



Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-967
Ein cyf/Our ref: RE/00336/20

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair of the Petitions Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

9 June 2020

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your letter as about non-domestic rates.

I recognise the importance of Debenhams stores to communities across Wales. The Welsh Government is providing non-domestic rates relief to the majority of Debenhams stores in Wales, with our support totalling over £1 million. I have also met the Chair of Debenhams to learn more about the company's position and I have asked officials to explore whether alternative support might be an option.

I am grateful for the hard work of local authorities which are home to Debenhams stores in Wales in working with the Welsh Government to find a viable mechanism for supporting the business. A number have been considering how they can use their discretionary powers to assist the continued presence of the stores in their areas. I am pleased that Newport City Council and Swansea Council have agreed to defer the non-domestic rates liability for the Debenhams stores in their city centres until 31 March 2021.

I do need to emphasise that the decision to set the threshold for the rates relief at £500,000 was not taken lightly. I also need to stress that, unlike the UK Government, we have relatively little control over the overall size of our budget, so face very difficult choices in the current crisis.

I must also make it clear that the financial challenges that Debenhams faces cannot be attributed solely to its rates liability, nor could the future of Debenhams be guaranteed by the availability of rates relief. Debenhams has already announced the closure of a number of its stores across the UK, including some which were eligible for relief.

The Welsh Government is continuing to consider this matter, and we appreciate the challenges Debenhams faces and the impact store closures would have on communities in

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Wales. We are working with local authorities to consider how our high streets can be best supported to ensure vibrant and enduring business activity and a strong retail presence.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Evans." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rebecca Evans AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Cyllid a'r Trefnydd
Minister for Finance and Trefnydd