

# Cross-Party Group on Independent Convenience Stores

The Scottish Parliament, Committee Room 3  
6pm, Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2024  
Minute

## Present

### MSPs

Gordon Macdonald MSP (Convener)

Foyso Choudhry MSP

John Mason MSP

Murdo Fraser MSP

### Invited Guests

Douglas Meikle, Scottish Alcohol Industry Partnership (Speaker)

Natalie Lightfoot, Independent Retailer (Speaker)

Ross Clark, Food Standards Scotland (Speaker)

Ferhan Ashiq, Retailer

Mark Tofts, BP

Robert McGeachy, Food Standards Scotland

Tam Cassidy, CAP

### Non-MSP Group Members

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

Aidan Smith, Scottish Grocers' Federation

Colin Smith, Scottish Wholesale Association

Dennis Williams, Broadway Premier

Ian Lovie, Scotmid

Jamie Buchanan, SGF Go Local program

Jamie Mackie, Scottish Grocers' Federation

Jayne Swanson, Scottish Wholesale Association

Katheryn Neil, SGF Healthy Living Programme

Kevin Lowe, Scotmid

Martin Devlin, SGF PGMA  
Dr Pete Cheema OBE, Scottish Grocers' Federation

## Apologies

Gordon Macdonald MSP (Convener) noted that apologies had been received from Daniel Johnson MSP (Deputy Convener), Maurice Golden MSP, Rachel Hamilton MSP and Jackie Ballie 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 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024. These were approved.

## Topic: Retail Crime, Food Crime and Proxy Purchasing

An overview of various aspects of Retail Crime in Scotland, including underage drinking, proxy purchasing, anti-social behaviour, illicit trade, counterfeit products, shop theft, burglary, and abuse and violence toward retailers and staff.

Luke McGarty (SGF) provided an overview of the Scottish Grocers' Federation & Retailers Against Crime (RAC) 'Don't Put Up With It!' campaign, thanking Maxine Fraser and the RAC team for their support delivering the campaign. The campaign is designed to provide guidance and support for retailers and raise awareness of the issue of Retail Crime and the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021.

Douglas Meikle, Scottish Alcohol Industry Partnership (SAIP) – outlined the work and progress of the SAIP. The 'It'll Cost You' campaign, which raises public awareness that purchasing alcohol for someone under 18 is a criminal offense, aims to help communities and retailers prevent this illegal activity. Aiding the reduction of anti-social behaviour, underage drinking and related retail crime. The campaign is held nationally each summer, while also targeting specific areas that have high levels of underage drinking. It features various in-store advertising, pavement stencils, radio and social media activity. Including peer to peer education through young police volunteers. The campaign is fully assessed each year to understand the reach and positive impact of the campaign, followed by a feedback report published in the autumn.

Ross Clark, Food Standards Scotland (FSS) - shared his expertise on the issue and impact of food crime in Scotland. This began by highlighting recent publicised cases of illicit counterfeit trade of alcohol products. Intelligence gathering and investigation (including protected sources) are a fundamental part of the operational process of the analyst team. Who build evidence and put forward cases to the Crown Office, in order to prosecute criminal activity. Using existing areas of legal framework such as fraud and reckless conduct legislation. The estimated cost of food crime on the UK is approximately £410 million to £2 billion. The FSS supports and coordinates investigations into food crime in Scotland, looking across the entire supply chain. This includes a prevention strategy to assess and reduce risks. Supporting, protecting and providing guidance for businesses at risk of potential food crime.

Natalie Lightfoot, Independent Retailer – outlined her own experience, discussing store security after hours, shop theft, abuse, and threatening behaviour toward staff. The presentation also illustrated the impact that retail crime has had on her mental health, and that of her family and community. Charting out the extremely challenging, threatening and violent behaviour of some perpetrators. Highlighting, in addition, that stealing from family businesses is 'no different from stealing from their children and family'. The presentation went on to describe several incidents involving customers and staff during shopping hours. This expanded into an account of an out of hour burglary involving nine other retail premises on the same evening. Followed by a subsequent organised burglary just a short time later. Importantly the impact was far beyond the financial loss, having a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing resulting in severe health repercussions and personal trauma.

## Questions and Answers

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

- MSPs present passed on their condolences to Natalie Lightfoot and thanked her for her presentation.
- The FSS provided further detail of the process of investigating the recent cases of counterfeit alcohol in the market, and the procedure of alerting the public and businesses. In many cases the toxic product will cause severe injury or death.
- It was highlighted that some businesses are now closing their stores due to the pressure and threat of retail crime. Noting that technology, such as AI, may have a role in helping to prevent and tackle crime. While also calling for support from government to retailers to introduce new technologies.

- It was noted that self-checkout facilities are a very difficult area to enforce, regarding proxy purchasing. With some adult individuals offering proxy purchasing as a service to younger people.
- It may be the case the 5-15% of food and drink products on the market are illicit. Covering a range of different margins, including stolen, unregulated or counterfeit goods.
- The meeting noted that a significant issue with retail crime is a lack of resources for Police Scotland the Crown Office. Resulting in significantly reduced police response and little consequence for perpetrators.
- However, it was noted that there will be an increase in police numbers this year. Reversing the previous trend through the Covid-19 period. While highlighting the fiscal reality that there are very little public funds available and new resources for the police would have to be cost neutral.
- It was raised that the increase in Minimum Unit Price could cause additional cases of abuse and anti-social behaviour in store.

Gordon Macdonald MSP (Convener) 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

Gordon Macdonald MSP (Convener) confirmed that there was no other business.

## Date of Next Meeting

Gordon Macdonald MSP (Convener) confirmed that the next Cross Party Group meeting (AGM) would take place at 6pm on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The meeting will be held in the Scottish Parliament.