

Football Association of Ireland
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Football Association of Ireland

Committee of Public Accounts, 22nd February 2024

Opening Statement

Cathaoirleach, Deputies, Senators, on behalf of the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) I would like to thank you for the invite to address the Committee today. With over 450,000 people in Ireland participating in football as players, coaches, officials and volunteers, the FAI is responsible for Ireland's single biggest participation sport, setting it up for success for current and future generations.

At the FAI, we greatly appreciate the funding we receive from the state and work to ensure public money is always used for its intended purpose and in the most efficient way possible, with robust auditing measures in place to ensure full accountability for how these funds are used.

Irish football is in a strong place, and we have made significant strides in many areas in recent years, much of which aligns with our strategic plan from 2022 – 2025, which is being overseen and delivered by a highly capable team.

We have come a long way over the last number of years to put the FAI on a more stable and sustainable footing. We have reduced our debt from €63.5 million to less than €43 million, which has been driven by the planned and systematic approach the FAI has adopted to reduce and restructure its debts.

Last year, the FAI exceeded its revenue targets, with our three key revenue pillars all performing well with final revenues in excess of €58 million for 2023 against our strategic target of €50 million.

The FAI, along with many other sporting bodies in Ireland, was significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with the Sport Ireland Covid-19 Relief Fund vital in ensuring the Association was able to successfully navigate this challenging period. The use of this funding has been the subject of a thorough audit, the results of which were positive. Details of this audit have been shared with the Committee, and we will be happy to address any questions you might have on this.

As part of today's agenda, we have also been asked to discuss other topics namely around oversight and governance of funding for the SFAIa FAI commissioned report which outlines how the betting levy can be amended to deliver much needed funding for all sports across Ireland, and the FAI's lease of a 30-acre site at Brook Lodge in Glanmire, Co. Cork amongst other topics. We have provided information on all of these topics in our submission to the Committee and look forward to discussing today.

We also welcome the opportunity to provide clarification on recent governance-related matters.

Agreed in January 2020, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the FAI and the Government was put in place for the period 2020 - 2023. As part of 163 Recommendations, 159 of which have been implemented, MOU Condition 35 covered the CEO's remuneration and required it to be in line with Government pay guidelines for a Secretary General.

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To ensure all the recommendations contained within the MOU were being adopted by the FAI, audits have been carried out by KOSI on behalf of Sport Ireland across all of the recommendations.

The outcome of one such audit concluded that the FAI had not embedded MOU35 in 2022 and that, in short, the CEO's total remuneration across 2022 and 2023 exceeded that of a Secretary General.

This arose in connection with the miscalculation by the Association of the BIK on certain expenses along with a payment made to the CEO in lieu of untaken annual leave.

Arising from the Joint Oireachtas Committee session on 13th December 2023, certain additional information was sought in respect of this issue as follows,

1. The issue of holiday pay arose in the context of another staff member applying via email for payment in lieu. This had been agreed by the then Finance Director and the COO.
2. In response to this email, I agreed the request and I made a suggestion in relation to my own unused holidays .
3. The then Finance Director (who was copied on that email) evidently regarded this as a request and he then passed this on to the former Chair.
4. Discussion ensued between the former Chair, Director of People and Culture , former Finance Director and the Chair of EPRCO. I was not party to these discussions.
5. The former Chair made a decision in February 2023 to approve the request and he has addressed at the Joint Oireachtas Committee meeting in December last, how this came about.
6. The Board acknowledges that the decision taken by the former Chair to approve the request was taken in good faith and that the consequent breach of MOU35 was unintentional. The Board has also taken steps to ensure that the Association's processes are more robust moving forward.

It is important to point out that both Sport Ireland and the Department have both expressed satisfaction that the matter is resolved and indeed had expressed this view and had considered the situation resolved in early November of last year. More broadly both have remarked publicly and on the record on the strong progress made by the FAI in implementing 98% of the 163 reforms set out in the Memorandum of Understanding.

The Association regrets that these events take the focus away from the superb work being done across all levels of Irish football – from grassroots to our League of Ireland through to our international teams. We also apologise for the difficulty it has caused for the extremely dedicated and committed FAI staff as well as for Sport Ireland and the Department.

To conclude, we are excited at what is to come in the rest of 2024 and beyond and continuing to build on the progress made in reforming the organisation over the past number of years.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee today and my colleagues and I are happy to answer your questions.

From: Aoife Rafferty <aoife.rafferty@fai.ie>
Date: Wednesday, 7 December 2022 at 09:36
To: Roy Barrett [REDACTED] Liz Joyce <liz.joyce@fai.ie>
Subject: RE: My Annual Leave days

Hi Roy & Liz

I will pick this up with Jonathan this week and make a recommendation on both.

Kind Regards
Aoife

From: Roy Barrett [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday 6 December 2022 22:11
To: Liz Joyce <liz.joyce@fai.ie>
Cc: Aoife Rafferty <aoife.rafferty@fai.ie>
Subject: Re: My Annual Leave days

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of FAI. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

That makes sense. Thank you

Sent from my iPhone

On 6 Dec 2022, at 21:41, Liz Joyce <liz.joyce@fai.ie> wrote:

Hi Roy, this is really something that Aoife as People and Culture Director can manage with Jonathan [REDACTED] (this needs to be a HR decision so there is transparency and consistency as well as compliance with employment legislation). Equally she can make a recommendation to you re Jonathan hence I have copied her here. Normally it is bad practice to allow employees to cash in holidays as there is a statutory requirement to ensure employees take a minimum of 20 days holidays and this is the employers legal responsibility to ensure adequate breaks are taken. It would be important to ensure that any exceptions have clear grounds for being so and don't create unhelpful precedents. I suggest Aoife works directly with Jonathan [REDACTED] and establishes what Jonathan's annual leave carryover is likely to be, clarifies his request and makes a recommendation to you for approval. Hope that makes sense, regards Liz

Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Roy Barrett [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, December 6, 2022 9:35:25 AM
To: Liz Joyce <liz.joyce@fai.ie>
Subject: FW: My Annual Leave days

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of FAI. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

From: Alex O'Connell <alex.oconnell@fai.ie>
Sent: 05 December 2022 15:41
To: Roy Barrett [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: My Annual Leave days

Hi Roy,

One other if you can please approve/consider – or you might consider whether it's one for Liz or full Board?

Jonathan requesting to be paid out his unused holidays. For added context, our normal policy is not to (it's a use them or lose them, but can carry over 5, policy) [REDACTED]

But re Jonathan, are you ok to pay any unused holidays? I will [REDACTED] confirm the number if you're happy to approve.

Let me know if should go to Liz or whomever though.

Kind regards,

Alex

From: Jonathan Hill <jonathan.hill@fai.ie>
Sent: Tuesday 15 November 2022 10:25
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Alex O'Connell <alex.oconnell@fai.ie>
Subject: RE: My Annual Leave days

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Jonathan

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



[REDACTED]



From: Liz Joyce <liz.joyce@fai.ie>
Date: Tuesday, 6 December 2022 at 17:50
To: Aoife Rafferty <aoife.rafferty@fai.ie>
Subject: FW: My Annual Leave days

Hi Aoife

Not sure if you were included in this decision-making process!

Maybe we could have a quick chat before I respond to Roy?

Liz

From: Roy Barrett [REDACTED]
Date: Tuesday, 6 December 2022 at 09:35
To: Liz Joyce <liz.joyce@fai.ie>
Subject: FW: My Annual Leave days

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of FAI. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

From: Alex O'Connell <alex.oconnell@fai.ie>
Sent: 05 December 2022 15:41
To: Roy Barrett [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: My Annual Leave days

Hi Roy,

One other if you can please approve/consider – or you might consider whether it's one for Liz or full Board?

From: Jonathan Hill <jonathan.hill@fai.ie>
Sent: Monday, December 19, 2022 2:38 PM
To: Alex O'Connell <alex.oconnell@fai.ie>; [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Annual Leave Days - 2022

Perfect.

Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Alex O'Connell <alex.oconnell@fai.ie>
Sent: Monday, December 19, 2022 2:37:36 PM
To: Jonathan Hill <jonathan.hill@fai.ie>; [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Annual Leave Days - 2022

Thank you both.

There are 3 days for between Christmas and New Years so that would be [REDACTED].

I hear you re weekends plus working through annual leave!

I think we're looking to try pay them (as per your request) however would go through Roy for approval (via Aoife) so let me know if that's ok with you?

Kind regards,

Alex

From: Jonathan Hill <jonathan.hill@fai.ie>
Sent: Monday 19 December 2022 14:08
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Alex O'Connell <alex.oconnell@fai.ie>
Subject: RE: Annual Leave Days - 2022

Hi [REDACTED]

Sorry for the delay on this – been a hectic few days!

Wasn't away on April 1st in the end as I was flying back from Doha. And April 11-12 I was in Gothenburg for the WNT game.

I'll also ignore the many weekends worked as a privilege of the job!!

Let me know where you end up. Alex – happy to carry over or what are the alternatives?

Jonathan

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 16 December 2022 10:56
To: Jonathan Hill <jonathan.hill@fai.ie>
Subject: FW: Annual Leave Days - 2022

Hi Jonathan

Can you please confirm if you agree with the below.

Kind regards
 [REDACTED]



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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 12 December 2022 13:01
To: Jonathan Hill <jonathan.hill@fai.ie>
Subject: Annual Leave Days - 2022

Hi Jonathan

According to your diary, the below are the days you took as holiday this year. Can you please confirm these, so I can then send to Alex :

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]



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From: Aoife Rafferty

Sent: Monday, March 6, 2023 11:02 AM

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: Annual Leave days - JH

[REDACTED]

Apologies I need to make an adjustment to the annual leave for JH. [REDACTED] has confirmed that he is only owed for 12 days from 2022 as he took 8 days at the end of year that were not captured. Sorry for all the changes.

Could you adjust in your calculations before we meet JH this week.

Many Thanks
Aoife