

**"That this Council requests amendment of the Valuation Act 2001 such that standard rates would be payable on constituency offices run by members of the Oireachtas for representational purposes."**

Constituency offices are important. They are a great way of enabling public representatives to connect with their local communities. So in proposing this motion, I am not for a second denouncing the benefits of constituency offices.

But what strikes me as extraordinarily unfair is that under the 2001 Valuation Act and its amendments, constituency offices are exempt from paying rates.

Businesses in my town are closing, one after the other. They pay rents, a range of taxes including VAT on gross profits, property tax, PRSI, water and waste charges, energy costs, bank fees, staff wages, insurance, public liability, material costs and they pay commercial rates. I know of one self-employed tradesperson with a shop outlet who earned €X after tax and although the business has effectively ground to a halt, he still owes €X in commercial rates per year.

TDs start with a basic salary of over €87,000 pa. They get an unvouched one off payment for setting up a constituency office. They have the right to claim back energy bills, rent, rates, furniture costs, IT, stationery, signage both on the office and on their car or van, insurance, public liability, cleaning, alarm installation, security costs, telephone calls, web hosting, advertising and leafleting. And in addition, under the Valuation Act, their constituency offices are exempt from commercial rates.

The defence is that a constituency office is offering a public service. And undoubtedly it does. But so does a doctor's clinic, a dentist's surgery, a solicitor's office, an accountant's office and so on. And all of these businesses pay commercial rates on their premises. The doctor, the dentist and the solicitor are all making a wage from the services they offer. But the TD too is taking home a salary and connection with the public is essential if that income is to be maintained. So whilst a constituency office may offer a public service, it is a critical part of keeping a TD in his or her job.

There are not one, not two but three TD constituency offices on Carrigaline main street at present. Don't begin to tell me this triplicate presence on the main street of a town is for any real benefit other than self-promotion. And to boot, the Citizens Advice Bureau operates out of the Carrigaline Youth Centre three mornings each week, also providing a public service. The only person carrying the cost of this quadruplicate service is the taxpayer.

This motion has nothing to do with the National Revaluation Programme currently underway, although the sooner Cork is included in that revaluation, the better. Rate-paying businesses could sorely do with a break. Rather, this motion is asking that through an amendment of the Valuation Act, TDs would be required to contribute, just like every other business, to the services of their local authority by paying commercial rates on their constituency offices. Nor would it be acceptable that either TD expenses or salaries would be increased to cover the cost but rather that TDs would align themselves with every other commercial ratepayer by paying commercial rates directly out of their income.

I ask for your support.