

Examination of Revised Estimates Volume 2020

Select Committee on Children, Disability, Equality and Integration

Opening Statement by Minister for Children, Equality, Disability,

Integration and Youth

Mr. Roderic O’Gorman T.D.

10th November 2020

Introduction

I am very pleased to be here today to discuss my department's Further Revised Estimate for 2020.

The committee will recall that I was with you very recently on 6th October when I presented the Department of Children and Youth Affairs' Estimate for 2020.

I noted at that time that the transfer of additional functions was being formalised and that the existing Department would expand and that I would revert subsequent to that with the Further Revised Estimate for debate and approval.

The expansion of the Department arose from the discussions on the formation of the new Government and the development of the Programme for Government, where it was decided to relocate a number of functions across Departments.

As part of the transfer of functions, I am assuming Ministerial responsibility for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

My Department will continue to have responsibility for policy, legislation and services in respect of children and young people.

It will also take on a number of new areas which had previously been under the remit of the Department of Justice.

Thus, with effect from 14th October 2020 my Department also has responsibility for:

- Gender Equality
- Disability Policy
- Migrant Integration Policy
- Traveller and Roma Inclusion Policy
- LGBTI+ Inclusion Policy
- Work-Life Balance and Supports for Working Parents and Caring Responsibility
- Funding Streams Associated with Policy Work Transferring

As part of the transfer of functions, the following work streams also now come under my Department's remit:

- Integration Service Delivery
- Magdalen Restorative Justice
- International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) and International Procurement Service (IPPS)

There are a small number of functions transferring out of the Department. These are in the Youth Justice area and relate to:

- Bail Supervision Scheme
- Greentown Project
- Research Evidence into Practice Project (REPP)

Overall, the areas transferring in, bring with them funding amounting to an additional €220m in 2020, whilst those transferring out had a budget allocation of €3m.

In this regard and taking account of an additional €3m in further capital funding having been secured, the allocation for my Department is increasing to €1.837bn. This is an increase of €221m from the Estimate approved by this committee in early October.

As a result, my Department is spending €1.796 billion on current expenditure and €41 million in capital expenditure during 2020.

At my previous appearance in respect of the Estimate, I detailed the significant impact of Covid-19 was having on the work of my department and its agencies in 2020, with the Early Learning and Care Sector and Tusla being the most affected.

Tusla continues to deliver frontline services whilst my Department continues to work with providers in the Early Learning and Childcare sector. The other areas of the Vote also continue to work with affected services and sectors during these difficult times.

In the areas newly transferred into my Department, there is also enormous work being undertaken to ensure continued service provision in these challenging times.

In particular, the area of accommodation for international protection seekers has been especially affected. My officials in that area have had to adapt to ensure that users of facilities are properly protected.

This has involved a need to identify specific processes and resources such as activating separate accommodation to prevent and deal with outbreaks of the virus, reallocating shared accommodation to reduce the number of residents sharing rooms, purchasing PPE and enabling older residents to cocoon as well as deploying staffing resources to meet the increased workload.

I would again like to acknowledge the tremendous efforts made across my Department, in response to the pandemic.

Turning to my Department's Vote. You will have been provided with a brief on the Department's Vote. On pages 6, 7 & 8 of the brief I have set out the funding allocations across the different programme areas along with a summary by subhead to include details of the allocation and any changes over 2019.

In my meeting with you at the start of last month, I dealt with the existing Children and Youth Affairs' elements of the Vote. I gave an expanded overview of the two larger areas of the Vote namely, Tusla the Child and Family Agency and Early Learning and Care before opening the discussion with yourselves on the entirety of the Vote's allocation.

This Further Revised Estimate now expands on the existing Children and Youth Affairs elements of the Vote. The changes therefore are

- the inclusion of the former Department of Justice elements of the Vote (€120m)

- the additional funding of €100m of Exchequer funding for Direct Provision
- the redeployment on a temporary basis of €40m from Early Years to Tusla (€20m) and Direct Provision (€20m)
- the transfer out of small elements of the Youth Justice remit to the Department of Justice (€3m); and
- an increase of €3m in capital funding to Tusla, Early Years and the Youth Sector.

I therefore propose now to briefly address the areas of change before opening the debate up to yourselves.

The areas transferring into the Department encompass equality, disability and integration. These are very important and challenging areas and with the additional funding being allocated as part of the FRE, amount to some €220m of taxpayer investment in services.

Part of these funds will continue to focus on reducing inequality and Programme D – An Equal and Inclusive Society, contains funding streams for areas such as the National Disability Authority, Refugee and Migrant Integration, Gender Equality, LGBTI+ as well as Traveller and Roma initiatives.

The majority of the funding is in relation to the very important area of accommodation under our International Protection services. The allocation to this area is contained in Programme E – A fair and efficient system for International Protection Seekers.

The aim of this programme is to provide accommodation and related services to persons in the international protection process. €200m is being directed towards subhead E4 which provides funding mainly directed towards the costs of accommodation.

The area has seen a significant increase in numbers applying for international protection in recent years.

The increased demand has stretched existing dedicated centres and the Department has increasingly had to rely on other premises such as hotels and guesthouses to provide accommodation on a short term basis.

The increased demand and use of emergency accommodation has had a significant impact on costs. In addition, the effects of Covid in 2020 have led to additional costs through the need for social distancing, the opening of self-isolation facilities and the purchasing of PPE.

The Programme for Government commits to end the current system of Direct Provision. Work has begun on the White Paper that will set out a new model for accommodating applicants for international protection, and this will be published by the end of 2020.

These changes will take time and in the meantime sufficient funds must be provided to this important area.

I am committed to ensuring improvements to the present system as we move towards a new model.

Chair, I am happy to provide further information on these and the other areas of the Vote which are detailed in the brief, as we move through the sub-heads during our discussion.

I and my Department will continue to work closely with all sectors and stakeholders as we strive to maximise outcomes from the resources being considered today.

Thank you Chair and Members for listening to my short introduction and I look forward to a fruitful and positive debate.

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