

**12th Meeting of the Retail Consultation Forum
12th June 2017**

The Italian Room, Department of the Taoiseach, Government Buildings, Dublin 2

Minutes

Chair: Eadaoin Collins, PO, Enterprise Initiatives Unit, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

The attendance list is at Appendix 1.

1. Welcome And Opening Comments

The meeting was chaired by Eadaoin Collins. Apologies were received from the Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, T.D., Dr. Stephen Brennan, Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Phil O' Flaherty, Department of Education and Skills, Dr. Fenton Howell, Department of Health, Finola Moylette, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs, Linda Barry of the Small Firms Association, Dr. John Murray, DIT, Aidan Candon of Euronics Ireland and Colin Fee of RGDATA.

Richard Guiney, Dublin Town is represented here today by Gerry Farrell, Maria Melia of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport is represented here today by Tim Barrett.

The minutes of the meeting of 27th February 2017 were approved.

2. Retail Consultation Forum Working Group Updates

Retail and Skills Working Group

Sean Carlin, chair of the group, provided an update on the progress of the Retail and Skills Working Group.

At the last meeting of the Retail and Skills Working Group on 29th March, the group heard from Ms. Irene Kanavan of Adesse on the options within the Skillnets Framework that focus on retail as a career option and the importance of employers and employees investing in and developing staff.

At the next meeting of the working group on 20th June, Ms. Natasha Kinsella, Regional Skills Forum Manager will make a presentation on the Tourism Insights Programme. This programme forms part of the National Tourism Careers Programme, which aims to promote tourism as a rewarding and exciting career opportunity and

encourage more young people to explore the options and career paths on offer. The Retail Consultation Forum has identified the need to present retail as a viable and vibrant career option, and the Tourism Insights Programme may provide a suitable template, which will be explored by the Retail and Skills Working Group, for a similar programme for the Retail Sector, to replicate the success of the Tourism Insights programme. An update will be provided to Members at the next meeting of the Retail Consultation Forum.

At the last meeting of the working group on 29th March, the critical need for a pilot digital and ecommerce programme to operate in parallel to the expanded framework was discussed. An application has now been made to expand the Skillnets Framework to incorporate digital / e-commerce modules.

The working group agreed at the meeting on 29th March that a competency based Health & Safety training course should be provided on the framework and will provide an example of best practice which can be disseminated via the Retail Consultation Forum. Retail Ireland through the Skillnet / Health and Safety Forum (IBEC) are offering a level 5 Health and Safety Programme. Irish Retailers are seeing the benefits of participating in the programme with many benefitting from reduced insurance premiums.

Following the update, Members raised the importance of developing a suite of skills opportunities that will continue support the professionalisation of the retail sector, addressing skills gaps that employers are experiencing, positioning retail as a career of choice, and attracting and retaining talent.

Members raised the ongoing difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified trainers to provide relevant courses for the retail sector. Sean Carlin acknowledged there is a challenge in sourcing trainers who are occupationally competent and this is especially difficult in the digital and e-commerce sphere. Members acknowledged the benefits of in-house training and knowledge transfer from experienced members of staff to newer members.

Members also raised the importance of communicating relevant courses with perspective students. Sean Carlin acknowledged the importance of communication and members are encouraged to publicise the training course offerings available within their organisations. Eadaoin Collins said there is lack of understanding of the breadth and depth of the courses available.

Sean Carlin stated that the courses offered by the Skillnet are 50% funded by Government and encouraged Forum Members to utilise the Skillnet Framework.

Eadaoin Collins welcomed the work of the group, emphasising the need for greater professionalization of the sector; and for demonstrating the training and development opportunities available to those working in the sector.

Town Centre Renewal Working Group

Catherine Curran, DJEI and Secretary to the Forum, updated Members on the work of the Town Centre Renewal Working Group.

The 'Framework for Town Centre Renewal', was launched on Tuesday 25th April. Catherine Curran thanked Members of the Retail Consultation Forum for their support of the Framework document which provides a blueprint for town/village renewal, with an emphasis on collaboration. A special acknowledgement was given to Retail Excellence, ATCM and Limerick County Council for their support in the preparation of the Framework.

The Framework is not linked to a direct funding source; however the Framework supports the Town and Village Renewal Scheme operated by the Department of Community and Rural Affairs.

Catherine Curran encouraged Forum Members to examine the recommendations of the Framework for Town Centre Renewal and drive the recommendations forward.

Eadaoin Collins stated that positive feedback has been received from Local Authorities regarding the tangible actions that attract talent and investment to local economies contained in the Framework for Town Centre Renewal.

Members raised the issue of the need to have a centralised support structure to facilitate the implementation of town and village renewal. Points were made in relation to the upcoming budgetary process and the opportunity that it presents in relation to source funding to support the Framework for Town Centre Renewal. The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government are seeking to introduce measures to support and fund town centre renewal.

The Chair suggested that Members of the Retail Consultation Forum support the efforts of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in this regard in their pre-budget submissions.

RGDATA will prepare a proposal on the need for a centralised function in charge of assisting town and villages in the renewal process. The proposal will be based on the learning points following the pilot town centre healthchecks.

Retail and Reducing Energy Costs Working Group

Vincent Jennings, chairman of the Retail and Reducing Energy Costs Working group updated Members on the outcomes of the pilot resource efficiency training programme for retailers.

12 Stores participated in the Pilot Programme with annual savings of €7,855 per store, which equates to €86,000 across the 12 stores. 2 convenience stores saved €30,000. The savings arose from adjustments to a more efficient use of energy and resources.

Following the initial pilot phase, a further pilot Energy Efficiency Training programme for retailers, devised in consultation with the working group and delivered by SEAI and Green Business, is due to start in July with members of CSNA and SFA. The course consists of two training workshops and a site visit to the participants' premises by experienced SEAI energy auditors.

This programme will focus on the needs and priorities of retailers and small business owners.

Dedicated financing options for businesses to make energy efficient investments have been made available from new sources, including Bank of Ireland, Exchange Bill, and Link Finance. At the outset, only AIB were offering dedicated loans in this area.

Representative Bodies of the Retail Consultation Forum were encouraged to actively promote SEAI / Green Business (EPA) energy efficiency training programmes to their members.

Members of the Forum expressed their concerns regarding the PSO levy and their complete dissatisfaction with increases in the levy. .

Members were critical that the PSO levy is based on the capacity of a business and not energy consumption. The PSO levy does not accordingly reflect the efforts by retailers to be more energy efficient.

Eadaoin Collins agreed to convene a meeting of the Retail and Reducing Energy Costs Working Group at the earliest opportunity to discuss how members can formulate their concerns surrounding the PSO levy and to put them forward in their pre-budget submission for consideration.

3. Brexit

Dr, Cathal Fitzgerald, Brexit Unit, DJEI provided an overview of the structures and responses to Brexit that are currently in place by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

DJEI is undertaking research into the firm-level impacts of Brexit, in Ireland's most exposed enterprise sectors, of which the wholesale/retail sector is one. The research looks at the impact of the UK being outside of the European Single Market and Customs Union on firms, the associated implications for investment, and – crucially – how this informs our approach to negotiations. A pilot research programme was undertaken from January to March in three sectors: wholesale/retail, food/drink, computer consultancy.

Across all three sectors piloted, ‘Market access’ and ‘Standards and Norms’ were of greater concern than Rules and Disciplines.

The six areas of particular concern post-Brexit to the Wholesale / Retail Sector are:

1. Tariffs and rules of origin
2. Physical border
3. Free movement of labour
4. Product standards
5. Mutual recognition, and
6. Receiving a service

Dr. Fitzgerald stated that he would prepare a detailed information document for Retail Consultation Forum Members regarding the issues that the sector needs to prepare for concerning Brexit.

Catherine Curran provided the Forum with an update on behalf of Conor Hand, Brexit Unit, DJEI regarding developments since the last meeting.

The negotiating directives have now been adopted by the EU General Affairs Council, completing the next important stage in the EU preparations for Brexit negotiations. The acknowledgement of Ireland’s unique circumstances by both the EU and the UK has been the result of a major Government campaign of engagement with EU partners and the EU institutions to ensure our specific concerns were fully recognised.

Members were encouraged to use the Enterprise Ireland Brexit SME Scorecard – a version of which has also been launched for LEO clients. This is an online tool that allows businesses to self-diagnose their readiness for Brexit. Catherine Curran will forward the link to Members following the Forum Meeting on the *Prepare For Brexit* Scorecard and information on the range of support tools developed by the Brexit Advisory Service of InterTradeIreland.

4. The Shadow Economy

The Forum heard presentations from Anne Marie Harte, of the Hardware Association of Ireland (HAI), and Olivia Brennan, of Retailers Against Smuggling.

Anne Marie Harte’s presentation focused on Illicit Solid Fuel Trading – the purchase of solid fuel imported from Northern Ireland without the application of the Republic’s Carbon Tax. The key points presented were, in summary:

- 89% of HAI members selling solid fuel believe they have lost trade as a result of illicit solid fuel trading

- The issue arises as a result of the differences in VAT treatment of solid fuel in Northern Ireland and the ROI (5% vs 13.5%), and the addition of a Carbon Tax on solid fuel in ROI.
- Many consumers are unaware that if they do not personally accompany solid fuel for their own domestic use across the border, they cannot import it without paying Carbon Tax.
- The Sale of Illicit Goods Bill 2017, introduced to the Oireachtas in April 2017, will make it an offence to purchase illicit solid fuel, or to purchase such goods from an unlicensed or unregistered retailer; and allows for the imposition of penalties in respect of these offences.
- HAI members believe enforcement is crucial to making this legislation effective.

Retailers Against Smuggling (RAS) was established in 2009 to assist retailers in raising awareness of the impact smuggling has on small to medium-sized businesses. It has over 3,000 retail members. RAS's core activities are raising awareness of the issues, increasing public/political awareness and engagement, and helping legislators to find solutions.

RAS's presentation focused on the Black Economy. Key points presented were, in summary:

- The Black Economy covers many consumer items, but RAS focuses on illicit Cigarettes and Tobacco, Alcohol, and Solid Fuel.
- The Sale of Illicit Goods Bill 2017 will make the purchase of these items illegal.
- Brexit has the potential to increase illicit trade along the Border, impacting on retailers and resulting in the loss of customers, jobs, and revenue to the exchequer.
- RAS's recommendations include a more joined up approach from industry, more resources for Revenue and Gardai, and awareness raising among customers of the illicit goods trade.

Conor Kennedy and Dan Kelleher attended the forum as representatives of the Revenue Commissioners. In response to the presentations, it was stated that the Revenue Commissioners understand and accept these challenges. It was pointed out that the Revenue Commissioners do not implement the Solid Fuel Carbon Tax (SFCT) or regulate the Solid Fuel sector— Revenue's responsibilities are to collect tax and investigate non-compliance. In this respect, detection would often be part of a whole case audit, in which the SFCT is one of a number of taxes an organisation/individual reports on. Revenue also accept Good Citizen reports on all tax compliance issues, and make assessments on the basis of intelligence sharing with other jurisdictions. Website reporting is also now available. Reporting on or publishing details of compliance is limited by confidentiality.

It was agreed that more information and awareness-raising was needed around the implementation of the Sale of Illicit Goods Act, and how it will work.

5. AOB

a) Taking Care of Business, November 2017

John Chambers (DJEI) presented on the Taking Care of Business Event, taking place in Dublin Castle on the 8th November 2017, from 8:30am to 1:30pm. The event is a one-stop-shop for businesses to meet State Agencies and Offices and find out what help is on offer. The event will be made up of information stands and short, live presentations by participating bodies. A previous event, held in 2014, attracted approx. 500 attendees; feedback from this and regional events was positive. Exhibiting partners include the Local Enterprise Offices, Microfinance Ireland, Skillnets, the Food Safety Authority, Enterprise Europe Network, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, and many others.

Retail Forum members are asked to notify their members of the event, and support it by publicising through social media. DJEI will be in touch with marketing materials to disseminate. There will also be a co-ordinated publicity campaign using press advertising, radio, etc. Any questions can be addressed to TCOB17@djei.ie.

b) Pre-budget submission on behalf of members of the Retail Consultation Forum

A draft document has been circulated to all forum members for comment and input. Final contributions were welcomed by Friday 16th June. In particular, the concerns of the Retail Sector regarding Brexit were taken into account.

Secretary to the Retail Consultation Forum

July 2017

Appendix 1
Retail Consultation Forum Meeting, 12th June 2017
Attendance List

Name	Organisation
Annemarie Harte	Hardware Association
Linda Barry	Small Firms Association
Paul Carroll	Department of Social Protection
Tara Buckley	RGDATA
Thomas Burke	Retail Ireland
Sean Carlin	Retail Ireland Skillnet
Jim Curran	Irish Pharmacy Union
Eoin Fitzpatrick	Fitzpatrick's Wholesale
Vincent Jennings	CSNA
Máire Flanagan	Department of Taoiseach
Tim Barrett	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
Daniel McLoughlin	South Dublin County Council
Colm Downey	Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government
Keith Rogers	ECCO Ireland
Gerry Farrell	Dublin Town
Neil McDonnell	ISME
Edel Clancy	Musgrave Group
Rebecca Harrison	Fishers of Newtownmountkennedy
Ian Talbot	Chambers Ireland
Feargal O'Brolchain	Department of Finance
Finola Moylette	Dept. of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Dr. Fenton Howell	Department of Health
Eadaoin Collins	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
Catherine Curran	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
Willie O'Byrne	Retail Ireland
Maire Flanagan	Department of the Taoiseach
Conor Kennedy	Revenue Commissioners
Dan Kelleher	Revenue Commissioners
Olivia Brennan	Retailers Against Smuggling

Benny Gilsean	Retailers Against Smuggling
Dr. Cathal Fitzgerald	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
Colm Forde	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
John Chambers	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
Emily Odium	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
Helen Keane-MacDonough	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
Niall de Buitlear	Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Apologies:

Minister for Enterprise, Jobs and Innovation, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, T.D., Dr. Stephen Brennan, Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Phil O' Flaherty, Department of Education and Skills, Dr. Fenton Howell, Department of Health, Finola Moylette, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs, Linda Barry of the Small Firms Association, Dr. John Murray, DIT, Aidan Candon of Euronics Ireland and Colin Fee of RGDATA, Lorraine Higgins, Retail Excellence, Helen O'Donnell, Dolmen Catering, John Jameson, DIT.