

Scottish Parliament Cross Party on Independent Convenience Stores
Minute of meeting held on 20th September 2017 in Committee Room 5
(as approved on 28th November)

The meeting began at 6pm

(In the absence of the Conveyor, Gordon MacDonald MSP, the meeting was chaired by Richard Lyle MSP).

The chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and asked for approval of the previous minutes. These were approved.

The chair outlined the main items of business: presentations from Professor Leigh Sparks of Stirling University and from Kathryn Neil, Development Manager with the SGF Healthy Living Program. The chair invited John Lee of SGF to provide some overall context and to introduce the first speaker.

John Lee said that diet and obesity related health issues were a major area of policy. The ways in which retailers could influence purchasing decisions by consumers was a much contested issue. Professor Sparks is the leading academic authority in Scotland on the retail sector and author of a recent report which contains many challenges for the retail sector in terms of healthy purchasing. Professor Sparks will now present on the main recommendations in his report.

Professor Sparks began by saying that there were now global challenges in respect of diet and obesity and that 'nudge behaviour' had not been effective in Scotland. There was now a feeling that more direct, interventionist and regulatory approaches were required to change consumer behaviour and improve health.

Professor Sparks' report had been commissioned by Food Standards Scotland. The main conclusions and recommendations in the report were:

1. Promotional activities, information and other stimuli reinforce purchasing behaviour focused on unhealthy products, placing the onus to combat this on the individual consumer.
2. The lessons of the soft drinks industry levy should be applied more widely, with the aim of encouraging product reformulation and product sizing.
3. Voluntary and self-regulatory approaches or relying on consumers to make good decisions are not having sufficient impact.
4. Information provisions needs to be enhanced, regularised, standardised and made more legally enforceable.
5. Regulation should be developed to rebalance the provision and promotion of products in-store (this should also include product reformulation).
6. Consideration should be given to introducing a food retail standard – close to a form of 'licensing' for grocery retail - to achieve this.

The chair thanked Professor Sparks for his presentation and asked John Lee to introduce the next speaker.

John Lee said that the Scottish-government supported SGF Healthy Living Programme aimed to promote the increased purchase of healthy eating options within convenience stores. The programme was an excellent example of how convenience retailers are promoting health eating in stores. Kathryn Neil, from the HLP, would now provide an overview of the program.

Kathryn outlined the main information on the Healthy Living Programme:

1. Total number of retailers in programme now 2,208.
2. This represents an increase of 11.5% since April 1st, 2017.
3. Stores in the most deprived areas of Scotland represent 67% of total number of retailers in programme.
4. Number of pupils who have now attended a Healthy Eating Day in store or Big Breakfast in school is 6,871.
5. Feedback from retailers and schools on these events is very encouraging. There are a number of retailers who are “signed up” for more of those events right through until February, 2018.
6. The Health Minister is attending a Healthy Eating day in Biggar on 4th December, 2017. The First minister “dropped in” on a Healthy Eating Day in Glasgow recently – good feedback.
7. We have been able to identify the number of symbol/buying group outlets that we do NOT have on the data base and these will be targeted going forward. Good work here at central office level.
8. A re-design of the Gold Standard is in progress to update information, signage etc.

The chair thanked Kathryn for her presentation and invited comments and questions from the meeting in respect of both presentations.

Linda Williams (Broadway Convenience Store) said that she was extremely concerned about the potential implication for retailers if regulations to restrict promotions were introduced – promotions do help retailers to create a point of difference for themselves, meet customer demands and help to maintain margins.

Wassem Shad (UWG Retailer) commented that in reality promotions were driven by manufacturers and/or wholesalers and retailers did not have as much control over these as had been suggested.

Pete Cheema (SGF) said that the industry had taken significant steps forward in terms of reformulation. The report ignored the steps already being taken by retailers – evidenced in the Healthy Living Programme. The role of educations, personal responsibility and choice were not being sufficiently addressed.

Professor Sparks responded that none of this would be easy to achieve. The report had been given a relatively narrow remit to focus on the in-store retailing environment but it recognised that retailers were not the only actors in this debate – the out of home sector had as big a part to play. He reiterated that voluntary approaches do not seem to be working.

Ewan MacDonald-Russel (SRC) said that there had been a big effort on reformulation and on labelling but that retailers cannot collaborate on prices and promotions.

Mike Gordon (Scotmid) said that while it was clear that more balance had to be brought into promotions etc. within stores, too much regulation was in effect a form of social engineering when really what was needed was social engagement through better education.

Pete Cheema asked how the Scottish government viewed the Sparks Report and whether or not it would influence policy.

Peter Fassen de Heer (Scottish government) advised that the Scottish government would publish a consultation on the refreshed diet and obesity strategy over the next two months and that it was likely that the consultation would look at measures related to promotions, reformulation and advertising.

Heather Peace (Food Standards Scotland) said that Professor Sparks had been given a remit by FSS to gather evidence on the current situation within the retail environment and that was what the report had done. This was necessary to understand what policy approached would be effective. FSS had a responsibility to promote healthy eating and the report should be seen in that context.

The chair advised that he was conscious of keeping the meeting to time and moved on to the next item of business; reports on the work of the CPG sub committees. The chair invited John Lee to introduce this item.

John Lee explained that there were 3 sub-groups: convenience stores and the economy, retail crime and community engagement. He advised that he would provide updates on the retail crime and economy group but that firstly, Linda Williams, from the community engagement group would provide an update in relation to that group.

Linda Williams advised that this sub group had taken some time to meet and discuss a work plan. However, since its first meeting much progress had been made. The group had agreed to assist retailers in contributing to the national healthy eating day as part of the St Andrew's week celebrations. Mars confectionery had agreed to support a new SGF award to recognise outstanding community engagement activities by convenience retailers in Scotland. The working title for the new awards is 'community heroes' and a soft launch would be undertaken at the SGF conference on November. The full launch would take place in April 2018 and the SGF Business Summit. The group had also agreed to promote a project to install defibrillators in convenience stores – the project would participate in the SGF conference. It was likely that community clean up, anti-litter and environmental activities would be a big focus for the group in 2018.

John Lee advised that the retail crime group had made a big contribution to the plans for a potential members' bill on giving shop workers additional legal protection. This was being taken forward by Daniel Johnson MSP. It was likely that a consultation on draft proposal would be launched in December 2017.

John Lee advised that the economy sub group was working closely with Professor Sparks and his colleague Dr Maria Rybazevska to produce report son the real cost of employment and the economic contribution of convenience stores to the local economy. The report on the cost of employment would be submitted to the Low Pay Commission for inclusion in the recommendations to the UK government on the National Living Wage.

There being no further business the chair brought the meeting to a close.

Appendix A Attendance List

Cross Party Meeting 12/09/2017

Independent convenience stores attendance list

MSPs	
Maurice Golden	
Daniel Johnson	
Gordon Lindhurst	
Richard Lyle	
John Mason	

MEMBERS	
Name	
Akmal, Mohammed	Shopsmart
Ali, Zulfqar	Shopsmart
Aslam, Harris	Eros Retail Ltd
Begley, Antony	Scottish Local Retailer Magazine
Cheema, Pete	SGF
Galbraith, Neil	Church of Scotland
Gordon, Mike	Scotmid
Lee, John	SGF
Leonard, Mike	United Wholesale Scotland
McLean, Colin	Scotmid
Neil, Kathryn	SGF Healthy Living Programme
Sha, Sohail	United Wholesale Scotland
Shad, Waseem	United Wholesale Scotland
Slaven, Tom	United Wholesale Scotland
Sparks, Leigh	University of Stirling
Ugarte, Irati	SGF
Williams, Dennis	Broadway Convenience Store
Williams, Linda	Broadway Convenience Store

NON MEMBERS	
Name	
Ahmad, Billy	B Ahmed & R Scotland Ltd
Ashiq, Ferhan	Shad's Supermarket
Bagah, Mukesh	United Wholesale Grocers
Canham, Anne-Marie	Underage Sales
Craig, Wendy	Camelot
Doyle, Claire	Muller Milk & Ingredients
Fassen de Heer, Peter	Scottish Government

Hislop, Claire	NHS Scotland
Maitland, Jim	NFRN
McDonald Russell, Ewan	Scottish Retail Consortium
McDougall, Michael	TLT Solicitors
McNee, John	Scottish Grocer Magazine
McWilliams, Fiona	Camelot
Milliken, David	Tennent Caledonian Breweries
Morrish, Charles	Muller Milk & Ingredients
Peace, Heather	Food Standards Scotland
Purdom, Neil	Food & Drink Federation Scotland
Roper, Adrian	NFRN
Rybazewska, Maria	University of Stirling
Weldon, Melanie	Scottish Government
Woodrow, David	NFRN