

## Review of Domestic Rating System

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to make the following observations about the Domestic Rating System.

1. Any rates should be fair, and seen to be fair, for all people.
2. I would like to see the introduction of a VACANCY RATE on all houses and apartments that are still vacant after six months. We are in a frightening situation where unregulated developers can force people from their homes (either by offers of huge offers of money or by making their home environment untenable by the new building) and build unattractive apartment blocks and houses which lie empty. The result, apart from making Belfast lose its traditional character and look like any other city in the world, is that the investors in this new housing are merely waiting for the value to increase and thus depriving ordinary people of affordable housing. The consequent increase in the value of housing will result in an increase in rates which will in turn force people to leave their homes to 'downsize' because their salaries, fixed pensions etc. will no longer be sufficient. Please consider a Vacancy Rate.
3. Water Rates: Forty years ago we paid separate water rates. Then we received a letter to say that these were to be included with the rates bill and not collected separately. Now we are being told we do not pay for the water at all. This can't be right – or something amiss has happened to the money we assumed was going to the water services. It is not realistic to assume that the size of a house relates to the amount of water used. If separate water rates are to be re-introduced, then every household should have its own water meter, just as we do for electricity, gas etc.

I would also like to be able to trust that public money is not being wasted.