Dear [Local MP]

**Business rates appeals - new system failing business**

I am writing because I have concerns with the new system to contest our business rates following the revaluation in April. The new system is unduly onerous and burdensome, and the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) website through which appeals are made, makes it worse.

The Government has implemented the new ‘Check, Challenge, Appeal’ regime (CCA) despite, I am told, widespread business objection to many of its features, and I have not found the VOA portal always helpful. I am particularly concerned that:

* Whereas before I have been able to appoint a professional rating surveyor to represent my interests and act on my behalf throughout, I find that I cannot now do so without having to spend not insignificant time myself undertaking various prior steps.
* As it happens while I have tried to do this on the Government Gateway, I have had to provide irrelevant personal (non-business related) data.
* My experience is that these procedures are extremely time consuming, the VOA portal is often unavailable, and that registration or claiming of properties is often rejected without explanation. The call back feature when something goes wrong means that by the time anyone calls back, if they do, I am doing something else or out.

I have discussed this with my advisor and he has indicated that this burdensome approach flows through the whole system. If we wish to query our assessment then we are now required to put forward an alternative valuation and support it with evidence. To do so we must somehow identify and collate every piece of potentially relevant evidence and include it with our initial challenge. If we or advisers fail to do so, then the regulations permit the VOA to ignore any evidence submitted at a later stage. This is another example of how the new regime imposes unacceptable burdens on business.

I would ask you to take up this matter with the Government and call for the following changes:

1. **A ratepayer should be able to authorise the Valuation Office to deal with their adviser in a simple one off way without having to spend hours fighting with data inputting on a computer**. I understand there is already a simpler procedure for properties in Wales and the same procedure should be adopted immediately in England.
2. **A fair approach to ‘Challenge’**– I consider that the onus ought properly to be on the VOA to justify its valuation rather than the reverse. If, however, the Government requires businesses to support its appeal with evidence such that the VOA is able to identify the reason why a ratepayer is dissatisfied with its assessment, then it should suffice for whatever evidence is readily available to the appellant to be submitted initially, without restriction on adding to it subsequently. The requirement for all relevant evidence to be submitted up front serves no purpose other than to delay the process and potentially deny a fair outcome.
3. **Adequate resourcing of VOA** – I am told and from my own attempts at contact I am concerned, that much of the reason for the delays in the system, are down to inadequate VOA resources. I am amazed to learn that further financial cuts are planned and I suggest that these cuts are reversed.

Business Rates are a tax that we appear to get nothing from so at the very least I would like reassurance that unnecessary burdens and red tape are removed, and that the tax is set fairly and transparently and that I can challenge my liability by a system that is also fair and accessible. I hope you will make the Government aware of these concerns.

Yours sincerely

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CC

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