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

**Retail Sector Council – 12 November 2018**

1. **Attendees**

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

Richard Pennycook, Co-Chair

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

Ian Filby, Chair, Sofology and Joules

John Rogers, CEO, Sainsbury’s Argos

Diane Savory, Chair, GFirst LEP

Ursula Lidbetter, CEO, Lincolnshire Cooperative

Helen Dickinson, CEO, British Retail Consortium

James Lowman, CEO, Association of Convenience Stores

**Guests:**  Alex Gowlland (GEO)

William Vereker, No 10 Business Envoy

Sacha Polverini, Director – Public Affairs, Walgreen Boots Alliance

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

**Apologies:** Nick Beighton, CEO, ASOS

Elizabeth Fagan, Non-Executive Director Boots UK & ROI

Sir Charlie Mayfield, Chair, John Lewis Partnership

John Hannett, USDAW

Victoria Robertshaw, CEO, Keelham Farm Shop

**2. Summary of Actions**

The Council is encouraged to input into the development of the Government policy wherever possible. The Sector Council will agree a forward work programme with two priority areas for each six-month period from 2019 onwards.

The BRC have agreed to lead on engagement with the GEO on behalf of the Council. All members to encourage best practice in responding to the gender pay gap reporting requirement.

The Sector Council will inform the Prime Minister’s office of the retail sector’s priorities for a post-Brexit immigration system.

**3. Note of Discussion**

**~~a) Welcome and introductions~~**

**a) Future High Street Forum – Expert Panel**

The Council received an overview of the measures announced in the Budget to support high streets during its transformation, including:

* £675m Future High Street Fund
* Temporary Business Rates Relief
* The Consultation on Planning Reform: Supporting the High Street and Increasing the Delivery of New Homes
* The High Streets Taskforce
* The Open Doors landlord pilot

Members suggested that these measures have been well received by retailers. The Council emphasised that there should be a focus on pace given the immediacy of challenges facing town centres.

Industry leads noted that while the Budget provided material support to smaller retailers, it did not address the Business Rates burden facing medium to larger businesses. Council members agreed that these issues will require major policy interventions to support successful high street transitions. The importance of effective local leadership was also highlighted.

**b) Retail Industry Gender Pay Gap**

The Secretary of State has written to the Sector Council setting out Government’s objectives for the industry’s gender pay gap.

Officials provided an overview of this reporting requirement and explained that the retail industry, along with health and education, is a priority area due to the high proportion of women employed. Policy makers are keen to identify practical solutions to address gender equality in retail, e.g. progression.

The Council heard that at 9.1%, the average gender pay gap for retail is less than half the UK average. It was noted that the pay gap is largely due to the proportion of women in retail, the occupations in which they work and the prioritisation of flexible or part-time working.

There is strong support in the industry for the core objectives of the reporting requirement and transparency, but there were concerns that this is a blunt mechanism. The Council will respond to the SoS’ letter and the BRC will lead engagement on this issue as proxy.

**c) No10 Business Councils**

The Council heard an overview of the new business councils.

There will be five new business councils, each chaired by business leaders and comprised of industry representatives. They will meet biannually with the Prime Minister to provide policy recommendations.

The five councils cover:

* Financial, Professional and Education Services
* Industrial, Infrastructure and Manufacturing
* Telecoms, Creative Industries, Technology and Media
* Consumer, Retail and Life Sciences
* Small Business, Scale ups and Entrepreneurs

Sector Councils will feed in issues for consideration to the relevant business council.

**d) Priorities of the Sector Council for 2019**

The priorities identified have emerged from conversations with the Council members.

These will form two-year workplans. Individual Council members will be identified to lead these working groups. While there is a suggested focus for each area, it will be for the workstream lead to propose the Terms of Reference. The importance of avoiding duplication of effort was also emphasised.

It was noted that pursuing multiple priorities simultaneously would likely prove unsuccessful. As a result, it was agreed that the Council should focus on two priority areas in any 6-month period.

**Dates of Future Meetings**

**12 February 2019**