

*These notes refer to the Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009 (c.8) which received Royal Assent on 3 November 2009*

# Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009

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## **EXPLANATORY NOTES**

### **CONSULTATION**

15. Views were sought on the broad direction of domestic rating policy during a 12 week consultation in 2007, which initiated the Executive's Review. The Executive agreed to take forward a range of measures in November 2007 subject to further research and consultation.
16. Policy documents, setting out detailed proposals, were subsequently published for twelve weeks consultation in 2008 on:
  - the reduction in the maximum capital value and the possible provision of transitional relief (4 April);
  - the rating of empty homes (21 May);
  - a rates deferment scheme for owner occupier pensioners (24 June);
  - data sharing (27 June); and
  - energy efficiency and zero carbon reliefs (4 July).
17. In total there were 288 responses to these consultation exercises, representing 63 organisations (including 20 district councils) and 156 individuals. This was supplemented by meetings with a range of key stakeholders. By and large there was support for the proposals set out in the consultation papers. A consultation report, setting out the way forward on the range of policy issues, as well as providing an update on various rating matters, was published on 6 January 2009.
18. On the non domestic side, changes are needed to the way in which the former public utilities are valued at the next rating revaluation and beyond, allowing them to be conventionally assessed instead of the valuations being prescribed in legislation. The revaluation was intended to take effect from April 2010 but this exercise has recently been postponed to April 2011. The policy changes given effect in this legislation are not expected to increase the rate liability of the majority of these undertakings following the revaluation, however, it may alter the assessments on the railway network and Belfast Port. Detailed discussions between the District Valuer and Translink and the Belfast Harbour

Commissioners have been ongoing and will continue before the new valuations are published.

19. A targeted consultation on the impact assessment for the small business rate relief scheme has been completed and no major issues were raised. A wider consultation around the case for a small business rate relief scheme was carried out in 2007 by the Economic Research Institute for Northern Ireland, on behalf of the Department of Finance and Personnel. Meetings were also held during 2008/2009 with the National Federation of Sub-postmasters on how the post office elements of the scheme might work.
20. The consultation documents, the responses received and the associated consultation report, setting out decisions on the way forward, can be accessed at <http://www.ratingreviewni.gov.uk>
21. In addition to the public consultation undertaken in 2007 and 2008 there was extensive liaison with the Assembly's Finance and Personnel Committee over the last two years. The Committee also responded to the Review of domestic rating, as part of which it undertook evidence sessions and produced a comprehensive report in November 2007 containing 33 recommendations. All of these recommendations were taken into account in taking forward the various measures included in this legislation.