

Examination of Revised Estimates Volume 2017
Select Committee on Children and Youth Affairs

**Opening Statement by Minister for Children and Youth
Affairs,
Katherine Zappone T.D.**

Final Version

8 March 2017

Introduction

I am very happy to be here today to discuss my Department's 2017 Estimate.

The Revised Estimate for my Department for 2017 provides a gross funding provision of €1.311 billion. This represents an increase of €173 million, or 16%, over my Department's 2016 allocation.

This is a significant investment of taxpayers money and I am very grateful for the trust and confidence being shown to me and my Department as we lead on our objective to improve the outcomes for children and young people in Ireland.

I remain fully committed to ensuring the full delivery of this Government's Programme for Government commitments. I want to see an Ireland where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled; where their voices are heard; and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future.

My Department, and its agencies, have a complex range of policy, legislation and services to deliver on. Examples of this range from:

- initiatives to improve the level and quality of early childhood care and education;
- providing for the needs of children and young people in the care of the State;
- providing services to protect children against child abuse and to provide help and support to children and their families when this unfortunately happens;

- providing adoption services; and
- listening to children, learning from them, and finding out what works when we look to improve their lives.

As I have noted, I have received a significant increase in funding in 2017 for which I am very grateful. This funding in particular will allow for a range of key service developments. This most significant in terms of the level of increased funding relates to the provision of an additional €120 million for early years care and education services.

This additional funding will be directed towards a suite of measures to improve the affordability, accessibility and quality of childcare. This brings the total allocation for early years child care and education to €465 million accounting for nearly 36% of my Department's overall allocation. This level of funding allows for the

- extension of the ECCE Scheme into a 2nd year and the further full roll-out of the Access and Inclusion Model
- providing more targeted childcare subsidisation for lower income families
- providing for universal subsidisation towards the cost of care for all children aged from 6 months to three years who are using regulated childcare.

I am also conscious that we need to assist making the childcare sector more sustainable and some of the additional funding in 2017 will be used to acknowledge non-contact time required to deliver high-quality services.

Some funding has also been provided to enhance inspections and registration of schemes to ensure services are delivered in a safe, supportive and caring environment.

I also welcome an additional investment of €37 million for Tusla in 2017. Tusla now has an annual allocation of some €713 million which, I am confident, allows it develop as a sustainable organisation which will standardise, streamline and improve its services to our children and families.

As the members of this Committee well know, this agency provides services for some of the most vulnerable children and families in the State.

The extra funding in 2017 will allow it to further alleviate service pressures in the areas such as unallocated caseloads, private residential and foster care and Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence services. It will also allow for Tusla continue to prepare for the introduction of mandatory reporting under Children First later this year.

In conclusion, the significant additional resources secured for 2017 will allow my Department and its agencies build on the good work by all involved in working with children and families to deliver on this Government's commitment to fundamentally reform the delivery of services.