

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON SMALL SHOPS

Minutes of the meeting held at 11:00am on 20th January 2016

Ty Hywel, Conference Room 24

PRESENT:

Janet Finch-Saunders AM (JFS)	Chair
Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM (LHG)	Member
Jenny Rathbone AM (JR)	Member
Hannah Moscrop (HM)	Janet Finch Saunders' AM Office
Edward Woodall (EW)	ACS
Steve Dowling (SD)	ACS
Adrian Roper (AR)	NFRN
Michael Weedon (MW)	BIRA
Rhodri Evans (RE)	FSB Wales

1. Welcome and Introductions

JFS welcomed attendees to the first meeting in 2016 of the Cross Party Group (CPG) and invited introductions. LHG is a Plaid Cymru AM for the North Wales region and JR is Labour AM for Cardiff Central. AR is Head of Public Affairs and Communications at the National Federation of Retail Newsagents (NFRN); Michael Weedon is Deputy CEO and Communications Director at the British Independent Retailers' Association (BIRA); and Rhodri Evans is Senior Communications Advisor at Federation of Small Businesses Wales (FSB Wales). From the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS), Edward Woodall is Head of Policy and Public Affairs; and Steve Dowling is Public Affairs Assistant.

2. Election of Officers

JFS was re-elected as chairperson of the CPG on Small Shops by LHG and JR. JR and LHG were both elected as new members of the Group by JFS. ACS were re-elected to provide the secretariat for the group. JFS commended ACS on their proactivity in organising the group's work during 2015.

3. Programme of Activity for 2016

EW stated that the CPG would host a hard launch of the Welsh Local Shop Report to raise awareness of local shops to Welsh policy makers and encourage engagement and publicity. An Assembly reception will be organised to gather AMs and retailers together. The CPG will be proactive in its response to issues that arise throughout the year on the political and small shop agenda.

4. Terms of Reference – Economic Development Group for High Streets

Edwina Hart AM, Minister for Business, Enterprise, Technology & Science, has accepted the CPG's plan to produce guidance documentation for use by local authorities in supporting their high streets. EW said the project would involve participation from a range of trade associations and report its findings and recommendations to the Minister prior to their publication.

5. Work Plan

EW outlined the importance of supporting the high street and its role as the economic centre of commerce in local communities. EW noted that Planning Policy Wales Chapter 10 is a strong document in highlighting the value of town centres, but that strong policy has not always led to effective local authority action. MW said that the Group must be aware of trends in the retail market. Specifically, out-of-town food retail is in decline, while non-food out-of-town retailers are thriving. The desire for convenience is a trend as well as the rise of discounters in dense population centres.

JFS noted the difference between high streets in coastal, rural and city communities. It was **AGREED** that this would be reflected in the resulting guidance. The Rural Shops Alliance will be contacted to be given the opportunity to provide insight to the Group. RE noted that a successful high street needs to achieve critical mass and a diverse retail offer. MW said that retailers are increasingly seeing their bank overdrafts cut or withdrawn, in correlation with the closure of many local banks. It was **AGREED** that the group would incorporate the banking sector through the 'Campaign for Community Banking Services'.

EW said that the group will audit existing work on high streets from which to start to frame a single Welsh-specific high streets document. JR said that the group should look into the 'Wales We Want' work of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. RE noted that the CPG must work alongside the Welsh Government's 'Vibrant, Viable Places' framework to avoid duplication of output. JFS commented that a recent Business Rates Panel chaired by Chris Sutton AM and attended by Edwina Hart AM may provide information on the effectiveness of current business rates administration in Wales.

EW asked attendees what areas the report should focus on. MW noted that property taxes, planning and parking could be three areas of emphasis. MW and BIRA **AGREED** to contribute their statistics and information on parking to help identify trends. It was **AGREED** that the guidance documentation would change one headline area of focus from 'parking' to 'access' to acknowledge the importance of public transport and road networks to a successful high street.

RE enquired about timeframes for the Economic Development Group for High Streets' guidance documentation. EW responded that the CPG aims to have it published prior to purdah in order to put high streets on the agenda fresh for action following the May elections. It was **AGREED** that this deadline would require proactivity from all parties present. It was **AGREED** that ACS would circulate a quarterly briefing to identified AMs and partners to increase engagement and awareness of the group's work. JFS raised the value of social media. It was decided that social media platforms may be established dependent on the success of the briefings.

6. Actions and Next Steps

EW stated that ACS will collate the stakeholder map and lead on the planning and parking sections of the guidance. It was **AGREED** that the BIRA would compile the business rates section of the guidance document. FSB Wales will work alongside ACS on the partnership working section. JFS encouraged attendees to send questions for Welsh Ministers to her office to be submitted to support the group's work. JFS raised the value in encouraging cross-portfolio ministerial engagement. It was **AGREED** that ACS would draft letters detailing the upcoming work of the group for JFS to send to Ministers.

7. Any Other Business

N/A.

8. Close

JFS thanked those in attendance and closed the meeting.