



29th September 2021.

Ref: JSPCRDI-i-64

Public Employment Services.

Fórsa's opening statement concerning to the Joint Committee on Social Projection, Community and Rural Development, and the Islands of Ireland concerning the current provision of the Public Employment Service and Fórsa's position on the development of the Regional Employment Services.

Fórsa welcomes the opportunity to address the committee this morning. There are more than 400 workers working across the Local Employment Services (LES) and Job Clubs (JC) throughout the country. As with most community services, Fórsa and Siptu trade unions have dual representation rights across the sector. The unions have agreed to write individual submissions in an effort to impress upon the committee the grave concerns of our members about the proposed changes in the way the future contracts for service providers takes place without any interventions from all relevant stakeholders. Specifically, proposals that the services of Public Employment Services are to be issued through the Request For Tender 2 (RFT2) process.

Presently, in Ireland, there are three models in the provision of Public Employment Services, these include:

- The Intreo services, provided direct employees of the Department of Social Protection.
- JobPath, provided by two private for-profit companies, Seetec and Turas Nua. In April 2019, the Dáil voted 81 to 42 to close this model down. It has been extended twice but is due to close at the end of 2021.
- Local Employment Service (LES) & Jobs Club (JC). There are approximately 23 LES across 82 locations and 40 JC throughout Ireland. These are all not-for-profit companies, the majority of whom have charitable statuses.

The existing not-for-profit organisations have provided these services to people within our communities who, for one reason or another, find that they need assistance to engage with employments, either for the first time, or when they seek to return to the workforce following a prolonged absence.

The existing not-for-profit organisations provide a ‘wraparound’ service designed to assist in every way that they can. Their objective is to help people become job-ready so that there are no cultural, psychological, physical or emotional barriers preventing them from entering the workplace.

These organisations support people who are on the live register, in addition to providing support to anyone in the community placed furthest away from the labour market. Our members have been providing these services to the most vulnerable within our communities for over 25 years, and they’ve been doing it well. The social model that characterises these services does not require them to turn service users into a commodity to ensure profit margins. The not-for-profit approach allows them to measure their success in terms of meaningful outcomes for service users. That is the model we are seeking to protect because that is the model that works. Reports cited in the Fórsa submission refers to for-profit models used in the UK and elsewhere, characterised by lesser terms and conditions for the staff who provides the service. This has the effect of downgrading the services provided, by applying pressure on the inexperienced low-skilled staff to get results, no matter what the outcome. We have seen this happen in Ireland previously with JobPath and at that time, Unions opposed its for-profit, payment-by-result, model of provision to the Public Employment Service.

Both Fórsa and Siptu represent a vast range of sectors within communities. We’ve consistently highlighted the hazards of putting our community (social) services into a for-profit model. Turning the services, and service users, into a commodity has been proved, time and time again to be simply unworkable. Our message to the committee today is, let’s put the service users first, particularly at a time when the pandemic has inflicted so much damage on the labour market.

What we are seeking from this committee is that due consideration is given to our statements, and a pause is put on the proposed tendering process. Without a predetermining outcome, we’re asking the department to engage in meaningful and inclusive engagement with representatives from the service providers, the service users, the employee representatives, academic experts and with an ethos consistent with the Social Platform.

Thank you.
Opening Statement End.