

AR is currently reviewing the economic performance and business trading metrics AR needs to support its lobbying work. The issues being considered include: why trade bodies hold such data; key operating principles on holding data; and data sets held by AR and potential research avenues.

Typically, most trade bodies hold an economic data base for two reasons. The first is to establish the industry's role in the national economy, especially the contribution it makes to growth in GDP, improvements in efficiency, sustainable employment and investment. If Government can be convinced an industry is important economically and contributes to as wide a range of its economic and social, policy objectives as possible, the industry has a better chance of persuading Government to ensure it operates within a benign and supportive tax and regulatory structure.

The second is to provide statistical information on trading patterns (sales volumes, customer expenditure etc). This data assists member companies in the management and future planning of their businesses. Also, it enables trade bodies to alert Government if trading conditions become difficult and the industry needs help if it is to maintain its economic and social contributions.

There is a third reason which is specific to AR - data which exemplifies the contribution and performance of retail parks and warehouses to retailing compared with that of the other two main sectors, shopping centres and high streets. Retail parks and warehouses are still seen by Government, local authorities and the BRC as a cause of the decline in retailing in the other two sectors. To counter this, comparative data is needed exemplifying our contribution to the economy and demonstrating we are part of the solution to retailers being able to compete with on-line competition.

Whatever data is held, there are three key operating principles which must apply to its use. First, It must be accurate and up-to-date - there is little point in holding data if it is not. If these two aims are not secured, economic data will not be accepted by Government as contributing to the formulation of policy and trading data will not be utilised by member company management teams.

Second, data must be publicised to opinion formers proactively not just reactive. If opinion is to be influenced, data held must be publicised to relevant parties (AR members, Government, Parliament (Lords and HoC), MPs), the media (press, TV and radio), other trade bodies, professional associations, local authority associations and single-issue lobbying groups. Used most effectively, data is published regularly to influence policy formation, not just reactively when policy has already been decided albeit for consultation.

Third, Publication must be followed up. Again, if opinion is to be influenced, publication must be followed up (e.g. responding to queries, addressing requests for further information, attending meetings etc).

=====