



Drug users affecting businesses

CONCERNED business owners have claimed that large numbers of drug users attending clinics in the city centre are having an adverse impact on the local economy.

by **Martin Flanagan**

The issue was raised by Southside TD, Kevin Humphreys (Lab), after he was contacted by a number of prominent business groups in the city centre who feel that the drug clinics, particularly those that provide methadone, are deterring people from shopping in areas where they are located.

Deputy Humphreys has argued that such clinics should instead be relocated to the suburbs. He has raised the issue in the Dail in an effort to establish the number of drug users being treated for addiction problems at the clinics, particularly those located on Pearse Street, Trinity Court and on Merchant's Quay.

He has called on Health Minister, Dr James Reilly, to provide a breakdown of the number of people who attend the clinics, including those who live outside Dublin.

However, the HSE has indicated that the figures will not be made available until next week.

"The issue of the high number of people attending drug clinics is definitely impacting on local businesses," Deputy Humphreys said. "People are intimidated by the large groups of methadone users who are gathering in the city. I think the best way to treat this problem is to offer localised treatments for people so they don't have to travel to these clinics."

He added: "The problem

will be made worse by the fact that there are a lot of vulnerable addicts attending these clinics who may be tempted into buying drugs from people selling them near the clinics."

Richard Guiney, the spokesman for the **Business Improvement District (BID)**, felt that locating large clinics in the city centre was not the best way of dealing with the problem.

"We would be looking abroad at a system whereby people with drug problems are treated by their local GP," he said. "People could be stabilised on methadone in a local pharmacy, which would be a much more cost effective way of approaching the problem."

"By having a number of large facilities quite close to each other – there are about three within a mile or so of O'Connell Bridge – creates a drug market because a lot of people come into one location."

He added: "By having so many addicts in close proximity means that this environment brings in people who are not using the drug rehab facilities themselves."

"We would be aware of people coming out of clinics who are regularly approached by drug pushers."

Tony Geoghegan, the chief executive of the Merchant's Quay drug clinic, said that although he understood the point made by business owners, he suggested the issue was a lot more complex than people realised.

"Drug users being drawn to cities is a natural phenomena that happens throughout the world," he said. "I understand the argument that the high volume of drug users in an area could impact on tourism and businesses, but the main solution would be to localise services."