

Kerry's Eye

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Taoiseach asked to block transfer of licence fee proposal

The Taoiseach was called on to block the proposed transfer of responsibility for television licence fee collection from An Post to the Revenue Commissioners by Independent Deputy Michael Healy-Rae.

“I declare an interest in this matter as the postmaster of a small rural post office,” he said. “The suggestion of the Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment is completely wrong. I really mean it. The collection of a television licence fee by a post office is a transaction. To ensure the Taoiseach is clear on this issue - every post office is paid based on the number of transactions. If we do this, it will cost post offices money. That is not what the Taoiseach wants and it is not what is stated in the programme for Government.”

Deputy Healy-Rae said the Minister's (Denis Naughten) heart is in the right place. “He is doing great work for the post office network. Will the Taoiseach stop this move immediately because it is wrong?”

In response, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said it was not a Government proposal and he had not yet read the report. “Like all Joint Committee reports, the Government will consider it and respond to it in due course,” he said.

Twenty per cent of sports grants applications are invalid

In 2014-15, approximately one third of all applications for sports grants were invalid, Minister of State Brendan Griffin told the Dáil. Due to changes which have been made to the scheme and the website, he told deputies they are now looking at an invalid rate of approximately 20%, which is a step in the right direction, albeit still 20% too much.

“I would like to see a 0% rate of invalidation and to bring everyone through the process as a valid applicant,” he said. “That would give every club the opportunity to have its application tested on its merits. For now, approximately 80% of applications are valid which means we are seeking to ensure that €56 million is disbursed among approximately 1,700 clubs. Grants will be based primarily on the amounts the valid applicants sought and the points they secured through the application process.”

“The Minister, Deputy Ross, and I were extremely determined to ensure that the true merits of applicants were reflected in allocations,” he said. “We feel we have come up with a way of doing that which is transparent and entirely fair. We are proud of it because it is a step in the right direction for the sports capital programme, which will have a meaningful impact on many communities when funding is allocated. For the volunteers, there has been a delay because of the extra funding and an unprecedented number of applications - 2,320 is the

highest ever - but it was worth waiting for because, ultimately, we will have a very good programme this year.

Healy-Rae seeks transfer of Fair Deal funds to Home Help

An update on a Government promise whereby it would be possible to transfer some of the money from the Fair Deal scheme across to people who need more hours of Home Help was sought in the Dáil by Independent Deputy Danny Healy-Rae.

“We have been waiting for this when we read in the papers that the Government will means test the elderly to see if they will pay for some of the public home help they receive,” he said. “I remind the Taoiseach that most of the elderly receive only a quarter of an hour each day, some of them half an hour daily, and occasionally two or two and a half hours in total weekly. Very few get any home help on Saturdays, Sundays or bank holidays.”

Most families and elderly people pay for private home help themselves to make up the deficit, said Deputy Healy-Rae. “Now we hear the Government is going to charge them for the measly hours and minutes that they are being given. Why is the Government doing this to our elderly people? Why will the Government not assist them to stay in their homes as long as possible? Why is the Government doing this?”

In response, the Taoiseach said the Fair Deal scheme needs as much as it has. “I do not know if it would be possible to transfer funds from the Fair Deal scheme to Home Help. “What is being considered, it may be at consultation stage or it may have completed that, is to set up a scheme similar to Fair Deal for Home Help and Home Care packages. The Fair Deal scheme works very well. People who need a nursing home and are assessed as such can get a place in about four weeks. Part of the reason it works well is that it is a statutory scheme with a standard assessment across the country and involves those who can afford to do so making a contribution. It may well be the model for a statutory Home Help and Home Care scheme which would guarantee people the Home Help and Home Care they need within weeks, but may include a contribution from those who can afford it.”

Taoiseach called on to re-open Kenmare garda stations

A proposal by Independent Deputy Danny Healy-Rae to reopen a Garda station on each side of the Kenmare River to prevent the importation of drugs and progress the apprehension of criminals in that vast countryside was rejected by the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach said six Garda stations are to be reopened on a pilot basis and thereafter their impact on Garda service and crime in the areas will be assessed. “There are no proposals to open any Garda stations apart from those six until the pilot scheme is evaluated and we see how the re-openings have impacted on those areas,” he added.