

MINUTES
27th Meeting of the Retail Forum
8th June 2022
10.30am – 12.30pm
(via video / tele conference & Room 110, Kildare Street)
Meeting held under Chatham House Rules

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

Attendance and apologies at Appendix 1.

1. Welcome and Opening Comments

The Chair welcomed those in attendance and announced that Enterprise Ireland (EI) would be represented on the Retail Forum. Ms Jennifer Melia is the nominated EI representative.

The Chair outlined that there will be updates provided on the Online Retail Scheme and the progress of the Working Groups.

The Chair thanked members for their participation on the Working Groups. He also advised that work on the Retail Study is still ongoing and would keep the Forum updated.

The Chair informed members that there would be an opportunity in the meeting to discuss the impact of the war on Ukraine on businesses.

The Chair advised members that minutes of the last Retail Forum meeting held on 2nd March 2022 are published on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) website and on gov.ie. Minutes of this meeting will be circulated to Retail Forum members for observations and approved under silence procedure.

2. Retail, Technology and Skills

The Chair called on Ms Anna-Marie Turley, Retail Team, Enterprise Ireland, to provide an update on the current Online Retail Scheme (ORS).

- The closing date for this round of the ORS was 1st June 2022.
- A high level of interest in the scheme was evident with over 200 retailers attending webinars in advance of the closing date.
- A broad base of retailers had applied. Evaluations of the applications were due to commence on the 9th of June.
- Over 400 queries on the Online Retail Scheme had been received since the Call opened.

Ms. Turley asked the retail representative bodies to disseminate information to successful applicants to ensure that they draw down funds within the set timeframe.

Comments arising:

- Members keen to know numbers of applicants under the scheme.
- Members noted the importance of evaluating the Scheme and assessing its impact.
- DETE secretariat advised that a spending review is being conducted by DETE for DPER to analyse the scheme and this is due to be completed in the latter part of Q3 of 2022.

3. Collaborative Work Programme for Retail

The Chair invited Ms Deborah Dignam, Secretary to the Retail Forum, DETE to provide an update on the work of the Future of Retail Working Groups:

- Future of Retail – Digitalisation and Skills
- Future of Retail – Green Transition
- Future of Retail – Town Centre First and Night-time Economy

Ms Dignam thanked members for their engagement in the Working Groups and updated members on the actions that have been drafted following the three meetings of each of the three working groups. She outlined that these actions would form part of the Work Programme of the Retail Forum in the Autumn.

She invited members to provide any additional observations to the Secretariat after the meeting.

The Chair invited Ms Maedhbh Cronin, Principal Officer, Retail and Locally Traded Enterprise Unit, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), as Chair of the Working Group on *Future of Retail – Town Centre First and Night-time Economy* to provide an update on its work. Ms Cronin commented that value can be added to the implementation of the Town Centre First Policy by the engagement with the business community. Ms. Cronin said the two objectives of the DETE is to examine how the Department can provide a business perspective in the Town Centre First Policy and how DETE can assist in the delivery of the policy for the benefit of businesses.

The Chair invited members to provide feedback on their involvement in the working groups.

Comments arising:

- Future of Retail – Town Centre First/ Night-time Economy
 - Members commented on the town centre framework and structures and the need for a co-ordinated approach by relevant stakeholders.
 - Town Centre initiatives need to be developed from the ground up with all stakeholders in a town involved.
 - The National Town Centre Office is a very important national office and should be funded accordingly.
 - There are continuing safety concerns for businesses in towns across the country including for staff working late shifts.
- Future of Retail – Green Transition
 - Reference was made to the launch of Sustainable Irish Retail Action's 'Sustainability in Retail Handbook'.
 - Engagement is necessary with retailers on how the Deposit Return Scheme due February 2024 will operate.
 - Concerns were expressed regarding the unintended consequence of the sustainability/circular economy initiatives being introduced by Government, including the 20c levy on disposable coffee cups, which could lead to a reduction in demand for take away coffee with financial impact for business
 - Discussion on how businesses using compostable and non-compostable disposable cups should be treated differently. Businesses have already invested in moving to compostable format so should be considered.
 - Mentoring is seen as a tool to support business on their sustainability journey.

- Future of Retail – Digitalisation and Skills
 - The future of retail is dependent on the labour market and skills.
 - Find innovative ways to attract people to pursue a career in the Retail Sector

- General Comments
 - Members considered the Working Groups valuable and would welcome their continuation.
 - Members commented that having a Minister for Retail, and the Retail Forum was very important.
 - Government has a direct influence on the business environment and the regulatory environment – sick pay, pension auto-enrolment, minimum wage – comments arising that these should be issues captured in the work programme for the Retail Forum
 - Important that the Forum is apprised of upcoming legislation, regulatory proposals and consultations that impact the retail sector e.g., Solid Fuel Regulations
 - Consensus that there was a need for a single go-to website containing all pertinent information for retail businesses including financial and non-financial supports

Ms Dignam advised that through the Night-time Economy group Gardaí have delivered vulnerability training to address safety in towns.

Ms Dignam advised that at future Retail Forum meetings, appropriate officials from Government Departments leading on implementing relevant EU legislation or other regulatory initiatives would be present to provide updates.

Ms Maedhbh Cronin emphasised to the Forum members the importance of providing relevant data in support of any issues they wished to bring to the Forum's attention to aid discussion and further examination.

The Chair thanked members for their feedback and advised that a final version of the Work Programme will be shared with the Retail Forum to support the future work of the Working Groups before the next meeting.

Actions:

Amend work programme actions and circulate final version to Retail Forum members by email over the coming weeks.

Provide updates on upcoming legislation, consultations and other regulatory initiatives that will impact on the retail sector at future Retail Forum meetings

4. Feedback from Members

The Chair invited members to provide feedback on issues that have arisen due to the war in Ukraine and any other issues

Comments arising:

Rising Costs

- Challenging time for consumer confidence due to media handling of rising costs etc

- Rising costs, including accommodation costs, affecting Ireland's ability to attract international businesses and talent to Ireland
- Concerns expressed that some retail businesses who are investing in green initiatives to cut energy costs and increase efficiencies are not seeing dividends in terms of a reduction in costs – what is the benefit of the PSO Levy?
- Labour shortages continue to be a major concern for businesses, including in the pharmacy sector.

Other issues

- Working from Home patterns impacting footfall into cities mid-week.
- Night-time economy taking longer to recover.
- Guidance from Department of Environment, Climate Action and Communications and regarding solar panels was needed.
- More potential for micro-generation by using solar panels in retail businesses.

The Chair commented that looking at energy costs continues to be a priority for Government. The forthcoming White Paper on Enterprise Policy. from the Department will consider this and other challenges facing businesses.

5. AOB

The Chair informed the members that the Retail team will be in contact with them regarding the date of the next meeting. A final Work Programme will issue to Retail Forum members over the coming weeks.

Action: Circulate minutes of this meeting to members and advise members of date for next meeting.

Appendix 1 – Attendance and Apologies List

Company	First Name	Last Name	Title
RGDATA	Tara	Buckley	Director General
CSNA	Vincent	Jennings	CEO
Retail Excellence	Duncan	Graham	Managing Director
Retail Ireland	Arnold	Dillon	Director
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)	Gerry	Light	General Secretary (MANDATE)
Ecco Ireland	Keith	Rogers	Head of Retail
ISME / Sligo BID	Finbarr	Filan	
Technological University Dublin	Damian	O'Reilly	Senior Lecturer - Retail Management
Irish Pharmacy Union	Jim	Curran	Director of Communications
Fishers of Newtownmountkennedy	Rebecca	Harrison	Director
Primark	Emma	Ormond	Head of Government Affairs
Waterford City and Co. Council (Local Government Management Agency Rep)	Michael	Quinn	Director of Service
Dublin Town (BID)	Richard	Guiney	CEO
Chambers Ireland	James	Kiernan	Director of Relationship Management
Musgrave	Colette	Sexton	Corporate Communications Manager
Retail Ireland Skillnet	Sean	Carlin	Manager of Skillnet
D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Maedhbh	Cronin	Principal Officer, Retail and Locally Traded Enterprise Unit
D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Deborah	Dignam	AP, Retail and Locally Traded Enterprise Unit
D/Taoiseach	Fiona	Curran	Economic Policy
D/Taoiseach	Jerome	Wholihane	Economic Policy
D/Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Michelle	O'Mahony	

Department of Rural and Community Development	Brian	Alcock	Rural Programmes & Policies Unit
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Presenter

Enterprise	Anna-Marie	Turley	Manager, Retail, Consumer & Online
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Apologies

D/Social Protection	Sinead	Watters	Key Account Manager - Employer Support Services Unit
Technological University Dublin	John	Jameson	Head of Retail School
Retail Ireland	Shane	Flynn	Chairman
DETE	Pauline	Mulligan	Assistant Secretary