

From the Director of Primary Care



Via Email

To: All GP Practices

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Dear Practitioner

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

I am writing at the request of Department for Communities to advise you about the implementation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in Northern Ireland.

A BID is a mechanism which brings together local business and other stakeholders with the aim of regenerating their areas. In 2013, the then Department for Social Development put in place primary legislation to allow for the establishment of statutory BIDs in Northern Ireland. BIDs are developed, managed and paid for by means of a compulsory BID levy which the non-domestic ratepayers within the proposed BID area must vote in favour of before the BID can be established. There is no exemption for public bodies; as non-domestic rate payers they are liable for any BID levy due following a successful ballot. It is not possible to refuse to pay a BID levy once it is in place.

A BID is not intended to replace public investment in the area; instead, additional services or projects are funded through the BID levy. Proposals are developed by local partnerships, usually in co-operation with their local council. A BID can cover almost any project or services that the partnerships agree would be of benefit and worth funding. Examples of projects could include improved infrastructure, additional cleansing and BID negotiated discounts on utility costs. I would encourage practices to engage with BID proposals at an early stage.


To date, votes to establish BIDs have been passed in Ballymena, Belfast City Centre (Belfast one), Belfast Cathedral Quarter, Newry, Strabane and Enniskillen. Additional details on BIDs are attached at Annex 1 of this letter for your information.



Working for a Healthier People

Should you require further advice or information about this scheme, please contact the BID lead within your area. Contact details for each area are attached at Annex 2 of this letter.

Yours sincerely



MARK LEE

Director of Primary Care

cc: Henry McArdle, DfC
Bill Pauley, DoH
Dr Margaret O'Brien, HSCB

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

A Business Improvement District (BID) is a mechanism that has been recognised as being successful in bringing local businesses and other stakeholders together with the aim of regenerating their areas and improving their local trading environment. BIDs are developed, managed and paid for by the business sector by means of a compulsory BID levy which the non-domestic ratepayers within the proposed BID area must vote in favour of before the BID can be established. All non-domestic ratepayers within a potential BID area have the opportunity to vote on the proposals before the levy is imposed.

While primarily aimed at the local business sector, non commercial organisations (for example public sector) in the area can also benefit from a BID through an improved working environment for their staff, i.e. a cleaner, safer, more attractive place to work in. Staff may also be able to avail of any loyalty or discount promotions introduced by the BID. Some non commercial organisations may also have opportunities to avail of BID negotiated discounts on utility or security costs.

Typical public sector BID payers can include:

- health boards or clinics;
- GP practices;
- Police and fire stations;
- Schools and education authorities;
- Housing Executive offices;
- Council offices;
- Jobs and Benefit offices; and
- Central Government Departments' offices etc.

As a BID area can include **any non-domestic ratepayers** within the designated area, Public Sector bodies and organisations should be aware that as ratepayers they may be covered by the proposal. If they are then that means that they will be entitled to vote on the BID proposals and if the ballot is successful will be liable for any BID levy due.

A BID can be established covering any geographical area; examples range from town centres to industrial parks. There is no upper or lower limit to the number of businesses that can be covered by a BID. It empowers interested traders and business owners to get together with their local council to look at improvements their area may need. A BID can cover almost any project or service that the businesses agree would be of benefit and worth funding. Projects can include core services such as additional cleansing and security or more wide-ranging projects such as recycling, business support, improved infrastructure, joint purchasing, area branding and promotion.

The Department for Communities is supporting the development of BIDs in Northern Ireland as a key component of its commitment to help strengthen the competitiveness of our towns and cities across the region. BIDs are also fully supported by the NI Executive and have been legislated for through the NI Assembly.

In 2013, DSD put in place primary legislation to allow for the establishment of statutory BIDs in Northern Ireland. The Business Improvement Districts Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and subsequent regulations, The Business Improvement Districts (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and The Business Improvement Districts (Miscellaneous) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014, introduced provisions providing a general legislative framework for a BID scheme and prescribing those matters that must be included in development and implementation of a BID.

In addition, the Department is pro actively encouraging and promoting the BIDs concept through a Northern Ireland BIDS Academy. The Academy has been running a pilot programme for the last 2 years and this is now nearing completion. Five of the six pilot areas have already voted in favour of a BID, with the final area scheduled to go to ballot in October. The areas that have voted to establish a BID are:

- Ballymena;
- Belfast City Centre (Belfast One);
- Belfast Cathedral Quarter (CQ BID);
- Newry;
- Strabane; and
- Enniskillen.

A BID is not intended to replace public investment in the area; instead, additional services or projects are funded through the BID levy. Proposals are developed by local business-led partnerships, usually in co-operation with their local council. A 'proposer' must develop a proposal describing the additional services and the proposed levy upon ratepayers. The proposal must also specify the length of time that the BID will last; almost all last for the maximum five-year period. It may also include provisions for discounts or exemptions from the levy (for example, for properties below a certain rateable value). It is up to the BID proposer to determine which non-domestic ratepayers will be eligible to vote and this will be set out in the BID proposals submitted to the local council. If a tenant is liable for the rates, then they are entitled to vote and will be liable for the levy. If a property is vacant, the landlord will be entitled to vote and will liable for the levy.

For the purpose of the BID ballot, a person shall be entitled to vote in a BID ballot if, on the date the notice of the ballot is published, that person falls within the class of eligible ratepayers entitled to vote as described in the BID proposals. If the result of the ballot is in favour of the BID, all non-domestic ratepayers which fall within the proposal will be obliged to pay the BID levy. **It is not possible to refuse to pay a BID levy once it is in place**; the only option would be to argue and vote against the BID being extended after its term ends.

CONTACT WEBSITES FOR BIDS

BID AREA	CONTACT WEBSITE
Ballymena	http://ballymenameans.com/
Belfast City Centre	http://belfastone.co.uk/
Belfast Cathedral Quarter	http://www.destinationcq.com/bid
Enniskillen	http://www.enniskillenbid.co.uk/
Newry	http://www.newry.com/about/business-improvement-district-bid/
Strabane	http://bidinstrabane.com/