

Cross-Party Group on Small Shops: The Small Shop Senedd Briefing

Wednesday 8th December 2021, 12:30 – 13:30: Zoom (Online)

MINUTES

PRESENT:

First	Surname	Organisation
Janet	Finch-Saunders	Conservative MS for Aberconwy
Russell	George	Conservative MS for Montgomeryshire
Vikki	Howells	Labour MS for Cynon Valley
Sioned	Williams	Plaid Cymru MS for South Wales West
Tabitha	Walker	Actsmart
Steve	Dowling	Association of Convenience Stores
Ed	Woodall	Association of Convenience Stores
Helen	Cunningham	Bevan Foundation
Meryl	Halls	Booksellers Association
Andrew	Goodacre	British Independent Retailers Association
Molly	Baker	Chambers Wales
Robin	Osterley	Charity Retail Association
Edward	Hiller	Mostyn Estates
Adrian	Roper	National Federation of Retail Newsagents
Sophy	Walker	National Federation of Retail Newsagents
Mark	Coray	National Hair & Beauty Federation
Rosina	Robson	National Hair & Beauty Federation

1. Welcome and Introductions

Vikki Howells MS opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and describing the current impact of Covid-19 on small shops in her Cynon Valley constituency.

She asked attendees to thank Janet Finch-Saunders MS for her many years of leading the CPG and representing the interests of small shops in the Senedd.

She outlined the agenda for the meeting and her hopes for the group to build on its prior activities to hold Welsh Government Ministers to account on issues for small shops and the Supporting Entrepreneurship Inquiry.

2. Nomination and Election of Officers

Russell George MS and Janet-Finch Saunders MS nominated Vikki Howells MS for election as Chair of the CPG on Small Shops. Vikki was elected unopposed.

Janet-Finch Saunders MS and Vikki Howells MS nominated Russell George MS for election as Vice-Chair of the CPG on Small Shops. Russell was elected unopposed.

Vikki Howells MS and Janet Finch Saunders MS nominated the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) to continue as secretariat to the group. ACS were elected unopposed.

The following MS' were confirmed as members of the CPG; Sioned Williams, Janet Finch-Saunders, Mark Isherwood, Tom Giffard, Samuel Kurtz, Llyr Gruffydd and James Evans.

3. The Senedd Briefing: Covid-19 Recovery, Regulatory Challenges & Policy Needs

Ed Woodall presented a policy update for attendees. The presentation outlined research on consumer attitudes to Christmas shopping and city centre recovery in terms of footfall and spend. Consumers in Wales are least likely to stockpile compared to other UK nations and regions. The labour market is increasingly challenging for retailers to recruit in due to increase wage costs.

Ed detailed why the Welsh Government should reform business rates to incentivise investment as a spur to economic growth. Ed suggested this should be done by retaining business rates as a property-based tax but rebalancing the burden of rates between bricks and mortar and online retail and enhancing Small Business Relief.

He also outlined forthcoming regulatory challenges including restrictions on the location and promotion of less healthy grocery products, the implementation of a deposit return scheme for drinks containers, and delivering a just transition to net zero business.

Edward Hillier commented on the need for retail and hospitality businesses to create more captivating experiences for consumers and for the Welsh Government to provide clarity on business rates bills from April 2022 to support business planning.

4. The Senedd Briefing: Panel

Vikki Howells MS invited Meryl Halls (Booksellers Association) and Andrew Goodacre (British Independent Retailers Association) to join Ed and form a panel session.

Meryl began by outlining how boosting the vitality of high streets required supporting businesses to innovate to deliver 'dwellable' places. Bookshops have performed better than the average for the high streets where they trade in terms of dwell-time for several years, acting as a footfall driver more than benefitting from passing footfall.

Andrew commented that the pandemic has caused a resurgence in local shopping but called for more practical resources from the Welsh Government to support smaller shops to cut their emissions.

Russell George MS asked the panel for their views on Covid-19 passes and retail. The panel outlined how mandating Covid-19 passes for small retail would not be workable, by requiring additional labour to check passes at a time when many stores are short-staffed. It was **AGREED** that the CPG would write to the Minister to highlight the positive work of retailers to maintain covid-secure shopping environments.

Rosina Robson from the National Hair & Beauty Federation outlined how members are more muted about growth in the coming months.

5. Chair's Closing Remarks

Vikki Howells MS thanked panellists, contributors and everyone for attending, before closing the meeting.