

Elderly shoppers out in cold in rush to go cashless

By Katie Morley, Consumer Affairs Editor

BRITAIN is going cashless too quickly, meaning elderly and disabled people risk being excluded from shops and restaurants, a report has warned.

A major review looking at the future of payments concluded that millions of consumers were in danger of being left behind by the digital revolution, after cash use was predicted to decrease by half over the next decade. The report, compiled by a consortium of payments experts, said that the UK, where just over a third of payments are in cash, could soon face similar problems to Sweden.

Large numbers of shops in the Scandinavian country are starting to refuse to take cash because it no longer makes economic sense.

In Sweden, where just 15 per cent of payments are made in cash, the Government has issued leaflets to consumers suggesting they hold cash in their homes in case of emergencies, and could soon issue card imprinters to all retailers in case payment networks go down.

A number of pubs, including The Boot in Freston, Suffolk, have already stopped accepting coins and notes.

Last week Dishoom, the London-based Indian restaurant chain, said it was considering going cashless and had asked customers for feedback on the move.

Meanwhile, London buses have been cashless since 2014. It comes after debit cards overtook cash as the most popular payment method for the first time last year, with fears also increasing about closures of cash machines throughout the UK.

Natalie Ceeney, the chairman of the Access for Cash group and former financial ombudsman, said the elderly and people with medical conditions were most likely to struggle in a cashless society.

She added: “Conditions such as Parkinson’s and arthritis can make it hard to use touch screens. People who suffer from mental health problems tell us that, at times of poor health, access to digital payments can lead them to clear out their bank account within hours.

“Do we want a situation where sectors of society are unable to use certain shops or pay for council services, purely because they use cash?

“And how comfortable would we be relying totally on digital payments. What might happen if there was another major IT failure or cyber-attack? “In Sweden, the government is considering issuing card imprinters to all retailers and has already leafleted consumers to suggest they hold cash in their homes, in case something was to go wrong.”

Ben Broadbent, deputy governor for monetary policy at the Bank of England, said: “It is true that an unmanaged decline in cash use could limit choice for people and businesses who prefer to use cash.”