

## **Evening Echo**

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

### **Cork in need of further development**

Cork City Council is building more houses than the private developers and that cannot be right, Senator Jerry Buttimer told the Upper House. A balance must be struck, he said.

“In particular, in Barrack Street, part of Douglas Street and in the inner city of Cork we can have a scheme to encourage living over shops and encourage regeneration through tax incentive schemes,” he said. “Those schemes have existed in the past, but they can be brought back again to incentivise and acquire lands and buildings. In certain sections there are problems with capital allowances and stamp duty, but this is about ensuring that we take the investment we have made in Cork - for example the public realm in Barrack Street - and incentivise either the local authority or a developer to come in and make it habitable. Vast parts of that area of the city are not inhabited.”

Speaking during a debate on the Finance Bill, he said as part of the National Capital Development Plan, or Ireland 2040, there is an ambition and strategic vision for the development of Cork. “I want to ensure that with a combined approach, working with local government, we will see an emphasis on collaboration to develop more social housing in Cork,” he said. “We have allocated €155 million to the city of Cork for the acquisition and building of over 624 housing units.”

### **Sinn Féin has full confidence in Disclosures Tribunal judge**

Sinn Féin has full confidence in Mr. Justice Charleton’s chairing of the Disclosures Tribunal, Cork South Central Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire told the Dáil. “We believe he has the right attitude and the right approach,” he said. “We expect that he will pursue everything possible right up to the lines of the terms of reference he has been given, but he cannot go any further than that. He cannot consider matters that are outside the terms of reference.”

Speaking during a debate on a Sinn Féin motion, Deputy Ó Laoghaire said Sinn Féin had suggested changes to the terms of reference in light of facts that were not really considered at the time of their setting. “All parties had an input into the process of setting the terms of reference. We have no problem with the process that was used. The additional facts that have emerged need to be taken into consideration. We are proposing that the Tribunal should be allowed to investigate the knowledge of officials, advisers and Ministers. At present, it is confined to investigating the knowledge of the former Garda Commissioners, Martin Callinan and Nóirín O’Sullivan.”

The key point, he said, related to the possibility of a cover-up, of suppression, or of deliberately not forwarding documentation on to the commission, which is a very serious issue. “I challenge the Minister (Charlie Flanagan) to find any head in the current terms of reference which would allow that to be investigated. There is none. There is no head which allows that to be investigated.”

### **Buttimer pays tribute to former Tánaiste**

Tribute was paid in the Seanad to the former Tánaiste Frances Fitzgerald by the Leader of the House, Fine Gael Senator Jerry Buttimer. “I want to express my sincere thanks to the Tánaiste for her work as a Minister, as a pioneering Minister for equality throughout her tenure in the Departments in which she served,” he said. “As Chairman of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children, I had the pleasure of working with her as the first member of the Cabinet to be a Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.”

“On a personal level, she has been a huge source of support and advice to me along my journey in life,” he said. “She is a friend and a woman whose advice I cherish. She was an exemplary politician and I very much regret her resignation. Today in this House we are debating an issue that is before a tribunal of inquiry. It is called the Charleton Tribunal, established by the Houses of the Oireachtas. We are having a discussion and we have lost a Cabinet Minister on the basis of a media frenzy, as the Taoiseach said, about a number of emails, when 230 documents have been sent to the Tribunal.”

History will show us that the Sinn Féin Party does not have any regard for due process and does not believe in natural justice, he said. “There are members of Sinn Féin who are resigning, citing bullying, all over the country, including in my own county of Cork,” he added.

### **Re-opening of Ballinspittle Garda Station welcomed**

The reopening of Ballinspittle Garda station was welcomed in the Upper House by Fine Gael Senator Tim Lombard. This is a very important step. The station in Ballinspittle was, he said, one of a number that were closed in 2012 and 2013.

“In many ways, the reopening is about trying to tackle rural crime,” he said. “Having Garda stations in villages such as Ballinspittle is very important. It is an extremely positive that the Minister, as part of a pilot programme, examined the position with regard to reopening this station. That is very positive for the local community, particularly the people who live in Ballinspittle. The entire peninsula on which the village is located requires a Garda station. It is on the periphery. The recent campaign by the community to achieve this reopening must be acknowledged. I hope similar communities can be supported in their battle against rural crime, which is a major problem for them. This Garda station will hopefully do its best to ensure that crime in the area will be tackled.”

### **Potential of Ehealth highlighted**

Regulations governing GPs using telecommunications for giving one-to-one advice over the Internet were raised in the Upper House by Senator Colm Burke.

“What regulation exists on this and how are we going to develop this area, which would be of benefit to GPs, especially in rural areas where patients would be able to access doctors

without having to travel long distances to meet them?” he asked. “We talk about developing primary care centres where there would be a far bigger number of GPs working, but they would be a greater distance from many people in rural areas. It is in that context that I raise this matter. It is important that we roll this out and regulate it properly to ensure that it works and patients are safe. As I understand it, there is nothing to prevent someone from starting such a service under the current legislation.”

In response, Minister of State Finian McGrath said Ehealth has the capacity to provide the building infrastructure and the technology needed to facilitate the wider use of technology to enhance patient safety and patient care in any health care setting.

“On the use of teleconsultations in healthcare delivery, there is emerging evidence that telemedicine teleconsultations can be implemented to support an integrated healthcare approach,” he said. “Teleconsultations between GPs and patients can provide benefits in certain circumstances, such as the provision of care in remote locations or for chronically ill patients, providing a service in alternative settings that are more convenient for the patient. Such consultations offer alternative channels of service and enhance patient choice.”