

Democratic Services Section

COPY



Your reference

Our reference

Date 10 December 2010

Mr John Wilkinson
Chief Executive
Land and Property Services
Queen's Court
56-66 Upper Queen Street
BELFAST BT1 6FD

Dear John

Belfast City Council Rates

As I am sure you are aware, the council is in the process of agreeing the district rate for 2011/12. The timely notification of the EPP from LPS is appreciated and the collaborative approach taken to produce the figures is a welcome step forward. We obviously wish to continue to work in partnership with LPS to address the many ongoing challenges affecting the rates income of Belfast City Council.

Come the New Year, Members will be turning their attention to the key issues which may impact on the delivery of the agreed budget for 2011/12. As 74% of our funding comes from the rate base, a key factor for the council will be that the collectable rate in Belfast is maximised and losses on collection are minimised. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee has discussed this issue at its recent meeting in December and Members expressed considerable concern about a number of aspects including the extent of rates arrears, vacant properties and the policy concerning non domestic vacant rating exclusions. They agreed that, as Chairman of the Committee, I should write to you to seek your agreement to a proposed way forward.

The Committee will be discussing rates issues again at its meeting in February, including the first report on LPS performance arising from the Memorandum of Understanding with Belfast City Council. It is most welcome that LPS is supportive of engaging with Members and officials in councils and as such, I would like to invite you to attend this meeting in order to discuss the actions being put in place by LPS to maximise the collectable rate in Belfast, address Members' concerns and provide an opportunity to demonstrate partnership working with us. The Chief Executive will be in touch to arrange the details with you.

In the meantime and in order to aid our discussions, I would be grateful if you could forward to him before the Christmas break, the following information relating to Belfast City Council:

- a. The number and value of properties which have been valued but a rates bill has not been raised and the actions being taken to get these bills issued.
- b. Details of the current level of rates arrears along with an age profile of the debt.
- c. Details of what steps are being taken to recover the rates arrears.
- d. Details of what improvements are being made to the management of vacant properties.

City Hall
Belfast BT1 5GS
Tel: 02890 320202

- 2 -
10 December 2010
Mr J Wilkinson

- e. Details of progress in getting bills raised as part of the vacant property exercise being completed in conjunction with the council's Building Control service.
- f. Details of what systems, processes and resources are being put in place to ensure that the introduction of vacant domestic property rating will be effectively implemented by October.
- g. Details of applications for NDVR exclusions and the potential liability to the council.

Once this information has been received, it would be helpful if you have an opportunity to discuss it with Council officials, prior to your attendance at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in February.

In the meantime, may I wish you and all the staff at LPS a Happy Christmas.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely



Councillor Ian Crozier
Chairman
Strategic Policy & Resources Committee

City Hall
Belfast BT1 5GS
Tel: 02890 320202