

IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS**NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE****Response by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to the
2007 Executive Review of Rating Reform**

1. Introduction

We note that the terms of reference for this review refer only to proposals for a new domestic rating system. Congress, in welcoming the opportunity to comment, would share the concerns of affiliates and others that this review is taking place over the main holiday period in Northern Ireland.

We also share the concerns of affiliated trade unions regarding the methodology of the consultation process and are unsure as to how all stakeholders mentioned were consulted. However, within the process available, we have taken views and the following are the comments from Congress.

2. Congress is opposed to any cap on rates and supports proposals to reform the rating system to ensure that charges are based on capital values. In saying this, it is clear that there must be protection and relief for disadvantaged groups in our society. These groups will include the elderly, disabled and the working poor. We support the view that any rate relief scheme should be the subject of public consultation.
3. On the broader question of relief, Congress believes special measures should be introduced to assist low income and single households as well as larger families. Congress also takes account of proposals to provide a measure of transitional relief where rate bills will increase in a disproportionate manner. We would be concerned if the less well off would have to pay for those in a position to pay any proposed increases.
4. Given that we are currently engaged in the Comprehensive Spending Review process and there are clear attempts to reduce public expenditure we would wish the Executive to take all measures to ensure that any additional monies raised through rating reform will remain in Northern Ireland and be in addition to the Block Grant.
5. Finally, Congress would wish to restate its total opposition to additional domestic water charges. We also believe that any proposed introduction of metering or privatisation would also be unfair and

introduce increased hardship and poverty. Congress is on the record in believing that water and sewerage services should be paid for through taxation and the payment of rates. Government should be held directly responsible for repairing the infrastructure of the system.