



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 2– RETAIL EXPERIENCE

5th JULY 2012

BRIEFING NOTE: SEMINAR – THE TOWN CENTRE CHALLENGE

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Representatives of the Panel attended a Seminar hosted by Skillsmart Retail on the Town Centre Challenge: Building a thriving high street for the future.

2 Information

- 2.1 Skillsmart Retail is the Sector Skills Council for retail. It reports that it acts as a catalyst to increase investment in skills to improve productivity and profitability, sets industry-wide standards for retail skills and career paths to enhance the reputation of retail careers, delivers products and services which are fit for purpose and accessible to all and operates a sustainable business that promotes continuous professional development in retail.

- 2.2 The aims of the Seminar were:

- Introduce how Skillsmart Retail can help towns and cities build a more profitable and thriving retail sector
- Emphasise the need for partnership working between stakeholders
- Launch Skillsmart Retail's new Retail Apprenticeship Training Agency

- 2.3 A number of key facts and statistics were provided such as:

- Retail continues to be the UK's largest private sector employer with 2.77 million employees
- The UK's top 75 retailers employ 2/3 of the total workforce
- The turnover of the retail sector in 2011 was £343 billion, equating to 8% of UKS GVA
- 188,000 retail enterprises, operating in around 286,000 retail establishments in the UK

Current challenges:

- Shop vacancy rates 14.6%
- Independent retailers struggling
- Low skill levels in retail
- High youth unemployment

- 2.4 The Seminar received a presentation from the Head of Economic Regeneration, London Borough of Newham around "Why shopping centre doesn't have to mean the decline of the town centre".

- 2.5 The presentation focused on London and statistics such as average output area price 2010, young and diverse statistics and public transport routes were provided.
- 2.6 The Seminar was informed of the London Plan: 25 Year Regeneration Priority is Newham, which includes 35,000 new homes, 110,000 new jobs and £22 billion investment.
- 2.7 The vision for the Royal Docks is currently being prepared by the Mayor of London and the Mayor of Newham.
- 2.8 Canning Town was highlighted, as was the priority for Metropolitan Master plan for Stratford which includes:
- 340 shops
 - 5 million square feet of offices
 - £1.8 billion investment
 - Casino
 - Stratford/Newham is the 3rd biggest retail destination in London
- 2.9 The Seminar received a presentation from the National Skills Academy for Retail, The Learning Shop, Bluewater on “The Y Factor: Keeping Young People in your area.”
- 2.10 Some reported key points:

Apprenticeships

- Work based training programmes designed around the needs of employers, which lead to nationally recognised qualifications
 - Designed to attract 16-18 year olds
 - Can be used to train new and existing staff
 - Retailers provide one year, full time job placement
 - Effective way to attract and keep people in employment
 - Economic benefits
 - The number of retail apprenticeships over the past five years has increased by 190%
 - The majority of retail apprenticeships are currently via larger retailers
 - The Retail Apprenticeship Training Agency helps to resolve issues such as independent retailers offering apprenticeships
- 2.11 A short film, including interviews with current retail apprentices, was shown.
- 2.12 The Seminar heard about Land Lease from the North West Kent College that reported the value of retail as:
- Over 8% of UK Gross Value added
 - 28% of UK business rates are paid by retailers
 - Over 150,000 sole traders in the sector
 - A third of the workforce are under 25 and a quarter are 50+

2.13 Some reported key facts around Town Centre Management: *A tried and tested formula....*” were given:

- The right people around the table
- A shared vision for the future
- The Plan
- Actions (not just words_
- Sustainability
- Communicating success

2.14 Skillsmart Retail is teaming up with local retailers up and down the country to celebrate Independents’ date on 4 July which it reports flies the flag for local retailers and encourages the public to buy at least one item from an independent retailer on the day to celebrate diversity on the high street.

2.15 The objectives of the campaign are:

- Increase footfall for retailers on 4th July
- Increase awareness of the contribution independent retailers bring to local communities and economy
- Improve perceptions of retail careers amongst the public
- Increase awareness of the support and advice available from Skillsmart Retail and the NSA for retail

2.16 For the Panel’s interest, full details of the presentations given and the film shown to the Seminar can be located [here](#).

3 Recommendations

3.1 That the information gathered from the Seminar hosted by Skillsmart Retail be used to inform the Panel’s evidence base.