**NB: All meetings are conducted under the Chatham House Rule. This note is a summary of the meeting**

**Retail Sector Council – 26 February 2019**

1. **Attendees**

**Co-Chairs:** Kelly Tolhurst, Co-Chair

Richard Pennycook, Co-Chair

**Members:** Ian Filby, Chair, Sofology and Joules

John Rogers, CEO, Sainsbury’s Argos

Diane Savory, Chair, GFirst LEP

Helen Dickinson, CEO, British Retail Consortium

James Lowman, CEO, Association of Convenience Stores

Elizabeth Fagan, Non-Executive Chairman, Boots UK and RoI

Ursula Lidbetter, CEO, Lincolnshire Cooperative

**Guests:** John Park, Amazon, Public Policy UK and Ireland

**Officials:** Tom Ironside, Stephen Bethel (BRC), Craig Watson (BEIS)

**Apologies:** Doug Gurr, UK Country Manager, Amazon

Sir Charlie Mayfield, Chair, John Lewis Partnership

Nick Beighton, CEO, ASOS

Victoria Robertshaw, CEO, Keelham Farm Shop

John Hannett, General Secretary, USDAW

**2. Summary of Actions**

Members are encouraged to contribute to the ongoing consultation on the National Minimum/Living Wage.

The Council will circulate its ‘costs of business’ survey throughout the industry, including views of BIDs and LEPs, once final modifications have been made. Confidentiality will be assured for those who request it.

Members will also respond to a survey on the Apprenticeship Levy.

The RSC Charter will be amended following feedback from the Council and workstream leads have agreed to begin formulating their objectives and success factors.

The Retail Sector Council website will go live imminently.

**3. Note of Discussion**

**a) Welcome and introductions**

The Council heard an update on EU Exit based on the Prime Minister’s prior statement.

**b)**  **Updates**

Officials updated members on the progress of the EU Exit Retail Panel and business readiness planning. Further updates on the Future High Streets Fund work were explained to the Council.

The Council’s letter to William Vereker on the retail industry’s priorities for future immigration policy was well received by members. The Government has since published its immigration white paper.

The Sector Council also penned a letter to the BEIS SoS on the gender pay gap in retail.

Members highlighted concerns over the National Minimum Wage enforcement audits, suggesting that the legislation is outdated. A Government consultation on this issue has already been launched.

**c) RSC Charter and working groups**

The Council was largely content with the draft Charter. Some clarifications will be made following this discussion.

The underlying objective of the Council is to promote productivity and sustainability in the sector, with consideration for public good.

More detailed objectives will be defined under each of the priority workstreams.

**d) Business costs workstream update**

Council members heard a progress update on this priority workstream.

The working group has developed a survey to understand the aggregate costs to different businesses. Some adjustments will be made based on the Council’s feedback prior to the survey being circulated throughout the industry to build a strong evidence base for policy intervention.

**e) Skills workstream update**

The skills working group has produced a paper on their key considerations for building an evidence base on the existing skills and future needs of the sector, with scope to discuss the societal benefits of this workstream (e.g. social mobility).

Greater consideration for what a career in retail looks/will look like is an important consideration for both the skills and employment workstreams. Hence, members suggested a narrative must be carefully crafted to make retail careers more attractive, particularly to young persons.

A review into the Apprenticeship Levy has been launched, in which Council members have been encouraged to participate.

**Dates of Future Meetings**

**June 2019**