



RAMSEY TOWN COMMISSIONERS

STATEMENT ON TOWN RATES FOR 2014/2015

INTRODUCTION

Central Government and Local Authorities are facing considerable challenges in responding to the Island's fiscal position and the Ramsey Town Commission has again had to consider very carefully its budgets and services in preparing its rates estimate for 2014/15.

In preparing its 2014/2015 estimates the Commission has sought to absorb the impact of inflationary increases for the forthcoming year whilst retaining funding for priority works. A conscious decision has been taken to reduce reserve balances retained for cash flow in the first quarter of each financial year, with a credit balance of £1,114,591 (162.41p) anticipated for the year ending 31st March 2014 and a credit balance of £623,783 (90.89p) estimated at 31st March 2015. The Commission will continue to apply great rigor in the management of expenditure.

The total net rateable value utilised in fixing the Town Rate for 2014/2015 is £686,262; an increase of £2,458 (0.36%) on the previous year. Growth in the Town's rate base (total rateable value) continues to lag well behind inflation. Without growth in rateable values, which can only result from development, the burden of inflationary increases and all of the transferred costs or increased charges applied by Government must be met by existing ratepayers.

The Commission remains of the view that the rating system is outdated and that re-valuation is well overdue, the last general revaluation having been undertaken over 40 years ago.

Provision for rates discounts, for payment on or before 30th June, 2014, of 5% of rates paid by that date, has been made in the sum of £82,000 (11.95p) in accordance with the provisions of the Rating and Valuation Act 1953. The Commission continues to believe that the provision of a discount for prompt payment should be discontinued and that interest should be charged in respect of late payments.

A figure of 2.75% has been used to allow for inflation during the new financial year, except for energy prices which are expected to remain stable over the forthcoming twelve month period.

TOWN AND VILLAGE REGENERATION SCHEME

The Commission continues to work closely with members of the Ramsey Local Regeneration Committee, the Members of the House of Keys for Ramsey and the Ramsey Chamber of Commerce, to progress the development of regeneration initiatives within the Ramsey Town Centre.

Phase 2B of the regeneration work has progressed well, and is scheduled for completion by March 2014. These works include the provision of new paving with amended kerb lines to the footpaths on East Street and part of Parliament Street, together with drainage improvements and new tarmac surfacing to the roadway. The regeneration works have already brought considerable improvements to the street scape in the vicinity of the Courthouse, and the next phase will link these works to the works nearing completion on East Street and Parliament Street.

To support the regeneration work and improve the visitor experience, provision is made to refurbish the public toilet facilities at Market Square, and also those adjacent to the Lakeside Centre, Mooragh Park. At present, a specification is being prepared prior to seeking tenders for the refurbishment works to Market Square public toilets.

In conjunction with the regeneration initiative, the Commission will continue to target the condition of private property, utilising powers vested by the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1984 and the Building Control Act 1991. Financial provision of £10,000 is again made in the forthcoming year against default works that may be necessary to privately owned property. Although the Commission will be seeking to recover all costs incurred, it is considered prudent to budget for this expense because recovery of cost may not occur in the year of expenditure.

TOWN HALL AND OTHER PROPERTY

The Town Hall and Library continues to be used regularly by many organisations for events, presentations and training courses. It continues to be a highly practical and popular venue within the Town, hosting local community events as well as events provided to give support to local residents such as the Chair-based Exercise session run twice weekly by the Department of Health. The Commission is pleased to continue to work in partnership with Age Concern to contribute towards the bridging of the “digital divide” through the Age Concern Computer Drop-In Centre and Lifelong Learning Centre which are well supported by local residents and visitors. The library is also serviced by a wireless internet “hot-spot” enabling users with wireless enabled laptops to obtain free access to the internet within the library area.

The Commission will continue to review services provided through the public library ensuring that those services are relevant and proportionate to the current and future needs of the community and delivered in a fashion which provides value for money for ratepayers.

The Ramsey Civil Registry, Northern Neighbourhood Policing Team and the Coroner for the Sheadings of Ayre and Garff are located in the Town Hall. The Commission recognises the opportunity to broaden the range of services able to be delivered locally to the community of Ramsey and the north.

TOWN HALL AND OTHER PROPERTY continued

The Members of the House of Keys for Ramsey 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 usage of the Town Hall facilities.

The Commission is progressing a scheme to upgrade all town hall lighting with new LED fittings. The scheme coincides with the decennial testing of the electrical installations, the replacement programme costs will be recovered within a period of 3 years providing further efficiencies of up to 30% reductions in energy costs over the 15 year life of the new fittings.

LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING

The cost of public sector housing provision continues to be met by Government through the provision of 100% housing deficiency grant payments. For the rate year 2014/15 the projected deficit on the Commission's housing, based on the capital programme in place at the time of rate setting, is estimated at £1,169,328, this is equivalent to £2,096 per house for the year, or £40.30 per week for each of the 558 tenanted properties in Ramsey at 1st February 2014.

The Department of Social Care has advised that public sector rents will increase by 5.0% for 2014/2015. The Maintenance Allowance will remain at the current monetary value uplifted by RPI of 2.4% (Sep 13). The Administration Allowance remains at the current level, but with no uplift, the Maintenance Allowance therefore represents 25% of Net Rents Receivable and the Administration Allowance 6.66% of Net Rents Receivable.

Current waiting lists for accommodation in Ramsey, as at 1st February 2014, show a total of 142 applicants in varying need of first tenancies (131 in 2013). 31 tenants are seeking transfers to alternative accommodation (28 in 2013). During the period 1st January, 2013 to 31st December, 2013, 4 properties (26 in 2012) were let to new tenants and 23 transfers of tenants to alternative properties (35 in 2012) were completed. There were no inter-authority transfers.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT & REFURBISHMENTS

The Department of Social Care continues to promote a programme of kitchen replacement to public sector housing, focusing on older housing stock, to bring the kitchen/dining facilities up to modern standards. This work is being carried out under the umbrella of an all-Island Kitchen Framework Agreement that is being managed by the Department. This aims to take advantage of economies of scale to carry out a large number of similar refurbishments. During the coming year it is intended that work to the kitchens in 130 properties will be initiated, subject to approval.

Housing at Mayfield and Close Woirrey estates has now been approved for major redevelopment, along with redevelopment of the existing Bus Station site, in partnership with the Department of Social Care and the Ramsey and the Northern Districts Housing Committee, within a wider development programme.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT & REFURBISHMENTS continued

In response to the changing demographic profile of our community, with the projected increase in numbers of our older population, the planned accommodation will comprise 36 x Sheltered Housing Units at Mayfield for persons of pensionable age; 12 x 1 Bedroom Flats at Close Woirrey for persons over 50yrs of age; and 14 x 2 Bedroom Flats at the Bus Station site for General letting.

A sum of £9.3 million has been identified in the projected Capital Expenditure for Local Authority and Sheltered Housing, in conjunction with the Ramsey and Northern Districts Housing Committee, for the above future redevelopment. The programme included in the 2014-15 IOM Budget for Ramsey Town Commissioners is as follows:-

	Total Est Cost	Probable to 31.3.14	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	Further expend
Planned Maintenance Programme	3,760,942	1,020,942	1,490,000	500,000	300,000		250,000	0
Close Woirrey Apartments	1,400,000	50,000	100,000		50,000	700,000	450,000	50,000
Bus Station Site Apartments	2,500,000	40,000	50,000	50,000	1,900,000	360,000	50,000	50,000
	7,660,942	1,110,942	1,640,000	550,000	2,250,000	1,260,000	750,000	100,000

As part of the Commission’s Planned Maintenance works during the past year it has completed the replacement of windows and dormers; fascias, gutters, and rainwater goods at Close ny Mooragh, which has given these properties a welcome uplift.

Further schemes are presently being considered and developed in conjunction with the Department of Social Care in relation to improving the external envelope of some of our older properties that are showing signs of damp penetration. The scope of such works may typically include re-roofing; re-rendering and dashing, or the application of external weatherproof coatings; and possibly, the demolition of chimney stacks.

The Commission continues to review its housing stock by way of an annual survey that is used to inform and update the forward maintenance programme; this approach has now been adopted by other major housing authorities, as best practice, throughout the Island.

SWIMMING POOL CONTRIBUTION

A sum of £17,500 has been included in the estimates as the Commission’s contribution towards the cost of Northern 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 paid by each of the constituent local authorities within the regional combined swimming pool board areas. These provisions are distinct regional facilities; no contribution is made by any of the authorities within the eastern catchment served by the National Sports Centre.

REFUSE COLLECTION

The Department of Infrastructure has advised of the new gate fee charge for domestic and commercial waste at the Energy from Waste Plant and Balladoole Civic Amenity Site.

With effect from 1st April 2014 domestic waste will be charged at £79.50 per tonne and commercial waste charged at £150 per tonne.

The table below details the gate fees for the next 5 years (subject to indexation).

Effective from	Domestic waste per tonne	Commercial waste per tonne
1 st April 2014	£79.50	£150
1 st April 2015	£99.35 (+Indexation)	£160 (+Indexation)
1 st April 2016	£120.35 (+Indexation)	£160 (+Indexation)
1 st April 2017	£141.35 (+Indexation)	£160 (+Indexation)
1 st April 2018	£161.35 (+Indexation)	£161.35 (+Indexation)

The Town produces approximately 2800 tonnes of domestic refuse each year. The Commission's rates estimates for the forthcoming year include domestic disposal charges totalling £217,650 (£157,700.00 in 2013/14), equivalent to a 31.71p in the £ rate. This represents a rate increase of 8.73p in the £ over the current provision which has been allowed for within the rate setting for 2014/15 rate year.

Tonnage charges for commercial waste are presently passed onto to producers, this arrangement will continue, increasing the cost per tonne for disposal to £150.00 per tonne charged by weight.

For 2014/15 the Commission will continue to use the arrangements that were introduced following a review of refuse collection services, and which have proved to be very successful. However the Commission will continue dialogue with the Clerk of the Northern Refuse Collection Board to establish if any means of co-joined working could enable both authorities to reduce collection and transportation costs and improve efficiency.

In the light of the projected increase in charges over the next 5 years a further review of the charge process for domestic refuse will be undertaken. The opportunity will be taken to review commercial charges for collection to ensure that they are appropriate for the service provided.

The Town's annual contribution made towards the operating costs of the Northern Civic Amenity Site at Balladoole has risen due to increased disposal charges. Provision is made for a contribution of £126,075 (£117,315 in 2013/14) an increase of £8,760 or 7%. The Town is contributing approximately 52% of the annual running costs of the facility. The site is visited by between 5,000 and 6,000 users per month, compared to 2,000 per month at the former Ballacallow site, and despite this greater through put there has been no increase in the tonnages of waste to be disposed of.

DECORATIVE AND STREET LIGHTING

The Manx Electricity Authority has not identified any undergrounding schemes within the Town for the forthcoming year however they will undertake an inspection of the street lighting columns on Lezayre Road using specialist equipment to determine the condition of the columns internally.

Maintenance of the existing street lighting infrastructure within the Town is on-going and improvements aimed at reducing the running costs of the system are being investigated.

Low energy street lighting heads are being incorporated onto existing columns as part of the ongoing regeneration works and further schemes will be identified for replacing existing street lighting heads with low energy lights.

As part of the overall strategy within the regeneration area, the design team is investigating new decorative lighting provisions to enhance the streetscape and extend the works carried out around the Courthouse/Post Office area.

STREET CLEANING

The Commission has signed an agreement with the Department of Infrastructure Highways Division to provide street cleaning duties within the Town and, at present, the Commissioners' Works Supervisor is providing supervisory duties for the street cleaning operative who is employed by the Department of Infrastructure.

The introduction of local management arrangements has resulted in an improvement in cleansing standards and the provision of a service more responsive to local needs.

PARKS PLAY AREAS AND OPEN SPACE

A specific sum of £10,000 is provided for a sixth year towards improvements to the woodland pathways running through the brooghs. Previous works have been well received and have greatly improved the amenity of the area. Unfortunately, some paths have suffered damage as a result of the continued wet weather during the winter months and works will be undertaken to stabilise the banks and make good the paths that have been affected.

The Commission's Head Gardener continues to introduce a wider variety of sustainable planting aimed to reduce day to day maintenance, whilst retaining attractive displays.

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 relevant safety standards and fit for use. The play areas and adult exercise equipment continue to be well used and the on-going investment in maintenance and upgrading ensures that they are amongst the best available on the Island.

STAFFING AND ADMINISTRATION

In August 2013 the General Registry announced its intention to close regional Registry offices. Following discussion with the General Registry it was agreed that the service could be provided by the Commission and in October 2013 the Commission assumed responsibility for the provision of Civil Registry Services for Birth, Death, Marriage and Civil Partnerships for Ramsey and the northern area with existing staff being trained to provide those services. This new service has been introduced on a five day a week basis, between the hours of 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. (Monday to Friday) without any additional staffing resource or revenue costs; a small income from certificate and fees has offset the loss of rental income from the Civil Registry. The Commission was very pleased that agreement was able to be reached to provide the service locally.

During the course of the past year, the equivalent of 1.5 full-time positions have been removed from the Town Hall establishment, those roles being subsumed within remaining staff responsibilities. Service provision will be monitored to ensure that there is no lessening of service standards resulting from the staff reductions. In addition, as in recent years, any posts vacated will be subject to review before any decisions to reappoint is made.

During the past year the Commission has seen two of its manual workforce successfully complete trade apprenticeships and achieve full craftsman status. In addition the Commission has employed a 2nd year trade apprentice who it is hoped will similarly achieve full craftsman status, and will be looking at further opportunities to provide apprenticeships in relevant crafts as an opportunity for young people in the north of the island.

The Commission's staff of both full and part-time employees is the equivalent of 41.33 full time employees at 1st April 2014. The Commission will continue its policy of reviewing any posts released through resignation or retirement of existing staff, with a view to absorbing duties within existing staff resources where possible.

RATE SETTING

Having regard to the aforementioned the **Ramsey Town Rate for 2014/2015 has been set at 348p** in the pound, with **no increase being made over the 2013/2014 rate**. A summary of the net estimated cost of the main services and facilities provided by the Ramsey Town Commission is attached to this Report.

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February, 2014.

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The net estimated costs of the rates funded main services to be administered by the Commission during 2014/2015 are as follows:-

	Net Rateable Value £ 683,804		£ 686,262	= increase	0.36%
	2013/14	Rate Poundage	2014/15	Rate Poundage	Increase/ decrease
Works and Development					
Refuse Removal & Disposal	£ 506,425	74.06	£ 560,350	81.65	7.59
Contribution - Northern Civic Amentity Site Operating Costs	£ 117,315	17.16	£ 126,075	18.37	1.22
Car Parks	£ 24,225	3.54	£ 25,465	3.71	0.17
Street & Decorative Lighting	£ 114,325	16.72	£ 98,600	14.37	-2.35
Amenities, Services, Miscellaneous Maintenance and Administration	£ 36,540	5.34	£ 45,610	6.65	1.30
	<u>£ 798,830</u>		<u>£ 856,100</u>		
Parks & Leisure					
Events and Attractions	£ 27,050	3.96	£ 21,155	3.08	-0.87
Parks and Gardens Maintenance and Redevelopment	£ 368,398	53.87	£ 391,900	57.11	3.23
Swimming Pool	£ 17,000	2.49	£ 17,500	2.55	0.06
Library	£ 134,775	19.71	£ 140,975	20.54	0.83
Other Amenities	£ 435	0.06	£ 29,145	4.25	4.18
	<u>£ 547,658</u>		<u>£ 600,675</u>		
Housing & Property					
Town Hall incl. Loan Charges	£ 247,750	36.23	£ 248,950	36.28	0.05
Miscellaneous Property and Health and Safety at Work	£ 69,525	10.17	£ 156,234	22.77	12.60
	<u>£ 317,275</u>		<u>£ 405,184</u>		
Finance, General Purposes and Establishment					
Administration	£ 111,100	16.25	£ 128,000	18.65	2.40
Office Expenses	£ 88,850	12.99	£ 116,000	16.90	3.91
Salaries and National Insurance	£ 517,650	75.70	£ 522,500	76.14	0.44
Superannuation	£ 129,750	18.97	£ 124,125	18.09	-0.89
Miscellaneous Income/Expenditure and Loan Charges	£ 78,689	11.51	£ 35,414	5.16	-6.35
	<u>£ 903,700</u>		<u>£ 971,550</u>		
	<u>£ 2,567,463</u>	375.47	<u>£ 2,833,509</u>	412.89	
Less					
Credit Balance at 31st March, brought forward	-£ 760,807	-111.26	-£ 1,184,100	-172.54	
Add					
Arrears and Allowances for Exempt Properties	£ 115,000	16.82	£ 115,000	16.76	
Add					
Credit Balance Estimate at year end	<u>£ 457,982</u>	66.98	<u>£ 623,783</u>	90.90	
Rateable Income	<u><u>£ 2,379,638</u></u>	348.00	<u><u>£ 2,388,192</u></u>	348.00	
	Rate	348p in £	Rate	348p in £	