

**Advice NI statement on the Department of Finance and Personnel’s Review of Northern Ireland’s Non-Domestic Rating System**

**Deadline: 25 January 2016**

**Background**

Advice NI is a membership organisation that exists to provide leadership, representation and support for independent advice organisations to facilitate the delivery of high quality, sustainable advice services. We provide our members with advice and information management systems, funding and planning, quality assurance support, training from foundation to diploma level, social policy co-ordination and ICT development to ensure best practice, best value and effective advice services delivery.

Membership of Advice NI is for organisations that provide significant advice and information services to the public. We have over 60 member organisations operating throughout Northern Ireland and providing information and advocacy services to over 150,000 people each year dealing with over 270,000 enquiries on an extensive range of matters including: social security, housing, debt, consumer and employment issues. For further information, please visit [www.adviceni.net](http://www.adviceni.net).

**Consultation Statement**

Advice NI supports the continuation of the current arrangements on charity shops business rate relief. The charities that are currently exempt from rates are those charities that have been established as “not for profit” and are crucially pursuing the organisation's objectives for the benefit of their local communities and Northern Ireland as a whole. An introduction of business rate charges would place a further hardship on charities who in the current economic climate have found it extremely difficult to stay solvent.

With public budgets to the charitable sector in Northern Ireland being restricted and cut annually; accompanied with the latest Office of National Statistics bulletin[[1]](#endnote-1) which shows household disposable income in Northern Ireland to be the lowest in the UK, charities in Northern Ireland are fighting a continuous battle to secure donations, funding and goodwill in order to continue trading. An introduction of rates on these charities would be detrimental in a lot of instances to their short term future and damage the local communities in which they reside and provide a very important function.

While we understand the concern of some councils in the disproportionately high volumes of charities in town centres, combined with the possibility of some charity shops being fictitiously labelled as such to enable their landlords to avoid paying rates, we believe that these problems could be easily addressed by searching the Charities Commission NI register in order to ensure that genuine, non-profit making charities who continue to exist in hard economic times are not further burdened by changing the current legislation on business rates.

Contact information on this consultation response:

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1. Office of National Statistics, Statistic Bulletin, 2015, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_405192.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)