

Tuesday 21st January 2025

Dear Valerie,

I am writing to you on behalf of our members to outline a number of factors which we would like you to consider prior to setting this year's District Rate, which could have a significant impact on many of our businesses who employ thousands of residents in Ballymena and across the Borough.

Whilst conditions for business have been challenging for a number of years, the difficulties faced due to the recent budget and other factors have added additional pressures which our businesses are struggling to deal with, in a way which secures the future of the business and their employees.

These pressures include –

- Significant increases to Employer's National Insurance contributions
- A rise in the Minimum Wage
- Post Brexit challenges relating to the movement of goods between the mainland UK and Northern Ireland and
- Inflationary pressures and the cost of borrowing

These issues have added significant costs, and any additional costs may have an extremely detrimental effect on the viability of some of our businesses. As you know last year businesses and residents in the Mid and East Antrim area saw the highest increase in rates across Northern Ireland. Whilst we discussed the rates increase with you and understand the position the Council faced, it did cause difficulty for many businesses and residents.

Given the pressures outlined above and the 'exceptional' rise in both Business and Domestic Rates last year we would ask Council to consider a reduction in both Business and Domestic rates this year.

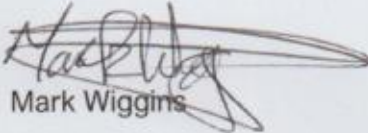
This would be one cost which would be reduced allowing businesses to address the other pressures without facing any additional financial pressures.

The Ballymena area is without doubt one of the most important 'economic hubs' in Northern Ireland and it is essential that our businesses are given every opportunity to grow and continue providing well paid secure employment to their staff and your residents.

As a Chamber we are proud to consider Mid and East Antrim Borough Council as a valued partner and know the extent to which Council supports our local businesses at all levels.

We trust that you will consider the issues raised and our recommendation when setting the District Rate. We would also value the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the issues in more detail.

I look forward to your early reply.


Mark Wiggins

President

Ballymena Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry