

## **The Liffey Champion**

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### **Legislation introduced to ease access to house adaptation grants**

Legislation to simplify the process for accessing a housing adaptation grant for people with a disability was introduced in the Dáil by North Kildare Fianna Fáil Deputy Frank O'Rourke.

At the moment, he said people are unnecessarily delayed in nursing homes and hospitals due to the amount of time needed to process and approve grants, which take approximately six months on average across all local authorities. "We know people who are elderly, or ill, are more comfortable and independent when living in their own home, and this is about making the process more efficient," he said.

"Our proposal, which we hope is accepted by other parties, is that when an application is made, it is put forward to the local authority with an occupational therapist's report, whether from the community or the hospital, with a proposal from a registered builder or architect, and accompanied by two quotations," he continued. "When all that is furnished to the local authority with proof of the person's income and proof they have paid the local property tax, all of which are part of the current process, a decision would be made on the application within a month in order to give some continuity and efficiency to the system."#

This, he said, is very important for the applicant, who will know they are being approved for the grant and what level of funding is approved. In addition, it obviously helps the process by preventing unnecessary delays in regard to bed-blocking in hospitals and nursing homes. It also gives some certainty to people making the application as to when they will get back into their own home.

Deputy O'Rourke said the funding is in place in local authorities so no additional cost will be imposed. "It is about making the system more transparent, efficient and effective and helping those in need to get meaningful and timely access to the funding," he added. "We do not propose any major changes to the current process, we propose only to make it more efficient and pragmatic."

The Government did not oppose the Bill at its First Stage.

### **Concern at denial of planning permission in rural areas**

Rural dwellers are being denied planning permission in their own areas which is a very serious issue for the future of rural Ireland, Fine Gael Deputy Bernard Durkan told the Dáil.

Speaking during Question Time, he said if Ireland does not have a rural population, there will be no need for services and eventually everything will decay. "That happened in the mid-est of the United States many years ago and it has happened in many other countries," he said.

"Will the Minister of State (Seán Canney) and the Department commit to an ongoing programme of creating an awareness of the necessity to ensure that all these areas in rural Ireland have the ability to absorb and to grow a population and to make a serious contribution to the community and economic life of the country?"

In reply the Minister of State said LEADER, the social inclusion and community activation programme, SICAP, community services, CLÁR, townland and village and outdoor

recreation are departmental schemes to enhance communities and to make them more vibrant. “Of course, we need to do more because we have had a significant deficit in the rural areas and they have suffered most. CLÁR is there to help the areas where there is a serious decline in population and to bring them on and make them more vibrant. Some communities are better at it than others so we need to work on that.”

Group water schemes, for example, have been the backbone of communities in rural Ireland and have brought services to the doors of many families which would not have been provided without the *meitheal* going on within parishes and half-parishes, he said. “When reviewing all these schemes, we will look to see how best we can develop them.”

### **Good news expected on treatment drug for children with muscular disability**

The up-to-date position on the availability of Spinraza for children suffering with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) was sought in the Dáil by Dublin Mid-West Deputy John Curran.

He said the Minister of State for Health, Jim Daly, had indicated that discussions were ongoing between the pharmaceutical company and the HSE. He also indicated that the talks were coming towards an end and that progress might be made.

“He did not indicate what the progress was,” he said. “The reason I raise the question again is that parents are waiting. I am happy to have the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, reply and give an update on the progress and whether there is likely to be a decision this side of Christmas.”

In reply, the Minister of State said his understanding is that there will be a decision this side of Christmas but he could not box in the HSE in the negotiations by putting a deadline on it, but he was hopeful that there will be.