

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON SMALL SHOPS

Minutes of the meeting held at 11:30am on 2nd April 2014 at Ty Hywel

PRESENT:

Janet Finch-Saunders AM (JFS)	Chair
Keith Davies AM (KD)	Member
Russell George AM (RG)	
Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM (RGT)	
Edward Woodall (EW)	ACS
Rosemary Thomas (RT)	Welsh Government
Jon Fudge (JF)	Welsh Government
Mair Roberts (MRR)	Secretary
Rhodri Evans (RE)	FSB Wales
Ian Hunt	Filco Supermarkets
Mark Roberts (MR)	The Co-operative Group
Emma Sands (ES)	Conservative Group Office
Craig Lawson (CL)	Suzy Davies AM
Sophie Traherne (ST)	Conservative Group Office

1.INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed attendees to the third meeting of the Cross Party Group (CPG) and introduced RT and JF who would present on the forthcoming Planning Bill and on the retail and town centre aspects of Planning Policy Wales.

2.PRESENTATIONS FROM WELSH GOVERNMENT PLANNING DIVISION

RT and JF from Welsh Government's Planning Division gave presentations on the forthcoming Planning Bill and on aspects of Planning Policy Wales that are relevant to the CPG.

RT started the presentation through outlining the Welsh Government's priorities for planning through the Planning Bill, and highlighted its intention to achieve a consistent framework in Wales. She stated that the bill would be introduced later in 2014, with the aim for it to receive Royal Assent in 2015 and for changes in delivery structures to be in force from 2016.

JF then discussed Planning Policy Wales, with specific reference to consideration for retail and businesses located within town centres. He highlighted that Planning Policy Wales had been updated according to needs on a regular basis since its introduction in 2002. He spoke of Local Development Plans, and said that more than 60% of Welsh local authorities now have their own plan.

JF also shared with the group the research currently being conducted with the University of Southampton on reviewing the Planning Policy, which is due to be published before Easter 2014. This research will include policies on how best to protect town centres.

He highlighted the importance of retailers' engagement with local authorities and other stakeholders to develop effective partnerships and local solutions.

Discussion

Following the presentation, a number of issues arising from it were discussed:

Larger Retailers' Advantage in Engaging with the Planning Process

JFS raised concerns that larger retailers and supermarkets had more resources to engage with local planning authorities. Other members of the Group also raised concerns that larger retailers might have access to the expertise of consultants in order to assist them with planning applications; an option that is often not available to smaller retailers. It was also suggested that sometimes local authorities do not have the expertise to fight against out-of-town developments submitted by larger stores.

Implications of Lowering the Number of Local Authorities

JFS asked whether the Planning Bill would be effective if it were decided in the near future that the number of local authorities in Wales was reduced. RT and JF indicated that the Planning Bill will be future-proofed and will be effective no matter how many councils there will be in Wales in future.

Application of Town Centre Policies

EW expressed concerns that the town centre first policy in English planning policy had not been effective to date in deterring out of town developments in England. JF highlighted Welsh Government's commitment to town centres through the Vibrant and Viable places campaign.

IH also highlighted the difficulty for local businesses to reinvent their local high streets because of the lack of funding currently available for regeneration initiatives.

Next Steps

It was **AGREED** that RT and JF's presentation would be circulated among members of the Group.

It was also **AGREED** that the Group will write to the Environment and Sustainability Committee on planning issues pertinent to small shops as part of its scrutiny of the Planning Bill.

The meeting was closed by JFS.