



RAMSEY TOWN COMMISSIONERS

STATEMENT ON TOWN RATES FOR 2008/2009

INTRODUCTION

The Ramsey Town Rate for 2008/2009 has been fixed at 324p in the pound, an increase of 12p or approximately 4.00% on the 2007/2008 rate.

The rate includes a contribution of £68275.00, equivalent to a rate of 10.47p in the £, towards the operating costs of the northern civic amenity site at Ballacallow, which is paid to the Department of Local Government and the Environment.

The total net rateable value utilised in fixing the Town Rate for 2008/2009 is £651,573; an increase of only £13,329 (2.08%) on the previous year. The continued lack of development in the Town has again meant that rateable value increases have fallen behind inflation, which in February 2008 was reported as being 4.1%. In essence the impact of inflation is being met by existing rate payers whereas with development growth the burden would be mitigated by increased rateable values.

Allowances of £32,000.00 (4.91p) and £35,000.00 (5.37p) have been made for exempt properties and rate default respectively; with an estimated credit balance of £444,302 (68.19p) as at 31st March 2009 provided to meet the demands of cash flow in the subsequent rate year. Provision for rates discounts for payment on or before 30th June, 2008, of 5% of rates paid by that date, has been provided for in the sum of £85,000.00 (13.04p).

A credit balance of £523,347.00 (80.32p) is anticipated for the year ending 31st March 2008, and this has been taken into account in fixing the rate for 2008/2009. The average loan charge interest applied in preparing the 2008/2009 estimates is 5.5%; a figure of 4.00% has been used to allow for inflation during the new financial year.

SWIMMING POOL CONTRIBUTION

A sum of £17,850.00 has been included in the estimates as the Commission's contribution towards the cost of Ramsey Swimming Pool, which is administered by the Northern Local Authorities Swimming Pool Board. This amount equates approximately to the product of a 2.5p rate.

The new swimming pool is being developed on land provided for that purpose by the Ramsey Town Commissioners. The release of land at the Peveril Plot is covenanted so that its future use will be restricted to that of a public swimming pool, and in the event that such use ceases the land would revert to the Commission.

The site of the existing pool, previously provided by the Commission, is to be returned to the Commission in April 2009 and the Commission has commenced a survey, in conjunction with the IOM Arts and Sports Councils, of leisure organisations in Ramsey and the north. The data collected will assist on the consideration of future options for the existing swimming pool building and will be published and maintained in the form of an internet based leisure directory for Ramsey and the North.

LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING

The cost of public sector housing provision continues to be met by Government through the provision of housing deficiency grant payments. For the rate year 2008/9 the projected deficit on the Commissions housing is £929,161.00, equivalent to £1,873.00 for each of the 496 tenanted properties in Ramsey at 31st January 2008.

The Department of Local Government and the Environment has advised that public sector rents will increase by 5% for 2008/2009. The Commission believes that public sector rents could be either set at market levels or means tested as the present system makes no allowances for the ability of some tenants to pay higher rents and provides insufficient incentive for tenants who could afford private sector accommodation to seek to move to such.

The Maintenance Allowance will remain at 33.33% of rents receivable with Administration Allowance increasing to 7.5% of rent receivable for authorities able to demonstrate a commitment to performance standards which the Commission is pleased to report it has achieved. Costs associated with building maintenance have continued to rise at above the rate of retail price inflation, meaning that the maintenance allowance will fund less works than in the past however the development of new housing to replace the Lezayre Estate will reduce the burden of maintenance which that estate has previously provided.

Current waiting lists for accommodation in Ramsey, as at 1st February 2008, show a total of 151 (152 at the same date in 2007) applicants in varying need of first tenancies. There are 92 (76 in the previous year) tenants who are seeking transfers to alternative accommodation. During the period 1st January, 2007 to 31st December, 2008 there were 9 (10 in the previous year) properties let to new tenants from the waiting lists and 24 transfers of tenants to alternative properties (43 in the previous year). There were also 2 inter-authority transfers.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT & REFURBISHMENTS

The development of new housing to replace the Lezayre estate is progressing well. The Commission has received 26 new homes at Gladstone Way and Paairk Ollay the majority of which are already occupied. Normal maintenance work will continue on Lezayre Housing Estate during 2008/09 and the extent of future expenditure will continue to be closely monitored to ensure that the works to individual units are appropriate given the programme for their redevelopment.

Ramsey Town Commissioners Rates Statement 2008/09

The capital programme for housing works in Ramsey up to 2013, contained within the Isle of Man Budget is shown below:-

RAMSEY	Total estimated cost	Probable to 31.03.08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	Annual revenue cost
£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's
Planned Maintenance Programme	3,414	1,587	707	545	475	100		334
Clifton Park Elderly Persons Housing	2,400					1,600	800	169
New Units - Ballure Road	2,500	1,917	500	83				176
Lezayre Estate Redevelopment								
Enabling works - Access Road / Drainage etc	2,023	2,023						142
Phase 1 Redevelopment	7,315	7,189	126					515
Phase 2 Redevelopment	4,284	322	2,794	1,101	67			301
Phase 3 Redevelopment	3,291	97	561	2,580	53			232
Phase 4 Redevelopment	3,413	78	131	1,545	1,605	54		240
Phase 5 Redevelopment	3,964	87			2,682	1,137	58	279
Mayfield Flats Replacement	2,175					600	1,575	213
TOTAL	34,779	13,300	4,819	5,854	4,882	3,491	2,433	2,601

Overall expenditure of over £34 million is planned over the next five years, the revenue implications of which, estimated at approximately £2.6 million per annum, are funded by the Department of Local Government and the Environment under the Housing Deficiency arrangements approved by Tynwald.

Maintenance and refurbishment schemes on the public housing stock include the provision of new doors and windows and upgrading of loft insulation to all properties not scheduled for demolition together with the continuation of schemes to provide central heating to all properties with the next phase being the installation of gas central heating to Brookfield and Seamount Road properties expected to commence in the Spring of 2008.

TOWN HALL AND LIBRARY

The Town Hall and Library continues to prove to show improvement in terms of service provision and facilities. The Ramsey Civil Registry, the Coroner for the Sheadings of Ayre and Garff and Northern Neighbours are renting office space within the new building, and a room is let to a local accountancy practice. The Town Hall, and its facilities, is regularly used by many organisations for events, presentations and training courses and is proving to be a highly practical and popular venue within the Town.

The Age Concern Computer Drop-In Centre continues to operate in the first floor library. The organization provides free internet training to older persons on three half days each week. Four Internet enabled computers have been added to the existing computers in the library and are used by the general public when not in use for training. The library is also serviced by a wireless internet "hot-spot" enabling users with wireless enabled laptops to access the internet within the library area. The library facility is very well used and provides an opportunity for many townspeople to access internet services and contributes towards the bridging of the "digital divide".

The Members of the House of Keys for Ramsey, the Hon. A. R. Bell and the Hon. Mrs. A.V. Craine, continue to hold a monthly political surgery in the Town Hall on the second Saturday of each month. The Commission will continue to encourage functions and displays with a view to maximising use of its facilities.

CAR PARKING IN THE TOWN

The Commission concluded an outline business plan into the provision of off-street parking for Ramsey early in 2003. The plan was submitted to the Department of Transport for consideration and has resulted in that Department agreeing to fund a feasibility study into the development of the Plaza/MER site for a multi-storey car park, combined with terminus facilities for the Manx Electric Railway and Manx National Transport.

The Department of Transport has presented a business case for the scheme in order to obtain funding support through the Treasury, and it is understood that agreement has been received by the Department of Transport to appoint the Design Team to take this matter forward.

REFUSE COLLECTION

The Commission continues to operate a commercial charging system for refuse based on the PM Onboard Weighing System. Domestic disposal charges imposed by the Department of Local Government and the Environment remain at £10.00 per tonne. It is not proposed to introduce weight based charging of households at this time, as the additional costs of administering such a system are not justified for charges that would average about £10.00 per household per annum. For this reason domestic disposal charges continue to be a rate borne expense.

STREET CLEANING

The Department of Transport presently provides street cleaning services within the Town. Requests to establish an Agency Agreement for Ramsey, such as exists within the Borough of Douglas, Peel and Onchan, have been accepted and negotiations at officer level continue with a view to the Commission undertaking street cleaning under an Agency Agreement for the Department of Transport.

SEWERAGE SCHEMES

The Commission act as agent for the Department of Transport in the maintenance of the Town's sewerage systems, the costs of which are met by the Department of Transport and not borne by the rate fund.

Investigative works are ongoing in respect of the condition of the short sea sewer outfall pipe which is located at The Vollan on the Mooragh Promenade. At present, this sea outfall pipe discharges all foul drainage waste to sea, however, as part of the IRIS Master Plan, it is proposed that Ramsey is to be served by a regional sewage treatment plant and, if suitable, the existing outfall pipe could serve as an overflow facility. Works have been identified in respect of the refurbishment of various pumping stations throughout the Town; these include the replacement of cabinets, control equipment and the provision of a telemetry system to allow for remote monitoring of the performance and particular problems within the pumping stations. In addition, some pumps have been identified as requiring replacement due to their not meeting the standards as set down within the Department of Transport Drainage Divisions specifications.

Further sewer lining works are to be undertaken in various locations within the Town including Parliament Square, Tower Road, Brookfield Crescent and Coronation Park. In addition, 5200 metres of sewer lines have been identified for CCTV survey together with a number of manhole cover and frames which are to be replaced or re-bedded and 3 new manholes are to be constructed.

DECORATIVE AND STREET LIGHTING

A scheme has been prepared for the underground of electrical services and provision of a new street lighting scheme on Brookhill Road, as part of the Manx Electricity Authorities Town Centre Renewal Scheme. The provision of new street lighting on the West side of Brookhill Road will enable the removal of the existing timber poles to the seaward side of the road and also enable the removal of the overhead supplies to the rear of nearby properties as electricity supplies to these properties are also to be fed below ground.

The works comprise the removal of the wooden poles, street lighting heads and overhead cabling and the installation of 5 No. 6 metre columns to the front and 1 No. 6 metre column to the rear of the properties on Brookhill Road, together with all undergrounding of services and other supply authority services as appropriate.

Provision is made to replace as necessary a proportion of the displays which are mounted on the street lighting columns throughout the street which is carried out as a rolling programme each year.

MOORAGH PARK

During the past year works to upgrade the tennis courts at Mooragh Park were completed and the courts have been very well received by users.

Two new attractions in the park, a skate park and the modern water play feature came into operation at Easter 2007. Both these facilities, and the multi-play area adjacent to the tennis courts, have proven to be extremely successful and during 2007 the Mooragh experience a definite resurgence of use as a place of family recreation.

A scheme to renew surface water drainage through the Mooragh Park is hoped to commence in 2008 /09 at an estimated cost of £150,000.00 funded over 15 years at a full years cost of £14,000.00 (2.14p rate). Survey work has been substantially completed, although further investigation is presently being undertaken into existing drainage, and consultant reports are presently awaited. A similar sum (£150,000.00) is also provided as a contingency in the event that works prove necessary to stabilise areas of the Brooghs where investigative work is presently being undertaken.

A specific sum of £10,000 is provided towards improvements to the woodland pathways running through the Brooghs.

PLAY AREAS

The Commission undertakes weekly inspections of all play areas and play equipment. An annual inspection by independent specialists is also undertaken to ensure that equipment remains compliant with appropriate safety standards and fit for use. The play areas continue to be well used and the ongoing investment in maintenance and upgrading ensures that they are amongst the best available on the Island.

MISCELLANEOUS FEES AND CHARGES

Membership fees for the Town Library for 2008/09 will remain at £10 for adult residents of Ramsey, £20.00 for non-residents and £1.00 for students and children. Bowling Club fees for 2008/09 have been fixed at £43.00 for adults, £24.00 for juniors and £30.00 for senior citizens.

Car parking charges for reserved spaces at Chapel Lane, College Street and Water Street are to be increased to £295.00 plus VAT per annum, an increase of 2.85%. Search fees in respect of property sales are increased to £85.00 with the charge for Letters of Comfort remaining unaltered at £27.00. Hire charges for the Town Hall Boardroom have been increase by approximately 4% to £65.00 plus VAT per session for corporate hire and weddings or £25.00 plus VAT for local or charitable events.

Ramsey Town Commissioners Rates Statement 2008/09

STAFFING

The Commission presently employs a total of 50 persons, with one vacancy, in both full and part-time positions being the equivalent of 46.44 full time employees. Provision is made within the estimates for an increase in establishment of 1 post to supplement the Technical Department in response to increasing workloads resulting from housing schemes, litter collection and sewer works, this provision requires confirmation of appointment subject to a review of existing resources and capacity to undertake additional duties. Subject to conclusion of an Agency Agreement on Street Cleaning additional employment of manual workers will result although initially the costs thereof would be met by central government.

Staffing budget at 20 February 2008	NJC		Whitley Council		Total	
	No.	Full Time Equivalent	No.	Full Time Equivalent	No.	Full Time Equivalent
Town Clerks Office	3	3			3	3
Technical Services Department	3	3			3	3
Finance & Administration	7	5.61			7	5.61
Housing	2	1.50			2	1.50
Library	5	3.08			5	3.08
Town Hall			1	1	1	1
Parks & Gardens			5	5	5	5
Works			10	9.25	10	9.25
Refuse			4	4	4	4
Housing			11	11	11	11
	20	16.19	31	30.25	51	46.44

Pay award details have not been confirmed, the Commission is required to meet the awards made under Whitley Council, National Joint Council and Civil Service Agreements and allowances have been made within the estimates to meet the effect of potential cost increases at 4.00%. The agreed Whitley Council settlement of 4.1% will be contained within existing budgets. Provision has also been made for 23% superannuation contributions, an increase of 0.5% on the previous year, towards the pension fund which is reported as at 31st March 2007 as being 79.6% funded. In addition a provision equivalent to a 1p in the £ rate has again been retained for staff training.

A summary of the net estimated cost of the main services and facilities provided by the Ramsey Town Commissioners is attached to this Report.

March, 2008.

**Town Hall & Library
Parliament Square,
Ramsey.**

