



Minutes: 37th Meeting of the Retail Forum

19 March 2025, 11am-1pm

(hybrid meeting held in Room 110, Kildare St and online)
Meeting held under Chatham House Rules

Chair: Alan Dillon TD, **Minister of State for Small Business and Retail**

Attendance at Appendix 1.

Item 1: Welcome and Opening Comments

The Chair, Minister Alan Dillon TD welcomed members to his first meeting of the Retail Forum. He listed issues that are important to the Retail Sector and mentioned the establishment of the Cost of Business Advisory Forum to look at costs.

He made reference to the ICOB and Power Up payment, acknowledging there was an issue regarding the misclassification of business sector by some businesses.

The Minister also mentioned that he is very much focused on other initiatives including the SME test.

Retail crime is a matter of concern to all retailers and the development of a Retail Crime Strategy is to be welcomed. The Minister mentioned that the Minister for Justice is to convene a meeting with retail stakeholders soon after Easter. Minister Dillon took the opportunity to welcome a Department of Justice official to the meeting who gave an overview of the Programme for Government commitments in relation to retail crime. The Programme for Government commitments on Retail Crime lie with the Department of Justice.

The Minister thanked members again for their attendance and introduced the agenda items.

Action: Date for Department of Justice meeting on retail theft to be finalised.
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Item 2: European Accessibility Act

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth presented on the European Accessibility Act. An official from the Department updated members on the implementation of the European Accessibility Act, which comes into force in June 2025. The EAA is an EU Directive that introduces mandatory accessibility requirements for certain products and services across the EU.

The Minister thanked the presenter.

Comments arising.

- Lessons need to be learnt from the introduction of previous legislation in terms of guidance.
- Members sought clarification regarding guidance for retailers as the obligations under the Act will affect a significant number of retailers.
- A member queried the approach to enforcement.
- A member asked whether the SME test had been applied – in respect of the proportionality of the obligation on small businesses.
- A member pointed out that this is another cost burden for retailers.
- A member informed the group that a survey on the EAA is to be published by Red C this weekend.
- Cost of implementation and timeline to prepare can be lengthy.
- DCEDIY representative clarified that the regulation is a new departure – affecting private sector as well as public and that they will facilitate and encourage compliance.
- Minister confirmed that the Department will engage with the CCPC and look at the challenges.

Action: Department to liaise with CCPC re guidance. Presentation slides to be published on the Retail Sector webpage.

Item 3: Green Claims Directive (GCD)

The Department of Environment, Climate and Communications presented on the Green Claims Directive. The aim of the Directive is to harmonise and regulate further environmental claims and tackle false environmental claims. Claims which are false can mislead the consumer. Lack of reliability, comparability and verifiability leads to:

- a lack of trust
- confusion
- an unfair advantage for businesses who make 'false;' environmental claims

Comments raised by members included –

- Member asked whether verification in one member state is applicable to other member states – it was confirmed.
- Member queried the methodology to be used for verification.
- Member queried whether the role of CCPC has been identified – it was clarified that no competent authority discussion has taken place yet.
- Member queried the method of communication.
- It was noted that the Directive is at trilogue stage and it's too soon to answer all queries at this point.

Action: Presentation slides will be shared. Minister confirmed that the development of the Directive is at Trilogue stage and will be addressed again at the Retail Forum as the process progresses.

Item 4: Balance For Better Business – Women in Leadership

A presentation was given by the Enterprise Strategy Unit, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

In 2018, Government established Balance for Better Business (B4BB) as an independent business-led Review Group to improve gender balance in senior business leadership in Ireland. The presentation highlighted that greater gender balance on boards and senior leadership teams is positively associated with business performance across a range of key metrics.

The **Seventh Annual Report** launched in February 2025 found that:

- Ireland's largest listed (ISEQ20) companies have now reached the **key milestone of 40% female directors overall**, compared to 18% in 2018. Irish-owned private companies have also increased the proportion of women on their boards by 5 percentage points over the same period
- Having lagged the EU average for female representation on the boards and leadership teams of its largest listed companies when B4BB launched, Ireland now ranks 6th in the EU for female board representation and 5th in the EU for leadership teams, well ahead of the EU average.

In 2024 B4BB launched a new set of targets as part of a renewed 5-year strategy focusing on a 'twin track approach' of quantitative targets to measure progress and qualitative guidance issued to companies, in the form of a B4BB roadmap.

Under this strategy, B4BB has set targets for 40%+ female representation on boards and leadership teams for all company cohorts, to be achieved by the end of 2028.

The presenter invited members to participate in a retail roundtable on this matter shortly. Details will be shared with members once received.

Comments raised by members included –

- Query on whether SME test been applied to gender pay gap reporting
- Derogation needed for small businesses.
- Guidelines needed for small businesses.
- Absence of affordable and available childcare options hamper women's participation

Action: Presentation slides to be shared. Invitation to attend retail roundtable will issue in due course.

Item 5: AOB – Cost of Retail Payments Study

Update from the Central Bank of Ireland. The presenter informed members of research being carried out in relation to the comparative costs of different payment methods for retailers in Ireland. Studies have been carried out in previous jurisdictions. The Central Bank will issue a survey to retailers.

Action: Information on the survey will circulate to Retail members in advance of the survey.

AOB

Members outlined other issues affecting the sector including –

- Forum members keen to input into agenda for meetings
- Some members keen to have more frequent meetings
- Cost of doing business is a major concern and rising labour costs (sick leave, pension auto-enrolment etc)
- Retail crime/theft and Defamation Bill
- Holistic approach in Government required – needs to be a pro-business approach
- Practical technological solutions to address retail crime
- Towns and villages in need of support – hollowing out of rural retail happening
- Stop expecting small retailers to solve social issues
- Amazon.ie creating jobs but will also result in loss of independent retailers and jobs. Homogenisation of retail happening.
- Dublin City Taskforce Report needs to be implemented

Minister thanked members for their input and recapped on issues mentioned and reiterated Government's PfG commitments. He invited members to suggest proposals and solutions to issues they have raised and to bring these to future meetings. He added that the frequency of meetings will also be considered.

Actions: Copy of presentations to be forwarded to the Retail Forum members. Actions under each agenda item to be followed up.

Attendees

Company	Name
ALDI Ireland	Padraig Barry
Basecamp Outdoor Store	Jack Layden
Bookselling Ireland	Cian Byrne
Brown Thomas Arnotts	Mark Limby
Chambers Ireland	Shane Hughes
CSNA	Vincent Jennings
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (D/ETE)	Brian Walsh
D/ETE (Secretary to the Retail Forum)	Marian Cassidy
Department of Finance	Éamonn Sweeney
Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage	Louise Purcell
Department of Justice	Gerry O'Brien
Department of Social Protection	Tadgh O'Leary
Department of the Taoiseach	Fiona Curran
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Michelle O'Mahony
Digital Business Ireland rep (Core Optimisation)	Kieran O'Brien
Dublin Town (BID)	Richard Guiney
Hardware Association Ireland	Martin Markey
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)	Gerry Light
Irish Petrol Retailers Association (IPRA)	Orla Allen
Irish Pharmacy Union	Jim Curran
ISME	Neil McDonnell
Musgrove Group	Edel Clancy
Network of Local Enterprise Offices	Padraic McElwee
Primark	Aidan O'Connor
Retail Excellence	Jean McCabe
Retail Ireland	Arnold Dillon
RGDATA	Padraig Broderick
Sligo BID	Finbarr Filan
Small Firms Association	Jonathan McDade
Technological University Dublin	Damian O'Reilly
Tesco	Rosemary Garth

Presenters and additional attendees

Company	Name
Central Bank of Ireland	Helena Roche
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Lianne Meagher Reddy
D/ETE	Éadaoin Collins
Department of Environment, Climate and Communications	Eóin Deegan
National Disability Authority	Donal Fitzpatrick
Central Bank of Ireland	Austin Carberry

Apologies

Company	Name
ECCO Distributors DAC	Paul Lyons
D/ETE	Mr Dermot Mulligan
Enterprise Ireland	Anne Lanigan
Waterford City and Co. Council (Local Government Management Agency Rep)	Michael Quinn