

CAP THE NEW RATES AT NO MORE THAN A 25% INCREASE ON THE OLD SYSTEM

Dear Mr Robinson

I should like to point out the iniquitous position of my family as a result of the last revision of rates.

My wife, a nurse, and I and children aged 6 and 8 live in a small 2 bedroom house off the Ormeau Road. We both have to work full-time and are earning approximately the average wage – circa £20000 each per annum. Out of this we need to pay for childcare for 2 children 5 days a week after school and 5 days a week during school holidays – a considerable sum.

As we live in south Belfast the value of our house has increased considerably over the years. This is something we have no control over and which will not benefit us unless we sell and move on. We knew what our rateable value was when we bought our house 12 years ago and could reasonably anticipate how our rates bill would increase. However our last rates bill was an almost 100% increase on the previous. Surely this cannot be fair. We are on fixed wages and are not in a position to find this extra money. Given that water rates are also coming along we may well have to move to a different area in order to be able to pay our bills.

I accept that the old system was unfair on some and thus needed revision. An upward revision partially based on the value of houses is not unfair in itself. There should, however, be a cap on the percentage increase. Surely it would reasonable to cap any increase at 25%. That way there is less likelihood of people on fixed income (like us) being driven from their homes.

Is this scenario fair? Not everybody in our area works. Rate increases and water rates will hardly affect folk on benefit. Thus, whereas, we may have to move because we cannot afford to live where we are, some non-working neighbours will not be unduly affected.

That last point was only to illustrate the inequity of huge percentage rate increases for the some.