

## **The Corkman**

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

### **Concern at increase in Cork housing waiting lists**

Cork County Council local authority area waiting lists have increased from 4,241 in September 2016 to 6,948, a year later, Cork East Sinn Féin Deputy Pat Buckley told the Dáil.

This is an increase of 63%, he said. “In figures, 2,707 households are now on the waiting list,” he said. “Something is not right here. It is quite simple; the Government is not building or buying a sufficient number of social and affordable housing units to meet the ever increasing demand. What is even more troubling is the very fact that in the same period there has been an increase of 18,671 households signing up for the Housing Assistance Payment, HAP. When a household goes into HAP it is removed from its respective council list. HAP has increased by 18,671. The House could surmise that as a reaction to this scenario the council housing waiting list would come down, but unfortunately the opposite is happening.”

Deputy Buckley asked Housing Minister of State Damien English if he knew the kind of stress this puts on families and individuals and how many are suffering at the moment. “It has to be soul destroying for parents, or a parent, to turn to a child or their children and say, ‘No love, it is not going to happen tonight, but maybe tomorrow’.”

Deputy Buckley appealed to the Minister to review the social housing targets for 2018 and beyond and to secure additional funds to increase the targets and to meet the ever-growing demand for affordable and social housing.

In response, Minister English said the latest official figures showed there were 4,241 households on Cork County Council’s waiting list, which represented an 11.7% decrease on the figures from the previous Statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments (SSHA) carried out in 2013.

“The 2016 SSHA figures are the most up-to-date official figures available on waiting list numbers,” he said. “They provide the most accurate and reliable record of the number of households qualified for social housing support under the social housing assessment regulations 2011 and whose housing need is not being met in any way.”

“We need the space and time to focus on housing delivery, which must be the absolute priority over the coming few years,” he said. “Time spent arguing over spurious sets of raw figures put into the public domain is time wasted. It helps nobody. Currently, the Department is finalising the results of the 2017 housing assessment summary. I expect that the data will be ready for publication within the next few weeks at the latest. This will allow the Department, in partnership with the local authorities, to plan strategically the delivery of the bulk of the €6 billion *Rebuilding Ireland* investment programme over the period 2018 to 2021.”

### **Action sought to protect Fermoy weir**

A request that all fishing be prohibited within 100 metres of the weir in Fermoy was made in the Dáil by Cork East Fianna Fáil Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe.

Fermoy town in north Cork, he said, has the lovely amenity of the River Blackwater flowing through it, providing immense tourism and sporting facilities for the area. However, there is a major problem in that the weir is crumbling.

“Three State bodies are mixed up about who is going to lead the project,” he said. “I am bringing this to the floor of the House because this comes under the EU Habitats Directive, step four of which requires assessment and conservation, but we seem to be failing in that at the moment. The weir is in a dangerous state and if we get another flood on the River Blackwater, it could go. The fishermen are up in arms, as are members of the rowing club. Will the Taoiseach urge his Ministers to talk to the various bodies, including Inland Fisheries Ireland and the OPW?”

In response, Minister of State Seán Kyne said he would certainly raise this with Inland Fisheries Ireland and come back to the Deputy with a response. “If there are safety issues, clearly, something needs to be done,” he said. “I will also liaise with the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys and revert to the Deputy on the matter.”

### **No plans for a fodder scheme for farmers**

There are no plans at this time to establish a fodder aid scheme for farmers, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed told the Dáil.

Replying to Sinn Féin’s Martin Kenny he said his Department has been closely monitoring weather conditions, grass growth and feed supplies. “It is clear that the weather conditions over recent weeks have been challenging, and this has created difficulties for farmers in parts of the country,” he said. “This has given farmers a number of challenging weeks managing livestock, with animals having to be temporarily housed and difficulties with securing later cut silage.”

The Minister said the European Commission agreed to his request for an advance payment of the 2017 basic payment scheme, BPS. This has been prompted by the protracted inclement weather conditions and also market difficulties caused by currency fluctuations. “This means an increase from 50% to 70% in the advance payment rate for the BPS to those applicants whose applications were confirmed fully clear,” he said. “These payments were recently issued and balancing payments will be made with effect from 1 December. There will also be an increase permitted to the advance for Pillar 2 rural development schemes such as GLAS. These payments and the payments under the areas of natural constraints scheme are injecting up to €800 million into the rural economy and will provide a very welcome boost for Irish farm families.”

