**Scottish Chambers of Commerce reacts to mixed results of Holyrood rates vote**

Whilst welcoming the Scottish Parliament’s decision to retain the Uniform Business Rate, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce (SCC) has urged the Scottish Parliament to reconsider what it believes is a major barrier to a more flexible, responsive rates system outside of the revaluation cycle following voting on the Non Domestic Rates Bill (Scotland) today.

**Dr Liz Cameron, Chief Executive of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, said:**

“The Scottish Chambers of Commerce is deeply concerned about the impact of Section 8B of the Bill which has the effect of completely removing Scottish ratepayers’ appeal rights when there is a change in economic circumstances.

“SCC made clear our views that this Section came forward at Stage 2 without proper consultation or consideration of the ratepayers that it would affect, and now guarantees a more inflexible system to market changes and undermines the move to three yearly revaluations.

“The Conservative party tabled a Stage 3 amendment to seek such a consultation but all other parties voted against this sensible amendment to what we believe is a part of the Bill that will be damaging to all ratepayers in Scotland and will prove to be a major barrier to a more flexible, responsive rates system outside of the revaluation cycle, which is what the Bill’s purpose was.”

**On the MSPs’ rejection of amendments calling for changes to the Uniform Business rate, Dr Cameron said:**

“SCC welcomes the rejection of an amendment to the Non-Domestic rates bill which would have seen powers over business rates devolved to local authorities. What is clear is that transformative changes such as this should be subject to significant scrutiny, taking into consideration the significant changes this could bring to the business environment.

“As a network, SCC is mindful of calls for greater regional powers which continue to be a feature of discussions with our members. The Bill has however, devolved powers on setting of empty property relief to local authorities which will create differences in treatment of empty properties in different local authority areas.”

**On new powers for Scottish Assessors, Dr Cameron continued:**

“SCC is concerned that calls for softening the imposition of onerous penalties and compliance deadlines have been rejected. This aspect of the bill will be particularly challenging for SMEs who often do not always have the resources to manage what information is being requested and for what purpose. The Chamber Network believes the penalty system in England appears more reasonable and proportionate and we urge Scottish Government to rethink and bring penalties more in line so companies in Scotland are not disadvantaged.”