



April 2010

## BFC FINDS ITS FEET AS VOICE OF INDUSTRY TO GOVERNMENT

More than 50 furniture folk attended the British Furniture Confederation's (BFC) 2010 open meeting, the main focus of which was the launch of the new BFC/FIRA guide to fire safety of non domestic furniture in the UK.

The meeting, held on 14 April at office manufacturer Herman Miller's prestigious showrooms in London's Aldwych, was also an opportunity for the BFC to reflect on its work and achievements to date and its current agenda.

"It's not easy going but we've made quite a lot of progress in our first three years, with the express objective of making sure government was aware of the furniture and bed industry, its challenges and concerns," said BFC chairman Martin Jourdan. "Government had made it quite clear it wasn't interested in talking to a myriad of separate organisations representing the industry's different sectors. If the Furniture Makers livery company had not brokered this co-operative, we would have little or no voice or influence at all!"

He outlined the BFC's leading role in encouraging an updating of the UK flammability regulations for upholstered furniture and its determination to resist any watering down of its standards. The new guide for non domestic upholstered furniture follows on from publication last year of a similar BFC/FIRA guide for the domestic sector.

Other activities over the past year have included briefing sessions about credit insurance and consumption tax with treasury and shadow treasury officials; and about best practice for furniture in public procurement with senior policy advisers and ministers. The idea behind the consumption tax initiative, which is modelled on a successfully introduced similar scheme in Denmark, is to replace NI with a higher VAT rate for furniture (it could also work for other

labour intensive products). This would be revenue neutral for government; not actually lead to higher prices in the shops as the exc.VAT selling price would be lower because of lower direct costs; and it would create a fairer playing field for home grown products alongside imports as well as encouraging employment.

The BFC also has a seat on the government's Creative Industries Board and has recently been offered the opportunity to exhibit at this year's London Design Festival in September.

After the General Election one of the first tasks of the BFC will be to ensure the establishment of a new All Party Parliamentary Furniture Group, as all existing groups are dissolved along with the old parliament. A strong and active APPFG is essential to securing on going recognition of the industry as an important sector of the economy.

The BFC will also have to once again embark upon a programme of briefings with representatives of all parties to ensure the industry's concerns are heard and understood. Existing initiatives will also need to be re-introduced to the new players in government. The BFC is holding an internal strategy meeting on 19 May to determine its main agenda with the new government and to ensure the issues it is pursuing are the issues its members want it to pursue.

Ends

#### Editors' Notes

The British Furniture Confederation (BFC) acts a single voice for UK furniture and bed manufacturers. Led by an executive, comprising representatives of BCFA, BFM, FIRA and NBF, and supported by associate members (AMUSF, GMB, Proskills and WCFM), its mission is to ensure that the UK furniture industry has a strong and sustainable dialogue with Government. Its roles include:

- Securing the long term future and prosperity of the British furniture industry
- Raising the profile of the industry at a political level
- Formulating strategies for dealing with key industry issues
- Engaging in dialogue and negotiating with Government on these issues
- Working with the All Party Parliamentary Furniture Group to promote cross party discussion and to meet with senior influencers within Government agencies
- Ensuring that the industry gains the recognition and attention that its size deserves

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