Cross-Party Group on Independent Convenience Stores [draft]
Online – MS Teams
1pm, Thursday 5th February 2026
Minute

Present

MSPs

Gordon Macdonald MSP (Convener)
John Mason MSP

Invited Guests

Jim Wilson - Head of Licensing and Dog Control Team, Justice Directorate, Scottish Government (speaker)
Simon Hannah - Chief Executive, JW Filshill (speaker)
Agis Baltagiannis - Senior Director, Asia Pacific Data & AI at SAP Software Solutions (speaker)

Brian Eagle-Brown – ShopMate
Christopher Bell - SCOTSS
Darren Moir – Westhill Service Station
Kev Widdrington – World of Sweets
Kevin Murray – Golden Casket
Martin Ward – Christie&Co
Paul McIntosh – ShopMate
Peter Fisher - Asel
Ricardo Mhlongo – University of Stirling
Zoe Stephens – KP Snacks

Non-MSP Group Members

Luke McGarty, Scottish Grocers' Federation (SGF) (CPG Secretary)

Aidan Smith – Scottish Grocers' Federation
Antony Begley – Scottish Local Retailer
Craig Brown - Filshill

Craig Lynn – CJ Lang
George Maglaras – University of Stirling
Graham Murdoch - CJ Lang
Gilian Edgar - Healthy Living Programme
Jamie Buchanan – Scottish Grocers' Federation
Jamie Mackie - Scottish Grocers' Federation
Jayne Swanson – Scottish Wholesale Association
John Lucas – Bobby's
Kathryn Neil - Healthy Living Programme
Maria Rybaczewska – University of Stirling
Martin Devlin – PGMA
Mike Leonard - Costcutter
Natalie Lightfoot – Retailer
Pauline Mullen – Scottish Grocers' Federation
Dr Pete Cheema OBE – Scottish Grocers' Federation –
Sarah Britton – Scottish Local Retailer

Apologies

Gordon Macdonald MSP (Convener) noted that apologies had been received from Murdo Fraser MSP (Deputy Convener), Jackie Baillie MSP and Rachael Hamilton MSP.

Welcome and Introductions

Gordon Macdonald MSP (Convener) welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Approval of Minutes and Action Points

Gordon Macdonald MSP (Convener) asked for the approval of the previous minutes of the meeting of 11th November 2025. These were approved.

Note on final CPG meeting in Parliamentary Session

Dr Pete Cheema OBE thanked the Convener, Deputy Conveners, Members and Non-MSP Members for their continued engagement with the Cross-Party Group throughout the session.

Topic: Digital Innovation & AI in Convenience Retail

The meeting considered how retailers are using technology to improve their businesses, and how developments in this area may shape the future of retail. We have an expert panel of speakers to discuss these key issues.

Jim Wilson - Head of Licensing and Dog Control Team, Justice Directorate, Scottish Government – Noted the opportunities for economic growth in Scotland which AI represents and potential risks of digitisation to the workforce. The Scottish Government's Programme for Government has announced the launch of AI Scotland. A national transformation programme driven by collaboration with business, academics and public agencies aimed at small and medium business. Building on the 2021 AI strategy and engagement with the Scottish Technology Council. A key work stream is how to secure verified and reusable digital identity. Scottish Government is aware that the growing use of digital identity is applicable across the wider economy, particularly in retail.

Simon Hannah - Chief Executive, JW Filshill – Noted the importance of early adoption for individual businesses and the wider retail sector. AI in business about a culture shift towards digitization, rather than an IT project. Utilising those who are passionate about AI, finding effective uses for it, and being willing to teach others about the potential benefits. However, it is essential to learn how to correctly use the tool to achieve the best results and isn't necessarily going to be useful without thought and practice. Uses include data analytics, aligning productivity around EPOS sales, understanding what time of day to fill shelves, streamlining shift patterns, analysing management accounts in terms of margin, cash flow, CapEx. Explore what other areas can be improved, how to build a revenue per square metre formula into systems, and cost savings in terms of productivity. Also aligning with wholesale partners on delivery window accuracy. A recent survey by CI&T of over 2000 shoppers in UK and Ireland, 61% of shoppers have used AI when shopping, 53% do it often, 63% use it to save time, 61% use it to get better prices. However, 68% of those respondents couldn't name a single retailer that was delivering A memorable AI experience.

Agis Baltagiannis - Senior Director, Asia Pacific Data & AI at SAP Software Solutions – Machine learning algorithms and models can optimise the location of stores, to optimise the experience retailers are giving. AI can run loyalty, card, direct marketing campaigns, or promotions. This includes an out-of-stock analysis and ways to differentiate pricing of products. So, traditional machine learning algorithms and statistics should focus on these three areas, focusing on products, stores, and consumers. Offering a very personalised experience to customers, improving sales. Now called Applied AI. However, it is also important to keep the human experience, while using technology and AI to offer better services. Authentic AI and AI capabilities are expected to increase productivity by 30 to 40 percent by combining AI technology with automation - hyper-automation.

Questions and Answers

Gordon Macdonald MSP (Convener) was required to leave. John Mason MSP acted as Convener for the remainder of the meeting.

Following the three presentations there was general discussion and questions from a range of those present. Some of the points made were:

- Many retailers are facing pressures, whether it's the national insurance hike, minimum wage, non-domestic rates or food inflation. So, may have limited resources to invest in AI.
- Concern around the skill set, in particular amongst smaller retailers which have limited resources. There is a need to understand what this might mean in terms of cost outlay going forward.
- Potential to create new systems that effectively work in convenience stores, especially staff training related to all the licensing for example.
- Concerns were raised about data and if that's going to be properly protected. Particularly regarding visual technology. Including age verification and age restricted products.
- There are also benefits in regard to retail crime. Specifically improved identification of behaviours and CCTV.

John Mason MSP thanked all the speakers for their presentations and attendees for their participation.

Action Points

There were no action points from the meeting.

Any Other Business

John Mason MSP confirmed that there was no other business.

Date of Next Meeting

John Mason MSP confirmed that this is the final meeting of the Cross-Party Group of the session, and the intention is to restart the group following the Scottish General Election on 7th May 2026.