

## **The Kilkenny People**

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### **Closure of post offices continuing in Co. Kilkenny**

The dismantling of the rural post office network continues across the country, Fianna Fáil Deputy Bobby Aylward told Minister Michael Ring in the Dáil. “We lost two important post offices in south Kilkenny at Mullinavat and Glenmore, and another is to close within the next two months at Kilmoganny,” he said. “This follows the retirement of two long-serving postmasters who gave many years of dedicated service to their respective communities. Despite significant community activism in Mullinavat and the hundreds of submissions made to An Post, the independent assessor's decision stood and the doors shut.”

The closure of post offices in Mullinavat and Glenmore and hundreds of similar closures in towns and villages around the country reflect a further denigration of services in rural Ireland under this Government, said Deputy Aylward. “The Government claims it has no operational responsibility for An Post but, as far as I am concerned, the buck stops with it. If it had the foresight to implement the recommendations contained in the Kerr report when it was furnished in 2016 regarding the need for additional services to be made available to post offices, places like Mullinavat and Glenmore would have had the chance to increase their footfall and maximise their commercial viability. Many of the rural post offices now under threat of closure could have been saved if immediate action had been taken at ministerial level, and that point is directed at the Minister.”

Where people want to keep their post office open and where there is a local supermarket or other business willing to take it on, that should be allowed, once it is viable, he added.

In reply, Minister Ring said if Deputy Aylward’s government had been as concerned about post offices when this country was awash with money and if it had given them the services they needed, there would not have been any closure of post offices.

“The Deputy should listen,” he said. “People took the packages. They were given the opportunity. “Let us be honest about what is happening and stop the nonsense about post offices. I will give an example. There was a post office in my own county (Mayo) where 500 people turned up at a public meeting. I am going to tell the Deputy how many of them bought television licences. There were 352 families and just 52 television licences were bought in that post office for that year. Either one of two things happened. They either had no licences, which I do not believe or they went elsewhere to get their licences. If they want to keep rural post offices open, they will have to start using them and not go to public meetings.”

### **Criticism of lack of overall development plan for Kilkenny**

There appears to be no overall plan for the development of cities or urban centres and allowing them the recognition they deserve in the context of their population and growth, Fianna Fáil Deputy John McGuinness told the Dáil.

Speaking during the final debate on the Local Government Bill, he said that is what happening in Kilkenny. “It does not make sense that there is no attempt to deal overall with not only the administration but also the boundaries and the election of public

representatives,” he said. “No effort is being made to bring back a level of local democracy throughout the country. The Minister of State (John Paul Phelan) spoke about the centre of cities being boarded up, etc. However, as he drives through Kilkenny, surely he can also see that the nature of High Street has changed, and that small towns and villages have changed. They need major investment to restore them to something like what they used to be while at the same time keeping up with modern developments.”

“The same question arises with planning. When the planning authority was with Kilkenny Corporation - Kilkenny urban council - it had a direct input,” he said. “It was part of a membership of 12 and now it is part of a membership of 24.”

Deputy McGuinness said the Government should go back to the drawing board, back to all of the good things that were happening in local authorities and restore the democratic process at local level in every city, county and urban centre, acknowledging the current growth patterns and projections for future growth. “I encourage the Government to do that because as it weakens local democracy and it detaches the democratic process from the people,” he added.

“As we have seen in France and other places around the world, when that happens there is disquiet because there is no way of influencing the shape of a local community, city or county,” he said. “The former Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Phil Hogan, divided a city in two before he left for Europe. He introduced a whole new rural part to electoral areas. It was impossible to administer and impossible for local public representatives to engage in a meaningful way with those who elected them.”

In reply, Minister of State Phelan said he did not accept at all the arguments put forward by Deputy McGuinness and others about inconsistency. “The issue here is that in Kilkenny there are 100,000 people and it is perfectly reasonable to think that we should have one local authority there,” he added. “Deputy McGuinness believes that people in Kilkenny city should have two ballot papers whereas I believe that everyone in County Kilkenny should get one ballot paper in a local election.”