

Growing the Economy and Creating Jobs with Lower Corporation Tax

Inquiry by the Committee for Trade, Enterprise and Investment

Written Submission from Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council note the announcement by the Westminster Government to introduce a bill to devolve corporation tax varying powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly from 2017.
- 1.2. We believe that Mid and East Antrim Borough Council is well placed to grow a sustainable economy with jobs and skills to match, and have identified Growing the Economy as a key strategic priority for our Council.
- 1.3. The new powers vested in local government will enable councils to develop areas which will be attractive to business and investment. Council led community planning and the development of a Local Development Plan are key tools in “Place Shaping”, working in partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive, communities and businesses, we are confident of Mid and East Antrim’s ability to grow our economy, providing jobs and improved quality of life for our citizens.

2. Key determinants of inward investment and economic growth and recommendation for action

Differentiation

- 2.1. Mid and East Antrim Council believe that Northern Ireland must favourably differentiate itself from other regions and countries, providing the right conditions for businesses to thrive. In turn, Mid and East Antrim must favourably differentiate itself within Northern Ireland as a place for business to thrive.
- 2.2. To attract sustainable investment, Northern Ireland requires the right infrastructure and the right workforce.

Infrastructure

- 2.3. Mid and East Antrim benefits from its strategic location within Northern Ireland. In addition to the Port of Larne we benefit from close proximity to both major airports and the port of Belfast. The connectivity will be further enhanced by the upgrades of the A8 and A2 improving road travel between Mid and East Antrim and Belfast, and the dualling of the A26 to enhance the strategic corridor with the north of the province.
- 2.4. Infrastructure is however wider than good roads. We are focused on ensuring that Mid and East Antrim enjoys fast and efficient public transport routes; universal, fast and reliant broadband and mobile network coverage; affordable housing; and leisure and cultural facilities. All these will differentiate Northern Ireland from the rest of the world as an attractive place to invest, work and live.

Workforce

- 2.5. Northern Ireland needs to offer people with the right skills and knowledge. Statistics indicate there remains a high level of those of working age who are economically inactive and low levels of self-employment and entrepreneurship.
- 2.6. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council believe that the potential is there, and with the right incentives and training, can be unlocked.
- 2.7. Community planning provides an opportunity to address local skills shortages, identifying where gaps lie and the solutions to close those gaps. Although Further Education Colleges and Universities are not statutory community planning partners, closer collaboration with the further and higher education sector, regarding what is needed and what could become an area's unique selling point, is essential.

Supporting our local businesses

- 2.8. It is encouraging that the Northern Ireland economy has started to return to growth. Although Mid and East Antrim maintained an above average employment rate during the economic downturn, Mid and East Antrim Council recognise that more work is required to address the issues of economic inactivity, consumer and public debt and below UK average living standards faced by our citizens.

- 2.9. Council believe that a prosperous local economy will attract further investment and thus encourage a continuous cycle of wealth and job creation.
- 2.10. With the Transfer of Planning to local councils, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council see this as an unprecedented opportunity to fundamentally transform our local areas. We believe it is one of the tools to regenerate our area in order to deliver tangible results in terms of jobs, **better paid and higher value**, growth and rejuvenation.
- 2.11. Flexible office accommodation will support both existing businesses and attract inward investment.**
- 2.12. New economic development powers and functions transferring to Councils, along with local development plans and the General Power of Competence, will enable Council to take reasonable action to improve our local economy, within legal compliances. Supporting our existing businesses by reducing red tape, in line with the *'Making Life Simpler: Improving Business Regulation in Northern Ireland'* report and working more closely in partnership with the private sector to deliver economic success.

Partnership approach

- 2.13. Mid and East Antrim Borough Council believe that all stakeholders will need to work together to deliver the outcomes of economic growth and job creation. Silos must be broken down and a new approach adopted to how growth and jobs are delivered embraced.
- 2.14. Collaboration between the public, private and voluntary sectors must be fully utilised, and regional policy supported by local knowledge. Formal strategic partnerships designed to deliver outcomes, both regionally and locally are vital and councils have a key enabling role through existing structures and knowledge to support this partnership approach.

Greatest potential for growth

- 2.15. In addition to the priority areas identified by the Committee, Mid and East Antrim Council believe that, particularly within our area, developing our tourism potential will be key to driving economic growth.

2.16. A regional Tourism Strategy, reflective of local tourism objectives, is a priority action going forward, supported by a collaborative working relationship between the Tourism NI, Invest NI, local government and the private sector.

2.17. Reduced air passenger duty and sea travel costs would support tourism initiatives.

2.18. Mid and East Antrim Borough also boasts a number of successful advanced engineering, life and health sciences and agri-food companies and the potential to take advantage of their experience through a shared knowledge forum should be explored.

3. Conclusion

3.1. ***In conclusion, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council believe we are in a strong position to alongside the Northern Ireland Executive and its Departments to jointly shape the development of the Mid and East Antrim area to ensure that our people and place are supported and developed to embrace the opportunities to grow the local economy***