

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COISTE UM CHUNTAIS PHOIBLÍ

COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Déardaoin, 17 Nollaig 2020

Thursday, 17 December 2020

The Committee met at 11.30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Colm Burke,	Deputy Neasa Hourigan,
Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill,	Deputy Marc MacSharry,
Deputy Matt Carthy,	Deputy Paul McAuliffe,
Deputy Cormac Devlin,	Deputy Imelda Munster,
Deputy Alan Dillon,	Deputy Catherine Murphy,

DEPUTY BRIAN STANLEY IN THE CHAIR.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy (*An tArd Reachtaire Cuntas agus Ciste*) called and examined.

Business of Committee

Chairman: We have received apologies for this part of the meeting from Deputies Devlin, McAuliffe and Carthy who had to travel across the river to terminal 2 - the convention centre - to attend to Dáil business. We are joined remotely by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. Seamus McCarthy, who is a permanent witness to the committee. I remind all those in attendance to ensure their mobile phones are on silent mode or switched off.

Caranua: Financial Statements 2019

Ms Rachel Downes (*Chief Executive Officer, Caranua*) called and examined.

Chairman: In today's meeting, we will engage with officials from Caranua, formerly known as the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board, to discuss the 2019 financial statements and the wind-down of the body. To assist us in our examination of these matters and with regard to public health guidelines we are joined in person from Caranua by Ms Rachel Downes, CEO; Ms Sinéad Dwyer, director of services; and Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick, director of finance and corporate governance. We are joined remotely by Ms Jane Merrigan, head of communications at Caranua; and from the Department of Education by Ms Catherine Hynes, principal officer; and Mr. Hugh Geoghegan, assistant principal. I welcome each of the witnesses to the meeting and thank them and their staff for the briefing material they have prepared for the committee.

I must explain some limitations to parliamentary privilege and the practices of the Houses with regard to references that witnesses may make to other persons in their evidence. Witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the presentations they make to the committee. This means witnesses have an absolute defence against any defamation action for anything they say at the meeting. Witnesses, however, are expected not to abuse this privilege and it is my duty as Chairman to ensure this privilege is not abused. Therefore, if witnesses' statements are potentially defamatory with regard to any identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that witnesses comply with any such direction.

Members are reminded of the provisions within Standing Order 218 that the committee shall refrain from inquiring into the merits of a policy or policies of the Government or a Minister of the Government or the merits of the objectives of such policies. Members are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I ask that members and witnesses remove their masks when speaking to ensure they can be heard clearly on the sound system, and that when members are leaving and taking their seats to sanitise the area. To assist the broadcasting service and the Debates Office, witnesses attending the meeting remotely should be called on by name and if not called upon by name, they should please state their name before beginning their contributions.

I now invite the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. Seamus McCarthy, to make his opening statement.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: The Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board, more usually known as Caranua, was established in March 2013 under specific legislation. The fund was established to receive and to hold voluntary contributions from certain religious congregations that in the past had run residential institutions for children. The value of the contributions that could be received into the fund from the congregations was limited in the legislation to €110 million, plus any interest accruing. The money was ring-fenced for use to provide grants and supports for the benefit only of persons who had formerly been resident in the institutions. Consequently, the support scheme was cash limited.

The types of approved support services for which grant funding was available were housing-related services, health and well-being services or education, learning and development services. The services and supports provided were not to be a substitute for services otherwise already available to the applicants under existing public service schemes. The Act also provided for the resources in the fund to be applied to pay the expenses necessarily incurred by Caranua in administering the scheme.

Contributions from the congregations were received in tranches, in parallel with the making of payments to applicants for support. It is useful, therefore, to consider the transactions cumulatively. The latest financial statements disclose that by 31 December 2019, Caranua had received the full €110 million contribution from the congregations. Accrued bank interest and investment returns totalling a further €1.7 million meant that a total of €111.7 million was available for use for the fund's statutory purposes. A total of €92.8 million had been paid out by way of grants or direct supports for eligible applicants. A total of €12.1 million had been used to fund Caranua's running costs, which average around €2 million per year. At 31 December 2019, there was a net balance of €6.7 million remaining in the fund.

The 2019 financial statements signalled that the board expected to wind down Caranua's operations in an orderly way in 2020, having discharged almost all of its commitments to applicants and to creditors and having used almost all of the available funding. On dissolution, any residual liabilities and assets are to be transferred to the Department of Education for finalisation. This process has taken longer than expected and Caranua consequently continues in existence. The Caranua and Department representatives will be able to provide the committee with an update in that regard.

My audit opinion in respect of Caranua's financial statements for 2019 draws attention to the disclosure in the statement on internal control that weaknesses in the operation of the board's system of control over payments to applicants created a risk that grant expenditure in some cases may not have been used effectively for the purposes intended. This is a concern to which I have also drawn attention in previous years.

Chairman: I thank Mr. McCarthy and ask Ms Downes from Caranua to make her opening statement.

Ms Rachel Downes: I thank the Chairperson and the committee for inviting Caranua to discuss our 2019 financial statements. I am Rachel Downes and I am here with my colleagues, Michael Fitzpatrick and Sinead Dwyer.

Caranua was established in 2013 as the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board under the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. Caranua is responsible for the management of a limited fund to improve the quality of life of people who, as children, experienced abuse and neglect in institutions and who have received awards from the Residential Institu-

tions Redress Board, the Irish courts or a direct settlement with a congregation. Although it is a public body, Caranua does not receive any State funding. A limited fund of €110 million was provided from religious congregations and an additional accrual of €1.38 million in interest. The Act states the fund provided to Caranua cannot exceed €110 million, excluding interest.

Caranua began accepting applications in January 2014 and ceased making payments on 11 December 2020. During this period, we received applications from 6,181 survivors. By the end of November 2020, Caranua had made over 57,000 funding support payments to the value of €97.1 million. The average funding support received is €15,728. The highest provision of funding supports is in home improvements, at €68.1 million, followed by health, €27.2 million, education, €1.4 million, and exceptional needs supports, €400,000.

The legislation sets out that all operational costs must be met from the fund and over the lifespan of the organisation, €13.4 million has been spent on operations. The board and management have worked determinedly to minimise operational costs and continue to do so during the wind-down. The closure of the service was carefully managed to ensure that adequate resources were available to meet the requirements of survivors' applications.

Caranua has taken a flexible approach towards survivors' applications. However, with limited funds remaining, survivors are aware that funding support services are no longer available. Over two years ago, in May 2018, plans for the orderly wind-down of the fund were announced. In early 2019, Caranua began contacting survivors with open applications to discuss person-centred timelines for completion. The board decided to extend the timeline for the completion of Caranua's services from June of this year to December in order to allow survivors impacted by Covid-19 restrictions additional time to complete their applications. Also during 2020, as there was a surplus available, Caranua initiated a number of projects to re-engage with survivors who had not previously availed of their individual limit of €15,000.

Caranua must strike a balance between working with survivors in a person-centred and compassionate manner and our obligations as a public body with fiduciary accountability. While at times the process has been seen by some survivors as too onerous, Caranua needed to respond to the audit opinion of the Comptroller and Auditor General in the context of controls. As a public body, Caranua is required to follow Government procurement guidelines and this requirement extends to the provision of funding support services to survivors. Survivors are, therefore, required to provide a specified number of quotations depending on the cost of the requested service. However, operating as a person-centred organisation means that there have been occasions when it was decided to work outside of procedures to support the survivor.

Caranua continues to work in partnership with survivor support groups and counselling services including the Christine Buckley Centre, Right of Place Second Chance, Towards Healing Counselling Service, One in Four, the HSE national counselling service and Barnardos' origins tracing service to support the asks set out in the Facing the Future Together conference report. They are the provision of an enhanced medical card for survivors and support with access to housing, continuation of free and easily accessible counselling services for survivors and their families and the provision of advocacy supports for survivors in the long term, including access to public services. All medical and public service staff working in customer-facing roles should receive trauma-informed practice training. Supports needed by survivors based outside of Ireland should also be identified.

As well as supplying funding supports, Caranua staff have provided advocacy services to many survivors, supporting them to access their rights and entitlements to public services, in-

cluding communicating with local authorities regarding housing or repairs, or with hospitals to expedite appointments. This service is no longer available and survivors may miss out unless other advocacy services are put in place.

Through our work with survivors, we have found that social isolation is a major issue and this has become more prevalent throughout the pandemic. Many survivors regularly contact Caranua as we are their only social interaction. Although we signpost to other agencies, many survivors take comfort from the fact that we are a survivor-specific organisation. We have assisted survivors ranging from 28 to 100 years old. While the majority are older, 32% are under the age of 60. Experience has shown us that in this younger population, there is a higher incidence of imprisonment, homelessness, managing addiction or all three.

Caranua was delighted to be invited to a recent meeting with the Minister of Education, Deputy Foley, to discuss the ongoing needs of survivors. This was a positive meeting which brought together survivor support groups and counselling services from Ireland and the UK.

The fund has been spent and Caranua's work is now complete. However, we are happy to provide information and share our expertise in support of survivors. I again thank the Chairperson and the committee for their interest in the work of Caranua and the ongoing needs of survivors.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I welcome our guests and thank them for taking the time to be here. The report that Caranua has published features several stories from survivors who shared their positive experiences of engaging with Caranua. Why were none of the negative stories covered in the report?

Ms Rachel Downes: To what stories is the Deputy referring?

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I do not think we can name people in here but the committee, obviously-----

Chairman: I would ask the Deputy not to name people. He can refer to places but I ask him not to name people.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: We have obviously engaged with Caranua in correspondence. There were would have been cases that were negative and where people did not have a good experience.

Ms Rachel Downes: I have not seen the correspondence the committee has received.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Is Ms Downes unaware of anyone who has had a negative experience?

Ms Rachel Downes: There are cases that we have dealt with intensively with survivors over the years but I am not sure-----

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Would Ms Downes not share one of those stories to show where Caranua got it wrong?

Ms Rachel Downes: I would not necessarily say that we got it wrong, I would say that we have had to work with survivors. Caranua is, obviously, a relatively young organisation and there has been a lot of learning over the seven years it has been in existence so-----

Deputy Marc MacSharry: There is one-----

Ms Rachel Downes: Sorry.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I apologise. I ask Ms Downes to go on.

Ms Rachel Downes: In the early years, for example, we would have found that a high number of cases were being accepted. Over 2,500 applications were made in the first three months of Caranua's existence. That has been a consistent theme throughout so we have had to work with that. There were low staff numbers and we had to build staff and ensure that they were fully trained in dealing with and working for survivors. There were, for example, long delays. At one stage, there was an eight to nine-month delay between somebody making an application and receiving a service from Caranua. That is something we have worked determinedly to improve over the past couple of years and I am happy to say that there has been no delay in services over the past 18 months to two years.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: One case to do with housing assistance has been going on since 2014. A man has had to use his outdoor facilities as a bathroom. There was repeated toing and froing. We will call him Mr. W because we do not want to mention any names. I do not know why any of us in the State, a State body or agency feels a need only to tell the positive stories and ignore the negative ones. There are two cases in particular of which I am aware, although I am sure there are many more than two, that have not yet been dealt with.

Ms Rachel Downes: I will step in there. As we have said, we obviously cannot discuss individual cases.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Yes.

Ms Rachel Downes: There are no outstanding cases at the moment. I am happy to discuss a case with the Deputy afterwards but we cannot discuss a case here. If the Deputy has permission from the survivor to share, I am happy to discuss that with him. It is obviously open to all committee members, if they have any queries about an individual application, to use the procedures that are there to contact Caranua at any time. We are happy to share the information with the permission of the survivor.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I would just say that where a State agency, or an agency paid for by the State, is involved, it would be important to give the whole story, warts and all, rather than just the good news stories.

Ms Rachel Downes: Just to say, we are not a State-paid agency. The funding does not come from the State, it comes fully from the fund.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: All right.

Ms Rachel Downes: To go back, there are no cases outstanding since 2014. I have to correct that.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Okay. We must be getting false correspondence in that case.

Ms Rachel Downes: I have not seen the correspondence that the committee has received so I cannot say if it is false or not. I am happy to see a copy of it and give an update to the committee.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I am actually pretty confident it is not false.

Ms Rachel Downes: As I said, I am happy to have a conversation with the Deputy after the meeting.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: That is no problem at all. We cannot get into individual cases because of the ridiculous rules that apply to us. Anyway, the point is clear, no matter who pays Caranua. Not all the stories were good news, unfortunately. There were some outstanding cases and issues that I hope can be dealt with.

Ms Rachel Downes: Again, no cases at the moment are outstanding, so I am unsure-----

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I appreciate that is the position of Ms Downes. Those of us on this side are paid by the public and we have to listen to what they are telling us.

Ms Rachel Downes: Again, I am happy to discuss it. It would be useful if we had a conversation to clarify some matters.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: We will send Caranua the details.

Ms Rachel Downes: That would be great.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: In the case of those survivors who were less satisfied during the period, what were the main complaints?

Ms Rachel Downes: It would usually be on waiting times. As I mentioned in my statement, our process can be onerous for some survivors. I will offer one example. If an application is under €1,000, a survivor had to provide one quote. If the work was going to cost between €2,000 and €5,000, the survivor would have to provide two quotes. For anything over €5,000, the survivor would have to provide three quotes. For some survivors, that was difficult to do.

I suppose this is a recurring theme, as the Comptroller and Auditor General has raised the question of internal controls. I will give an example of what we did on occasion. We have had survivors who were in prison. The services they may have required may have needed three quotes. It may have been impossible for them to provide three quotes to Caranua. We worked intensively with the Prison Service to try to facilitate that. However, there are times when we take a decision that the person cannot be expected to provide three quotes and, therefore, we accept one or two quotes that the survivor can provide and then proceed with that.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: At that point, Caranua makes a judgment on the quotes. If Caranua did not like the look of the quotes, it would send them back. Is that not right?

Ms Rachel Downes: Obviously, we have to follow strict rules. It is set out that we have to satisfy audit as well. As part of our audit process when a quotation comes in to us, it needs to be clearly defined. It would need to set out what it is and the breakdown of costs per area. One common occurrence is that a quotation that comes in does not give enough specific detail in respect of what is looked for. We would have to go back to the survivor and ask him or her to resubmit a quote. When we can, we work with survivors if they are happy to share permission with us. Then we contact a supplier on behalf of the survivor and explain exactly what we need. We have documentation that sets out exactly what is needed on a quotation.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Does Ms Downes believe that the guidelines and legislation handcuffed Caranua in providing an optimum service to survivors?

Ms Rachel Downes: There are complexities with it. Obviously, we are trying to strike the balance between working as an organisation with fiduciary responsibilities and a person-centred approach. These do not necessarily match for the organisation.

We have worked with 6,181 survivors. Some managed the process well and these survivors have had no issues with it and have been able to do it. Others have struggled with it. We have struggled at times as well to be able to give them the support required. We are a small organisation based on using telephones. Ideally, we would like to have more staff for face-to-face services. For example, we moved to a new premises in 2018. We were able to facilitate survivors coming into the office to meet us. We also started doing outreach to prison services. We continued our work in the deaf village and went to the UK. We have found that when a survivor is more vulnerable, the impact of a face-to-face meeting is far stronger. We are able to support the survivor in a more satisfactory way for the person's needs. It means that the funding and advocacy supports received from us are far better.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: The Department has to put something in place when Caranua ceases to exist. If Caranua was advising the Department, would it recommend that the Department address the overly bureaucratic nature of the scheme? Given the difficulties that victims have had and the levels of education that they were unable to take up, would Caranua say email and telephone is not the way to go and that a bureaucratic paperwork system-----

Ms Rachel Downes: As I said, for some survivors it works well and they do not need additional supports. However, there is a cohort who need additional support. It was set out in the Facing the Future Together report - I imagine the Deputy has received a copy - that advocacy supports are a key area of support.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: With the benefit of hindsight, would Ms Downes be advising, therefore, that because there is diversity and limitations on what people can deal with, we need a simpler system for the future?

Ms Rachel Downes: I do not want to overstep my role and direct the Government on policy. However, there is learning that I am happy to share with the Government. As I said, we met the Minister a week and a half ago to discuss areas of future supports for survivors and that would be an area for discussion.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: To be doubly clear for the record, there are no applications outstanding. Is that correct?

Ms Rachel Downes: There are three applications outstanding at the moment. All are under way. However, all are high-cost applications. Given the cost associated with these, and following guidance from previous audits, we do not pay out the full amounts. We take a staged approach to payments. All three are under way.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Apart from the three applications, how many decisions are with the appeals officer?

Ms Rachel Downes: As the appeals officer is independent from Caranua, I am not aware of the detail.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: He does not tell Caranua.

Ms Rachel Downes: He would not say. When the appeals officer receives an appeal, he

comes to us looking for a response to it. That is what is on hand in respect of that information.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Are there many outstanding responses?

Ms Rachel Downes: My understanding is that it is in single figures.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: The figure is somewhere between zero and ten. Is that correct?

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes. I can come back to Deputy MacSharry and clarify that.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: We would be interested in having that.

I have a question on the financial side. I notice the figure for membership and subscriptions amounts to €4,600. What are they?

Ms Rachel Downes: I might just defer to Mr. Fitzpatrick to answer that question.

Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick: I apologise, I do not have that information to hand.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Even anecdotally, are the Caranua representatives aware of memberships that are paid by the organisation?

Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick: We have paid a fee on an annual basis to IBEC for membership. That would be the majority of that balance. I can clarify again if there is any small balance in addition to the IBEC costs.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Yes, I would appreciate if Mr. Fitzpatrick could do so. I was a member of IBEC in the past in business. What role does IBEC play? What did IBEC ever do for Caranua?

Ms Rachel Downes: We use the organisation for employment advice. If we have any issues internally or anything like that, we would use IBEC for guidance.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Is there no state agency or Department to which Caranua could defer for such advice?

Ms Rachel Downes: We are separate from the State in that sense.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Caranua joined IBEC for that. The cost is approximately €4,600 per year. It is a lot of cash in the scheme of €100 million. Is it not?

Ms Rachel Downes: I think it would probably save more money in the long term. If we did not take accurate employment advice and we ended up in the Workplace Relations Commission, we could end up in a situation where it could be more costly and costs paid could be far higher than the annual subscription fees.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: It simply jumped out at me. I do not imagine there are too many agencies like Caranua that are members of IBEC. Legal fees increased by €90,000 during the year. What was the reason for that?

Ms Rachel Downes: In 2019 a number of survivors took a High Court case against the independent appeals officer. It related to the €15,000 limit introduced by the board of Caranua in June 2016. Some survivors who had received higher funding amounts than €15,000 took the view that this should not apply to them and that they should be able to start a fresh application and receive funding in addition to the €15,000. The appeals officer upheld a decision that the

€15,000 limit does apply and therefore it was taken to court.

Caranua had to join as a notice party because any decision of the High Court would impact on the operations of Caranua. Caranua was successful but the judge made a decision that because survivors were involved, he did not award costs to Caranua.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: Under travel and subsistence, there is expenditure under international travel in 2019 of €5,670. Can Ms Downes fill us in on that?

Ms Rachel Downes: International travel comes under two areas. One is for board members. We have a board member based in the UK. The person travels to and from Ireland.

As I mentioned, we did outreach. We went to the UK to meet survivors based over there. We had three outreaches, two were based in London and one based in Birmingham. We met between 50 and 60 survivors with these. Normally, team staff would go over for a two-day period and meet as many survivors as possible. Those days are normally very successful. What we find, particularly in London, is that several survivors come along, stay for the day and use it as an opportunity to socialise and catch up with each other.

Deputy Marc MacSharry: I will send Ms Downes the details of the two cases in which I am interested.

I ask the representatives of the Department to update the committee on what will be the situation post Caranua. They may not be in a position to tell us anything at this stage as the matter may be under consideration. What will the situation be post Caranua for any victims or others who have dealt successfully or unsuccessfully with Caranua in the past? Is the Department putting something in place that will be continuous and permanent and with which people can liaise? Has funding been allocated in that regard? I am seeking an update on that issue.

Ms Catherine Hynes: The Department is very aware that survivors will have ongoing needs post Caranua. We are also aware that the advocacy service Caranua provided was an invaluable support for many people. Our research indicates that several other agencies currently provide advocacy for people. We are trying to see how we can harness existing organisations to provide the service for survivors. Survivors themselves have expressed their needs going forward. They are looking for things such as the enhanced medical card. There are those who consider that private health insurance or a fast-track access to consultancy services would suit their health needs as they are an ageing population. None of that is within the gift of the Department, so we are working with other agencies and across Departments to see what services can be put in place for survivors. That is the updated position.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I too noted the report and wondered for whom it was produced or who was expected to read it. I expected that the report would be read by certain State agencies in the context of what would be required. Although it addresses some issues, it is essentially a glowing tribute to Caranua rather than a report identifying a path forward and the kind of lessons learned from the engagement with survivors.

Ms Rachel Downes: I apologise for interrupting. Is the Deputy referring to the annual report?

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Yes. I know there is other work on capturing information. Services in this country are very fragmented. The people who are best able to navigate their way through those services are those who have not had challenges in their lives. As Ms Downes

will be aware, the cohort in question here are very vulnerable people, some of whom find it very difficult to navigate services. Some Deputies deal with people in that category on an ongoing basis and, as such, have an understanding of the issue. On the issue of fragmented services, I expect to see, for example, some specifics about what needs to be done with regard to engagement with local authorities and advocacy. This may be more a question for the Department than for Caranua, which is now being wound down. There must be a one-stop-shop and a simplified system for people to navigate public services because how to do so is not immediately obvious to many people.

On the issue of survivors, 6,181 survivors engaged with the service. Did all of them get a payment? Can the committee take it that those who engaged with the service received a payment? We know from the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse that there are 15,600 former residents. As such, more than half did not engage with Caranua. What knowledge does Ms Downes have in that regard? What efforts were made to reach that group? It seems made that the people who were more able were the ones who made contact first.

Ms Rachel Downes: As the Deputy stated, more than 15,000 people availed of redress. Caranua commissioned a report in early 2014 or 2015, which looked at the life expectancy of survivors and estimated how many people would apply to Caranua. At that stage, it was estimated that approximately 12,000 survivors were still alive. They were based all around the world, although the majority of them were in Ireland. As the operational costs come out of the fund, we always had to be very mindful of advertising. I will step back for a second. We were given just the names of the people who successfully applied for redress. We were able to use that information as proof of eligibility but we were not allowed to use the list to contact survivors. Caranua was not allowed to make first contact with a survivor. Obviously, it would have been ideal to send a letter to the survivors initially to state that Caranua was in existence and to ask whether they wished to apply to it. We were very much relying on advertisement and word of mouth. We ran a poster campaign that covered that every GP's office, social welfare office and many other offices. The campaign was repeated a couple of times through the years. However, we had to be very mindful that advertising is very expensive and that cost would have been removed from our fund.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I have very limited time for my questions.

Ms Rachel Downes: Okay. The Deputy spoke about navigating services that are available. Although Caranua was set up to provide funding supports, we have stepped into that advocacy role because we see a need for it. As we know we are winding down, we have been dealing with a significant amount of signposting with survivors through the past couple of years. The survivor support groups that are already there are an invaluable service, with many of them providing counselling. We also use services such as Alone, Citizens Information and the Money Advice & Budgeting Service.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I understand the point. A matter about which the committee has some prominent concerns is the overheads. In hindsight, I am not certain that it was a great idea for the State not to pick up the cost of the overheads because it certainly felt like the cost was being taken out of the fund that was-----

Ms Rachel Downes: I totally agree. That has been an issue from the beginning in terms of the survivors feeling that the fund is being utilised for operational costs.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Ms Downes stated that this service was primarily provided

over the phone, yet there are fairly substantial costs relating to it. I know the organisation had to pay for office accommodation, which would have been secured by the Office of Public Works, OPW. However, the office accommodation cost €243,000 per annum plus €36,400 in service charges, which adds up to almost €280,000. That is a fairly significant overhead in the context of a service that is predominantly provided over the phone.

Ms Rachel Downes: Obviously, we need to have an office location in which to base our staff. The Deputy is correct that we used the OPW to secure the office accommodation and it was able to negotiate a very good rate. Caranua staff have been working from home since March in accordance with Government guidelines. We expected that our work would be complete at this stage but the board decided to extend services. Our lease for the office finished in June and the new leaseholders have very kindly allowed us a small office space free of charge since then.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: There is no follow-on cost there.

Ms Rachel Downes: There has been no rental cost since June.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: On the issue of the inadequate controls from 2014 onwards as identified by the Comptroller and Auditor General, that has been a feature right through. Why were better controls not put in place? I completely understand that the people involved are quite vulnerable. I would have expected Caranua to help them to get the quotes if they were not able to do so themselves, for example.

Ms Rachel Downes: We do so when we can, but some survivors do not want a supplier to know that the quotes are being provided because they are a survivor. One has to work with that. If Caranua was open for 20 years, this would still be a recurring theme each year because there is no possibility that every survivor who applies will be able to supply the required number of quotes. It was 30% last year. We have improved our numbers year-on-year and we work incredibly hard and intensely with survivors to try to get them over the line. That could have been 30% of survivors who did not get a service and I would rather take a controlled risk on a Comptroller and Auditor General audit than for a survivor to go without.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Travel and subsistence was €5,600 in 2019. That was up from €4,000 in 2018. What was that for?

Ms Rachel Downes: We would use that for outreach, including travel over to the UK, as I mentioned earlier.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: It was up in 2019.

Ms Rachel Downes: Each year we try to increase that outreach. We would have engaged more and we would have gone down to our place in Cork. As I said, we had three instances of outreach in the UK as well.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I want to go back to a question I asked earlier about the 6,181 survivors. Did they all get a payment?

Ms Rachel Downes: They did not. The number who received a payment would be closer to 6,000. I do not have the exact figures. When some of the survivors went through the process they decided they did not want to continue with it and that they did not have any needs, or sometimes, survivors had more of a transient nature and we were unable to contact them again.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I understand that Caranua can only work with who applies but looking at the initial payments and with the benefit of hindsight, was an evaluation done on people who were in rented accommodation, for example, and who could not get housing supports? That is the dominant difficulty survivors had. They would have done less well in life and the Caranua services may well not have been as available to them as they would have been to somebody in more secure accommodation.

Ms Rachel Downes: That was a big part of our approach. In 2014 and 2015, there was no limit in place and it was quickly discovered that people who were homeowners were unfairly advantaged in that a large portion of the fund was being utilised very quickly. This was when it was looked at again and additional services were put in place. Survivors were spoken to and we moved into the area of white goods, including furniture for the home. Funeral supports and help for survivors to tell their stories were added to the service, along with the introduction of a €15,000 limit, to ensure there would be a fair and equitable distribution of the fund so that more survivors were able to benefit. That has been in place since 1 June 2016.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Will the €300,000 wind-down cost be fully used and what does that account for?

Ms Rachel Downes: The majority of that is for salaries. We have low costs aside from that. I will pass this question over to Mr. Fitzpatrick.

Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick: It is a mixture of payroll and non-payroll expenditure. For instance, some staff will continue with the organisation until 24 March, when the board is due to be dissolved, and hopefully that will happen. On non-payroll expenditure, there will be some ongoing expenditure on audit fees and there may be some small element of legal fees continuing into the new year. There are a number of suppliers, probably only about five or six at this stage, that we will continue to conduct business with until the end of March when the board is dissolved.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I thank the witnesses for making themselves available. In a letter to the committee, dated 4 November, Ms Downes stated: "All survivors are treated fairly by Caranua". The independent appeals officers and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission did not believe that people were treated fairly by Caranua.

Ms Rachel Downes: Was that stated somewhere?

Deputy Imelda Munster: Yes. If Ms Downes reads their reports she will see that they did not feel people were treated fairly. There were particular incidents which Ms Downes will see if she reads the reports. I received correspondence about a particular case. I know Ms Downes said Caranua will not discuss individual cases, which is fine. This correspondent has given me permission to-----

Chairman: I ask the Deputy not to name the person.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I absolutely will not. The survivor gave me permission to raise the case and I am particularly doing so, given that Caranua's report had positive cases so I might give voice to this case. The correspondence I will read was in response to an email this Monday from Caranua to this survivor. The last part of the email from Caranua to this survivor said: "All of your needs have now been met with regards to Caranua and your application is complete." That was on Monday morning. On Monday afternoon, this survivor sent the following correspondence to Caranua.

My application is not complete and what you have said in your email is not true. I have a number of outstanding matters, including my bathroom, sitting room and kitchen floor. My needs have not been met. My home was damaged by workmen you paid to do work. The defects were reported to you in 2016 and I also refer to the 2018 expert surveyor's report. I have asked for funds to put right that damage. I have made repeated requests for such help. Finally, in October 2020, you agreed to put right some of the problems caused by your builder. However, Caranua has refused to pay for the bathroom, sitting room and kitchen floor repairs. Your part payment for the bathroom only covers just over half of the cost of the work and as you know, I do not have the money to make up the difference. The fund was used to pay for substandard work. My home is in disrepair. Clearly, it is not correct for Caranua to continue to claim that all outstanding matters have been resolved. The procedure to decide that a case is complete requires my knowledge and consent. I do not consent. The file is clearly not complete. Once again, I call on Caranua to pay for the works to put right the damage caused to my home. I want it noted that I have found the process nothing but stressful. My health is now being affected by all of this. I have made it known from the start that I did not want the said bathroom tiles. These tiles are the same colour as the uniform that I wore in the orphanage. Despite me voicing this opinion, I was repeatedly told that when they are fitted I would love them. I am now reminded of unwanted memories that I wish to leave behind me. I further feel that over the last six years, Caranua has been less than understanding when dealing with my concerns. I don't deserve this treatment. Have I not suffered enough?

Is that not an awful sad legacy as Caranua wraps up to leave behind from a survivor who has been dealing with it for six long years? Ms Downes mentioned earlier that Caranua's remit was to improve the quality of life for people by helping survivors with housing-related issues and their health and well-being. None of those were served for that survivor. One would have to ask a question, therefore. Where was the fairness, sensitivity, compassion and understanding shown to that survivor? Do the witnesses agree that it is a shameful legacy? There were survivors and some of them had referred to their experiences with Caranua as being re-abused. Will Caranua take this opportunity, therefore, to apologise to those survivors who experienced Caranua's services in this way?

Ms Rachel Downes: Due to the committee protocols I am unable to discuss an individual-----

Deputy Imelda Munster: I am not asking Ms Downes to do that. I am asking her if she would take this opportunity. Ms Downes acknowledged earlier that there were cases in which survivors were not satisfied. Would Ms Downes like to take this perfect opportunity to apologise to survivors who feel their experience was not satisfactory or helpful but was stressful and who feel they did not get what they deserved from Caranua?

Ms Rachel Downes: As I said, we have worked with 6,181 survivors. I cannot discuss an individual case here. However, I am happy to discuss it with the Deputy afterwards. As with all cases, there are different complexities and nuances involved with each individual case. We are working with a limited fund.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Specifically, for those survivors who felt that the process they experienced with Caranua was like being re-abused, will Ms Downes take the opportunity to apologise to those survivors who felt that was their experience of Caranua's services?

Ms Rachel Downes: If there are any survivors who feel they have been re-abused by

Caranua, I am very happy to speak to them individually.

Deputy Imelda Munster: So Ms Downes will not apologise.

Ms Rachel Downes: I am happy to speak to any survivors who feel they have been abused.

Deputy Imelda Munster: Ms Downes will not take this opportunity to apologise, as she wraps up.

Ms Rachel Downes: As I said, I am very happy to speak to any survivor-----

Deputy Imelda Munster: No, that is all right. Ms Downes is not prepared to take the opportunity to apologise to those survivors, as she wraps up. No.

Ms Rachel Downes: No, the opportunity I am prepared to take is that I am very happy to speak to any survivor who feels that they have been re-abused and to have a discussion with them on their experience of Caranua.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I am sure at this stage they are not interested in anything.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: I want to go back to procurement and the financial side of things. I note from the Comptroller and Auditor General's report that most of the issues with procurement are beyond the 2019 session but are ongoing because of contractual obligations.

Caranua was set up in 2012 and it is under the Department of Education. Procurement comes up repeatedly in this committee. Obviously, Caranua struggled in some sense with the constraints of people from whom they were getting quotes and the procurement process. When Caranua was setting up the procurement processes, what kind of guidance and intervention was it given by either the then Department of Education and Science or the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Ms Rachel Downes: As I was not there at the beginning, I cannot speak about what information was provided at the beginning of operations. I was acting CEO from 2017. With that, I suppose, we worked under the code of governance for State bodies.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: I do not mean to cut across Ms Downes. Is there anybody on the staff who would have known? The normal thing to do would be for a Department to provide the procurement process and a booklet on how to do it. Is anyone aware whether that happened?

Ms Rachel Downes: We do not have anybody on the staff who was there at the very beginning.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: Is there anybody here from 2012?

Ms Rachel Downes: No.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: I presume at some stage Caranua realised that there were issues in this regard, both with getting a number of competitive tenders or adhering to existing best practice in procurement. Did Caranua seek guidance from either the Department of Education or the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform?

Ms Rachel Downes: We did. When we realise there is an issue with something we have worked very hard to overcome, we engage with the Department of Education in relation to any contracts we might seek. We get permission from the Minister for Education before any con-

tracts are enacted. We also follow the procurement guidelines as set out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as well.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: Does Caranua have a particular staff member who is responsible for that?

Ms Rachel Downes: That falls under the director of finance's remit.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: Would that involve direct and constant contact with the Department of Education or the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform? Has Caranua received any guidance from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform?

Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick: Certainly not during the period that I have been in the organisation. I have been in the organisation since August of last year.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: That, since August 2019. Is there nobody here from before that as far as procurement is concerned?

Ms Rachel Downes: As I said, I have been there since 2017. I do not recall receiving any direct correspondence like an information pack or an A, B, C.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: What I am trying to get to is what intervention or guidance is received either from the Department involved or, probably more correctly in this case, from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, when a State body or semi-State body overseeing significant amounts of money, perhaps not taxpayers' money but certainly money within the State purview, is set up. Over the lifetime of the current Government, it is likely that other semi-State bodies will be established. I am trying to get to the point where I understand what guidance Caranua was given and what connections it had with the Department during this process.

Ms Rachel Downes: My understanding is that when a new body is being set up - this may have changed since then and this is, I suppose, hearsay from previous colleagues - we would have loved some form of information pack, containing the A, B, C, steps through everything one needs to do to set up a State organisation. It may have changed but I do not think that was in place at the time.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: That was not in place in 2012.

Ms Rachel Downes: It was not. It may be now.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: In 2012, we were well down the road of recognising how important procurement is. If there is nobody here today who can do so, would it be possible to send me a note on whether at the beginning in its establishment - it is probably in the terms of reference of the establishment of Caranua - the agency received guidance from either the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform or the then Department of Education and Science on best practice in procurement?

Ms Rachel Downes: No problem.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: I thank Ms Downes.

Before my time runs out, Ms Downes' opening statement was helpful and I thank her for that. I note that Ms Downes outlined five asks that were set out in the "Facing the Future To-

gether” conference report that Caranua is working with other groups to implement. As Caranua winds down, there will probably be a handover and that is quite difficult. If I had more time, I would go through all five. In the limited time, I will pick one, which is, that all medical and public service staff working in customer-facing roles should receive trauma-informed practice training. That is an issue that comes up, for example, in dealing with persons with disabilities or learning difficulties, that medical and public service staff who are paid by the State should receive training on how to deal with members of the public who might be in a vulnerable position. Could Ms Downes give us an update on that?

Ms Rachel Downes: This is a recommendation. It is not something Caranua is working on as an organisation. It is not within our remit. I would have to defer that to the Department of Education, which is looking after that area. The Deputy is correct. That section with trauma-informed training would have widespread positive impacts for the greater population outside of survivors. Anyone who is dealing with vulnerable instances, addiction or anything like that would really benefit if staff had trauma-informed care training.

Deputy Neasa Hourigan: Sorry, I know I am out of time but-----

Ms Rachel Downes: I am happy for the Deputy to contact me outside if she wants to discuss it.

Chairman: I will let Deputy Hourigan back in in the second round. I call Deputy Colm Burke.

Deputy Colm Burke: I thank the organisation for the work it has done over the years. It is important to acknowledge that. It was an extremely difficult challenge because the people who were making applications had come through difficult times.

There was €97 million paid out and there were 57,000 payments. I refer to what Deputy Munster asked earlier on. In respect of those people who are unhappy with the way their applications were dealt with, can Ms Downes give us the number who are still corresponding or engaging where they are totally unhappy with the response they have got from Caranua?

Ms Rachel Downes: Just to explain, we have a complaints procedure in Caranua.

Deputy Colm Burke: I know that. I do not have the time now.

Ms Rachel Downes: If someone is unhappy with our complaints procedure, we have had two complaints so far this year.

Deputy Colm Burke: What about outstanding claims?

Ms Rachel Downes: On 3 December, we stopped taking applications completely because that would not give people any time to get the quotations in. We have had 11 contacts since then. Of them, ten of the people have already received in excess of €15,000 in funding supports.

Deputy Colm Burke: What of complaints, such as Deputy Munster said?

Ms Rachel Downes: We have had two complaints this year.

Deputy Colm Burke: But going back over the past four years.

Ms Rachel Downes: We had 17 complaints last year in total. In the entirety of 2019 and 2020, we have had 19 complaints.

Deputy Colm Burke: And prior to that?

Ms Rachel Downes: I would have to get those figures for the Deputy.

Deputy Colm Burke: Could Ms Downes get the figures for 2016, please?

Ms Rachel Downes: Of course.

Deputy Colm Burke: It is important to take it into account in the overall context of the number of complaints.

Ms Rachel Downes: The majority of complaints in the earlier years were in respect of waiting times for service, as opposed to their application.

Deputy Colm Burke: Can I deal with the issue in relation to salaries for 2019? What level of decrease would there have been between the workload, say, in 2016, and in 2019?

Ms Rachel Downes: Up until probably mid-2019, we were working with approximately 2,500 survivors at any one time. The staff numbers started off relatively small and by 2018, the full staff complement sanctioned was 35 people. As people started leaving in 2019, we did not replace them, to the extent that we are now at a position where we have 11.6 staff. We have further staff finishing at the end of this year and we will have five staff going forward to 24 March.

Deputy Colm Burke: Were there 26 staff at the end of 2019?

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes.

Deputy Colm Burke: As for the members of staff who have left since then, have they left under redundancy?

Ms Rachel Downes: Some people were made redundant in October of this year.

Deputy Colm Burke: Has there been provision in Caranua's budget for that?

Ms Rachel Downes: We pay statutory redundancy. Anybody who was with the organisation for more than two years receives statutory redundancy, which was utilising the fund.

Deputy Colm Burke: In relation to someone who was there for five or six years, for example, what redundancy is being paid?

Ms Rachel Downes: Again, statutory redundancy. My understanding is that for every year that one is there, it is two weeks' salary to a maximum of €600, plus one.

Deputy Colm Burke: Plus one week?

Ms Rachel Downes: One week, that is, an additional €600. For example, if somebody was there three years, that person would receive six weeks' salary plus one, that is, seven in total, to a maximum of €600 per week.

Deputy Colm Burke: Was adequate provision made in 2019 in relation to the staff number?

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes.

Deputy Colm Burke: The workload has decreased substantially by this stage.

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes.

Deputy Colm Burke: Could cost savings in respect of salaries have been made at an earlier date?

Ms Rachel Downes: No. The redundancies were made in October. Up until September of this year, we were working with a couple of hundred survivors. That was reduced then to 11.6 in lieu of the lower numbers that we were working with and the change of practice.

Deputy Colm Burke: To go back to the earlier issue relating to the assessment of claims and coming to a decision on payments, there was a detailed mechanism in place for dealing with assessments. Of the 6,181 people who claimed, how many actually filed appeals over the years with regard to applications that were made?

Ms Rachel Downes: I have to come back to the Deputy with that number. I do not have it on hand.

Deputy Colm Burke: Does Ms Downes have details for each year?

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes. I can give the Deputy a breakdown of ones that were successful and unsuccessful. We have quite a lot of detail on that.

Deputy Colm Burke: I thank Ms Downes.

Chairman: Okay. I will move on. I call Deputy Verona Murphy, who has been here from the start of the meeting.

Deputy Verona Murphy: I thank everybody for coming in today. To pick up on some previous points that were made with regard to the recent correspondence we have received, Ms Downes stated that all claims were settled in October or by the end of October.

Ms Rachel Downes: No; December.

Deputy Verona Murphy: December.

Ms Rachel Downes: As in this month.

Deputy Verona Murphy: Ms Downes has discussed how staff were trained and so on to deal with survivors. I find it incredible that in the response to the email that was sent to Caranua, not one thing was addressed in it. The particular line states: "All of your needs have now been met with regards to Caranua and your application is complete".

Ms Rachel Downes: I cannot discuss an individual one but-----

Deputy Verona Murphy: I am sorry but Ms Downes will not get away with that with me.

Ms Rachel Downes: I would be very happy to discuss that outside-----

Deputy Verona Murphy: No. I do not want to discuss it outside. We are in the committee.

Chairman: Allow Ms Downes answer the question.

Deputy Verona Murphy: There is no personal detail given.

Chairman: Do not give personal details but allow Ms Downes to answer the question.

Deputy Verona Murphy: I want to know how that callousness was the response given to someone who is telling Caranua clearly that they were opposed to bathroom tiles that reminded them of where they were abused. The answer states: “All your needs have now been met with regards to Caranua and your application is complete.” Does that sound as if it addresses the survivor’s needs?

Ms Rachel Downes: I would be very happy to speak to the Deputy outside this, because I think-----

Deputy Verona Murphy: That is a “Yes” or “No” answer. Does she believe on a humane level that that answer has addressed the needs of the survivor?

Ms Rachel Downes: Everything that is named in that is not the full facts of that case. I would be very happy to discuss with the Deputy-----

Deputy Verona Murphy: I am very sorry but there are plenty of other facts. It is very obvious to anybody on this committee, in terms of what is detailed in the email sent to Caranua, that the person received that type of response. They are the facts. The line states: “All your needs have now been met with regards to Caranua and your application is complete.” That person will live with the abuse for the rest of their lives. By no means has Caranua met their needs. It has not even responded to the email on a humane level. On a humane level, does Ms Downes not think there is need to address that?

Ms Rachel Downes: There is more to that case. I would be happy to discuss it with her outside this-----

Deputy Verona Murphy: The Chairman should be aware that there is no more to the case. The fact is that it is outlined in an email to Ms Downes and that is the address given.

I want to ask Ms Downes about administration costs because the level of compensation that person was looking for is much less than what Ms Downes seems to have spent. When she announced the wind-down of Caranua in 2018, there was €86,950 spent.

Ms Rachel Downes: To advertise it.

Deputy Verona Murphy: Not to advertise it. It is the nature of maintenance and relocation costs.

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes. We moved office in 2017.

Deputy Verona Murphy: This is in the 2018 accounts. The Comptroller and Auditor General might address that. Is it a 2017 or a 2018 expenditure?

Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick: If I could add that the actual invoices were received in 2018, so it related to the fit-out of the premises that we occupied up until June of this year.

Deputy Verona Murphy: There was another €13,350 for premises in 2019. Was that for the same premises?

Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick: That is the same fit-out. There was a small percentage of the total cost kept for a later date when some particular work was carried out. I think it related to signage so when some particular signage was put up by the Office of Public Works, OPW, or the company acting on its behalf, a final payment had to follow on foot of that.

Deputy Verona Murphy: That was €13,350 for a sign and with regard to the email which states: “All your needs have now been met with regards to Caranua and your application is complete”, the figure was €5,000.

Ms Rachel Downes: I am sorry, Deputy-----

Deputy Verona Murphy: I am sorry, Ms Downes, but I am asking the questions. Meeting and conference costs were €10,006, which was more than five times the cost for the previous year at a time when Caranua was winding down. Can Ms Downes give me a breakdown of that expenditure?

Ms Rachel Downes: We increased our outreach expenses in 2019. We wanted to target funding for survivors in particular, so we increased our outreach. That involved travelling to the UK, hiring rooms-----

Deputy Verona Murphy: Caranua had a conference in the UK.

Ms Rachel Downes: We did not have a conference.

Deputy Verona Murphy: This refers to meeting and conference costs.

Ms Rachel Downes: It is just a title. It was a meeting. We did not have a conference.

Deputy Verona Murphy: Caranua already has subsistence, if I am not mistaken. There are other-----

Ms Rachel Downes: That is travel subsistence. That is for actual travel to get there. Those costs are associated with room hire to facilitate survivors.

Deputy Verona Murphy: I would like to put on the record that I read the report also and the report, and what is reported to this committee, as well as what is in the public domain, does not reflect the work of Caranua. I am very disappointed that the report is not transparent. What we need to learn in this day and age is that survivors in receipt of what Ms Downes or other people may deem to be compensation were treated in this manner and that it was not reflected transparently that there was such a level of complaints. There were many complaints and that is not reflected in Ms Downes’ report. To be honest, I do not believe that we have learned anything from it.

Chairman: I call Deputy Matt Carthy.

Ms Rachel Downes: I would be very happy to discuss it with the Deputy outside this meeting-----

Deputy Verona Murphy: I do not need to discuss it.

Ms Rachel Downes: -----but I want to say that there was a complaints procedure.

Deputy Verona Murphy: I thank Ms Downes.

Ms Rachel Downes: There were two complaints made this year and 15 complaints were made in 2019.

Chairman: I am sorry but I have to ask Ms Downes to desist.

Ms Rachel Downes: I am sorry Chairman.

Chairman: The next speaker is Deputy Carthy.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Caranua is a unique organisation in the sense that it was operating under a fixed budget of €110 million plus any interest accrual, which I understand was approximately a further €1.7 million. This was money clearly set aside essentially for compensation but outside of that Caranua's running costs were also taken from that same pot and it amounted to approximately €2 million a year. Looking back and reading the Comptroller and Auditor General's reports appraising Caranua, does Ms Downes believe that the running costs across those years could have been lower, recognising that any saving would have gone to the survivors of institutional abuse?

Ms Rachel Downes: That is something we worked very hard on to try to minimise. As the Deputy said, we had that balance between the operational costs versus the funding supports. It has always been the aim of the board and the executive to ensure that we maximise the funding supports. Overall, the operational costs have run at about 12.1%, which is relatively low. It is actually very low for a public body and is on a par with a charitable organisation. We have worked extremely hard. Outside of our salaries----

Deputy Matt Carthy: Does Ms Downes not believe there was any scope for saving within that €2 million per year?

Ms Rachel Downes: If the Deputy looks at our budget he will see we literally run on bare bones.

Deputy Matt Carthy: It was mentioned earlier that Caranua pays an annual subscription of €4,600 to IBEC.

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Ms Downs says that was to do with advice relating to staffing and employment. Does Caranua not have any HR officers employed?

Ms Rachel Downes: We did not at all stages. We do have one now. I am sorry; we did have one. I am not sure when the IBEC team was put in place but there was one. I was not working for the organisation at that stage.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Caranua has its HR people but it also pays a subscription. How many times would it have contacted IBEC for employment related advice?

Ms Rachel Downes: I would have to come back to the Deputy on that.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Does Ms Downes have a sense-----

Ms Rachel Downes: I do not. I would not be confident to confirm that.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Can Ms Downes confirm that Caranua would have sought such advice on a number of occasions?

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes. We definitely did. I would not have been contacting it myself. It would be a different member of the team so I would not know but we definitely have contacted it.

Deputy Matt Carthy: What process would have been engaged in to decide that IBEC was the best organisation to give employment advice, considering there is a myriad of organisations

that specialise in this particular area?

Ms Rachel Downes: I cannot say. I was not working in the organisation when the IBEC contract was put in place so I cannot say what that procurement was.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Is it not renewed on an annual basis? Is it just rolled over?

Ms Rachel Downes: It is rolled over.

Deputy Matt Carthy: So it is a case of pay the subscription regardless of-----

Ms Rachel Downes: No, obviously there would be a conversation about the needs for it. As I mentioned earlier, the advice we received has been invaluable over the years and has saved costs because we need to divert from WRC issues or anything like that.

Deputy Matt Carthy: So the advice has been invaluable.

Ms Rachel Downes: It has been.

Deputy Matt Carthy: But Ms Downes does not know how many times Caranua actually sought that advice.

Ms Rachel Downes: As I said, I do not personally contact it but I can provide information to the Deputy.

Deputy Matt Carthy: What metric was used? A sum of €4,600 would resolve someone's bathroom or a myriad of specific issues, so it is an example of expenditure going to one place at the expense of another. I have seen quite a number of subscription costs. Was that appraised on an annual basis?

Ms Rachel Downes: I am happy to come back to the Deputy about that.

Deputy Matt Carthy: The letter dated 4 November to this committee is on the record of this committee and it stated that all survivors are treated fairly by Caranua. We have heard testimony and reports that some survivors do not feel they were treated fairly. Is there a better way of reflecting that fact in Caranua's correspondence and the public record Ms Downes outlined?

Ms Rachel Downes: We always operate from a person-centred point of view when we work with survivors. Every adviser would have an individual application file he or she has worked with over the years. There has been intensive engagement, particularly over the past year. We have been able to engage in very intensive engagement with survivors. There is a complaints process. We received two complaints this year. What is being named here does not match the experience of the organisation. I take on board what the Deputy said-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: When one deals with these type of issues, I might think that I have treated Ms Downes very well here, while she might have a different view of that. Her opinion is as valid as mine. Is she saying that in this instance, in terms of the official reports of Caranua, her opinion is more valid than the opinions of survivors of institutional abuse who have a different view?

Ms Rachel Downes: I did not say that.

Deputy Matt Carthy: This is the official language. The official report from Caranua states that all survivors are treated fairly by Caranua. We have testimony from people who say they

do not feel they were treated fairly by Caranua. I asked Ms Downes whether she could amend the official recording of Caranua to reflect that and she essentially said “No” because Caranua has a different view from that of those people.

Ms Sinéad Dwyer: We will not get into individual cases but there are far more complexities relating to these matters. It is not as straightforward as monetary matters. We cannot meet all the needs of survivors but we make every effort to do that within the guidance and limits with which we have been provided.

Deputy Matt Carthy: My point is that Caranua’s report to this committee, which is on the record of the committee, states that all survivors are treated fairly by Caranua. Some survivors say they have not been treated fairly. I am asking Caranua whether it can amend its official report to reflect their position.

Ms Sinéad Dwyer: What I have said is that there is far more complexity to that rather than “Yes” or “No”. It is not that simple.

Deputy Matt Carthy: But Caranua said-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Matt Carthy: I think the answer is no, it will not.

Ms Sinéad Dwyer: That is not the answer. It is definitely not the answer. I disagree.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: Staying with the issue of survivors and their applications, I know the witnesses will not go into any individual case nor will I. I will just highlight one without identifying anybody. I note that home improvements accounted for €68.1 million of expenditure. Last summer, in respect of the staying at home, home help and tenants support scheme, I made contact with Caranua on behalf of a survivor. This individual is living in a family home that happened to be rented from the local authority. Therefore, there seemed to be a bit of an issue. I wondered about it at the time so it is opportune for me to ask how many other individuals found that difficult. It was a kitchen upgrade because the property, which I saw myself, required that but that individual found it very difficult to access what I call their funds. How was that the case? Ms Downes has stated there is a complaints mechanism and that there were two complaints this year. How many complaints have been made since 2013? One should remember that some of these people are extremely vulnerable individuals who are not used to articulating or are sometimes unable to articulate their concerns and, therefore, some of them might turn to public representatives.

Ms Rachel Downes: I am not sure about the specifics of the case to which the Deputy is referring. However, the legislation sets out that Caranua cannot replicate publicly-available services, so if somebody is a local authority tenant and if repairs are required in a local authority home, in the first instance, he or she should-----

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I am aware of that. That was not about repairs. Under the home help and tenant support scheme, an individual is able to re-carpet the house or do things a tenant is responsible for doing. I found it exceptionally difficult in this case. We were in contact through written correspondence. Eventually, it did work out. How many complaints have been received since 2013?

Ms Rachel Downes: I am happy to provide that information.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: Ms Downes does not have it?

Ms Rachel Downes: I have the numbers for this year and last year but I do not have-----

Deputy Cormac Devlin: How many were made last year?

Ms Rachel Downes: Seventeen.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: In her opening statement, Ms Downes said that a surplus was available during 2020 and Caranua initiated a number of projects to re-engage with survivors and access their individual limit of €15,000. Last summer, I understood there was going to be a cut-off mark for that home help and tenant support scheme - probably towards the end of last year, which was correspondence I saw - but I now understand that it was extended and has been extended even further due to Covid, which is welcome. How many survivors have not engaged given the fact that 6,181 are eligible? I know there is money left over but how many people is Caranua unable to engage with? What is the process there?

Ms Rachel Downes: Does the Deputy mean the people outside the cohort of people who have applied to Caranua?

Deputy Cormac Devlin: Yes.

Ms Rachel Downes: I may have mentioned earlier that under legislation, Caranua received a list of the survivors who availed of redress. We can only use that for eligibility purposes. We cannot make first contact with survivors. We advertised on a regular basis from the beginning - again trying to keep the costs as low as possible. The most common form would have been posters in GPs' offices, social welfare offices and Garda offices. Much of it came through word of mouth as well. There are a lot of family members through the survivor community so we would have been very aligned on that. Unfortunately, if a survivor did not make first contact, we would have no way of contacting him or her first.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I understand. Does Ms Downes know from the list Caranua had how many survivors still-----

Ms Rachel Downes: It is difficult to tell. A report by Caranua in 2014 showed that there were probably 12,000 survivors at that stage. We have worked with 6,181 people. We are aware of the deaths of 393 survivors with whom Caranua worked over the years. We find that the health of survivors can be much poorer than that of the general population and that there is a likelihood of premature death. One of the reasons why there was a call for the report relates to the enhanced medical card to allow people to access additional services-----

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I apologise for cutting across Ms Downes but my time is limited. Is Ms Downes saying that based on the list with which she was provided that ranged from 2013 to the present day, in theory, there are about 5,000 survivors with whom there has been no engagement?

Ms Rachel Downes: In theory, that is correct.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: What is the process for those individuals subsequent to the wind down of Caranua? What happens then?

Ms Rachel Downes: Caranua has no remit with regard to anything that happens after the wind-down.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: So it goes to the Department.

Ms Rachel Downes: It would be the Department of Education.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I ask Ms Downes to come back to me, particularly with the regard to the tenant support scheme and the number of complaints because I have concerns about individuals from whom none of us have ever heard but who have made an application for access to their €15,000. From where I am sitting, that money is theirs to spend. I accept what Ms Downes said about repairs and items for which a local authority or another landlord is responsible. Where it goes to home improvements and making their quality of life better, we should do our damndest to ensure money gets to them and they get the benefit.

Ms Rachel Downes: It is why €68.1 million has been spent in the area of home improvements.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I see that but we are talking about the other element. I thank the witness.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: I thank the witnesses for coming today. I will focus on the complaints process in general in the annual report. I find it interesting in the context of working with a different group of people but all of us as Deputies work with people who have problems of different natures. Some of those problems we can resolve and others we cannot. We try to resolve some of them but some are not resolvable. There is a spectrum of experience and then people come with a different ability to help themselves or navigate the system themselves, as Deputy Catherine Murphy said. People have very different experiences of that. It must be particularly difficult to navigate a system where a person may be dependent on further support. What safeguards were anticipated to try to protect people raising complaints or difficulties with the Department to acknowledge how much more difficult it might be in that context?

Ms Rachel Downes: Survivors working with Caranua have an individual application adviser. With a complaint, the process is completely separate. Any complaint would not be dealt with in the relationship but rather by a quality and compliance information officer. This is to try to get some segregation and allow people to feel comfortable.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: That is fine from an assistance perspective but I can imagine somebody, for example, bringing an employment complaint within an organisation and although it is dealt with by a different organisation, it would still be intimidating or difficult. For example, what is done on the human level? Do people proactively meet the complainants or is the process done over the phone? What caring steps are taken to meet those needs?

Ms Rachel Downes: As I mentioned earlier, the majority of services are telephone-based. If somebody makes a complaint through Caranua, he or she would speak to one of the call line operators. A complaint can be done this way, through email or a third party. When the complaint arrives, the quality and compliance officer would make a phone call to discuss the complaint and get the facts, and this would be taken further to manage the substance.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: It is not person to person.

Ms Rachel Downes: The quality and compliance person would speak directly to the survivor.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: It would happen in a meeting.

Ms Rachel Downes: It would not be a face-to-face meeting. It would be by telephone.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: It is much more difficult by phone. Phones and email feel much more remote.

Ms Rachel Downes: Of course.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: Some of these matters are difficult and personal contact helps. When I look at the feedback, it is extraordinary with any survey to get 98% positive feedback. There are issues of bias and self-selection. If I did a survey of the café around the corner or Eir's customer service, I would never see a 98% positive feedback rate in a spontaneous process. The presentation of that is unusual, to be frank. That may well be the spontaneous expression.

Ms Rachel Downes: Those are the facts and numbers as represented.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: Yes but it is so interesting that it is included. Will the witnesses from the Department discuss the wind-down operation? In the short time available, I am interested in the timing of the process, anticipated problems and legislation. Will the witnesses give a quick summary on where we are?

Ms Catherine Hynes: We have been working very closely with Caranua on the winding down of the operation. Caranua has been planning this for a long time and announced its intention to close for applications over a long and protracted period. It has taken the steps of gradually decreasing the number of staff it has and overheads. It made arrangements for termination of contracts, including accommodation contracts.

The actual dissolution of Caranua requires legislation, which is currently in train, and we hope to see it advanced in the new year. The tenure of the board of Caranua is over on 24 March and many of the board cannot be renewed. Renewing a board when there are no funds to administer it is not very practical or sensible. We hope to continue to work with Caranua, the remaining executive and the board to complete the orderly winding down of the organisation in the new year.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: Essentially the Department will work with the remainder of the board.

Ms Catherine Hynes: It will be the remainder of the executive.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: Sorry.

Ms Catherine Hynes: There are transitional arrangements, for example, relating to finance. The final audit for Caranua can only be done when the board and the organisation ceases to exist. There are a few practical matters like that and the details will have to be completely worked out.

Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill: The Department will have a contact point for survivors in an ongoing process to follow up any matters.

Ms Catherine Hynes: We are working on trying to get a contact point where survivors will be able to avail of advocacy services afterwards. Caranua's applications will cease to exist

when Caranua itself ceases to exist.

Deputy Alan Dillon: I thank our witnesses for joining us today. I want to focus on the total amount for debtors and prepayments, which was €253,000 at end of the 2019. That includes cancelled payments recovery of €204,500, compared with €105,000 before. That is nearly a 100% increase on 2018. What are the circumstances giving rise to these cancelled payments?

Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick: The cheques remain legal for six months but we find that some survivors do not cash them and they become outdated. Over a period of six months, many of these cheques are returned to us. Some are returned for reissue and others just become outdated.

We track the cheques that are approaching six months and when they are four months since date of issue, the services team under Ms Dwyer contact the survivors to check that they still intend to use those payments. In as many cases as possible we try to take back the cheques and reissue them in order to give the survivor additional time to utilise them.

Deputy Alan Dillon: Was this not flagged in the 2018 accounts? The number is almost double what it was in the previous year. Is there oversight so as to be diligent about spending and being accountable in the internal audit system in capturing these data? Was this discussed by the board?

Ms Rachel Downes: I can explain how the process works with cheques. Caranua uses a third party company and Caranua's name is not on the cheques. As Mr. Fitzpatrick said, the cheques are sent to the survivors and accounted for as part of our normal expense. It is quite common for a survivor to send a cheque back in order to get the supplier name changed or when the cheque has expired. As Mr. Fitzpatrick said, there is a process in place to do regular checks with people but we cannot make the survivor lodge a cheque in a particular period. It has been running into the millions of euro over the years where cheques have had to be cancelled and reissued, with a follow-up required. It is the nature of the process.

This year in particular the issue has been very complex because of the Covid-19 restrictions. The committee will see it again next year and there will be much toing and froing where cheques have been provided but not utilised.

Deputy Alan Dillon: The Comptroller and Auditor General observes that there were one or more quotes for 30% of funding support payments in 2019, 33% of payments in 2018 and 56% of payments in 2017. That is from the sample of quotes reviewed. Is there any reason for that?

Ms Rachel Downes: When Caranua gets quotes from survivors, we are bound by the same regulations under procurement. If the cost is under €1,000, one quote is required; if it is between €2,000 and €5,000, two quotes are required; and if it is more than €5,000, three quotes are required. I used survivors in prison as an earlier example and sometimes survivors are just not in a position to get the required number of quotes and Caranua takes a person-centred approach to work this out. Another example is that survivors may be going through treatment for cancer, and we do not ask them for three quotes as we must take that person and survivor-centres approach to manage the process.

During the Covid-19 pandemic we have been very aware of the restrictions on survivors and the difficulties in trying to access quotes. We contacted the Department to ask to amend the process. If a quotation is under €7,000, they only require one quote, between €7,000 and €10,000 they require two quotes, and over €10,000 it is still three. The Department, in recognition of the special circumstances, actually did sanction that and that is the process we have used

since mid-year.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I thank the witnesses for attending. Many of my questions are for the Department on how we progress the five asks, but I do not want to move on and allow something unintended to come out of today's meeting. Caranua has been given the opportunity to address the real concerns that have been represented to us as public representatives. One member asked if Ms Downes would apologise to anybody who has not been treated fairly by the organisation. I would like to give her another opportunity to address that again. As public representatives we deal with people every day. We know that there are always two sides to a story. We know that people who have been through trauma find it very difficult to negotiate the system. Just because a complaint has not been made, it does not mean that people do not feel the process let them down. On this issue there should be no attempt to pull the shutter down and say everything was done perfectly. These are people who have been let down and any hint of trying to protect the organisation ahead of those people cannot be allowed. As Deputies Munster and Carthy have said, some people have been through the process and are not happy with the outcome. I ask Ms Downes to address that concern.

Ms Rachel Downes: Earlier this year, Caranua looked at the need for an independent evaluation of the service we provided to survivors bearing in mind the 6,181 survivors we have worked with, the wide variation of needs and the complexity of issues that some have raised. We did a tender process and we got an independent researcher as a result of that. That researcher has been working with survivors. We had hoped to have the report published by the end of this year. Unfortunately, the Covid restrictions has pushed it out, but it probably will be made to the Minister next year.

With that, 87% of the survivors told the independent researcher that the support they received from Caranua was either very good or good. More than three quarters, 78%, thought the service provided by Caranua was excellent, very good or good. I take the Deputy's point that some people are going to be unhappy with the service. Unfortunately, as we are working with limited funds, we have had to curtail the supports that have been offered to survivors as well. There have definitely been learnings over the years on engaging with survivors and supports. There have been some complexities with the telephone service. We did find when we were able to offer the face-to-face service - I think over the last year we were able to meet 200 survivors in a face-to face capacity - there are massive improvements when we can do it that way. That is just-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Does Ms Downes accept that the 13% who were not happy or very happy had issues with the service? As victims, they are just applying. They are not responsible for the design of the system, the method or any of that. I am sure Ms Downes will not want to leave the meeting today with the message going to those 13% that she is not sorry that things did not work out for them or that they were not happy about the service. Nobody has 100% satisfaction, and everybody has some level of dissatisfaction with their service. I am sure Ms Downes regrets that.

Ms Rachel Downes: As I have said, I have had hundreds of contacts with survivors over the year. I am very happy to take a contact from anybody to discuss it and if a survivor is unhappy, I would rather speak to them face-to-face rather than make-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Regarding that broader group, I do not have one case. I am sure Ms Downes regrets that some people feel that Caranua did not meet their needs. That might not all be Ms Downes's fault, but-----

Ms Rachel Downes: I suppose, as I said, it is the difficulty of working with a limited fund. Ideally, we would be able to meet the need of every single survivor who applied to Caranua, but when we are working with a limited fund, some survivors-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: If Ms Downes were to say today that she regretted that Caranua was not able to do that and that some of those reasons were outside its control, that would go a long way.

Ms Rachel Downes: I am actually very proud to work at Caranua. We have provided over €97.1 million in funding and supports to survivors.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Ms Downes should not leave today without acknowledging that there is some level of dissatisfaction. It is not being fabricated. To be fair, we all know the reasons for it. However, I feel Ms Downes is doing a disservice to all the good work Caranua may have done by not acknowledging that the service could be better.

Ms Rachel Downes: Again, I am happy to speak to anybody who wants to raise the issue with me.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Regarding the Department, there are clear asks. As the co-ordinating Department, what learnings will the Department of Education take from this process? We hope to get the mother and baby homes report early in January and we do not know if it will have a redress scheme. There may be other redress schemes in the future. What learnings has the State taken from having an independent structure, the wind-up costs and the administration costs for any future application of a scheme of this nature? Has there been an evaluation of the entire process?

Chairman: I ask Ms Hynes to respond to that.

Ms Catherine Hynes: The Deputy has raised a very interesting issue. In looking back over the history of Caranua, when the organisation was first set up, it was set up possibly without being staffed comprehensively and the rest of it. Possibly the limit of €15,000 should have been applied from the start. There are an awful lot of learnings to be had from Caranua's existence. I would like to reiterate what Ms Downes said in that it provided a very good service for an awful lot of people and spent a lot of money to provide services for people.

The Deputy's points are very interesting, but we have not gone through a formal evaluation of what could have gone better and what we should do if another organisation similar to Caranua was ever set up in the future. Certainly, it is food for thought.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Given the upcoming publication of the mother and baby homes report, including, I imagine, calls for redress, it should be more than food for thought. We should prioritise the evaluation of the spending of a vast amount of money from the State's perspective, not in the administration and operation, but from whether we believe it was the appropriate way to address an issue that is there.

Ms Catherine Hynes: The Deputy again has raised a very interesting point. The Comptroller and Auditor General asked us to undertake an evaluation of the actual redress scheme for survivors or people in State-run institutions. We have that 99% complete and would hope to bring it to fruition early in the new year. Again, it shows very valuable lessons and is probably very appropriate before the mother and baby homes report comes out.

Chairman: Regarding legal costs, when there has not been a satisfactory outcome as judged by a survivor and it has been challenged it legally, how much has Caranua spent on court legal costs since 2014?

Ms Rachel Downes: I will need to come back to the Chairman on that.

Chairman: How many cases have survivors taken to the High Court?

Ms Rachel Downes: Last year, eight survivors took a case. That was against the independent appeals officer as opposed to against Caranua. However, that was taken as two cases as opposed to all eight cases being sought to reduce costs.

Chairman: What has been the average cost of awards where they have been successful?

Ms Rachel Downes: Is the Chairman asking about those taken through legal cases?

Chairman: Yes, the average cost.

Ms Rachel Downes: The cases last year were not successful. They were found in Caranua's favour.

Chairman: I am asking about successful cases.

Ms Rachel Downes: I think there was one. I do not have the figures with me.

Chairman: Ms Downes might come back to me with that.

Ms Rachel Downes: I can, of course.

Chairman: As I said at the outset, I am aware of people who benefited. Obviously, there are problems with every system and there is 98% satisfaction among people who were questioned and that is as it should be. I am aware of cases where people have benefited from the funding from Caranua, particularly for housing and to improve housing. The accounts show €96 million or €97 million in expenditure over six years. In 2015, Caranua made €29 million in awards. There is a big spike. I am looking at the graph that was helpfully provided by the Comptroller and Auditor General on this. However, in 2016, the figure collapsed to €13 million. In 2017, it was €15 million; in 2018, it was €14 million; and in 2019, it was €12 million. I can understand the figures tapering off near the end. What was the average award in 2015? Very high awards were given out that year, and rightly so, but did that money then start drying up and funds start running out? It was a €110 million fund. Did some of the survivors who submitted late applications or who only subsequently became aware of the process and that fund lose out in later years? What was the difference in the awards given in 2015 and subsequent years?

Ms Rachel Downes: In 2014, 2015 and up to mid-2016, there was no limit on the amount of funding a survivor could receive. As members can see, there was a very high cost in those early years.

Chairman: Would Ms Downes say that was a mistake?

Ms Rachel Downes: It should definitely be considered that a limit should have been put in place from the beginning. The board realised very quickly that the majority of the fund would be spent on a very small population of survivors and that many survivors were going to miss out. The aim was to be fair and equitable. From June 2016, a limit of €15,000 was implemented and additional services were introduced as well. It had been found that homeowners were

unfairly advantaged in that structural works such as windows, doors or heating systems were being done whereas renters were not able to utilise the same services. Therefore, assistance for white goods was introduced.

Chairman: I understand that there was a problem with consistency of tenancy or tenure. An independent review is being carried out, which Caranua commissioned. Who is carrying that out?

Ms Rachel Downes: Dr. John Weafer.

Chairman: Caranua commissioned him.

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes.

Chairman: What is the cost of that review?

Ms Rachel Downes: I am not sure it is appropriate to give that information if it is through a tender process.

Chairman: When is he due to report?

Ms Rachel Downes: We hope to have a report given to the Minister early next year.

Chairman: Could this committee have a copy of its findings?

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes. That should not be a problem. It will obviously go to the Minister first.

Chairman: Of course. I do not want to dwell on specific cases but I am familiar with a few cases and I just wanted to say this to be helpful. Public representatives here would know about this, particularly those who were councillors. With local authorities sometimes a person will make an application for a grant and the higher up in an office it goes the better the chance of it actually being dealt with face to face. I do not mean to be smart but I will make a suggestion. There are two cases, which I do not want to go into, but one thing struck me when I looked at them. Maybe some of this has been done already. Local authorities have somebody like a clerk of works, who is not a highly qualified individual. They generally come from the trades and are at the same level as the site foreman or whoever. Usually they come from the carpentry trade because they intervene at several stages in the development of any construction project and they are seen as having good all-round knowledge. One of the things that would be helpful is if a clerk of works, the preferred bidder and the client were able to meet on site. With the funding available, when people go on site and look at what is there, what the person needs and what is possible, they can join up the ends. We could argue about that in this room and Caranua could do so within its office structure. I am not being in any way disparaging about that. I am trying to be practical. I worked in construction, although I am not an expert in it, and I am a public representative. In my experience, if one gets a clerk of works, the client or constituent and whoever is doing the job on site, even if there is only a certain amount of money to do it, with 20 minutes or half an hour spent like that and a bit of tick-tacking for a week or so afterwards, the ends can be joined up. I ask that Ms Downes takes that point. I am saying it in a very helpful way. Perhaps the clerk of works or a technician could do that. It does not have to be someone highly qualified but someone who has a practical mind, who understands these things and is prepared to put on a pair of Wellington boots and go out on the site and meet the other two people.

Ms Rachel Downes: I thank the Chairman for that guidance.

Chairman: I am just saying that by way of being helpful and I ask Ms Downes to take that away with her. There are four members present so I will let them in for three minutes each. I call Deputy Catherine Murphy.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I remember 2017, although I think Caranua had a different CEO at the time. This matter came before the Committee of Public Accounts and there was a newspaper article at the time that reiterated the concerns some of us had. Survivors said that they were left for months without a response and were told they would get no support if they made contact again. Some of them were in tears and felt retraumatised. That was the kind of stuff that was said, to the point that a solicitor was working with a group of about 40 survivors who said they wanted Caranua wound down. That was what was said. When we talk about survivors, we are talking about people who survived Artane, Goldenbridge, Letterfrack and the myriad other locations. The reality of it is that these are people who are not prone to complaining. People did not survive if they complained.

I am getting angry sitting here this morning. I have never seen a more defensive response to a committee regarding complaints. Legitimate complaints were made by people. There are many people within that survivor group who will not complain but that does not mean there is not dissatisfaction. It should be acknowledged that there is dissatisfaction. This is a very different group. This money that was provided by the congregations was not about philanthropy. It was in return for work people did and that work was done because they were not educated. They worked instead of being educated and they have high levels of illiteracy. I know some of these people and so do some of the rest of us. I just do not think this defensive approach is fair to those people. I rarely get as angry as I have while sat here and I have been getting angrier and angrier as the morning has gone on. This is not helpful.

Ms Rachel Downes: I am sorry the Deputy feels that way. She is talking about correspondence, referred to here, which I have not had an opportunity to view. I cannot respond as I do not know what information the committee has received but it has obviously created a lot of concern for Deputies.

Over the past two years in particular, Caranua has engaged intensively with survivor support groups and counselling services and we have asked for guidance and advice to feed back. I do not think Caranua would have been invited to be part of the organising committee for the conference if the survivor support groups that were working day in, day out with survivors felt as the Deputy does. We are working day in, day out with survivors and we have their best interests at heart in everything we do. I have worked with some of the most dedicated people in my four years in Caranua. Nobody is setting out to upset survivors. That is not our aim. We know what survivors have been through. Our aim is to work with survivors to try to ensure they get the best possible outcome out of the funding supports available to them. As I said, while our remit is funding supports our role has gone above and beyond that and includes the advocacy supports we offer on a daily basis and social interactions. So many survivors contact us all the time just to say we are the only people they can talk to and the only voice at the end of the phone. I have to say that.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I am a new enough member of this committee but I have to say that with all the other witnesses who have come before us, when questions were asked we got detailed answers. I have not found that today. There has been a lot of the witnesses saying that they will come back to us or that they do not have information to hand, not just in response

to my contribution but to those of others as well. I am a bit surprised by that because from our perspective, Caranua will be wound down from March, although that may be extended, so this is our opportunity on behalf of not only the survivors but the public to question certain elements. Nobody is casting aspersions on any individual here. We are just asking questions about how the fund was operated. On that basis - and Ms Hynes from the Department might be able to come back in on this - when is this legislation on the wind-down of Caranua anticipated to come before the Houses? Equally, because the list of correspondence that Ms Downes is going to come back to us on is getting longer and longer as the meeting goes on, I suggest that we might analyse that, Chairman, and then examine it again as a committee, certainly prior to March because we may have follow-on questions.

Chairman: I ask Ms Hynes to come in on that for the Department.

Ms Catherine Hynes: In response to the Deputy, we hope to bring the legislation to the Government in the new term, in the new year. As for some of the questions the Deputy feels may not have been answered, one of the questions has concerned the number of appeals that have come before our appeals officer. The Department of Education publishes appeals statistics every month on its website, so we have cumulative totals over the years as well. It might save some of the correspondence if the information on our website is referred to.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I thank Ms Hynes for that but neither question was answered. While I know the legislation will come before the Houses in the new year, does she have a specific timeframe, perhaps to the nearest month? I am conscious that Caranua probably will not exist after 24 March. I think that is the date.

On the issue of the data on the website, that is great, and I can look for those data after the meeting but I was hoping somebody attending the meeting might have the data to hand. That would have been much more useful.

Ms Catherine Hynes: We do have the information on the appeals to hand but I will not go through it because I think we are running out of time at this stage. I cannot give the Deputy an exact timeframe for when the legislation will be brought before the Houses because I do not have a timeframe at the moment.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: That is fine if it is not available. I just thought it would be a good question to ask because it would give us as a committee a timeframe to work to. I will source the data myself.

Deputy Verona Murphy: I want to go back to the statement of internal control. I am curious as to why no board member of Caranua has attended today. Is there any specific reason?

Ms Rachel Downes: Our chairperson had hoped to attend but the current restrictions prohibited him from doing so.

Deputy Verona Murphy: How many board members are there?

Ms Rachel Downes: There are nine.

Deputy Verona Murphy: Only the chairperson was-----

Ms Rachel Downes: That was the decision that was made. There are nine board members, of whom four are survivors.

Deputy Verona Murphy: Caranua did not proffer one of them instead of the chairperson? No. Okay.

The statement of internal control states that the board is “reasonably assured”. Could that statement be elaborated on?

Ms Rachel Downes: Obviously, I cannot speak on behalf of the board but I am happy-----

Deputy Verona Murphy: Well, Ms Downes signed the statement. It is signed by her and Mr. O’Callaghan.

Ms Rachel Downes: When the Deputy said “the board”, I assumed she was looking for an opinion-----

Deputy Verona Murphy: No. I asked why there is no one here from the board. What is written is that “The Board is reasonably assured that the systems of Internal Control instituted and implemented in the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board for the financial year ended 31st December 2019 are effective.” It is signed by both Ms Downes and Mr. O’Callaghan but on behalf of the board, I assume.

Ms Rachel Downes: I am not sure what the Deputy’s question is.

Deputy Verona Murphy: I am asking what needs to be assured-----

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Maybe I could offer the Deputy something on that. In the context of a statement of internal control, one cannot get absolute assurance. It is just not possible. The phrase that is conventionally used is that the system of control provides a reasonable level of assurance. It cannot be an absolute one.

Deputy Verona Murphy: I thank the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It may sound odd but it is a standard phrase and a standard expectation.

Deputy Verona Murphy: Is the question then more whether there are any reservations regarding the statement?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Again, I have brought attention to the controls that were not operating, and that is the key deficiency in that regard.

Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick: There is an external firm that carried out a number of internal audits. In 2019 there were six internal audits completed.

Deputy Verona Murphy: Is the firm a UK company?

Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick: Yes. Six internal audits were completed in total. The final audit was completed in December 2019. That was a review of all the recommendations that had been made in the previous reviews. That final review on 12 December 2019 found that the recommendations that had been made in the original five reports had been implemented. For 2020 we have two internal audit reviews under way as well. One is a finance review and one is a HR review. They will be completed by the end of December.

Deputy Verona Murphy: May we receive those?

Mr. Michael Fitzpatrick: I am not sure what the protocol is there.

Ms Rachel Downes: They will need to go the board for approval first.

Chairman: I wish to ask a question before we conclude. Regarding the appeals process, where clients got a refusal, were they always notified as part of that refusal that they had the opportunity to appeal the decision?

Ms Rachel Downes: Yes.

Chairman: In each and every case?

Ms Rachel Downes: We call that getting an unsuccessful letter. An unsuccessful letter will go out explaining why the service was not provided for. It would also explain the appeals process. A second letter is included. Clients can send one letter to the appeals board and one to be kept for the record, and an information leaflet is included as well to explain how the appeals process works.

Chairman: What percentage of appeals were successful?

Ms Rachel Downes: For this year or-----

Chairman: Over the five-year period.

Ms Rachel Downes: I will have to provide that information later. I am sorry. We prepared for 2019. I have not brought the information for all-----

Chairman: Roughly, would it be 25%, 50%?

Ms Rachel Downes: It would be less than 50%, but I do not have the-----

Chairman: Would it be more than 25%?

Ms Rachel Downes: I cannot say for definite.

Chairman: I thank Ms Downes for the information. I thank the witnesses from the Department and Caranua for joining us and for the information they have provided. I also thank the Comptroller and Auditor General and his staff and the liaison officers for their assistance today. Is it agreed that we request the clerk to seek any follow-up information and carry out any agreed actions arising out of today's meeting? Agreed. Is it also agreed that we note and publish the opening statements and the briefing provided of today's meeting? Agreed.

It is just left for me to adjourn the meeting until 4.30 p.m. on 13 January 2021, members will be happy to hear, when we will engage with the Office of Government Procurement. I wish all the members and our guests from the Department, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and Caranua a happy Christmas. Of course, I wish the same to the secretariat staff here, who have worked very diligently over the past few months to assist the committee in our work. Best wishes to each and every one of you for Christmas and the new year.

Ms Rachel Downes: If Deputies have a concern about any individual, they should feel free to contact us. There is the Oireachtas email address. We are very happy to discuss any incidences with Deputies.

The committee adjourned at 1.38 p.m. until 4.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 13 January 2021.