

MARCH INSIGHTS by CHRIS TURNER

New governments bring new things! British BIDs have been much involved in several policy responses this month; the Transforming Business Rates Review, the Devolution White Paper, a new Crime and Policing Bill and a new Employment Bill. As all four of these impact on BIDs in one way or another, much of this month's Insight covers these matters, although as ever much else is going on and is discussed here.

We have been working on the British BIDs [response](#) to the **Transforming Business Rates** review for some time now and thank you for your involvement; do please look and get back to me if there is anything we have missed. All businesses are clearly deeply affected by business rates, and we have collated comments from our members in formulating this response. Firstly, by way of the annual survey of all in the BID industry; we also undertook a piece of research with the New Economics Foundation on [BIDs and the New Normal: their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020](#), which allowed data collection from a stratified group of over 60 BIDs and having given presentations and workshops on the research, much new follow-up material emerged. We responded to both the [House of Commons Select committee on Business rates in 2019](#) and the [Treasury Fundamental Review in 2020](#); that thinking has been much updated for this response. British BIDs deliver training and run qualification courses throughout the year and thus speaks regularly to our members. British BIDs have an Advisory Board of industry experts, and we also meet with the National Head office levy payers quarterly. All these sources of information have been used as part of the British BIDs response. The current draft response can be viewed [here](#), and the headlines suggest that business rates can be retained but reduced dramatically; to do so requires a fundamental rethink of the local taxation base. Sadly, we believe that, despite its title, this Treasury Paper does not manage to transform very much; it amounts to a mere tinkering with the current model rather than a proper review of local taxation and is merely pushing this fundamental issue into the future. There is a view from many that despite reforms, high tax burdens remain, and the Government has missed an opportunity to fundamentally overhaul the business rates system. Currently businesses are liable for a

group of taxes: Corporation Tax, National Insurance, Value Added Tax, and Business Rates. A Sales Tax, which would clearly include an Online Sales Tax, and a Capital Value Tax should be added to this portfolio, and the Treasury could explore an approach based on a portfolio of business taxes. We also believe that the lack of any sensible review of residential council taxation is what is driving the inexorable and very disproportional rise in business rates. We also note that successive governments have refused to engage with this issue but believe that this is now changing; a new Resolution Foundation [report](#) has warned that the ‘regressive’ tax is costing the poorest households an ‘ever-greater’ share of their income; and an increase in the number of Council Tax bands would be a fairer and more useful major source of extra funding.

Local Government Devolution Paper

The Local Government Devolution White Paper and its concomitant rearranging of local government structures across much of England is still being debated and responded to across the country. It seems clear that the new top tier Strategic authorities with elected mayors will have a major impact on economic growth and development across the whole country. It also seems very clear that the new unitary authorities coming into much of the rest of England will have an impact on BIDs by way of the ballots, the levy collection and the enforcement issues that the current local authority structures involve. It will be very much up to us to engage with the new local authorities and ensure that our current close relationships with most of them continue with the new ones as they emerge; Sophie Alexander speaks well on this [here](#).

There is also growing concern that the new **Employment Bill** might wreak havoc on our already fragile economy. Small employers are bracing for staff reductions, according to some very useful [FSB research](#). They believe that small firms are tightening their belts on jobs, with potential changes that will expand the grounds for unfair dismissal and higher sick pay costs at the top of their list of worries. The data shows that in the last quarter of 2024, 33% of small employers said they expect to reduce staff. 51% of small employers say labour costs are one of the greatest barriers to growing their business, 75 % highlighted

fears relating to unfair dismissal changes, while 74% raised concerns about changes to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP).

Announced this month, the government has [unveiled](#) a sweeping [Crime and Policing Bill](#) aimed at transforming the fight against retail crime and restoring confidence on British high streets. The Bill will empower police to search premises without a warrant when stolen items are electronically tracked – a move designed to ensure swift recoveries during the critical ‘golden hour’ of an investigation. It will also abolish the outdated law that treated shoplifting of goods under £200 as a minor offence, ensuring every incident is taken seriously. Dee Corsi, Chief Executive Officer at New West End Company, [commented](#): “Today’s commitment from the government to enhance police powers to tackle anti-social behaviour and phone theft, alongside the scrapping of the counterproductive law that trivialised shoplifting of items under £200, marks a critical step forward in protecting our high streets. “The new standalone offence for assaulting shopworkers is a long-overdue measure that we and our peers in the industry have been calling for. However, these reforms must be backed by the necessary funding and resources for local policing to ensure that the public and local businesses feel safe and secure”.

Postal ballots are an issue in local government elections as well as BID ballots! As all those BIDs who have had ballots recently know there are major volume and capacity issues within Royal Mail, and it is useful to know that others agree. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) has warned these issues "must be addressed" after "problems across the board" during both local and general elections last year. In its recent [report](#), *New Blueprint for a Modern Electoral Landscape*, the AEA highlighted the challenges. Approximately 1.3 million new postal vote applications were made for last year’s general election and the volume of applications and registration requests "overwhelmed many electoral registration officers and their teams,.". It also pointed to the pressure on printers and stressed that such tasks "must not be underestimated".

Ministers have [announced](#) that £67m will be awarded to ten [culture projects](#) – although only half the level of funding promised by the last government funding. The Ministry for

Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has now announced it will spend £50m on seven projects across England and Scotland, which were ‘prioritised’ because of their ‘significant cultural impact and ability to maximise economic growth’. The chosen projects include the National Railway Museum in York, the International Slavery Museum and the Maritime Museum in Liverpool, the National Poetry Centre in Leeds and Dundee’s Victoria and Albert Museum.

We are so pleased to be able to say that The CEO and Chair of **Maidstone BID** had the honor last night of receiving the [Freedom of the Borough](#) Award from the Mayor of Maidstone and Maidstone Borough Council on behalf of One Maidstone and the Private Sector. This was to honor the private sector heroes who worked throughout the pandemic to provide essential services to the community.

As ever, these topics on BIDs and their places are discussed in greater detail in our [Academy Courses](#), the [Certificate in BID Management](#), [Certificate in BID Marketing](#), and the [Diploma in BID Leadership](#). Please [get in touch](#) if you would like further information.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Professor Christopher Turner, Head of Research, British BIDs