

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON SMALL SHOPS

Minutes of the meeting held at 8.30am on 15th October 2013 at Ty Hywel

PRESENT:

Janet Finch-Saunders AM (JFS)	Chair
Elin Jones AM (EJ)	Cross Party Group Member
Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM (RGT)	
Eluned Parrott AM (EP)	
Russell George AM (RG)	
Simon Stranks (SS)	Janet Finch-Saunders AM
Mair Roberts (MRR)	Secretary
Shane Brennan (SB)	ACS
Laura Doel (LD)	Alun Davies AM
Phil Bale (PB)	Julie Morgan AM
Alexander Phillips (AP)	William Powell AM
Mark Roberts (MR)	The Co-operative Group
David Yates (DY)	Blakemore
Janet Read (JR)	National Skills Academy for Retail
Sophie Traherne (ST)	Conservative Group Office

1.APOLOGIES

Keith Davies AM

2.INTRODUCTION

JFS welcomed attendees to the first meeting of the Cross Party Group (CPG) and outlined its importance in raising and influencing on policy issues that could have an impact on small shops and highlighted the sector as a key component to the Welsh economy. JFS also provided an outline of her long-established career in the independent retail sector.

3.PRESENTATION FROM SHANE BRENNAN, ACS

SB from the Association of Convenience Stores gave a presentation on the contribution made by the convenience store sector to the Welsh economy, which included figures on the number of stores and jobs in the sector in Wales. He also explained ACS' collaboration with the Independent Retailers' Confederation (IRC), who he hoped will also be able to participate in the CPG's activities.

SB's presentation was followed by a proposal of what policy topics should be discussed by the Group in future meetings, including: property costs, parking and planning issues.

Welsh Language

Following the presentation, JFS asked SB about the number of convenience store owners and employees spoke Welsh. SB answered that 27% of convenience store owners in Wales spoke Welsh. MR informed the CPG of the Co-Operative Group's work with the Welsh Language Commission to provide employees with a Welsh language toolkit.

Cash Machines

RGT raised concerns about ATM machines that charge customers, particularly in deprived areas. MR and SB assured the Group that retailers generally do not wish to charge customers for the use of ATM machines.

Parking

The Group discussed the benefits and disadvantages of parking enforcement and provision. EJ highlighted the success that a parking enforcement scheme has had in Aberystwyth and warned that a 'free for all' in parking provision might not necessarily be the best way for customers to be able to access local shops. SB spoke about the Association of Town and City Management's work on parking in town centres, and suggested that this organisation could participate in the CPG's future meetings.

Planning

LD expressed her concerns about supermarkets who gain planning permission for large edge-of-town and out-of-town developments on the basis that employment opportunities will be created but that have no intention of creating a store on that site, citing examples from Blaenau Gwent.

Following the discussion, it was **AGREED** that ACS would distribute SB's presentation to the CPG.

4. SKILLS

JR outlined the National Skills Academy for Retail's 'Thriving High Street' campaign in conjunction with the Welsh Government to encourage retailers to improve their skills. She explained that it was difficult to encourage retailers to participate in the scheme.

EP asked JR what she thought the barriers were for retailers to take up the training provided. JR said that reasons included a lack of time, not having enough staff in store, and unfamiliarity with up-skilling. JR highlighted that retailers were more likely to respond to testimonies from other retailers of the benefits of the scheme than to the Academy.

6. PRIORITIES FOR THE GROUP

Future topics CPG meetings were discussed and **AGREED**. These topics included:

- Best Practice Examples from retailers
- Planning
- Skills
- Small Business Saturday