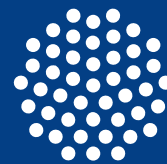


Issue 7 | Summer 2022



RetailNI

Standing up for
Independent Retailers

The Retailer

The Magazine for **Retail NI**



Retail NI launch New Ambition Plan for Next Assembly

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SALES

DISTRIBUTION

MARKETING

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QUALITY
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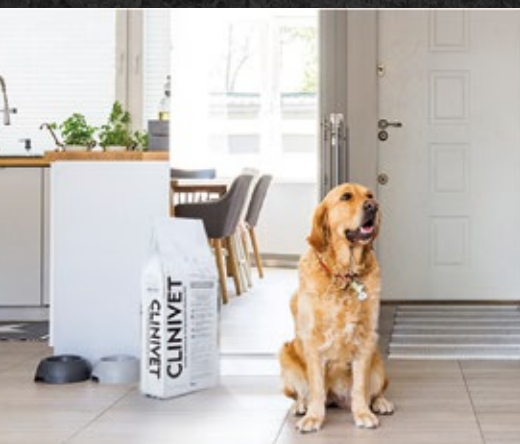
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Message from the President



Welcome to the Spring/Summer Edition of The Retailer.

It has been a busy few months for Retail NI as we have continued to support our members through particularly challenging times. We successfully lobbied for the Business Rates Holiday to be extended until July, introduction of the 'Back in Business scheme' which gives new start independent retailers 50% rates discount and the restoration of the Small Business Rates Relief Scheme.

Retail NI played a key role in the establishment of the NI High Streets Taskforce and the drafting of its final report-which included for the first time ever a five year high street reconstruction plan. Addressing the 'Cost of Doing Business' crisis is our top priority in our engagement with Stormont and Westminster and we are pressing the political parties to extend the Rates Holiday until January 2023 to alleviate the high energy costs.

We hosted a successful Future High Street Summit. Five Ministers from across the UK and Ireland addressed a packed room at Titanic Belfast on 30th March. Tánaiste Leo Varadkar TD, NIO Minister of State Conor Burns MP, Shadow Levelling Up Minister Alex Norris MP, Agriculture Minister Edwin Poots and Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey all spoke at what was one of the largest ever attended high street conferences to be held in Belfast. It was great to see so many people back in one room. I was also delighted to be involved in the launch of Retail NI's New Ambition, Policy Priorities for the NI Assembly 2022 – 2027 in Omagh. The document has 29 policy priorities for the new Assembly term covering: Improving Government, Tackling the Cost of Business Crisis, Modern Infrastructure and Better Planning & Addressing the Climate crisis.

As we head into the summer, I'm looking forward to the launch High Street Heroes competition. This competition gives the public the opportunity to vote for their favourite independent retailer. Further details will be circulated in the coming weeks. If any of our members have any issues or problems please do not hesitate to contact the team.

Peter McBride

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CONTACT DETAILS

Glyn Roberts CEO
Joelene Poole

028 9022 0004
028 9022 0004

07515 710 517
07542 845 834

glyn@retailni.com
joelene@retailni.com

245 Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST. BT4 3JF

[@retail_ni](https://twitter.com/retail_ni) [@RetailNI](https://facebook.com/RetailNI) [@RetailNI](https://linkedin.com/company/RetailNI) [@RetailNI](https://instagram.com/RetailNI)

Interview with a Retailer

MARK MCCALL
McCall's Lisburn

Who in the business world do you admire the most?

At the minute I'm enjoying Steven Bartlett's podcasts, but top of the heap for me has to be Elon Musk.

What do you do when you are not working?

I'm currently dedicating most of my spare time to a non-profit I founded with a friend last year.

What is the biggest misconception people have about you?

I think a common misconception about retailers in general, is that we just work from 9:00 - 5.30.

Who are your biggest role models in life?

As a third-generation family business, we all look up to my grandfather, father and uncle, who established the company in 1956 and worked so hard to build it up.

If you had a superpower, what would it be?

I got the chance to get up in a light aircraft with a friend last week. Newtownards to Lisburn in just 9 minutes and everything looked so good from up there, so it would definitely have to be the ability to fly!

Describe your job in 3 words

Varied. Rewarding. Family.

Where do you see things going in the next 12 - 24 months?

2022 is shaping up to be the busiest year ever for our wedding suit department and so our formal business



is in rude health. On our ground floor we've just added Barbour to our store and along with great brands like Gant and Tommy Hilfiger, casualwear is booming too.

What company do you admire most & why?

There are plenty of inspirational companies right here in Northern Ireland like the Beannchor Group which recently invested in a fantastic new hotel in the centre of Lisburn.

What has been the most valuable piece of advice you have been given in your career?

The only thing that's impossible is taking your trousers off over your head.

What is your favourite task of the week & why?

It's gratifying to read customer reviews when our team has provided great service

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Future High Streets Summit

Five Ministers from across the UK and Ireland addressed the Retail NI Future High Streets Summit in Belfast in March, outlining their vision for the regeneration and transformation of high streets.

Tánaiste Leo Varadkar TD, NIO Minister of State Conor Burns MP, Shadow Levelling Up Minister Alex Norris MP, Agriculture Minister Edwin Poots and Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey all

addressed one of the largest ever attended high street conferences in Northern Ireland.

Tánaiste Leo Varadkar TD told business leaders attending the Summit that the future of retail is hybrid, with both brick-and-mortar and online stores crucial in high street regeneration. Virtually addressing attendees, Ireland's Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment pointed to the pandemic as ushering in a third way of doing business

under a new and improved hybrid model.

Minister of State for Northern Ireland, Conor Burns MP, spoke about the UK Government's vision for the high streets of Northern Ireland and how the Levelling Up funding will help the regeneration of the high streets, with £49 million already being invested in innovative projects across Northern Ireland.

Shadow Minister for Levelling Up, Alex Norris MP, also spoke on the UK Government's recent White Paper and how levelling up can be delivered on a local level in Northern Ireland.

The in-person conference promoted a new vision for our high streets post-pandemic and discussed how local, regional and national governments can deliver real change for local towns and cities.

Alison McCullagh, Chief Executive of Fermanagh & Omagh District Council called on the new Executive to review the policy gap in rural regeneration funding. Current policy means that only Fermanagh and Omagh are eligible for funding interventions, smaller towns in the council area are ineligible.



Deidre Hargey MLA

Sponsored by DWF Law, the Summit was hosted by broadcaster Tara Mills and featured panel discussions with Executive Ministers on the Assembly's future economic priorities ahead of May's election. The Summit also considered key strategic documents including the work of the newly formed High Street Task Force.

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar TD said:

"Two years ago, none of us could have predicted the terrible consequences that Covid-19 would have on our previously bustling high streets and shopping centres. From business closures to stay-at-home orders, necessary public health measures meant that, while our population was protected, many bricks and mortar traders were devastated. Many adapted quickly, moving online, setting



Alison McCullagh Chief Executive Fermanagh & Omagh District Council



up delivery services and finding other ways to hold on to their customers."

"Now as we emerge from the pandemic and rebuild, this conference has been a really good opportunity to share our experiences and

find ways to work more closely together for a strong, prosperous all-island economy. I strongly believe that the future for retail is hybrid with physical stores and on-line shopping providing a new and even better retail experience."



Glyn Roberts (CEO Retail NI), Alex Norris MP (Shadow Minister for Levelling Up), Conor Burn (Minister of State for NI), Helen Wall (Vice President Retail NI)



Paddy Doody (Chair Retail NI), Conor Burns (Minister of State for NI)

Minister of State for Northern Ireland, Conor Burns MP, said:

“Northern Ireland high streets have enormous potential, great produce and wonderful customer service. It is that personal touch and connection which brings people back into shops again and again and it’s something which I personally value.”

“Through the Levelling Up Fund, the Government is already delivering support to Northern Ireland’s retail sector. Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, for example, received £1.2 million from the first round of funding to help revitalise their town centre and improve the experience of everyone who spends time there.”

“As we look ahead to the next round of Levelling Up funding, I look forward to working closely with partners in the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government, as well as those in the business sector, to ensure we continue delivering for the people of Northern Ireland.”

Chief Executive of Retail NI, Glyn Roberts said:

“There is no doubt we are not short of strategy and policy when it comes to the future of our high streets. The Executive’s Investment Strategy, Infrastructure



Edwin Poots MLA

2050, UK Government’s Levelling Up White Paper and the Northern Ireland High Street Taskforce report all set out ambitious plans for our town centres.”

“The question that Retail NI members ask is how we get local, regional and national governments all pushing in the one direction and more importantly how all these policy priorities can be delivered so we can create 21st century high streets. Alongside a dynamic retail and hospitality offering we also need to ensure they become multi-functional hubs with libraries, community services, police stations, healthcare, leisure, education, open spaces, housing and sports facilities.”

Head of Real Estate in Northern Ireland at DWF Law, Julie Galbraith said:

“We were thrilled to partner with Retail NI for its Future High Streets Summit. Our town and city centres are thriving hubs of innovation and growth, best evidenced through Northern Ireland’s ever-growing independent retail sector. Supporting our high streets does not just boost jobs and economic activity, it helps build stronger communities that work together to improve livelihoods and build prospects. It was great to get speaking to those business and political leaders in attendance at this morning’s excellent Summit.”

Belfast Distillery Company launches new McConnell’s Sherry Cask Finish

Connoisseurs, influencers and distributors from the drinks industry joined the Belfast Distillery Company team at The Dark Horse, in Commercial Court Belfast, to launch their newest blend, McConnell’s Irish Whisky Sherry Cask Finish.

Lucky guests were treated to the first pour of the latest spirit from Belfast Distillery Company, while the brand was also reintroduced to the City.

Described as their ‘new expression’, the McConnell’s Sherry Cask Finish has been aged for five years and matured in first fill select Bourbon barrels, then finished in the finest Oloroso Sherry Casks which bring out rich aromas of dried

figs, dark chocolate and lingering spice. The spirit is bottled at 46% ABV, non-chill filtered, and presented in a new eye-catching design.

Speaking from the launch, John Kelly, Chief Executive at Belfast Distillery Company said:

“Today is an exciting milestone in the McConnell’s Irish Whisky journey, as we bring our latest product to market. The whisky and sherry symbiosis is long established and we are very confident the new McConnell’s Sherry Cask Finish will prove extremely popular with our customers at home and abroad.”

“There is a proud whisky distilling history and heritage in this



city. This new addition to our portfolio will support the rapid growth of McConnell’s and Belfast Distillery Company as we continue our pursuit to bring distilling back to Belfast.”

The McConnell’s Irish Whisky brand was re-launched two years ago and has already achieved significant success since then, with distribution deals in place across Europe, North America and as far afield as Australia. McConnell’s Irish Whisky has won several awards, including a Gold Medal at The San Francisco Spirits Awards and a Master Award at the Drinks Business and Spirits Business Spring Tasting, and has quickly become one of the top Irish Whisky brands in the US market.

McConnell’s Irish Whisky Sherry Cask Finish is on sale now and available to purchase locally in Northern Ireland’s finest independent off sales, bars and restaurants, as well as McConnell’s key global markets.

For more information on McConnell’s Irish Whisky visit www.mcconnellsirishwhisky.com.



Award-winning 'field to fork' brand Mash Direct skinny fries

Mash Direct the award-winning 'field to fork' vegetable accompaniments brand has launched its latest potato-based product to add to its innovative range in the form of a Skinny Fries.

The Skinny Fries product offers Mash Direct's famous home-grown potatoes thinly cut, coated in a light crispy batter and fried for a perfect texture. Oven-cooked in just 15 minutes from chilled, the product is gluten-free and also boasts three green traffic lights for being low in saturated fat, salt and sugar, and is full of natural veggie goodness. The well-known and well-loved version of chips is a great addition to any mid-week meal or perfect as part of a 'Fakeaway' meal at home at the weekend, be it with sausages, fish or simply on their own: lightly sprinkled with salt and dipped in ketchup.

Lance Hamilton, Chief Commercial Officer at Mash Direct comments:

"Potatoes are at the heart of what we do at Mash Direct, and it's always exciting to launch a new iteration of our fabulous home-grown potatoes, especially when it's a classic such as Skinny Fries.

We are always innovating to meet consumer demand and offering our consumers quick and convenient solutions to satisfy the family at mealtimes."

Mash Direct's Skinny Fries are prepared immediately after harvesting, which ensures an unrivalled freshness of flavour and retains the natural texture and nutritional benefits of the produce. The Skinny Fries are also low in saturated fat, 100% gluten-free and free from artificial flavourings and colourings.

Mash Direct was founded and is led by the award-winning Hamilton family team: husband and wife Martin and Tracy and their sons, Lance and Jack. The farm is located in the lush green countryside of County Down, close to the shores of Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland, and the family is proud to select older heritage varieties of vegetables for their products, chosen specifically for their flavour.



New Mini Moo convenience drinks from Clarke Millar

Clarke Millar Foods in Northern Ireland has introduced a convenient format of its successful Millar Moo milk-based drinks.

The company, which is based at Dunmurry, near Belfast, has launched two flavours of Mini Millar Moo drinks for a variety of uses especially for lunchboxes and quick snacks.

The drinks in 200 ml packs, which are 100 percent recyclable, at £2.49 RRP are available in strawberry and chocolate flavours. The drinks are a natural source of calcium and a rich in fibre and protein with no artificial sweeteners. They are also gluten-free and low in fat.

Mini Moo drinks are available in a convenient six-pack format and are ideal for children and young people as a handy snack.

The new product builds on the success of the family-owned company's longstanding Millar Moo drinks which are readily available in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland through retailers such as SPAR and Musgrave Retail, and Wholesalers Savage & Whitten and Musgrave Cash & Carry.

The company, owned and run by experienced food entrepreneur Clarke Millar,



has developed a wide range of convenience and snack foods.

Mr Millar, commenting on the new product, says: "Mini Moo is the outcome of our ongoing contacts with retailers in the UK and Ireland which told us that there has been a growing interest in convenience versions of our well-established Millar Moo drinks especially from mothers seeking a healthy drink for school lunchboxes. There's no widespread recognition of the benefits from Millar Moo flavours in easily recyclable bottles.

"It was important to us to create a convenience drink in recyclable packaging due to our longstanding commitment to sustainability," he adds.

Mr Millar formed the company in 2013 to manufacture convenience foods in particular and also to provide contract manufacturing and distribution services to other producers. He has developed a successful track record in convenience foods with his Mulligan's branded burgers, hot dogs and his wraps including chicken which recently secured business with Sainsbury's in Northern Ireland.

Please get in touch with Clarke Millar for more information on **07591 833543** or email **mark@clarkemillar.com**. Follow us on Facebook, Tik Tok and Instagram #success #facebook #instagram



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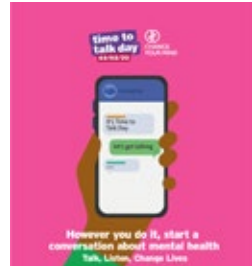
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Inspire wellbeing

3rd February saw Time to Talk Day and Retail NI were delighted to support the campaign. It provided a great opportunity to get the nation talking about mental health.



Inspire Wellbeing partnered once again with their friends Mind, Rethink Mental Illness, Time to Change Wales, See Me in Scotland and See Change in Ireland to champion the nation's biggest mental health conversation.

Time to Talk Day was an opportunity for friends, families, communities, and workplaces come together to talk, listen and change lives. We know that conversations about mental health have the power to change lives. Their recent research shows how important open conversations in communities are to support everyone's mental wellbeing.

One in 4 of us will experience a mental health issue in any given year and talking about how you are feeling, is more important than ever. Talking about mental health reduces stigma helping to create supportive communities where we can talk openly about mental health and feel empowered to seek help when we need it. That's why opening up the conversation about mental health and supporting campaigns like Time to Talk Day is so important – by talking about our mental health we can support ourselves and others.

A Taste of Success for IFEX 2022

29th March 2022 saw the welcome return of IFEX 2022. IFEX is Northern Ireland's largest foodservice, hospitality and retail event. It returned to the Titanic Exhibition Centre on 29th to 31st March after having to cancel both 2020 and 2021 events.

The event itself was even bigger and better than before as it was the 25th Anniversary. Over eighty exhibitors attended the 3-day event.

"With all industry support and a sold out show we had high hopes for this year's event, however IFEX 2022 has exceeded all our expectations!" comments Toby Wand, Managing Director of 365 Events Ltd.

IFEX saw thousands of visitors from the foodservice, hospitality, catering and retail sectors, descend on the Titanic Exhibition Centre, Belfast, bringing together some of the most exciting businesses in the industry right now. With exhibitors reporting that substantial business was done and overwhelming positive feedback from visitors and exhibitors alike, IFEX 2022 really did serve up a show that will benefit all of those involved in the months and years ahead.

As one of the first trade exhibitions in Northern Ireland to open its doors, the return of IFEX was welcomed from across the industry and comes at a time when businesses within the hospitality and foodservice



Paul Caves
Stephens Catering

industries are focused on rebuilding. Strong visitor numbers across the three days shows signs that in an increasingly digitalised world, unique opportunities for meaningful face to face time, still hold strong appeal. The event had significant sponsorship from The Department of the Economy, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Stephens Catering, Flogas and Budget Energy, as well as strong association support through Hospitality Ulster, Retail NI, NI Hotels Federation, Food NI, FSB and NI Takeaway Association.

As the premier trade event for the food, retail and hospitality industry, IFEX returns in early March 2024! Register your interest with the team at 365 Events via ifexexhibition.co.uk or contact Lyndsey Harker, Head of Sales via Lyndsey@365-events.co.uk

Ministerial Update

Foreign Secretary – Liz Truss MP

Back in January 2022 Retail NI today hosted the Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, at one of its members, Greens of Lisburn to discuss the NI Protocol.

Speaking after the meeting, Retail NI Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said:

"I was encouraged with the meeting and hopeful that a deal to resolve the challenges around the NI Protocol is achievable"

"At the meeting with the Foreign Secretary, we presented a number of case studies illustrating the problems local independent retailers are experiencing trading with GB based suppliers as result of the NI Protocol".

"It is vital this issue needs to be resolved to ensure that consumers are given the full product range in Northern Ireland. We need a long-term sustainable deal which ensures stability, certainty and affordability for the broader business community in Northern Ireland".

"Continuing to ensure full access to the EU single market is essential, as part of any deal".

Marie Simonsen - European Commission

Retail NI & members met with Marie Simonsen from the European Commission on 16th February 2022.

There was a full and frank conversation on issues facing members in the transport of goods to Northern Ireland. The various members of the Commission have agreed to continue the dialogue with regular meetings to allow members to obtain help with their problems.



Glyn Roberts (CEO Retail NI), Liz Truss Foreign Secretary & Kenny Bradley

Finance Minister – Conor Murphy MLA

Retail NI took part in a useful round table meeting on Banking, hosted by the Finance Minister Conor Murphy.. A range of stakeholders attended. There were good discussions on the future of local banking, ATMs, Post Offices and access to cash in rural communities.

We are changing the way we work

Please contact us before you apply for planning approval. There is a new **PRE-PLANNING PROCESS** you need to complete.

This new 3-step process lets us work together to assess any potential network or treatment capacity issues.

To make sure your development process is as simple as possible, contact us early, especially if your project is large.

For more information, go to niwater.com/services-for-developers

1. Pre-Development Enquiry

If no constraints are identified in our report, NI Water will support your planning application. If there are constraints, you can submit an Impact Assessment Application.

2. Impact Assessment

An engineering report will outline options to resolve issues for your site (if a solution is possible). We can then work with you to agree a site specific solution for your project.

3. Planning Permission

If you apply for planning without completing these steps and there are capacity constraint issues, we will recommend to the planning authority that your application should be refused. If you receive full planning permission, we will support you with applications to connect to our network. The larger your plans and development ambitions, the more important it is to consult with us early.

developer services
Connecting you to what matters

northern ireland water
Delivering what matters

Savage & Whitten Expands A Whole Lot More

We promised we would deliver A Whole Lot More and we are delighted to announce our redevelopment project plan. An investment of more than £15 Million in a landmark 20-Acre Site will be home to a new multi-purpose distribution hub, Head Office Space, vehicle management area, recycling area and much more. The new state of the art storage centre will boast 180,000 sq. ft hosting all ambient, chilled, fresh and frozen products all under one roof.

To give you the magnitude of the investment our current location in Carnbane which has been home since 2010 already operates at 100,000 sq. ft. This redevelopment plan will almost double in capacity allowing our continued vision for growth, improve our efficiencies and investment in both the business and local area.

The conveniently based move to Chancellors Road, just off the main A1 Dual Carriageway out of Newry to Dublin will position us in the best

location to service our retail and wholesale customers throughout the island of Ireland with greater ease.

Michael Skelton, MD of S&W Wholesale had this to say, "Over the past number of years we have experienced sustained growth and this investment into the new multi-purpose site is aimed at facilitating this growth further and to provide our employees with a better working environment but as well as providing a more efficient way of working across the entire business."

The site will become more eco-friendly focused with the introduction of solar panels, electric car charging points and methods of reducing waste -reducing S&W's carbon footprint for the future.

Michael continued with, "We are committed to driving our footprint in the local community with plans to build on our 250+ workforce and work alongside local business and organizations in



Norman Savage, Operations Director
Alan Dorman, Trading Director
Michael Skelton, Managing Director
Anthony McVeigh, Chief Financial Officer

making a real positive change in the local area and beyond."

Aspects of the new facility are well under way with a local architect firm spearheading the cutting-edge design.

"We are really excited about the build and to get Phase 1 underway. With all that has happened over the past few years with the pandemic this is a positive story for all involved with S&W, the local area, employees and their communities as well as our retailers and trade partners as we continue to be one of Ireland's leading grocery wholesalers." We will continue to deliver A Whole Lot More." Michael Skelton, MD.

SPAR NI's Community Cashback scheme returns for 2022

After a successful campaign throughout the height of the COVID Pandemic, SPAR NI has brought back its Community Cashback Scheme for 2022.

SPAR UK is pledging £100,000 to help fund local community organisations across the UK, with £20,000 going towards applicants in Northern Ireland.

Sixteen of Northern Ireland's community groups and charitable organisations benefitted from the inaugural Community Cashback Grant in 2020, when SPAR NI donated £20,000 to charities providing a variety of complex and critical services here, including Air Ambulance NI, Crossroads Care, Action Mental Health, Kilkeel Development Association and the Mae Murray Foundation.



Air Ambulance NI benefitted from a £2,000 donation from SPAR NI's Community Cashback Grant back in 2020.



Kilkeel Development Association benefitted from a £2,000 donation from SPAR NI's Community Cashback Grant back in 2020.

The Community Cashback Scheme now makes a return as part of SPAR's Joy of Living Locally brand positioning, which celebrates the unique characteristics of SPAR stores in Northern Ireland. The launch of the Scheme will aid the roll out of the Nurture our Neighbourhood pillar, used to bring the positioning to life in-store for shoppers.

There are 30 grants available for the new scheme, covering all geographical regions across the UK. Amounts available in Northern Ireland are 1 x £10,000, 1 x £5,000, 1 x £2,000, and 3 x £1,000. Successful applicants will then be visited and awarded their grant from a local SPAR representative.

Applications will run until 04 May 2022 via <https://www.spar-ni.co.uk/community-cashback>. All applicants need to do is share the exceptional contribution a local organisation has made to their community and what the grant would be put towards.

Bronagh Luke, Head of Corporate Marketing at Henderson Group which owns SPAR in Northern Ireland commented; "SPAR has a long history of nurturing our neighbourhoods and supporting the communities we serve, and we're thrilled to bring back the Community Cashback Scheme to give back to the local organisations who are actively working in these communities.

"This year's Community Cashback Scheme is being used to launch our brand pillar 'nurture our neighbourhoods', across the UK. We know the importance of looking after our shoppers and the communities they live in, and this will help build and strengthen their neighbourhoods even more."

Extension of Business Rates Holiday

Retail NI were delighted to secure a further three months of the Business Rates Holiday from April and a one-year freeze in the Regional Rate. They continue to lobby the executive to get this extended further to allow members to recover from the lost revenue over the past 2 years.

In March Conor Murphy, Finance Minister confirmed a £50m Business Rates Package

At an Election event in Lisburn Glyn Roberts said

“We are no longer just experiencing a cost-of-living crisis-it is also a cost of doing business crisis which threatens jobs and businesses across every sector of our economy. Businesses are facing a perfect storm of cost increases including Energy, National Insurance, Inflation, Covid Recovery, and rising Interest rates”

“With the Business Rates holiday ending in July for many of our members, we are concerned that this will make a bad situation even worse”

“After next week’s election we need to see the political parties hit the ground running with immediate discussions to form an Executive and agree a business support package. This must include an extension of the current Rates Holiday until January to help ease the burden on businesses”



Dr Katrina Collins (President Lisburn Chamber of Commerce), Paul Givan MLA, Sorchá Eastwood MLA, Glyn Roberts (CEO Retail NI) Laura Turner & Pat Catney

“Make no mistake this is about saving jobs and businesses over the next months. We need immediate action and leadership from our political parties”

He also commented

“This is a very welcome package of support for our members and the broader business community. We appreciate that the Minister has listened and acted upon the concerns of our members”

“Continuing the Rates holiday by another 3 months and extending the Small Business Rate Relief scheme will be well received by small traders particularly given the twin pressures of rising energy costs and the forthcoming National Insurance hike”

“After the Election it is important that the Assembly and Executive agree a broader reform of

the entire system of business rates as they are the highest in the UK”

“This package is a significant step in the right direction but much more will be needed to support the recovery of our high streets”

The package will provide businesses with a £50 million rates support package in the 2022/23 financial year as well as continuing the Small Business Rate Relief which will benefit thousands of business premises.

RETAIL NI LAUNCH NEW AMBITION PLAN FOR NEXT ASSEMBLY

Retail NI launched its New Ambition plan in Omagh in April. The Plan sets out 29 policy priorities for the next Assembly term. The trade body has also urged immediate all-party talks post-election to agree a Programme for Government and form an Executive.

New Ambition has four key sections, Improving Government, Tackling the Cost of Business Crisis, Modern Infrastructure and Better Planning and Addressing the Climate Crisis.

Retail NI President Peter McBride said:

“Launching our New Ambition report in Omagh signals Retail NI’s commitment to campaign for a better deal for our rural towns and villages from Government. A top priority in our report is establishing a Rural Town and Village Infrastructure investment fund to ensure our small and mid-sized town are not left behind”

“Our members want to see a new Executive hit the ground running with a radical

Programme for Government and a plan to address the Cost of Living Crisis”

Retail NI Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said:

“These Elections are not about the Protocol. They are about who is best placed to deliver real change in policy and address the huge challenges that face our economy”

“Following the Election, the parties should have immediate discussions on agreeing a Programme for Government and forming an Executive. Not having an Executive in place during a Cost-of-Living Crisis is and would be utterly irresponsible”



“Retail NI members are facing a perfect storm of challenges from, energy hikes, labour shortages, National Insurance increases and Covid-19 recovery. We are not just dealing with a cost-of-living crisis, we are also facing a cost of business crisis too.

“Our New Ambition report outlines the need for urgent action from the next Economy Minister to establish and Chair a Cost of Doing Business Taskforce to ensure a comprehensive package



Colm Broderick Peter McBride Glyn Roberts

of measures is produced by late June.”

“We also want to see the current business rates holiday extended until January 2023 to alleviate some of the pressure on business”

“With the review of Invest NI ongoing, Retail NI wants to see the Executive create a new Small Business Champion to head a new agency which will focus on micro and small business development and be a ‘one stop shop’ for those seeking to start up on their own”

“We have also put forward plans for a radical reform of Business Rates relief to enable businesses to bring forward new investment, create jobs and Green technology”

“Retail NI wants to see the NI High Street Taskforce recommendations implemented in full and with new Executive established immediately implement the five-year High Reconstruction plan”

Visit www.retailni.com/publications to download a copy of the Plan

Junior Ministers Welcome Launch of High Street Task Force Report

Junior Ministers Gary Middleton and Declan Kearney welcomed the publication of the Executive's High Street Task Force report 'Delivering a 21st Century High Street', along with its 14 recommendations.

The Junior Ministers, who are joint chairs of the task force, were presented with the report by High Street Task Force members Glyn Roberts, Retail NI; Seamus McAleavey, NICVA; and Cathy Reynolds, SOLACE; they paid tribute to the work carried out and the collaboration involved from both inside and outside of government.

Junior Minister Gary Middleton said: "Our high streets have experienced constant and increasing change, particularly in recent years.

"We want to empower people and communities to reshape and repurpose their local villages, towns and cities, to create a more diverse high street - high streets that are clean, green, family friendly destinations that are welcoming for everyone.

"I want to thank the High Street Task Force for bringing forward this report which has been developed to prioritise those actions that can drive delivery and build momentum.

"A joined-up and collaborative approach must continue over the coming years to deliver high streets, village, town and city centres that are fit for the 21st century and this report provides the next steps for the new Ministers in the next mandate to take forward work to revitalise our village, town and city centres."

Junior Minister Declan Kearney said: "We want to see our cities, towns and villages regain and retain their vibrancy, purpose and sense of place.

"High streets of the future should be safe and attractive gathering points for whole communities, where people can live, work, shop, learn, do business, use public services and enjoy their leisure time.

"The High Street Task Force report provides a long-term focus on addressing the transformation of our high streets and recognises that there will be a requirement for a number of short, medium and long-term interventions.

"I want to thank the Task Force for their hard work and commitment to date and commend the joint-working and co-design roles played by departments, retail and other business organisations, trade unions, local councils and the community and voluntary sectors.

"I believe this report and its recommendations can play a vital role in revitalising our high streets."

Glyn Roberts, Retail NI Chief Executive and Chair of the High Street Task Force – Influencing Policy and Strategy sub-group, said: "This report sets out proposals for a five-year reconstruction plan for our high streets, reform of our business rates and the need to improve our retail planning policy.

"We hope that an incoming Executive after the election will hit the ground running with this plan and begin the long road of recovery for our high streets."

Seamus McAleavey, Chief Executive of NICVA and member of the High Street Task Force – Developing Capacity sub-group, said: "It is obvious change is happening. We are in the Fourth Industrial Revolution; it has speeded up during the Covid pandemic by necessity. Online



Declan Kearney Glyn Roberts & Gary Middleton

commerce is the norm and communities need to re-invent their town centres.

"Only a new vision will work as the past is the past. Communities are the heart of the city, town and villages centres. We can build vibrant high streets; places people want to work in, shop in and enjoy themselves in. It is achievable."

Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development, Place and Economy Department, Belfast City Council, and representing SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives), said: "Our high streets have experienced significant change and challenges over recent years, and it is critical that there is a focused effort to address these challenges and build on opportunities to ensure the future sustainability of our towns and cities.

"A long term sustained approach is required to ensure high streets are supported to thrive and most importantly survive."

The High Street Task Force report and its recommendations will be subject to consideration by the next Executive who will determine how it can be aligned with the future Programme for Government.



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Glyn Roberts CEO Retail NI, Conor Murphy MLA & Victoria Nicol MD We Are Two Sisters

Retail Roundup

RETURN TO WORKPLACE WORKING GROUP

Retail NI wrote to the First and deputy First Ministers back in January urging them to establish a working group to plan for the safe return of public and private sector employees to their workplaces. They continued to lobby the Executive to review the work at home guidance to allow the reopening larger public and private offices to boost footfall in our towns and cities.

Retail NI Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said:

"Northern Ireland needs to catch up with other parts of the UK with its return-to-workplace message." "Safely reopening offices is not just important for boosting footfall for our high streets, but also for our economy and returning our society to near as normal"

"Retail NI want to see the Executive establish a working group to produce a clear and co-ordinated plan for the safe and timely return of public and private sector staff to their offices and workplaces. We envisage this group to include key public, private, retail, hospitality, and trade union representatives."

"Health & safety, risk assessments and ventilation will be key issues for these employers to resolve in their workplaces as staff return. This will be a significant challenge and will require extensive planning."

"We fully understand that hybrid working is likely to be a significant feature of

the future of the office and needs to be factored in as we begin to repurpose and rethink our high streets."

BACK IN BUSINESS SCHEME

In March 2022 Finance Minister Conor Murphy launched a revamped, more generous 'Back In Business' scheme offering businesses a 50% rates discount for up to two years if they occupy a vacant shop unit.

The Finance Minister hoped the scheme will give business owners who set up in empty premises help to get established in the first two years. "This rate

relief scheme will help attract businesses onto the high street and into our town centres. This revamped scheme builds on the rate relief previously offered and extends the relief for an additional year. This will be vital in boosting post pandemic footfall for all businesses, new and existing, and will help restore the vibrancy of the high street as shoppers, tourists and workers return to the town centres.

The Minister met with Retail NI CEO Glyn Roberts at Two Sisters Deli in South Belfast to highlight the package.

"I have seen the effects of the pandemic during visits to town centres in recent months and I hope this scheme will support the regeneration of our high streets, building up business occupation in these areas."

The Scheme offers 50% rate relief for up to two years when empty premises become occupied. There are currently over 12,500 vacant business premises across Northern Ireland. The previous scheme, which expired in 2017, supported over 550 businesses. The new Scheme concession applies to any business ratepayer who moves into premises, which were previously used for retail purposes and have been unoccupied for 12 months or more.

Minister Murphy added: "There are many opportunities for new businesses to move into their first premises and for existing businesses to expand. With over 12,500 empty properties available, I hope this rate relief will encourage

businesses to take the opportunity, knowing they will have discounted rates to pay for the first two years."

Retail NI Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: "Given the huge challenge of addressing dereliction on our high streets, this scheme is both welcome and timely. It will incentivise and support new start independent retailers and other businesses with their all-important first two years of trading."

Further information on the Back in Business scheme, can be found at:

www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/backinbusiness.

The scheme will open for applications in May.

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MUSGRAVE CROWN ‘STORE OF THE YEAR’ WINNERS AT GLITTERING AWARDS CEREMONY

Three local SuperValu, Centra and MACE stores have clinched the coveted title of ‘Store of the Year’ at Musgrave’s awards event on 29th April.

Back for the first time since 2019, the ceremony saw Musgrave NI celebrate and recognise the achievements, hard work and dedication of its retail partners across the three brands.

SuperValu McCool’s Kells claimed the title of SuperValu Store of the Year, Centra Martin and Boal’s in Holywood picked up the Centra Store of the Year award and MACE’s Store of the Year award went to MACE Dolan’s Kildress.

In addition SuperValu Wilson’s Portadown was announced as Newcomer of the Year while in the Musgrave owned store categories, SuperValu Portstewart and Centra Portglenone were champions.

The awards also saw SuperValu Strabane

clinching the crown for Fundraising Store of the Year for Action Cancer, while MACE McDonald’s, Lurgan won Fundraiser of the Year for NI Chest Heart and Stroke for the second time, both Musgrave’s charity partners.

Congratulating all finalists, Trevor Magill Managing Director of Musgrave in Northern Ireland said:

“The Musgrave Store of the Year Awards are a part of a continuous drive to maintain the highest possible standards across our retail brands. We were delighted to hold the event once again and are proud to recognise the hard work and dedication of our retail partners, as well as our Musgrave owned stores, who are redefining convenience retail.



“Our stores are at the very heart of communities across Northern Ireland and are dedicated to delivering the best in customer service. I thank all of our retailers who work tirelessly to set themselves apart from competitors through hard work, passion and commitment to excellence.”

The awards, which were hosted by radio presenter Pete Snodden and held at the Slieve Donard Hotel, showcase and recognise all of Musgrave’s retailers in Northern Ireland across the SuperValu, Centra and MACE brands. Finalists are selected following several rigorous rounds of performance and standards audits, with the highest accolade being ‘Store of the Year’.

Changes are coming!



Carrier Bag Levy NI

From 1st April DAERA will increase the carrier bag levy to 25p

RETAIL NI ISSUE REMINDER TO SHOPPERS ON CARRIER BAG LEVY

With the Carrier Bag Levy rising to 25p from 1st April, Retail NI is reminded consumers to be ready for the increase.

Retail NI Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: “We absolutely agree on the objective to reduce the level of plastic in circulation as well as the levels that continue to litter our streets. Retail NI members have led the way in reducing plastic packaging and promoting bag for life options”

“Retail NI argued for the 5p charge to be increased to a more realistic figure of 10p in line with what is being proposed in England and Scotland. We believe this increase to 25p will disproportionately impact on working families who are struggling with the cost of living crisis”

“However, we will work with DAERA on its implementation and urge them to keep this policy under review”

“As is the case in Wales, we would now like to see responsibility given to our members to allow them to decide on what local environmental projects the proceeds of the levy, that they administer, is spent on”

“Successive Environment and DAERA Ministers have never consulted local retailers on how the proceeds of the levy is spent. We want to empower our members to make the decisions themselves on how best to spend the levy which they collect”

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