

Diane Dodds MLA
Economy Minister
Department for the Economy
Netherleigh
Massey Avenue
Belfast
BT4 2JP

20th April 2020

Dear Minister

I am getting in touch to seek changes to the Retail, Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Grant and the Small Business Support Grant schemes. These schemes both have the potential to mitigate the long-term impact of the coronavirus crisis on the charity retail sector, but changes are required to ensure that this is the case.

Based on our research, Northern Ireland's 300 charity shops raised £6.46 million for charities in 2018/19 with 77% of this money spent on charitable activity within Northern Ireland. While raising this money, charity shops supported over 500 full time equivalent jobs and over 4,000 volunteer opportunities whilst diverting around 13,200 tonnes of textiles from landfill or incineration.

Small Business Support Grant

The current guidance appears to exclude charity shops from the £10,000 grants for properties with a rateable value of £15,000 or less because charity shops are not in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief. I would be grateful if you could review this point and amend the guidance and/or scheme details so that it is clear that small charity retailers are eligible for this scheme. I note that the scheme has already been amended so that properties in receipt of Industrial Derating are not excluded and would hope that the same change can be made for businesses benefiting from the business rates Charitable Exemption.

Retail, Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Grant

Today's announcement that these grants will not be on a per property basis has been hugely disappointing for charity retailers in Northern Ireland. In England, Scotland, and Wales these grants are being awarded on a per property basis either at 100% or 75% for the full rate for each subsequent property. I urge you to reconsider the decision to limit these grants to one per business. The provision of this grant scheme on a per property basis is important to enabling charity retailers to restart business effectively following this period of closure.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Robin Osterley
Chief Executive