

MINUTES
20th Meeting of the Retail Forum
Via videoconference
24th September 2020
9am – 10.30am

Chair: Damien English TD, Minister for Business, Employment and Retail.

Attendance and apologies at Appendix 1.

1. Welcome and Opening Comments

The Chairperson welcomed those in attendance and reminded attendees that it is less than 100 days to Brexit and this meeting is about the change of focus to Brexit.

The draft minutes of the Retail Forum meeting of 14 July 2020 were circulated to Forum Members prior to the meeting.

Action

Minutes of the meeting of 14 July will be placed on dbe.gov.ie .
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2. Preparing for Brexit

The Minister called on Ms Anne Coleman-Dunne, Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation to update the Forum on Brexit.

Ms. Coleman-Dunne advised that the 9th round of negotiations were due to take place next week. She added that the messaging hasn't changed regarding Brexit. Forum members were encouraged to examine their supply chains, familiarise themselves with changes to customs procedures and product certification.

Various supports in relation to Brexit preparedness are available. Ms. Coleman-Dunne encouraged Forum members to review Revenue, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and Government Agencies such as the HSA, NSAI, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) websites for information sessions and webinars on Brexit preparedness. She also added that the main government signpost on Brexit is Gov.ie

Issues Arising

- Brexit Omnibus Bill
- Medical Devices CE
- North/South Tariffs
- SMEs with UK contracts

Minister English added that it was important that companies engage with the Government and its agencies. He added that some businesses are not engaging and it will be difficult to help those businesses after 1 January.

Action

Secretariat to circulate Brexit Key Messages and updates from Government Departments and Agencies [circulated on 30 September].

3. Digitalisation

The Minister called on Mr Ross O'Colmain, Enterprise Ireland Manager for Retail and Consumer Sectors in Enterprise Ireland to update the Forum on Call 2 of the COVID-19 Online Retail Scheme.

There has been no change to eligibility. Enterprise Ireland updated their website to make it more explicit as to who is eligible for the Scheme. The weighting for ambition to internationalise has been increased from 10% to 20%.

Mr O'Colmain asked representative bodies to encourage their members to apply as applications for Call 2 closes at 3pm on Monday 28 September 2020.

Comments Arising

- Consideration be given for criteria to be widened to include Business to Business operations. Mr O'Colmain advised that they are aware that Business to Business operations are interested in participating in the scheme and Enterprise Ireland are tracking interest and reflecting on this. Priority is currently on business to consumer operations.
- What is the current level of interest in Call 2?
Mr O'Colmain advised that the level of interest could be slightly lower than in Call 1, and he considers this could be due to
 - clearer eligibility criteria
 - during Call 1 only essential retail was trading
 - fewer ineligible businesses are applying which would lead to a higher success rate overall.

4. COVID-19 Updates – Resilience and Recovery**Item 1: Local Economic Initiatives (Section 5.5 Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19)**

The Minister called on Ms Finola Moylette, Department of Rural and Community Development to provide an update.

Ms Moylette outlined how an overarching working group will be established in the coming days. Discussions are currently ongoing with relevant Stakeholders / agencies.

Comments Arising

- Forum members expressed the view that consultation, engagement and collaboration with stakeholders is crucial for the success of town centre renewal.
- The view was expressed that the Town Centre Health Check is a great way to bring a town together.
- Forum members asked that retailers would not have to incur more costs in the next 6 months, and that the Deposit and Return Scheme should be cost neutral.
- Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Purple Flag Towns and the Irish Town Centre Development Association would welcome the opportunity to input into the Town First Programme to share their experience and insights that have been gained through international networks.

The Minister expressed the view that a Town Centre approach, to bring activity back into town, has a lot of potential. The capital resources and funding is available and they need to be matched with action.

Item 2: Code of Conduct

The Minister called on Ms Helena Quilty, Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation to provide an update on the Code of Conduct.

Ms Quilty thanked stakeholders who have engaged with the Department on this initiative. She advised that the Code of Conduct, which is a voluntary code between landlords and tenants, has been forwarded to the Tánaiste for review and it is hoped that the Code will be launched by the end of September. Stakeholders will be advised in advance and she added that feedback is welcomed.

Comments Arising

- Forum members welcomed the Code and said that this was becoming a big issue for store owners, in particular, with institutional landlords. They enquired if there would be a move to arbitration.
The Minister advised that the first step was to produce the Code, establish practice and go from there.
- Forum members outlined the link between stores closures and rent issues.

The Minister said that he understands the current difficulties in relation to rents, premises / debt and he will work with Forum Members over the coming months in relation to these issues. He added that he wants to ensure that both parties find a positive outcome.

5. AOB

Forum members raised a number of additional issues relating to COVID-19 including

- Scope of the EWSS to include those earning less than €151.50 per week, particularly for weekend workers in retail and hospitality
- Plans for testing of Essential Workers
- Clarification sought on what is 'essential retail' in advance of any moves to different levels of the Living with COVID Plan
- Sufficient notification be given for changes to the level restrictions
- Local Transport plans if the country moves to another level of the Living with COVID Plan
- The impact of restrictions on non-essential retail
- Shop local campaign
- Update sought on insurance costs
- Valuation Office and Local Property Tax
- Fast Track examinership proposed
- Update given on Retail Ireland Skillnet apprenticeship programme and launch of Retail Technologies and Future Skills report in November 2020

Appendix 1 – Attendance List & Apologies

Representative Bodies		
Arnold Dillon	Director	Retail Ireland
Duncan Graham	Managing Director	Retail Excellence Ireland
Vincent Jennings	Chief Executive	CSNA
Tara Buckley	Director General	RGDATA
Neil McDonnell	Chief Executive	ISME
Elizabeth Bowen	Senior Executive	Small Firms Association
Richard Guiney	CEO	Dublin Town
James Kiernan	Director of Relationship Management	Chambers Ireland
Jim Curran	Director of Communication & Strategy	Irish Pharmacy Union
Sean Carlin	Network manager	Retail Ireland Skillnet
Retailers		
Edel Clancy	Director of Communications & Corporate Affairs	Musgrave Group
Keith Rogers	Head of Retail	ECCO Ireland
Rebecca Harrison	Director	Fishers of Newtownmountkennedy
Public Sector and Academic Bodies		
Ruairí Ferrie	Planning Policy	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
John Jameson	Head of the School of Retail & Services Management	TU Dublin
Damian O'Reilly	Senior Lecturer - Retail Management	TU Dublin
Jackie Brennan		Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection
Stephen O'Dwyer	Deputy Director, EU-UK Unit, EU Division	Department of Foreign Affairs
Presenters		
Anne Coleman-Dunne	Principal Officer, Brexit Unit	Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation
Ross O'Colmain	Enterprise Ireland Manager for Retail and Consumer Sectors	Enterprise Ireland
Finola Moylette		Department of Rural and Community Development
Helena Quilty		Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation
Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (D/BEI)		
Declan Hughes	Assistant Secretary	D/BEI
Céline McHugh	Principal Officer	D/BEI (attended Department Offices, Kildare Street)
Deborah Dignam	Assistant Principal	D/BEI
Denise Cash	Assistant Principal	D/BEI
Andrew Rea	Assistant Principal	D/BEI

Apologies		
Martin Markey	Chief Executive Officer	Hardware Association Ireland
Michael Quinn	Director of Service	Waterford County Council