

Waterford News & Star

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

Butler appeals to Minister to prevent ISPCC closure

Fianna Fáil Deputy Mary Butler appealed to the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone, to prevent the closure of the Waterford unit of the ISPCC. She said it is manned by 35 volunteers and two full-time staff who take 30,000 calls a year and support 20 families annually with a unique mentoring service. “Tusla provides €9,000 but the cost of running the unit is €100,000,” she said. “I appeal to the Minister and the Taoiseach for a four-week stay on the decision to allow a solution to be found by 31 December.”

In response, Minister Zappone said it was regrettable that the ISPCC has decided that it had to close the office in Waterford and the two services it provides there. “I understand from our recent conversations with it that any child from Waterford and the south-east will continue to have full access to Childline,” she said. “My understanding of how the service works is that when a child calls, he or she may be connected to a person who could be in any part of the country. I understand the mentoring service that is run from the office is mostly provided by volunteers for the ISPCC. They are finishing their work with some children and families.”

In cases where they have not finished it, she said they are working with local services to hand them over. “That is my understanding of how, in the context of the decision to close, the ISPCC is ensuring the children in need will receive what they require,” she said. “I will continue to work closely with the ISPCC to see if it is possible to find further funding in the New Year.”

Obstacles blocking future development of Waterford city

In Waterford, there are particular issues that are constraining the immense potential of the city and the metropolitan area, Green Party Senator Grace O’Sullivan told the Upper House. At recent events in the city highlighting digital creativity, community voluntary activity, regional development and educational opportunities, she said the intelligence, skills, eagerness and potential energy of the people of Waterford city and county were always evident.

She asked the Leader of the House, Senator Jerry Buttimer when the Government will be delivering the funds that are promised to the North Quays Strategic Development Zone in Waterford city. “With the public consultation closing this week, and a city transport development plan under discussion that will reshape the face of the city, it is crucial that Waterford city’s position as the capital of the south-east is locked down in the developing National Planning Framework and the capital investment plan,” she said. “Greater certainty around the provision of emergency medical care in the region is crucial for the continued development of the city and county, and this is something I expect the Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris, will be addressing shortly as part of a national review of services.”

Of particular and immediate concern she said is the nature of emergency medical transport for the region, as well as the provision of out-of-hours cardiac and mental health care. “The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation recently met in Waterford city,” she said. “The Committee heard from experts in the region about these issues and the crucial need for a technological university for the south east region that could go so far to unlock its potential. I am eager to debate this in more detail, and I hope we have the opportunity to do so in the House soon.”

Coffey pays tribute to former Tánaiste

Former Tánaiste Frances Fitzgerald introduced legislation that will ensure many generations of children in the future will be protected, Senator Paudie Coffey told the Upper House. Speaking in the wake of her resignation, he said she led the way in much of that groundbreaking legislation.

“We now understand that, since the Taoiseach ordered the trawl of documents in the Department of Justice and Equality, further information and documents have been disclosed,” he said. “The Charleton Tribunal is charged with examining all of this in fine detail. I believe, however, that the Department of Justice and Equality needs to be turned inside out in respect of the way it conducts its dealings because it is obvious that Sergeant Maurice McCabe has been the victim at many levels, not only within An Garda Síochána but also of collusion within the State and the Department of Justice and Equality.”

Senator Coffey said he was annoyed about that, as are colleagues of his. “I believe fundamentally, however, that the former Tánaiste, Deputy Fitzgerald, will be vindicated when the Charleton Tribunal has the opportunity to examine, according to due process and natural justice, the fine detail, the evidence, facts and truth behind much of this.”