



# Minutes: 38th Meeting of the Retail Forum

## 25 June 2025, 2pm-4pm

*(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 welcomed attendees and updated members on a number of matters including the Cost of Business Advisory Forum (COBAF). The first meeting of COBAF took place earlier this month and the Chair added that the themes of COBAF are quite broad and welcomed feedback on the themes. On Budget 2026, the Chair said that the Department is consulting with stakeholders in advance of outlining its strategic approach and asked members to ensure that they input into the process. The Chair acknowledged the last Retail Crime meeting in May with Minister O'Callaghan and hoped it was beneficial for Retail Forum members.

### Item 2: Retail Crime

The Chair invited Mr Gerry O'Brien from the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (DJHAM) to update members on the Retail Crime strategy as identified in the Programme for Government. DJHAM said that the Department is focusing on 5 themes for the Retail Crime Strategy: - Prevent and Deter Retail Crime; Support Intelligence led policing; Supporting Enforcement; Community & Rehabilitation; and Supporting retailers and their employees. DJHAM hopes to complete the Retail Crime Strategy by the end of this year. DJHAM propose to engage with Retail Forum members throughout the life of the Retail Crime Strategy.

### Comments arising

- Members said that the increase in gardai presence in Dublin 1 & 2 is making a difference.
- Members gave their views on the effectiveness of a media campaign.
- A retail representative body asked about the crime prevention scheme for retailers and asked for meaningful sanctions for offenders.
- The Defamation Bill was raised by a number of members, in particular its impact on retailers.
- One member raised that the response time to '999' is slow.
- A retailer member proposed a positive campaign to increase footfall by encouraging people into the city. They added that KPIs are important to show the effectiveness of each element of the strategy.

**Action:**

- The Chair agreed that Retail Crime will be included on the agenda at the next Retail Forum meeting.
- DJHAM agreed to engage with Retail Forum members on the Retail Crime Strategy.

**Item 3: Cost of Business Advisory Forum**

The Chair invited Ms Sarah Brown, Economic and Tax Policy Unit, Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment to update members on the Cost of Business Advisory Forum (COBAF).

The first meeting of COBAF was held on the 11 June 2025 and was attended by 54 participants including Enterprise/Business Representatives, Government Officials and State Agency Organisations. Retail was represented at the meeting and two further invitations issued to CSNA and RGDATA to attend the next meeting on the 23 July 2025. There are a number of areas identified for discussion. The cost of wages has been excluded as its being dealt with by separate group. Feedback at the meeting on 11 June suggested the inclusion of additional areas to review such as insurance, research and development and sustainability. The public consultation closed on the 20 June and the Unit are reviewing both the submissions and feedback from the first meeting of COBAF. Any revisions to the topics will be issued to COBAF members in advance and discussed as an agenda item at the next meeting. The focus of the COBAF is to bring a report to Government. The timeline has not been finalised yet. A COBAF webpage will be set up shortly on the Department's website.

**Comments arising**

- Additional items raised by members for consideration in COBAF's review include Insurance, commercial rates and VAT returns.
- A retail representative body asked for the timeline sequence between the Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity (consultation closed 20 July 2025), the National Development Plan review and the COBAF Report. They also raised the deferral of alcohol labelling and the changes to the Agri Food Regulator statutory powers.
- A retailer said that small retailers are not represented on the LEEF (Labour Employer Economic Forum) where minimum wages are discussed.
- A retail representative body is seeking a reduction in employer's PRSI for small businesses.

**Action:**

- The Chair agreed that COBAF and minimum wages for small retailers will be included on the agenda at the next Retail Forum meeting.

## Item 4: Budget 2026

The Chair asked members for their suggestions and ideas on Budget 2026 as the Government wants to acknowledge the cost pressures on businesses.

### Comments arising

- Areas for consideration raised by Retail Forum members - SME test, VAT Returns, Commercial Rates and PRSI rebate.
- Statistics given by a retail representative body said that there has been a 38% increase in wage cost in 4 years with no financial supports.
- It was proposed by a member that if a further grant scheme is under consideration it is important that the amount given is reviewed.
- Members pointed out there is a clear difference between medium and micro businesses and this should be considered.

## Item 5: Town Centre First

The Chair invited Mr Stewart Logan, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (D/HLGH) to update members on the Town Centre First Policy.

### Comments arising

- D/HLGH was asked about a Future National Planning Statement on Retail Development *[D/HLGH said that the current Section 28 Retail Planning Guidelines would be reviewed by the Department as part of a programme of translation of existing guidelines into new National Planning Statements under the Planning and Development Act 2024. A programme of priority would be devised by DHLGH.]*
- The Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant was welcomed.
- The Forum were advised that the Town Centre First National Oversight and Advisory Group (NOAG) had last met in Q4, 2024. Members of the NOAG had recently been asked for submissions on the further development of the initiative.
- A member highlighted the need for data on towns to understand what is required and referenced Co-operation Ireland's All-Island Local Authority Forum.

### Actions:

- A copy of the presentation to be forwarded to Retail Forum members and placed on the Department's website.
- D/HLGH agreed to advise the Retail Forum when a review of the Retail Planning Guidelines was underway and on the arrangements for stakeholder engagement as part of the guidelines preparation process appropriately at that time.

## Item 6: AOB

The following items were raised by Retail Forum members

- Will businesses be informed if they are due to receive a grant under the reclassification of the Power Up Grant. *[DETE advised that local authorities will contact relevant businesses].*
- Clarification of the timeline for the Auto-enrolment Scheme. *[The Chair advised that members will be updated on the timeline of the Scheme]*

### **Actions:**

- Retail Forum members to be advised of the timeline of the Auto-enrolment Scheme.

## Attendees

Retail Forum Members	Name
Basecamp Outdoor Store	Jack Layden
Bookselling Ireland	Cian Byrne
Brown Thomas Arnotts	Mark Limby
Chambers Ireland	Abbie Brennan
CSNA	Vincent Jennings
Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (DETE)	Brian Walsh
Department of Finance	Éamonn Sweeney
Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage ( <b>Presenter</b> )	Stewart Logan
Department of Justice, Home Affairs, and Migration ( <b>Presenter</b> )	Gerry O'Brien
Department of Social Protection	Patricia Hynes
Department of the Taoiseach	Fiona Curran
Digital Business Ireland rep (Core Optimisation)	Kieran O'Brien
Enterprise Ireland	Anne Lanigan
Hardware Association Ireland	Martin Markey
.IE	Sean Tobin
.IE	David Curtin
Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)	Gerry Light
Irish Petrol Retailers Association (IPRA)	Orla Allen
Irish Petrol Retailers Association (IPRA)	David Blevins
Irish Pharmacy Union	Ailbhe O'Briain
ISME	Damien Heffernan
ISME/Sligo BID	Finbarr Filan
Network of Local Enterprise Offices	Padraic McElwee
Retail Excellence	Jean McCabe
Retail Ireland	Arnold Dillon
RGDATA	Tara Buckley
Small Firms Association	Jonathan McDade
Technological University Dublin	Damian O'Reilly
Tesco	Rosemary Garth
Waterford City and Co Council (Local Government Management Agency Rep)	Michael Quinn

### Additional attendees

Organisation	Name
DETE – Secretary	Marian Cassidy
DETE – Presenter	Sarah Browne
DETE – Special Adviser	Jenny McCormack

### Apologies

Organisation	Name
ALDI	Padraig Barry