



Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-446
Ein cyf/Our ref EH/03108/13

William Powell AM
AM for Mid & West Wales
Chair
Petitions committee

committeebusiness@Wales.gsi.gov.uk

09 October 2013

Dear William,

I am writing to update you on the Welsh Government response to the review of Business Rates Reliefs for Charities and Social Enterprises. This is further to previous correspondence from the Petitions Committee and my oral statement on 1 October 2013.

Following the Task and Finish Group's Report on Business Rates Reliefs for Charities and Social Enterprises, I consulted on its findings. I published the responses as well as a summary of these online and encouraged Members to see the views that had been expressed. In addition, I consulted with Cabinet Colleagues on the recommendations and obtained legal advice.

The response that I set out to Members is a measured and considered one.

The key recommendations from the Review that were of interest to the Committee, concerned the proposals to alter business rates relief for charities. These recommendations attracted the most interest and debate throughout the consultation. I have considered these in detail.

These recommendations would need primary legislation and I have written to the UK and Devolved Governments to ascertain their position and assess whether there is consensus in this area. As a result, I will be keeping all of these recommendations under review.

I will, however, be acting immediately on a number of the recommendations from the Review. One of the key issues for the Task and Finish Group was the

need for diversity in our town centres. As a result, I have launched the Open for Business Scheme. This scheme will offer 50% business rates relief to occupiers who take on a property that has been empty for a year or more and will run for an initial 18-month period.

I was very pleased to see broad support across most responses to the consultation for the recommendation to more effectively monitor the selling of new goods in charity shops. I have been discussing with the Minister for Local Government how to best ensure that this is being enforced. We will be taking action to make sure that this is properly and consistently acted upon.

I have also written to the Minister for Housing and Regeneration and asked him to ensure that the concept of a separate planning use class is kept in mind for future consideration. In addition, the joint fund that we announced to provide start-up funding for Business Improvement Districts in Wales will actively encourage charities to participate in these.

I will ensure that the Petitions Committee are kept informed of any important updates against the recommendations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. I. Jones', written in a cursive style.