

MINUTES
22nd Meeting of the Retail Forum
Via videoconference
11th March 2021
10.15am – 12 Noon (via video / tele conference)

Meeting held under Chatham House Rules

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

Attendance at Appendix 1.

1. Welcome and Opening Comments

The Chairperson welcomed those in attendance and advised that the Department will continue to work with the Retail Forum on issues relating to Brexit and COVID-19, however the focus of today's meeting is on the future of Retail.

The Chair welcomed new Forum Member, Primark, to the meeting.

The draft minutes of the Retail Forum meetings of 24th September 2020 and 21st October 2020 were circulated to Forum Members prior to the meeting and approved under silence procedure. The revised Terms of Reference for the Retail Forum are available on enterprise.gov.ie.

Action

Minutes of the Retail Forum meetings of 24th September 2020 and 21st October 2020 will be placed on enterprise.gov.ie.

2. Retail Technology and Skills

The Chair called on Ms. Róisín Woods and Dr Oran Doherty of Retail Ireland Skillnet to provide their presentation of an overview of the *Retail Technologies & Future Skills Report 2020*.

The presentation included an overview of the background, objectives and outcomes of the Report.

The *Retail Technologies & Future Skills Report 2020* is available to download from the Retail Ireland Skillnet website at: <https://www.retailirelandskillnet.com/report/>

Forum members thanked Ms. Woods and Dr Doherty for their presentation.

Comments arising:

- Accessing employees with digital skills for small businesses is important. Small businesses need employees with digital skills to ensure that the business has a fully integrated digital system eg cyber security, working with suppliers and not just a website.

3. Retail and the Green Economy

The Chair called upon Ms. Aideen O’Hora and Ms. Karen Deignan from Sustainability Works to provide a presentation on their research about the impact of climate change on the Retail Sector.

The presentation focused on Sustainability Works *Climate R/O* project. The project, which is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), explores how Irish businesses need to adapt to climate risks (R) and opportunities (O) in order to be resilient for the future. The Retail Sector is one of the 5 Sectors the project is focused on. The next step is to publish a report, along with sectoral guidance.

Forum members thanked Ms. O’Hora and Ms. Deignan for their presentation.

Comments arising:

- A Forum member enquired as to specific advice for their sector in relation to training opportunities and risk assessments. The Forum member will follow up with Sustainability Works bilaterally.
- The cost of making the transition to low-carbon footprint is high, supports for business from the Government and EU are required. Collaboration and communication are important. The changes are happening but at a slow pace and Retail Forum could support a faster transition.
- Small independent businesses are working hard to reduce their carbon footprint and impact on the local community. All businesses need to be recognised and consulted in relation to the transition.

The Chair commented that the transition will need Government leadership and intervention.

4. Government Initiatives

The Chair called upon Ms. Maedhbh Cronin, Principal Officer, Retail and Sector Transformation Policy Unit in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to provide a presentation on the Town Centre First initiative.

In October 2018, the Department of Rural and Community Development launched a Town Centre Living Initiative to explore in a holistic way how to encourage increased residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. The pilot focused on 6 towns with different characteristics in different parts of the country.

An independent report on the pilot Town Centre Living Initiative was published on 22nd June 2020. The report highlighted the value of developing a shared vision, or masterplan, for individual towns if they are to be attractive places in which to live.

An Inter-Departmental Group has been established which will consider all of the suggested actions in the report on the Town Centre Living initiative, as well as progressing the commitment in the Programme for Government to develop a Town Centre First approach to the regeneration of our towns and villages. The Group is chaired jointly by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Ms Cronin chairs the working group on *Economic and Social Purpose* and will follow up with Forum Members for their contributions / feedback / comments.

The Chair of the Forum encouraged Forum Members to engage with the working group.

Forum members thanked Ms. Cronin for the presentation.

Comments arising:

- Forum members commented that retail is core to the debate.
- Need for integrated approach re cultural, social, economic factors along with an evening economy, that it's not just about pubs and nightclubs.
- The work of the Night-Time Economy Task Force was raised.
- Co-ordination required across all Government Departments regarding funding. Funding models need to be pulled together - long-term thinking with long term funding.
- Importance of support for cities.
- Need to get the balance right between commercial / residential offerings.
- All stakeholders including local Government need to be consulted. Collaboration is important.
- Proposed that a Town Manager be appointed in towns.
- It is an all Government Policy issue that affects many regions.
- Request that the work on the issue be expediated.
- Forum members are happy to engage and support the Town Centre First approach and working group.

5. Discussion on the Future of Retail

The Chair called upon Ms. Maedhbh Cronin, Principal Officer, Retail and Sector Transformation Policy Unit in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to provide an update to the Forum on the Retail Sector Study.

The Forum were advised that the Terms of Reference for the Retail Sector Study are being finalised, and that it would be shortly going to tender. The Working Groups of the Retail Forum will feed into the Research.

An update on the Retail Sector Study will be issued to Retail Forum members shortly.

The Chair advised Forum members that individual meetings regarding Town Centre Renewal and the Future of Retail can be arranged as required.

Comments arising:

- Forum members welcomed the update on the Retail Sector Study.
- The voice of retail workers is very important, when presenting retail as a career.

6. AOB

Comments arising from Forum members on COVID-19:

- Timeline needed for re-opening non-essential Retail requested

- Possible taskforce established for non-essential retailers
- Legal guidance on face masks in retail settings; requested some type of emblem/signal to identify those not required to wear face coverings. No response from the Department of Health.
- Prioritisation of frontline retail workers for vaccination
- Enforcement of regulations re essential retailers selling non-essential items
- Workplace antigen testing for COVID-19
- Online Retail Scheme
- Cross border Retail
- The postponement of the opening date for personal services will drive the black market.
- The name of the new Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID (SBASC) is misleading as it says 'Small' and is open to businesses with up to 250 employees. Under the SME definition 'small' is a business that has fewer than 50 employees.
- Additional measures regarding Rent – Code of Conduct.
- Local Authority Rates

The Chair advised Forum members:

- Current decisions are made based public health advice; no guarantees can be given regarding a re-opening date.
- The Department is engaging regularly with the Department of the Taoiseach. Comments from Forum members are relayed to the Department of the Taoiseach
- Click and collect / appointment shopping is being considered. The Government's focus is that when retail is reopened, it stays open. However, data will determine the decisions taken by Government.
- The Chair is aware that some essential retailers are not making arrangements for the separation of essential and non-essential items. He urged those not complying to comply to the regulations.
- NPHET are due to publish a report regarding antigen testing for COVID-19. The Chair hopes that this will be available for the next meeting of the retail roundtable.
- The Chair is aware of issues affecting retailers regarding non-compliance of individuals not wearing face coverings. Working to resolve this issue.
- There has been some engagement with institutional landlords on rent. No update to report.
- Local Authority Rates are dealt with by quarter by quarter. DPER and Department of Finance are looking at supports linked with the Recovery Plan. If any update is available the Chair will provide this at the next meeting.
- The Chair said that there is €10m available for two rounds of the Online Retail scheme and there will be a few changes to the scheme for the next call to ensure that more businesses can access the scheme. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment advised Forum members that the next call of the Online Retail Scheme will be launched shortly. The Department added that businesses who are considering applying for this scheme need to make preparations in advance of the next call as funding needs to be drawn down by the end of 2021.
- The Chair agreed to meet a focussed group of non-essential retailers, following the next retail roundtable meeting.

The Minister thanked the presenters for participating in the meeting. He also thanked Retail Forum members for their engagement.

Appendix 1 – Attendance List

| Company | First Name | Last Name | Title |
|--|-------------------|------------------|--|
| RGDATA | Tara | Buckley | Director General |
| CSNA | Vincent | Jennings | CEO |
| Hardware Association of Ireland | Jim | Copeland | Head of Member Relations |
| Retail Excellence | Duncan | Graham | Managing Director |
| Retail Ireland | Arnold | Dillon | Director |
| Retail Ireland | Brian | Donaldson | Chairman |
| Small Firms Association | Elizabeth | Bowen | SFA Senior Executive |
| Irish Pharmacy Union | Jim | Curran | Director of Communications |
| Chambers Ireland | James | Kiernan | Director of Relationship Management |
| ISME | Neil | McDonnell | Chief Executive |
| Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) | Gerry | Light | General Secretary (MANDATE) |
| Retail Ireland Skillnet | Sean | Carlin | |
| Dublin Town (BID) | Richard | Guiney | CEO |
| Musgrave | Edel | Clancy | Director of Communications & Corporate Affairs |
| Ecco Ireland | Keith | Rogers | Head of Retail |
| Fishers of Newtownmountkennedy | Rebecca | Harrison | Director |
| Primark | Lorraine | Culligan | Group Director of People and Culture |
| Primark | Emma | Ormond | Head of Government Affairs |
| Technological University Dublin | John | Jameson | Head of Retail School |
| Technological University Dublin | Damian | O'Reilly | Senior Lecturer - Retail Management |
| D/Taoiseach | Pamela | Malone | Economic Policy |
| D/Taoiseach | Tanya | Ganly | Economic Policy |
| D/Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media | Sean | O'Connor | Tourism Policy and Marketing Division |
| D/Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands | Cassandra | Hinchy | |

Presenters

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|------------------------------------|---------|---------|--|
| Retail Ireland Skillnet (Ibec) | Róisín | Woods | E-learning and Communications Manager - Apprenticeship in Retail Supervision |
| Retail Ireland Skillnet (Ibec) | Dr Oran | Doherty | |
| Sustainability Works | Aideen | O'Hora | |
| Sustainability Works | Karen | Deignan | |
| Sustainability Works | Laura | Heuston | |
| D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment | Maedhbh | Cronin | PO, Retail and Sector Transformation Policy Unit |

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

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| D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment | Declan | Hughes | Assistant Secretary |
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