



No sweets at the till

BY POLINA GANEVA
Tesco has removed sweets and chocolate from all of its checkouts to reduce pester power and help families choose healthier food.

The supermarket removed confectionery from larger stores 20 years ago but the changes that take effect today will apply to all stores in the UK and the Republic of Ireland including around 2,000 smaller Metro and Express outlets.

A spokesman said confectionery would also be removed from areas adjacent to the tills - for example, racks of sweets at children's eye level next to checkout queues.

Tesco's managing director of health and wellness, David Wood, said: "Our customers told us that removing sweets and chocolates from checkouts would help them make healthier choices, so from today our checkouts will be sweet and chocolate-free zones."

"We hope this will make our customer's lives easier, as taking sweets and chocolates off the checkouts will really help parents with young children."

"The response we've had from parents has been overwhelmingly positive, so it'll be interesting to see if other supermarkets follow our lead and do the same thing."

Call HRMC - wait 10 mins

BY POLINA GANEVA
Callers to key government tax and benefit helplines are waiting twice as long to get through as last year according to latest official records.

Average waiting times for HM Revenue and Customs contact centre telephone queues reached 10 minutes and 53 seconds in September, more than double the five minutes 21 seconds registered at the same point in 2013.

Some 34.5% of calls were cut off, significantly up from the 20.5% recorded last year while the number answered in under two minutes dropped from half to a quarter, according to the HMRC figures.

Shadow exchequer secretary Shabana Mahmood said: "This is an unacceptable level of service to taxpayers."

"At a time when people are paying more in tax and have seen their tax credits cut under this Tory-led government it simply isn't good enough."

"Long waits and poor service are particularly frustrating when many people are facing difficult times for the personal finances."

"Ministers need to get a grip on this chaos and ensure HMRC is providing a decent service for taxpayers. The Government shouldn't be leaving people hanging on the telephone."

A HMRC spokesman said: "We are working hard to improve our handling of customer calls and are moving up to 1,500 extra people on to the phones during January, as the Self Assessment deadline approaches."

Save



Dippy

The iconic 85-foot-long plaster dinosaur skeleton of the Natural History Museum is to be moved from the main hall. **People protest: 'Despite being a fake, Dippy is loved around the world and is a monument of British heritage.'**

BY POLINA GANEVA
Dippy the Diplodocus has become a monster trending hit on Twitter as supporters rally to stop him being put out to pasture by the Natural History Museum.

The news that the 85-foot-long plaster dinosaur skeleton is to be moved out of the museum's main hall to make way for a blue whale quickly set the social media site alight.

Hundreds of people voiced their surprise and outrage, using the hashtag #SaveDippy, and signed an online petition calling for the decision to be dropped.

Dippy, who has been at the London museum for more than a century and greeted wonder-struck children filing into the Hintze Hall since 1979, now has his own Twitter account, @SaveDippy with a rapidly rising number of followers.

His personal description reads: "Natural History Museum dinosaur looking for work. Forced into retirement at the young age of 150 million. Still have life left in me #SaveDippy."

From summer 2017, Dippy will be replaced by the 83 foot long (25.2 metres)

real skeleton of a blue whale, suspended and "diving" from the ceiling of the Hintze Hall.

The change is part of a "decade of transformation" planned at the museum by its director, Sir Michael Dixon.

He explained that the museum wanted to focus on the "real and authentic" and tell a story that is relevant to the natural world today.

Dippy is a fake - one of 10 replicas around the world based on the near-complete skeleton of a real Diplodocus unearthed in Wyoming, US, in 1898 and housed at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh.

In contrast the female blue whale is the genuine article. The huge creature was found beached at the mouth of Wexford Harbour, Republic of Ireland, on March 25, 1891, after being injured by a whaler.

Its bones were sold to the Natural History Museum for £250 and eventually put on public display with the opening of the Mammal Hall in 1938.

By 1pm today the "Save Dippy" petition organised by Metro UK had collected more than 700 signatures.

The petition says: "Despite being a fake, Dippy is loved around the world and is a monument of British heritage."

"Replacing Dippy with a blue whale skeleton would threaten this and lead to many unhappy faces in the UK youth."

"We demand Dippy be saved and remains in the main hall forever."

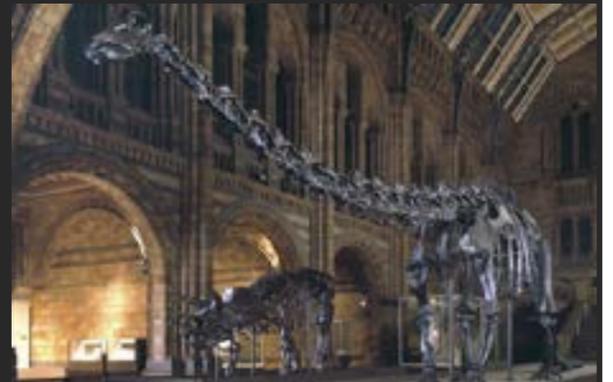
Future plans for Dippy are uncertain but include the possibility of a national tour and making a copy of him out of more durable material that can stand in the museum grounds.

Eventually the skeleton is expected to find a new home in one of the museum's galleries.

Dippy's fans include Huddersfield Labour MP Barry Sheerman, who wrote: "Rather sad about the removal of Dippy the Dinosaur from star billing @NHM_London Can we have it in Yorkshire?"

George Jenkins @gj253 wrote: "Can't believe the natural history museum is retiring Dippy the Diplodocus, he's an icon!"

Speaking after the news of Dippy's departure was



STILL DISPLAYED Dippy the Dinosaur

announced, Sir Michael said: "As the largest known animal to have ever lived on Earth, the story of the blue whale reminds us of the scale of our responsibility to the planet."

"This makes it the perfect choice of specimen to welcome and capture the imagination of our visitors, as well as marking a major transformation of the Museum."

"This is an important and necessary change."

Dippy was unveiled in the Natural History Museum's Reptile Gallery on May 12 1905.

He was donated to the Museum by Scottish-born American millionaire and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie after King Edward VII saw an illustration of the original skeleton and asked for a copy.

The skeleton, which contains 356 plaster cast bones, was constructed over a period of 18 months and shipped to England in 36 crates.

To avoid damage during the Blitz, Dippy was taken apart and stored in the Natural History Museum's basement. In 1979 he was rebuilt and given pride of place in the central hall.

The #SaveDippy campaign was started by well known children's author James Mayhew, creator of the Katie and Ella Bella Ballerina series.

He wrote: "Starting a campaign here on twitter. @NHM_London are getting rid of their diplodocus! Please reconsider, we love him! #savedippy"

Commenting on the Twitter reaction, Sir Michael offered sympathy to Dippy fans, but no hint of a change of heart.

He said: "After inspiring millions of visitors over 35

years, it's no surprise to me that some want to keep the Diplodocus centre stage."

"We love Dippy too. Once it leaves Hintze Hall, taking the Diplodocus on tour would inspire many more millions of people and, given the public response, we will now see how we can involve people in making this tour happen. In the longer term, Dippy is destined to find a new home back in South Kensington."

"I believe the whale's story links directly to our species' impact on the natural world and our chance to build a sustainable future. We're looking forward to showing that the blue whale can be equally stunning and it will connect the visitors to the work of scientists in the Museum."



UK VISITOR Merkel

Cameron to talk politics with Merkel

BY POLINA GANEVA
German chancellor Angela Merkel will visit the UK for talks with David Cameron next week.

The two leaders will discuss a range of issues, including the Ukraine crisis and the European economy during their meeting.

The talks will also help prepare for the G7 summit, which is being held at Schloss Elmau in the Bavarian Alps in June.

The discussions will focus on the bilateral relationship between the UK, as well as European and international issues, the German government said.

Although the Prime Minister's plans to reform the UK's relationship with Brussels are not expected to feature heavily in the talks with Mrs Merkel, the London meeting comes in the build-up to a general election campaign in which the issue of Europe will feature heavily, largely thanks to the rise of Ukip.

Mr Cameron has vowed to hold an in/out referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union by the end of 2017 if he remains in Downing Street after May's general election.

He has vowed to make curbing immigration from Europe a key part of his plan to renegotiate the terms of the UK's membership of the EU.

Mr Cameron has set out plans to bar EU migrants from claiming welfare for the first four years after arriving in the UK and to deport those who do not find jobs within six months.

While he could gain support in Europe for measures to restrict so-called benefits tourism, the German chancellor has made no secret of her opposition to any proposals which undermine the principle of the free movement of labour within the EU.

New education on how to handle rape survivors

BY POLINA GANEVA
Charities have welcomed new guidance for police officers and lawyers dealing with rape cases, saying it could boost victims' confidence in the justice system.

Alison Saunders, the Director of Public Prosecutions, yesterday unveiled a new "toolkit" to spell out situations where possible victims may have been unable to give consent to sex.

It also advises officers and lawyers to ask how the complainant had consented to sex "with full capacity and freedom to do so".

Katie Russell, from Rape Crisis England & Wales, welcomed the move, saying it was "vital if the criminal justice system is to become fit for purpose for survivors of sexual violence".

She said: "Rape and other sexual offences have long been under-reported, with the Government estimating that only 15% of those who experience these horrific crimes choose to go to the police. Through our frontline work at Rape Crisis, we know that

among the many reasons for survivors' reluctance to report is fear, including fear of not being well treated by the criminal justice system."

"We hope the police, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and others will continue to strive for positive change of this kind to enable the cultural shift necessary for sexual violence survivors to receive the criminal justice they want and deserve."

The CPS said the toolkit looked at situations where someone is incapacitated through drink or drugs or where "a suspect held a position of power over the potential victim - as a teacher, an employer, a doctor or a fellow gang member".

The ability to consent to sex should also be questioned where the complainant has mental health problems, learning difficulties or was asleep or unconscious at the time of the alleged attack, it said.

It also covers domestic violence situations and those where "the complainant may be financially or otherwise dependent on their alleged rapist".

Addicted teens can't say 'no' to extreme texting

BY POLINA GANEVA
Teenagers may face a lifelong struggle with addiction because of their perpetual use of modern technology - and parents are helping to maintain the habit.

As many as 83% of UK teenagers would struggle to give up vices such as texting, drinking alcohol and using social media for a month according to a report out today.

The average teen checks social media 11 times a day, sends 17 text messages, equating to once every 1.5 hours they are awake, said the report. Moreover teenagers take an average of 7.4 selfies a month, the same as one every four days.

The study, released by Allen Carr Addiction Clinics, questioned 1,000 UK teenagers aged between 12 and 18. It highlighted a trend of thrill seeking in a growing number of young people, mostly carried out through technology and social media.

The report suggested that several elements involved in this habit - the constant pursuit of stimulation, peer approval,

instant gratification, and elements of narcissism - are all potential indicators of addictive behaviour.

Teenagers spend an average of £15.81 a week on vices such as alcohol, junk food, gambling and technology, meaning they fork out around £62 each month before they even consider other expenses.

To fund this spending, 14% of teens said they lied to their families to get money, while 7% said they had stolen from a relative at one point to finance their habits. The report suggested this was a particular problem in London, with 29% of the capital's teenagers having either lied to or stolen from their parents to fund their vices.

The report suggested 72% of youngsters remain oblivious to the risk of addiction to social media, apps, games, and other technology.

The constant search for the "next thing" is highlighted in how teenagers use apps. The average teen has 13. Yet 46% admitted they stopped using or deleted an app after less than a week.