

Cross-Party Group on Independent Convenience Stores

6pm, Tuesday 28th February 2023
Minute

Present

MSPs

Gordon MacDonald MSP (Convener)
Daniel Johnson MSP (Vice Convener)
Murdo Fraser MSP
Sharon Dowey MSP
Douglas Lumsden MSP

Invited Guests

Amanda Gordon, Office of Gordon Macdonald MSP
Stephen McGowan, TLT solicitors
Jim Wilson, Scottish Government Licencing
Graham Watson, Watson's Licensed Grocers
Seonag Mackinnon, NFRN
Andy Kenny, BP Oil UK
Joe Meaden, Portman Group
Daisy Thomson, Dram Communications Ltd

Non-MSP Group Members

Luke McGarty (CPG Secretary), Scottish Grocers' Federation
Jamie Mackie, Scottish Grocers' Federation
Martin Devlin, PGMA
Sophie Williams, Broadway Convenience Stores
Denis Williams, Broadway Convenience Stores
James Harper, OneOOneRetail
Graham Thomson, OneOOneRetail
Abdul Majid, Baba's Kitchen/Costcutter
Mark Spalding, CJLang

Apologies

The Convener noted that apologies had been received from Jackie Ballie MSP and Foyso Choudry MSP.

Welcome and Introductions

Gordon MacDonald MSP (Convener) welcomed attendees to the meeting including Daniel Johnson MSP (Vice Convener), Murdo Fraser MSP, Sharon Dowey MSP, Douglas Lumsden MSP, who were also in attendance.

Approval of Minutes and Action Points

The Convener (Gordon MacDonald MSP) asked for the approval of the previous minutes from the 16 March 2022 meeting. These were approved.

Topic: Restriction of Alcohol Advertising and Promotion in Scotland (Consultation)

Sophie Williams

Family business, Broadway Stores, Edinburgh. The store will soon be celebrating 40 years in operation. Sophie is passionate about serving her local community and providing high quality retail. During the pandemic, the store was vital in supporting their local customers and in particular assisting vulnerable people in the community.

Sophie outlined the concerns for retailers with the proposed restrictions. Retailers would face by significant outfitting costs, alongside logistical issues and many other challenges faced by the sector. This would have implications on business viability and may pass increase costs on to customers during a cost-of-living crisis. The initial cost of implementing measure could be approximately £10,000 to £30,000 per store.

Stephen McGowan

Leading expert in Alcohol regulation and licensing, recognised at the highest levels of trade, local authority, and Government. He has chaired and sat on numerous Scottish Government working groups on licensing reform. Stephen is also a recognised leading author for Scottish licensing law.

Stephen highlighted that retailers would require approximately 5,500 variations being lodged with Local Authorities in the process of converting retailers and off-licensing premises. Noting a considerable burden on local authority staff and retailers.

Stephen also noted the impact on display of alcohol in windows, and in particular specialist retailers who may have to black out windows. Including the potential impact on staff safety and anti-social behaviour. He called on MSPs to consider the impact of restrictions on smaller shops and retailers.

Question and Answer

Following the two presentations there was discussion and questions from a range of those present.

Some of the points made were:

- The First Minister confirmed that whisky tourism locations would not be impacted by the restrictions.
- The proposals appear to be a 'silo/one sided view' and do not highlight the benefits of retail in a community, or the significant challenge of numerous regulations effecting retail.
- More post legislative scrutiny of the impact of regulation would be helpful for limiting negative impact on retail.
- The 'constant flow' of new regulation limits the time MSPs have for post legislative scrutiny.
- The Scottish Government has an obligation to meet World Health Organisation targets.
- There are questions for the Scottish Government on what the restrictions are trying to achieve.
- It was noted that local stores have a unique connection to customers and the community and that they 'are not part of the problem they are part of the solution'. Convenience operators are at the heart of their communities and customers are 'part of a family'.
- The legislative burden is falling disproportionately on retailers.
- It would be helpful to distinguish between product and the causes of over consumption, such as deprivation.
- There is a distinction between the large stores and smaller ones which depend more on alcohol products for business viability.
- There is already significant regulation on alcohol presentation and promotion within stores.
- The consultation proposes a wider set of restrictions than measures in other countries, such as depersonalisation of products. For example, the Irish version is not as comprehensive.
- These measures would target all consumers, not just vulnerable people or those who consume more than recommended.
- The most significant impact on younger generation is online advertising.

The Convener thanked all the speakers for their presentations and attendees for their participation.

Action Points

- Explore the possibility of asking retailers to invite their local MSP to visit their store.

- The Convener to find out whether smaller retailers may be exempt from restrictions.

Any Other Business

The Convener confirmed that there was no other business.

Date of Next Meeting

The Convener confirmed that the next Cross Party Group meeting would take place at 6pm on Wednesday 14th June. A decision would be taken in due course as to whether it would be held virtually or in-person.