LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
CALL FOR VIEWS ON THE NON-DOMESTIC RATES (SCOTLAND) BILL
SUBMISSION FROM DEAFSCOTLAND

deafscotland is the umbrella body representing the interests of those affected by deafness. There are over one million scots affected across the spectrum of deafness, represented by the four key pillars Deaf/Deaf Sign Language users (12,500); Deafened (355,000); Deafblind (4,000); and Hard of Hearing (600,000). We promote access, equality and citizenship for all deaf people, the social model of disability and a person centred, rights based approach. There are a range of different barriers and potential solutions to alleviate the impact of deafness which is the major language and/or communication barriers affecting daily life. Language and/or communication are rights as well as enablers to fully enjoy rights. They are central to the well-being of people and a human rights approach. Inclusive communication is a cross cutting ambition of Scotland’s Disability Action Plan. Our comments relate to the access to information, participation in change process and rebalancing of mainstream communication.

Firstly, many people with disabilities are disadvantaged in business development because the information and regulatory activity is not accessible to them either in terms of language or communication support. Whilst many British Sign Language users and others affected by deafness are or become self-employed they cannot access the correct information and/or business support. As well as developing contributions to other aspects of life, they wish to participate and develop socio-economic activity in a way that is currently denied. The current changes are unlikely to improve those circumstances and consideration needs to be taken to enable significant opportunity within these changes.

Secondly, many would want to develop business ideas within their communities in areas such as sports, holiday and recreational activity, culture, well-being and other social benefit activity. The review needs to consider incentives to business development and the interlinked impact of non-domestic rates, issues around working from home, developing business within public spaces and VAT regulation too. Is there going to be a punitive impact on the development of British Sign language schools for example? Has there been a human rights and equality impact assessment of the changes proposed and/or involvement of those with barriers to business been engaged with to date?

Finally, what work has been done to consider the impact of these changes on those on lower income and/or with disability that enjoy the current affordability of some of the business adversely affected by proposed regulatory change? Will it have further negative impact on those least able to manage the changes?
For our perspective it would be useful to know of any work that has been done to support the proposals in order to share it with our members and consider the socio-economic impact in a more and better informed way. It is difficult for us to make a better contribution at this time.

May we thank everyone on the Local Government Committee for the opportunity to respond and wish them well in their work on this and other matters.