

MINUTES
23rd Meeting of the Retail Forum
Via videoconference
9th June 2021
10.30am – 12 Noon (via video / tele conference)

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 Chairperson welcomed those in attendance and thanked members for their continued support of the national effort through this unprecedented public health crisis.

The Chair asked retailers to continue to review their work safely protocols and their compliance with national health guidelines.

The Chair highlighted the range of Government supports available to employees and businesses including the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), the COVID Restrictions Support Scheme (CRSS) and Commercial Rates Waiver. The Minister also highlighted the National Economic Recovery Plan, which launched on 1 June, and includes funding under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP).

The draft Minutes of the Retail Forum meeting of 11th March 2021 were circulated to Retail Forum Members prior to the meeting and approved under the silence procedure. The Minutes have been published on enterprise.gov.ie and gov.ie websites.

2. Retail Technology and Skills

The Chair called on Mr Thomas McEvoy, Head of Enterprise from the Local Enterprise Office Louth to provide a presentation on their *Superior Retailing Programme*.

The *Superior Retailing Programme 2021* is a detailed management skills development programme for owners and managers of small Retail and Service Sector businesses in Cavan, Monaghan and Louth. The Programme assists participating businesses build management skills and develop a plan for business recovery and growth to address issues arising from Brexit and COVID-19.

The Chair thanked Mr Thomas McEvoy for the presentation.

Comments arising:

- The need for retail businesses to focus on the financial aspect of their business.
- Retail Ireland Skillnet's *Retail Math Fundamentals* training course was highlighted.

Action

The presentation will be circulated to Forum members
 Information regarding Retail Ireland Skillnet's Retail Math Fundamentals training course to be circulated to Retail Forum members.

[Presentation and information circulated to Retail Forum members]

3. Retail and the Green Economy

The Chair called on Mr Andrew Moloney, Climate Action and Infrastructure Unit in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), to provide a presentation on *The Retail Sector and the transition to a low-carbon economy*.

The presentation focused on

- the Climate Action Plan 2019.
- Climate Action Bill 2020. The Climate Bill sets out the targets to achieve a climate neutral economy by no later than 2050. The Retail sector and all business will be required to reduce their carbon emissions.
- EU and international climate goals.
- Supply Chain - The retail sector is the conduit between producers/manufacturers and consumers, and the transition to a low-carbon economy will require the sector to be resilient and articulate a strategy for a low / no carbon future.
- Climate Toolkit 4 Business – The toolkit is currently under development and will assist enterprises to bridge the knowledge gap by:
 - calculating their carbon footprint – energy, waste, water, travel;
 - provide a series of relevant actions companies can take & formulate a tailored Climate Action Plan. and
 - direct them to advice and supports available from the IDA, Enterprise Ireland, SEAI, Irish Water, EPA and others.

The Chair thanked Mr Andrew Moloney for the presentation.

Comments arising:

- Businesses are fully supportive of the ambitious 2030 / 2050 targets.
- Retailers can support upstream and downstream.
- Supports needed to overcome challenges.
- Request that eligibility and useability of existing Schemes be examined.
- Potential issues re differences in approach between landlord / shop tenants re implementing environmental / sustainable improvements.
- Consumer research suggests customers want to use sustainable transport options; retailers need to support this.
- Examine options for shared delivery services in towns / cities to help reduce emissions.
- Gen-Z are very environmentally conscious.
- Need to address plastic waste.

- Good opportunities for the sector.
- Encourage consumers to shop local / shop locally online to help reduce emissions / packaging.
- Consider rewilding / pollinator plans / planting on streets for towns and cities, working with the Local Authorities.
- Every accountant should be reminded/made aware of Accelerated Capital Allowances for equipment that reduces energy usage.
- LEO Louth offered to circulate the *Climate Toolkit 4 Business*.

DETE to follow up with Retail Forum Members on points raised and, in relation to the circulation of the *Climate Toolkit 4 Business* when it is published.

Action

The presentation will be circulated to Forum members.

[Presentation circulated to Retail Forum members]

4. Government Initiatives

The Chair called upon Mr Martin Colreavy, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to provide an update on the *Town Centre First initiative*.

A Town Centre First (TCF) Inter-Departmental Group has been established to consider the regeneration of towns and villages. Both the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Rural and Community Development are currently co-chairing this joint approach which is making progress towards a TCF Framework. The Group will provide recommendations for consideration by Government in the coming months and it is envisaged that recommendations will cover the short, medium and longer-term out to 2040, to align with Project Ireland 2040. DETE are members of the Group.

The Chair thanked Mr Martin Colreavy for the presentation.

Comments arising:

- Town Centre First initiative is a comprehensive co-ordinated initiative.
- Inter-Departmental approach is welcome.
- Crucial to get commercial and local buy in to drive the initiative forward.
- Need for the framework to be tailored to the townland.
- Local Authorities each have different levels of skills / expertise. Need to have national co-ordination to standardise success.
- Importance of data for Town Managers to support town development – metrics on commercial rates, zoned land etc. Matching data to solutions.
- Large cities also need attention. Possible co-ordination between the five large cities.
- Huge scope for Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to be involved in regeneration.
- Aligning BIDs to Local Authority Development Plans.
- The need for living cities – use underutilised / derelict spaces.

- The need to integrate digitalisation and the in-person experience.
- Brilliant opportunity coming out of COVID-19 in relation to what can be done to support towns.
- High vacancy rates are a big issue.
- Alternative uses for retail spaces need to be considered – social, community and cultural based activities.
- Concerns raised about retail in 2022, following the initial surge of pent-up demand after reopening.

Mr Martin Colreavy welcomed the comments and outlined how the initiative will give towns the tools and investments to enable them to achieve their goals.

5. AOB

Comments arising:

- The redeployment of unvaccinated workers as vaccinated and un-vaccinated workers return to their place of work.
- The Chair highlighted the Statutory Sick Pay Scheme and advised that the scheme will be implemented on a gradual basis, starting in 2022.
- The Chair thanked Mr. Brian Donaldson, Chair of Retail Ireland and CEO of the Maxol Group for his service to the Retail Forum.

The Chair thanked the presenters for participating in the meeting and Retail Forum members for their engagement.

The next Retail Forum meeting is scheduled for **16th September 2021**.

Appendix 1 – Attendance and Apologies List

Company	First Name	Last Name	Title
Chambers Ireland	James	Kiernan	Director of Relationship Management
Chambers Ireland	Shane	Conneely	Head of Research
CSNA	Vincent	Jennings	CEO
D/Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands	Cassandra	Hinchy	
D/Taoiseach	Tanya	Ganly	Economic Policy
D/Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Sean	O'Connor	Tourism Policy and Marketing Division
Dublin Town (BID)	Richard	Guiney	CEO
Ecco Ireland	Keith	Rogers	Head of Retail
Fishers of Newtownmountkennedy	Rebecca	Harrison	Director
Hardware Association of Ireland	Martin	Markey	CEO
Irish SME Association	Finbarr	Filan	
Musgrave	Edel	Clancy	Director of Communications & Corporate Affairs
Primark	Emma	Ormond	Head of Government Affairs
Retail Excellence	Duncan	Graham	Managing Director
Retail Ireland	Arnold	Dillon	Director
Retail Ireland Skillnet	Sean	Carlin	Network Manager
RGDATA	Tara	Buckley	Director General
Small Firms Association	Stephen	Browne	SFA Senior Executive
Technological University Dublin	Damian	O'Reilly	Senior Lecturer - Retail Management

Presenters:

D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Andrew	Moloney	Assistant Principal Officer, Climate Action and Economic
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Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Martin	Colreavy	Senior Advisor, Head of Urban Policy, Capital Investment and Regeneration, National, Regional
Louth County Council	Thomas	McEvoy	Head of Enterprise, Local Enterprise Office, Louth County
Louth County Council	Peter	McGrane	Business Adviser, LEO Louth

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment:

D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Declan	Hughes	Assistant Secretary
D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Maedhbh	Cronin	Principal Officer, Retail and Sector Transformation Policy
D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Sandra	Mullen	Acting AP (Acting Secretary to Retail Forum)
D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Mary	Cullen	Assistant Principal, Sector Transformation Policy Section
D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Stephen	Foley	Special Advisor Minister English's Office
D/Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Niamh	Martin	HEO

Apologies:

Irish SME Association	Neil	McDonnell	Chief Executive
Waterford City and Co. Council (Local Government Management Agency Rep)	Michael	Quinn	Director of Service
Irish Pharmacy Union	Jim	Curran	Director of Communications