

Speaking Note for Minister Martin for appearance at the Select Oireachtas Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media on Tuesday 28th November at 7pm regarding Supplementary Estimate 2023

Fáiltím roimh an deis labhairt libh inniu maidir leis an meastachán forlíontach do Vóta mo Roinne do 2023.

Eascraíonn an €16m breise atá á lorg do RTÉ ó mholadh ón gCoimisiún um Thodhchaí na Meán maidir le maoiniú eatramhach do RTÉ in 2023, arna dhearbhu ag anailís NewERA ar ioncam agus caiteachas pleanáilte RTÉ go dtí deireadh 2024. Dá réir sin méadaítear meastachán athbhreithnithe 2023 do mo Roinnse dá bharr go €1,181.509 m (€1.181509 Bn) ón meastachán tosaigh €1,165.509 m (€1.165509 Bn)

One of the key tasks of the Future of Media Commission was to make recommendations as to the sustainable funding of public service media in Ireland, including RTÉ. The Commission had recommended that in advance of the implementation of a new funding model, interim funding should be made available to RTÉ to ensure that it could meet its statutory obligations. The recommended amount for 2023 was €16m.

While discussions are continuing with regard to the optimum long-term funding model, it is important that we proceed with making interim funding available so that quality public service content continues to be provided to Irish audiences

Members will be aware that RTÉ themselves had indicated that a higher level of funding would be required. However, it was necessary to obtain a fresh analysis of funding requirements in light of RTÉ's current financial position.

In doing so, NewERA re-confirmed the €16m interim funding requirement, and RTÉ itself will need to take actions to address costs and introduce more efficiencies.

NewERA also advised that further funding of €40m would be required in light of forecast reductions in TV licence income, and the impact this may have on RTÉ's financial position next year. This second element of funding will be addressed in the 2024 Revised Estimates, and will be linked to further progress on reform and re-building trust.

We are all aware of the vital role that public service media plays in our society, enabling informed public discourse and debate, supporting social cohesion, and celebrating moments of national importance. This was seen very clearly during the COVID-19 pandemic and in ongoing efforts to tackle disinformation through the availability of trusted content.

That is why it is important that RTÉ is properly supported to carry out its important role as public service broadcaster. However, it is even more important that the trust of the public is restored. There are a number of key steps in this.

Firstly, immediate action was required to change how RTÉ carries out its business, and I welcome the initial steps that the Director General and Board have taken. Strengthening of internal governance procedures, tighter financial controls and greater efficiencies in the use of public funding were clearly needed, and are being implemented.

More does need to be done, however, and this will be informed by any recommendations brought forward by the two independent Expert Advisory Committees which I established during the summer. The work of both Committees is ongoing and I expect to receive their reports in February next.

Tangible progress on implementing reforms will be needed, will be monitored and will be linked to release of the €40m funding.

Finally, we also need to see a clear path set by RTÉ as to how it will fulfil its important role in our society. I believe that the Strategic Vision submitted by the Director General, allied to the management and governance reforms and cost-savings measures introduced already, were sufficient to enable us to move forward with a decision to confirm the additional funding.

RTÉ will continue to develop detailed actions to underpin this Strategic Vision, and this will include wide-ranging consultation, including with those most directly involved in the provision of public service content – the staff of RTÉ.

This Committee has played an important role in examining the causes of the crisis that has engulfed our national broadcaster. I welcome the contributions that members have made to the debate and I look forward to working with the Committee as we work towards a better future for public service media in Ireland.

As I have said, much has been done, more is required, but we must also ensure that the resources are made available so that Irish audiences continue to have access to quality public service content.

The technical supplementary estimate comprises two parts. Firstly a redistribution of savings arising across my Department's Vote to the benefit of the Sports Capital & Equipment Programme (SCEP) and Sport Ireland. My colleague Minister Byrne will brief the Committee in relation to this proposed redistribution.

In addition, the technical supplementary seeks to move Departmental savings arising in the Gaeltacht programme area to TG4, and this matter was substantively dealt with during my appearance at the Committee on the Irish Language, Gaeltacht and the Irish-speaking Community on 23rd November last. I will now hand over to my colleague Minister Byrne for a more detailed address on the proposed redistribution with regard to Sport.

Míle buíochas don choiste as ucht a gcuid ama