

## Westmeath Examiner

By Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

### Funding sought for Good2Talk in Mullingar

The need for funding for the Good2Talk Counselling and Psychotherapy Support Services in Mullingar was raised in the Dáil by Fianna Fáil Deputy Robert Troy.

Speaking during Question Time, he said this is counselling service that offers crisis intervention and long-term crisis prevention, helping clients to develop healthier coping strategies, preventing suicide and high-risk behavioural patterns. “It deals with financially disadvantaged clients aged from 16 years and many different ethnic groups,” he said. “It has made an application for funding. Its funding was cut by the HSE in previous years.”

Good2Talk is governed by a board of directors, he said. It complies with the CRA requirements. It works within clear guidelines, policies and procedures, working towards transparency and accountability. “Its accounts are audited every year and presented at its AGM,” he said. “Its clinical work is guided by best-practice guidelines and ethical guidelines of the IACP. In 2013 it dealt with 167 clients; in 2014 it dealt with 397 clients; in 2015 it dealt with 480 clients; in 2016 it dealt with 444 clients; and this year it has dealt with approximately 485 clients. It is dealing with people who need help and it is filling a gap the HSE is leaving wide open.”

In reply, Minister of State Jim Daly said Good2Talk was awarded funding through the HSE resource office for suicide prevention of €25,000 for 2014 and €39,600 for 2015. In addition, it received €18,000 under the National Lottery grant scheme for 2016, and has made an application under the National Lottery grant scheme for 2017.

“The HSE funding was accessed by the resource office for suicide prevention under the community resilience funding stream financed by the National Office for Suicide Prevention,” he said. “This funding stream ended in 2015 with the advent of the national strategy, *Connecting for Life*, in 2015. The ending of the community resilience funding stream after 2015 was communicated to all of the recipients of the funding, including Good2Talk.”

All future needs for funding will be assessed under the provisions and implementation of the new county suicide prevention plans, which aim to develop and implement consistent multi-agency suicide-prevention action plans to enhance communities' capacity to respond to suicidal behaviours, he said. “Good2Talk has been informed about the development of the *Connecting for Life* implementation plan for Longford and Westmeath and has been invited to participate in the plan's consultation process.”

It is not possible to have a bottom-up service delivery system, he said. What was needed is a nationally co-ordinated system with localised delivery. “That is what we announced in 2015 with the *Connecting for Life* strategies that are being rolled out in every county. Every county has its own specific means and demands on it.”

## **Housing crisis a hindrance to foreign direct investment**

Concern that the housing crisis and the planning system are leading to an uncompetitive environment in the State for the retention of foreign direct investment and damaging efforts to attract new investment was expressed in the Upper House by Fianna Fáil Senator Aidan Davitt.

He said the The recently published report by American Chamber of Commerce Ireland, *Growing Great Teams in Ireland: The Role of the Residential Rental Sector*, clearly illustrates the severity of the housing shortage and how it could lead to Ireland being uncompetitive in the future which could, in turn, be a deterrent to foreign direct investment.

“The report states more than 30,000 new one-bedroom and two-bedroom rental properties are needed in Dublin by 2022 to meet the housing demand arising from the new jobs created by foreign direct investment,” he said. “The Tánaiste and IDA Ireland must outline the Government's response to this finding from a jobs growth perspective. The Government can no longer sit on the sidelines and hope the housing crisis will end and house constructions will commence. All successful projects work from the bottom up. It is easy to see that the Government's refusal to launch an organised and co-ordinated social and affordable house building programme is endangering further growth and the creation of high-end jobs in Ireland.”

Rents in Dublin are 20% higher than they were at their peak in 2008, he said. On average, a semi-detached house costs €3,000 per month to rent in Dublin 1. “That is an horrific cost in an area in which many of the people who come to Ireland to work in higher end jobs are located and in which they wish to live,” he said. “We have had a lot of talk about solutions but zero substance when it comes to action. Will the Minister of State indicate whether there is a definite plan in place to commence a house building programme?”

In response, Minister of State Catherine Byrne said the Government accepted that the adequate supply of quality, affordable housing in the right locations, to buy and to rent, is a contributory factor to Ireland's overall competitiveness.

“The link between the cost of housing and wage expectations means that developments in the residential property sector impact on our international competitiveness and ability to compete for mobile talent,” she said. “We are now one year into the implementation of *Rebuilding Ireland*, the Government's action plan for housing and homelessness. In that time many key actions have been delivered or put in train and it is clear from a range of housing related trends that the supply response is coming on stream. All key indicators of construction activity show that residential construction is ramping up considerably.”

She said the number of planning permissions is up by almost 50% year on year and the ESRI's latest commentary in October forecast that the number of house completions would reach 19,000 this year and 24,000 in 2018. “On that basis, the *Rebuilding Ireland* target of 25,000 homes per year by 2020 will be met and quite likely exceeded,” she said.

