

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to protest at the increase in domestic rates demanded from us.

In 2006/7 our rates were £699.39 per annum, including charges for water. In 2007/8 they are £2, 291.78, with transitional relief of £1, 279.08, meaning we have to pay £1, 012.70. The transitional relief lasts only three years. We are also threatened with additional charges for water and sewerage, and further swingeing increases in rates in 2010.

In effect, our rates will have more than trebled when the transitional relief ends. We have received no advice on how to find this money. My husband is a pensioner. I have just been driven out of my job, and am unlikely to find another. Now it looks as if we will be driven out of our home as well. If the policy of basing the domestic rate on alleged capital value of the property is allowed to continue, more than 20% of my pension after tax will be spent on rates.

If our house was in another part of Belfast, we would occupy the same space, receive exactly the same services (i.e. rubbish collection and water and sewerage) as we presently receive, but we would not be charged so much for them. The garage is a 1930s wooden structure, now rotten and falling down; the kitchen is dilapidated, and has no oven, but both have been assumed to be 'standard'. The rates will mean we cannot contemplate repairs.

The free medical services we are supposed to receive do not appear to be available to us. When recently I needed an urgent appointment with a consultant gynaecologist, followed by a computed tomography scan, I was told the only way to obtain the services in time was to pay.

I cannot imagine that you seriously intend to turn the Malone district of South Belfast into an exclusive ghetto for the very rich, but the rates will drive out everyone else. A local income tax would be a much more equitable way to pay for local services.