

Westmeath Examiner

Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

Troy seeks details of sports grants allocation

Concern over the leaking of details of when this year's Sports Capital grants were expressed in the Dáil by Fianna Fáil Deputy Robert Troy.

Applications for the programme opened in January 2017 with a closing date of 24 February, he said. That is over ten months ago. "Many small, voluntary sporting clubs in my constituency of Longford-Westmeath and right across the country put a lot of time, effort and hard work into preparing their applications for the sports capital programme but to date there are some which do not know whether they will receive funding."

Deputy Troy said he was also concerned that a number of colleagues had approached me recently to indicate that certain members of Government parties were ringing around sporting clubs to advise them that they had been successful and to expect a phone call later. "If that is happening, I am very worried," he said. "Funding allocations should be made known in an open and transparent manner to all Members of the Oireachtas. I am aware that there were a large number of applications this year."

In response, Minister of State Brendan Griffin said when he came into the Department on 20 June, applications had closed. At that stage, there was a budget of €30 million for both the local and regional schemes, with a breakdown of €26 million to €4 million, respectively. Unfortunately, the overall value of the 2,320 applications submitted for both the local and regional schemes was €155 million. He said he later managed to increase the funding from €30m to €60m.

He said the breakdown in 2012 was that 48% of clubs made invalid applications. Due to changes which have been made to the scheme and the website, he said they are now looking at an invalid rate of approximately 20%, which is a step in the right direction, albeit still 20% too much.

"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."

Penrose salutes work of carers, the "unsung heroes"

Carers deserve our deepest and sincerest level of gratitude for their unstinting and devoted work and Herculean efforts 24 hours each day, seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year, Labour Deputy Willie Penrose told the Dáil.

Speaking on the Social Welfare Bill, which implements the provisions of the Budget, he said these are the real unsung heroes of Ireland. "If a proper honours list is ever introduced in this country or inaugurated by the Government in conjunction with the President, each carer should be honoured every year," he said. "We should forget about the tax exiles and the flash

Harrys, who might turn their noses up if we had such an honours list. Carers are the real people. More than 300,000 of them are scattered across Ireland, saving the country in excess of €6 billion each year. If they downed tools today, the health system, the accident and emergency departments, the acute hospital beds and everything else associated with health would grind to a halt and collapse. Their work is invaluable and their contribution absolutely incalculable.”

Deputy Penrose said he intended to draft an updated Carers' Needs Assessment Bill in order to try to put their requirements and the necessary assessments on a statutory footing. “If we have more money or resources to distribute, they should always be first in line,” he said. “I have spent 25 years advocating their cause and will continue to do so for as long as I am in this House because they deserve not just our attention, not just lip service, but real payments to acknowledge their contribution.”

Deputy Penrose said he also welcomed the provision to continue the back to work family dividend scheme beyond 31 March 2018, with no closing date given. “This is an important political instrument to encourage families to move from social welfare into work by offering financial support to people with qualified adult children who take up employment or self-employment and, as a result, cease claiming a jobseeker's payment or one-parent family payment,” he said. “That support lasts for up to two years if the recipient remains in employment. It is not taxable and is based on the standard increase for a qualified child, which is now rising to €31.80, up to a maximum of four children.”