent Board, which has a clearly defined public interest remit.



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