

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COISTE UM CHUNTAIS PHOIBLÍ COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Déardaoin, 9 Iúil 2026

Thursday, 9 July 2026

The Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Cathy Bennett,	Deputy James Geoghegan,
Deputy Grace Boland,	Deputy Paul McAuliffe,
Deputy Joanna Byrne,	Deputy Séamus McGrath,
Deputy Albert Dolan,	Deputy Paul Murphy,
Deputy Aidan Farrelly,	Deputy Joe Neville.

DEPUTY JOHN BRADY IN THE CHAIR.

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

The committee met in private session until 10.31 a.m.

Business of Committee

An Cathaoirleach: Everyone is welcome to the meeting. We have received no apologies.

Before we proceed, I have a few housekeeping matters to go through. Members are reminded of the provisions within Standing Order 226 whereby 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 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 also remind them of the constitutional requirement that in order to participate in public meetings, they must be physically present within the confines of the Leinster House complex or within the precincts of Leinster House.

The agenda is to first discuss the minutes, accounts, statements, correspondence and upcoming meetings. The committee will then suspend before beginning the engagement with officials from RTÉ. The minutes of the meetings of 25 June and 2 July were agreed by the committee and these will be published on the committee's web page.

Seven sets of accounts and financial statements, laid between the 29 June and 3 July 2026, are due to be considered today. We are joined by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. Seamus McCarthy, who is a permanent witness to the committee. I ask him to now address these before I open the floor to Members.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: First, we have the financial statements of the National College of Art and Design for 2024-25. They received a clear audit opinion.

Second are the accounts of the Ireland-United States Commission for Educational Exchange, better known as the Fulbright scholarship scheme, for 2024. They received a clear audit opinion.

Third, the financial statements of the external oversight body of the Defence Forces for 2025 received a clear audit opinion.

Fourth, the financial statements of the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority for 2025 received a clear audit opinion.

Fifth, the financial statements of the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board for 2025 received a clear audit opinion.

Sixth, the financial statements of the Corporate Enforcement Authority for 2025 received a clear audit opinion.

Seventh, the financial statements of Uisce Éireann for 2025 received a clear audit opinion. However, in that case I drew attention to a disclosure that the Commission for Regulation of Utilities has proposed a €31 million penalty in the form of a future revenue adjustment. The commission considers that in the period 2020 to 2024, Uisce Éireann underperformed in achieving key targets for water leakage reduction and the collection of non-domestic revenue.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. McCarthy. A number of members are indicating. I call Deputy Farrelly first.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: In truth, I am left scratching my head a little bit on this because Uisce Éireann confirmed to the committee that 93.5% of its staff received their full performance-related award, PRA, for the year 2024 because they had reached performance targets, yet the CRU has said the agency missed many of the targets for the period 2024. That is notwithstanding the unique position the body is in, in terms of trying to attract a workforce, who are doing phenomenal work on the ground. How can an agency be fined for underperformance to the tune of €31 million, as highlighted here, and pay out close to €18 million in 2025 in pay-related bonuses? I am struggling to solve that equation in my head. Is there a precedent for this from the C and AG's perspective? We have this culture of paying significant sums of money, only to find out that they are not reaching their targets or performing to the extent that was set out. How can both things happen in parallel?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: To be quite honest, I do not know. The performance-related bonuses are quite an unusual situation among the bodies that I audit. There are very few that have schemes of that nature. It reflects the history of the development of Uisce Éireann. There are good questions to be answered there.

I should say that Uisce Éireann has strongly defended its position in relation to this revenue adjustment. It is challenging the methodology for the calculation of the targets. It has outlined elements outside of Uisce Éireann's control that have not been considered as mitigating factors, specifically the Covid pandemic and demand growth driven by population increases. There are obviously two sides to the question of whether the revenue adjustment is appropriate. Uisce Éireann will have an opportunity to explain those matters when it comes before the committee.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I just want to echo what has already been said. When we had Irish Water before this committee, we were told that 93% of its staff get bonuses. I asked what they got the bonuses for. I have been looking back over the transcript of the meeting. The answers were hard won, but what Irish Water basically outlined at the time is that they were for clean water, fewer boil water notices and spending money on major capital projects. The CEO went on to say that, additionally, the person has individual targets relating to his or her job. How can it be justified that every member of staff gets a bonus and then the regulator for Irish Water imposes a €31 million penalty for not meeting the water leakage reduction targets and not collecting commercial revenue from people who have to pay water charges? It is just crazy. It makes absolutely no sense. Early in the new term after the Dáil returns, we should have Irish Water back before the public accounts committee to account for these issues.

An Cathaoirleach: That has been agreed by the committee already. Irish Water is on the list to come in very soon after the summer recess.

Deputy Grace Boland: Similar to everyone else, I recall I specifically asked Irish Water about the performance-related pay scheme. I am pretty sure I highlighted, in particular, the leakage of water from pipes, etc. If I am honest, the response was a little bit "nothing to see here" and that the staff were all meeting their targets. It would be good if we wrote to Irish Water and asked it to set out the details of the scheme, because the huge penalty just does not add up with the level of performance-related pay.

Has Irish Water assessed whether the performance-related scheme is appropriate in its current climate because maybe it is too easy to satisfy the terms of the performance-related scheme?

Deputy Joe Neville: I have a question for the Comptroller and Auditor General. Some €31 million has obviously been paid. Is that in the 2025 accounts?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: No, it is going to affect its future revenue.

Deputy Joe Neville: So the 2026 accounts.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Yes, and subsequent years.

Deputy Joe Neville: Where does that money go?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It is basically revenue that it cannot collect. It will not be allowed to.

Deputy Joe Neville: From whom?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: I do not have the detail of it. I think Irish Water would be better placed to explain how this is likely to expect its cashflow in the future.

Deputy Joe Neville: It is a very strange accounting and financial concept, that it will not be able to collect-----

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It is not a fine. It is a revenue reduction.

Deputy Joe Neville: It is not a fine. It is a revenue reduction next year, which means it will not be collecting revenue from someone.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Exactly, so it will have to tighten up on the expenditure side to compensate for the lower revenue that it is allowed to collect.

Deputy Joe Neville: The CRU has increased prices for next year for Uisce Éireann commercial customers. That leaves it all a little bit colder, if it realises that there are leakages, yet the Commission for Regulation of Utilities is actually putting up the prices. On the one hand, it is saying that Uisce Éireann is not doing its job and yet on the other hand, it is saying that it needs more money to do its job, so it does not really make sense. I am disappointed with the CRU's increase in prices almost awarding Uisce Éireann for its inefficiencies, yet one of the key issues that I raised here with Uisce Éireann was that it was not even aware of people who were using its product, no more than people in a house are aware of a person taking their water. It has almost no knowledge of where its water goes and it has leakages too. The CRU has a role to play in this too.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Absolutely. I audit the CRU.

Deputy Joe Neville: Can we get it in too?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Obviously. The committee can call the CRU. It could be that whatever mechanism the CRU is using to adjust prices for the future disallowed further increases that might have been applied.

Deputy Joe Neville: That is really important to know, because if people are looking on from a commercial perspective, is this something that may be a reduction in their bill, or is that already included in the future pricing that has been set out?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: I cannot-----

Deputy Joe Neville: I know Mr. McCarthy does not know and almost cannot know but I think we need to know that.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: There is the point to make about the performance-related bonus scheme. If the sum of the individual performance targets does not align with the organisation's targets, then, inevitably, there will be underperformance by the organisation but everybody meeting their individual targets, so it may be a question of whether the personal targets were sufficient challenging.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I refer to the correspondence I sent to the committee about the chief executive's pay. There are two parts of the discussion. When Irish Water comes before us, it says that its system of bonuses is a cheaper alternative to the public service increment system. In the public service, people receive increments each year because they have been in that post for a longer period of time, and there is no connection with any performance, delivery of targets, or any of that. It is based on increments and length of service. Uisce Éireann suggests that its bonus system, which is a horrendous word, is a less expensive version of the public service increments system. If that is true, we need to see not just its rationale for that but a detailed breakdown of its argument, in comparison with the current information, because that might have been the outline in 2011 but there might be a different case for or against it now, in 2026.

I acknowledge that Deputy Murphy said in advance of Irish Water coming before us, we should ask it to outline in detail the rationale for the system of bonuses rather than increments. The ESB currently has a similar system. Its argument is that if the organisation delivers its services, 93% will get their bonuses. In most public bodies, 100% of staff get increments and there is no connection with bonuses. As a body, we need to be able to balance those two systems.

A totally different discussion is the increase in salary of the chief executive. I note that because of a Government decision in 2011, the chief executive was precluded from receiving bonuses, and I can understand the political reason for that in 2011, but it has now resulted in an increase of nearly €118,000, a 43% overall increase. There might be an argument for that but that is a very significant amount of money and a very significant increase, although with political sign-off on it, which is something we should raise with Irish Water too, because the board has to request that. If the body is getting fined, the chief executive holds a unique responsibility. For them to make a case to increase salary when those things are not being done is totally separate from the ordinary workers. I would have no issue with people getting their normal increments if that is what they are entitled too.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: It is an extraordinary waste of €31 million of taxpayers' money. Uisce Éireann has a huge turnover of €1.8 billion. It is a huge amount of money and it wastes €20 million of that on water wastage and another €11 million on uncollected fees. It is incredible that the taxpayer is being put through this. Whenever Irish Water's targets are not met, we have to be realistic about how the Department of housing is over Uisce Éireann. What is going on in the Department of housing and with the Minister that they are not overseeing

this? This should be overseen. A Minister should see what is going on. There is a severe lack of housing in this country, with upwards of 17,500 people homeless. There is a severe lack of housing and the Minister cannot even get to grips with Uisce Éireann and its vast underspend and overspend. It has a €1.8 billion turnover. This has to come back to somebody and somebody has to take charge. We cannot blame everything on Uisce Éireann. There is a Department and a Minister in charge of this Department, and it has to come back to there to stop.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I fully agree with the point initially raised about the gross contradiction of a €31 million penalty being imposed on an organisation and having a very strong bonus culture in place at the same time. In the Comptroller and Auditor General's wording, he said the CRU proposed, and he referred to Uisce Éireann challenging that. Is this determined?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: That is not a capacity of mine, but in the interests of transparency, Uisce Éireann was putting it on record that this is a likely or potential implication.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: So it can challenge it and there is a process for it to appeal this.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: At the time I was signing off, it was still in that process.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: So it is not a final determination.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It had not been finalised.

An Cathaoirleach: When was it signed off, for clarity?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It was 29 April.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It is important that it is not a final determination as such. It is proposed.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: I do not have the information but obviously Uisce Éireann could pretty quickly give the committee an update.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Nonetheless, all the points remain, and we need to probe it with Uisce Éireann when it comes before us.

An Cathaoirleach: I have a few comments. We can call it what we want, a revenue reduction, a fine, or a penalty. To me, it is essentially a fine on the organisation. We need to get clarity, if the accounts were signed off on 29 April, as to whether Uisce Éireann has or is appealing this. It is deeply concerning, given the bonus culture within Uisce Éireann. We see the huge volume of performance-related bonuses where, in 2025, we saw the bonus payments for staff increase by 36.5% to €17.84 million in 2025.

As alluded to, the overall pay package for the CEO, Niall Gleeson, increased by 43% to €391,953. That is extraordinary, given all of the failings which ultimately led to a fine of €31 million, coupled with other failures in relation to investigations by the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA has prosecuted Uisce Éireann on 35 separate occasions over wastewater discharge. We know that 59% of the State's existing treatment plants have consistently failed to meet the standards set by the EPA's licences to prevent pollution. That paints a picture of chronic and systemic failures within the organisation. If staff are receiving

bonuses for that level of failure, I would hate to see what the bonuses are for delivering successfully. I think they would be extraordinary figures.

This is deeply concerning. We need to get clarity from Uisce Éireann but there is also an issue here for the Minister and the Department. We need to get a briefing note from the Department on the bonus structure within Uisce Éireann, as to whether it is within the Minister's remit and if a review has been carried out. Unlike many other agencies, we know the bonus structure in place in Uisce Éireann. It is incumbent on the Minister to carry out a review of its structures.

I reiterate that this matter is deeply concerning. We need clarity on what the implications of a €31 million fine will be for Uisce Éireann in terms of service delivery, which is questionable. One of the most common complaints that my constituents mention to me relate to failures by Uisce Éireann in terms of communication and delivery. The situation is totally unsatisfactory and we need clarity. Representatives of Uisce Éireann will appear before this committee after the summer recess and we need to get this information beforehand. Do members agree that we follow up the various courses of action suggested? Agreed.

Deputy Joe Neville: Where are we with the Commission for Regulation of Utilities? Can we invite the CRU to appear before us as part of the same trip?

An Cathaoirleach: Yes.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I suggest the committee send a letter to the Department asking if the Minister has reached all his key targets in respect of Uisce Éireann.

An Cathaoirleach: We can ask for a briefing note from the Department around the whole structure of Uisce Éireann.

I will move on to correspondence. There are a number of B items of correspondence to consider today. These have been received by Departments and public bodies. We will start with one item that was deferred from last week's meeting. No. R2026/0340, dated 22 June 2026, is correspondence received from the Health Service Executive in response to the committee's request for a briefing note relating to Autism Initiatives Ireland. I flagged this item for discussion. It is an issue that I brought to the attention of the committee a number of months ago arising from the concern around allegations of funding to that organisation being given to the parent organisation across the water, in Britain. There were serious concerns around that, which have subsequently led to an investigation being carried out by the HSE.

This correspondence gives us a breakdown of the finances received by Autism Initiatives Ireland. It shows that since 2022, €46 million has been received by the organisation. We know that concerns had been raised about issues within the organisation, which led to a review and an investigation being carried out in 2022 in the organisation. It is quite concerning that an investigation was conducted in 2022 but we do not know what its outcome was or what its terms of reference were. We need to get that information because if an investigation has been carried out and if, subsequent to that despite €46 million going into the organisation, new and additional issues have come to light, that calls into question how thorough the initial investigation was in 2022. We need to ask for the terms of reference of the investigation in 2022 and its outcome.

In the correspondence, the HSE stated it is using the information and findings to look at other organisations. It is not in a position to say, in respect of the issues of concern relating to Autism Initiatives Ireland, whether there are any other organisations in similar circumstances. We need clarity on that. Is it agreed that we write to the HSE and try to get that information?

Deputy Joe Neville: Do we have any background information on it?

An Cathaoirleach: Does the Deputy mean the organisation?

Deputy Joe Neville: Yes.

An Cathaoirleach: Yes, we do.

Deputy Joe Neville: It is important to learn what this organisation is, what its activities are and what its key performance indicators, KPIs, are. That is a huge amount of funding every year. It is over €10 million.

An Cathaoirleach: Yes, €46 million is a huge amount of money.

Deputy Joe Neville: It is more than €10 million per year and the amount has increased every year.

An Cathaoirleach: Yes.

Deputy Joe Neville: Has somebody just ticked a box and handing over millions of euro each year without checking up on what the organisation is doing?

An Cathaoirleach: We can try to get more information on that.

Deputy Joe Neville: Thank you.

An Cathaoirleach: Is it agreed to note and publish the item? Agreed.

No. R2026/0341, dated 25 June 2026, is correspondence received from the Secretary General of the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation in response to the committee's request for further information relating to the application of the levy to be applied to Departments to reprioritise funding to education. Do members wish to comment?

Deputy Cathy Bennett: The new education levy will mean a huge cut in funding to every Department. It sounds like the Department of public expenditure has asked for efficiencies and reforms. For example, it has asked the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to cut spending by €26 million. The health group, which I presume is the Department of Health, has been asked to cut spending by €175 million. I ask that the committee find out from each Department, before the budget, where it is going to make these cuts. I would like to see exactly where the cuts will be implemented and what services will be cut. Huge cuts will be made in every Department for budget 2027. I ask that we get a report on where the cuts will happen in every Department.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I also have some concerns about this. I was led to believe that certain Departments would be exempt from these cuts, for example, the Departments of health and housing. It is clear from the information provided that cuts will be made across the board in terms of the levy being imposed. It seems the cut in the Department of Health, at €175

million, will be the biggest one. I agree that we need to get clarification on this. Statements have been made that certain Departments that are under intense pressure, such as the Departments of health and housing, will not have this levy imposed but that does not appear to be the case now.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: We need to be a little careful. It is not normally the remit of this committee to establish the budgetary priorities for the Government. As regards this levy, and I have an issue with the word "levy", essentially there was an unexpected need - it should not have been unexpected - largely for children with additional needs and that resulted in more money being needed for the Department of Education and Youth. As a result, the Government is reallocating money from other Departments to the Department of education, which will be largely spent on children with additional needs. I am happy to have that debate. I am happy to say that that is where I would put the money. I want the money to go to children with additional needs and if that means reductions elsewhere, we can have that debate. However, such matters are not normally a discussion for this committee. Every week, either the Chairman or I reads out the line that we are not here to direct Government policy. We need to be conscious that this is a budgetary issue and a matter for the budgetary oversight and finance committees. I do not believe it is a matter for the Committee of Public Accounts.

Deputy Joe Neville: I would like to respond to that.

I am on the budgetary oversight committee. I want to push back slightly against what was said. There was a gap of €461 million in the budget. There just was. The Department of education entered the budget process in a context where it needed to make €460 million in cuts during the year to make up the amount of money being given to it. As it turned out, the Department of education could not do that, and that number increased to €671 million. It is probably an issue with the budget process. I know the SNAs were part of it. That was part of the increase. At the same time, though, it did start off the year.

I do not know if the Comptroller and Auditor General wants to point out the situation to us and to Deputy McAuliffe. I think he might ultimately agree with the Deputy, and I possibly do too, because it is the budgetary oversight aspect really. The question is whether this is a case where there was an issue almost at the start. It was similar to when the Secretary General of the Department of public expenditure was here a few weeks ago. I asked him if the Department entered into the budget with the wrong numbers. This is a question in itself.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: It is.

An Cathaoirleach: I will let the Comptroller and Auditor General respond.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: I think that is the distinction I would make. How the budget was wrong in the first place might be the main focus of this committee as opposed to how the gap is going to be plugged.

Deputy Joe Neville: It is, therefore, a matter for the committee.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It is about how the mistake was made in the first place and the ability of Departments to put together a proper Estimate. Effectively, when we look at the structure of an appropriation account, it is all about explaining why the figures turned out to be different from what was sought and granted by the Dáil Éireann.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I would like to elaborate a bit on this. The Comptroller and Auditor General referred to the ability of Departments to run their budgets. We have had representatives from Department after Department sit in front of us with similar issues. We posed these questions to them in relation to budgets, deficits and overruns. There is no acceptance that anything is being done wrong, evasively or not planned correctly. On the back of there being no acceptance of that from the Departments, and the Secretaries General, who ultimately report to Minister after Minister, there is no accountability. How do we tackle this as a committee? This is just one issue in this regard being flagged to us here today, but this is an issue across the board in various Departments nearly week in and week out in this committee.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: To be quite honest, I do not know. That is, obviously, the discussion that the members need to have as a committee. As I said, the structure is there. When an Estimate is presented, it is represented that this is what is needed to deliver these services in the coming year. The structure of the appropriation account is to say, okay, you told us you needed X, but you spent Y. Note 3 in every appropriation account is giving explanations. We have pushed for meaningful explanations to be presented. If the Departments are getting their Estimate wrong, then they need to do something to improve their capacity to forecast what they will need in the following year.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Okay.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: When the HSE was here, or maybe it was when some of the hospitals were here, the committee had a discussion around a service plan being put forward which is costed. What comes back then is that the organisation can take X million out of that figure, and then it is left to figure out how it is going to do it. Effectively, this is what is happening across the board here with other Departments. They now have to find savings.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Briefly, on the Estimates, and I give a stupid question alert, are Departments putting forward what they think it will cost or are they being told what they have? Are we all working on the assumption that what is being put forward is an accurate costing for the year ahead or is it what has been appropriated for Departments so that is what they will ask for? I ask this because I think there are two different things there. The culture across the board, whether it is the HSE or different Departments, shows us that year on year the overspending may be beyond the Estimate, but actually this is the amount we have to give to the Department concerned, and then in quarter two, we will come back to that Department with a Revised Supplementary Estimate.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: There is a process. It has gone on since the foundation of the State. I would expect that there are certain things that are clear, quantity-driven and, unless the price being paid for something is changed, or the quantity, this is what is going to have to be spent the following year to maintain existing services. That is the concept. If the budget or Estimate as presented does not properly cost, then there are going to be either shortfalls in services or additional money will have to be sought through a Supplementary Estimate. The Dáil as a whole does not have to approve a Supplementary Estimate. That is a choice. Not approving it, though, would mean that services would have to be cut, and probably very late in the year.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I ask again if we can write to each Department and ask where their cuts are going to happen. As the Comptroller and Auditor General said, we do not want shortfalls in services. As he said as well, the different hospitals were in here, and they are

already underfunded, and now the Department is talking about underfunding them again by €175 million in that one line, while all the other lines have cuts too. I would like to know where the shortfalls are going to happen in services right across every Department. If we could get a note from every Department on this, that would be fantastic.

An Cathaoirleach: There clearly are issues here. We have this briefing note that clearly shows the level of the revisions and how this is going to impact on the Estimates for each of the Departments. The Standing Orders say, "The Committee may suggest alterations and improvements in the form of the Estimates submitted to the Dáil and shall bring any such suggestions as reported to the Dáil to the attention of the Committee on Budgetary Oversight." For us to be able to consider the issues raised with us, the Revised Estimates and the allocations to each of the Departments, I think it would be acceptable for us to write to each of the Departments and ask for a note on the level being imposed on them and what impact that will have on their Estimates in future. I propose, then, that we write to each of the Departments in this regard.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I thank the Cathaoirleach.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed. Is it agreed to note and publish the item? Agreed.

No. R2026/0342 is correspondence, dated 9 June 2026, received from the Secretary General of the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment in response to the committee's request for information regarding arrangements in relation to governance and oversight of public funding provided to the European Consumer Centre Ireland, ECCI. Do members wish to comment on this item? Is it agreed to note and publish the item? Agreed.

No. R2026/0343 is correspondence, dated 26 June 2026, received from the Secretary General of the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment in response to the committee's request for further information following the Department's appearance before the committee on 21 May 2026. I have flagged this item for discussion. I want to bring some attention to Whitestown illegal landfill, which goes back a long number of years. It dates back almost 20 years. At this stage it is probably over 20 years. It was described at the time as the largest illegal landfill in this State. The correspondence gives us a breakdown of costs to date. This shows that nearly €18 million has been spent in remediating or trying to remediate the site at Whitestown in my constituency of County Wicklow. We know Wicklow County Council has received grants and funding from the Department of €7.88 million, which leaves a shortfall to be met by the local authority of €10 million. That is a substantial amount of funding for any local authority to bear. Further additional costs are given from this point forward as well. It is estimated that the final cost for the full remediation of the site could be up to an additional €38 million. It is between €32 million and €38 million. The correspondence does not give clarity as to who is going to bear those costs, what liability will be on the council and whether the Department will furnish any of those funds.

To my deep frustration, despite continuous attempts to get clarity on the ongoing legal costs of this particular saga, we still have no line of sight on those legal costs other than a line in this to say they are substantial. The final figure to remediate what was the largest landfill, which is substantially still in place, causing all sorts of untold environmental damage, including to the River Slaney, could be well north of €50 million. It suggests we as a committee write to

Wicklow County Council to get a breakdown of the costs that the council has incurred to date but also the legal liability and what provision the council has made for that. I propose we write to the local authority. This is one of the deep problems we face. We do not have line of sight of local authorities because they are outside our remit but this again highlights the serious gaps in that governance and oversight. I propose we write to Wicklow County Council and try to get a breakdown of those figures and the potential legal liability. I propose we also write back to the Department to ask who will ultimately bear the full cost of remediation of this site – is it Wicklow County Council or will the Department cover 100% of the cost? Do any other members wish to comment? No. Is it agreed to note and publish the item with the agreed actions? Agreed.

I am conscious of time. We have three more items of correspondence. We will fly through them as quickly as we can.

No. R2026/0351 is correspondence received from the head of public affairs at RTÉ, responding to the committee's request for further information regarding RTÉ's expenditure on contracted car services, dated 2 July 2026. Do members wish to comment? They can reserve their comments for RTÉ. Is it agreed to note and publish the correspondence? That is agreed.

No. R2026/0354 is correspondence received from the Secretary General of the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, providing a response to the committee's request for further information regarding the arrangements for deportation flights, dated 2 July 2026. Do members wish to comment? I suggest we seek further information. We are compiling a report on the expenditure around IPAS which includes deportation flights and the costs incurred. While the Department does give some further breakdown in relation to the costs of the deportation flights, it does not get into a specific breakdown of costs for the Garda other than to say it can recoup up to 75% of the cost. There is a significant figure there. We do not have a full breakdown or a breakdown of the impact of sending a large volume of gardaí on these deportation flights, how long they are out of the jurisdiction and what are the full costs incurred in that regard. I propose we write to the Department and get a further detailed breakdown on the costs relating to the gardaí. It gives a rationale as to why there are those numbers of gardaí on the flights; I am not questioning that it but is just to get sight of the costs. Is it agreed to note and publish the item with the agreed action? Agreed.

No. R2026/0359 is correspondence received from the head of public affairs at RTÉ regarding RTÉ's attendance at this morning's meeting, dated 7 July 2026. There is no action required. Is it agreed to note the item? Agreed.

That concludes the correspondence items for discussion today.

Moving to the work programme, the following meetings have been agreed to: today, 9 July, we meet RTÉ; and next week, 16 July, we will meet the NTA and Irish Rail. The committee will return after the summer recess to meet on 17 September and consider business of the committee.

We now move to aon gnó eile. Are there any issues members wish to raise?

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Is there a possibility we could get a report from the Department of education or the Comptroller and Auditor General on Bus Éireann and transport? Every year there are serious issues with bus transport for children going to school. I would like to see how

much income related to school transport has been taken in. I refer to the school routes. It is complete chaos. It happens every September. Is the Department of education putting enough resources into school transport? Does the Comptroller and Auditor General have any idea in that regard from his calculations?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: As to the sufficiency of the funding, I cannot comment except to say that it has grown quite significantly in recent years. The costs are mounting. I did a fairly comprehensive report a number of years ago explaining the structure and the contract arrangements in place around school transport. I do not audit CIÉ so I cannot really do much more than I have done previously.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Does school transport come under the Department of education?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Yes, it pays for it. It pays CIÉ for that. Certainly the Deputy can inquire as to what are the costs and if there are specific questions I am sure the Department will answer them.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: It is just that around this time every year the representations start coming in about children who cannot get transport to school. School is supposed to be free and you are supposed to have transport to school but children cannot get it. It is the same scenario every year – no matter how much money is pumped into it, it does not seem to fix the problem. I will go back to the Department of education.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: We can arrange for the special report to be circulated to the Deputy after the meeting.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: That would be fantastic. Thank you.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It would be helpful for context.

An Cathaoirleach: There is just one item I wish to flag under any other business. In our private session this morning we had a comprehensive discussion on an interim report the committee wants to publish regarding the proposed national children's science centre, given the serious concerns it has in relation to the liability that the State has found itself with because of failures at different levels with regard to commitments which were given which were borne out through two rounds of arbitration. It is deeply frustrating and it is seriously impacting the work of this committee and our ability to move ahead with the full information and facts that we require to be able to give a well thought-out, full and accurate appraisal of the situation. We find ourselves in a situation of deep frustration. Despite numerous requests to the OPW to get the arbitrator's full determination, an 87-page document, it still has not been furnished to us. It contains critical information to allow us to deliberate fully and properly in coming to a final conclusion and a comprehensive report. It is frustrating the work of this committee. It is completely unacceptable that, despite numerous requests to the OPW, including here at the meeting, for that critical piece of documentation that we still have not had sight of it. I find it extraordinary. It tried to paint a picture of confusion and that it was not clear about what was required. It is very clear what the ask of this committee is and has been consistently over several months, namely, that we want, need and must get access to the arbitrator's full determination. We will be seeking compellability on that documentation from the OPW. It has until close of business today to furnish that documentation, given the latest request we have given to the OPW.

It must give us that document; otherwise we will seek to compel it to do so. This is frustrating the work of the committee. It is still our intention to move ahead with an interim report, given the committee's serious concerns about the level of exposure to the State and the obligation that has been placed on the OPW to move forward to tendering before the year is out. It is critically important that we get that document to see the clear timelines, financial exposures and other implications for the State and taxpayer.

There is a huge level of frustration, annoyance and, it has to be said, anger at the blatant - I will not say refusal - denial of access by this committee to that document. It is totally unacceptable.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I agree.

An Cathaoirleach: It has to be heard. It is essential we get that document; otherwise we will compel to get it. We will now suspend the meeting for five minutes.

Sitting suspended at 11.21 a.m. and resumed at 11.26 a.m.

Raidió Teilifís Éireann - Exchequer Funding, Governance, Oversight and Reforms

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst (*Director General of RTÉ*) called and examined.

An Cathaoirleach: Today, we are engaging with Radió Teilifís Éireann, RTÉ, in advance of its coming into the remit of the C and AG and being directly accountable to the public accounts committee.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome officials from RTÉ: Mr. Kevin Bakhurst, director general; Mr. Adrian Lynch, deputy director general and director of audiences, channels and marketing; Ms Annette Malone, chief people officer; Ms Eleanor O'Shaughnessy, chief risk and compliance officer; and Mr. Robert Shortt, company secretary. We are also joined by officials from the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, who are attending in a representative capacity: Mr. Stephen Ryan, principal officer, public service media governance and policy unit; and Mr. Adam Larragy, principal officer, public service media financing and performance unit. Finally, we are joined by officials from the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, including Mr. Seamus McCarthy, Comptroller and Auditor General, who is a permanent witness to the committee, and Ms Paula O'Connor, deputy director of audit. They are all very welcome.

Before we begin, I wish to explain some limitations to parliamentary privilege and the practice of the Houses as regards references witnesses may make to other persons in their evidence. The evidence of witnesses physically present or who give evidence from within the parliamentary precincts is protected, pursuant to both the Constitution and Statute, by absolute privilege. This means witnesses have an absolute defence against any defamation action for anything they say at the meeting. However, they are expected not to abuse this privilege and it is my duty as Cathaoirleach to ensure this privilege is not abused. Therefore, if witnesses' statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative they comply with any such direction.

Witnesses are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make

him, her or it identifiable or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of the person or entity.

I call the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. McCarthy, to give his opening statement.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: I obviously do not comment on RTÉ financial statements as of yet, but I will briefly refer to Vote 33 - Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media appropriation account, which is or was the source of funding for RTÉ in 2024.

The 2024 appropriation account for Vote 33 is presented under five expenditure programme headings that reflect the breadth of the Department's remit at the time. Programme E, broadcasting, recorded expenditure totalling €304.5 million in 2024. This included funding of €205.5 million issued to RTÉ in the year, from two programme subheads. Teilifis na Gaeilge received €61.5 million and the broadcasting fund, managed by Coimisiún na Meán, received €19.3 million.

Subhead E7 is titled Coimisiún na Meán and was previously used to fund the agency's activities before it began to receive industry levy income. The charge of €4.3 million reported for 2024 relates to payment by the Department of fines for late transposition of the 2018 EU audiovisual media services directive.

I drew attention to this loss in my audit report, and the committee may wish to pursue that matter with the Accounting Officer on another occasion.

Expenditure under the broadcasting programme is linked to the receipt of appropriations-in-aid from sales of television licences through An Post, and a contribution from the Department of Social Protection in respect of free TV licences for State pensioners. The TV licence receipts in 2024 totalled just under €195 million. This represented a drop of 3.2% on the €201 million received in 2023, and a cumulative drop of 11.8% from the €221 million in 2022.

Arising from standard Government accounting rules, the licence fee income is not formally ring-fenced for any specific purpose. However, there is statutory provision for the Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport to provide funding to RTÉ and to the broadcasting and media fund of amounts equivalent to the receipts. Subhead E3 is the licence-related funding for RTÉ, and amounted to €173.5 million in 2024. Separately, RTÉ received funding of €32 million under subhead E8, which represents Exchequer funding.

As members will be aware, the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2026 proposes to provide a mandate for the audit by my office of RTÉ's financial statements and the establishment of direct accountability for the director general to this committee in respect of financial matters and value for money. I already audit TG4 and Coimisiún na Meán.

Significant changes are also proposed in the Bill in relation to the oversight of RTÉ and TG4 by Coimisiún na Meán and by the Department, and in relation to the operation of the broadcasting fund. Ensuring effective and practical reforms that strike the right balance between necessary operational independence for public service broadcasters and meaningful public accountability by their management is a complex challenge.

I understand the Bill is currently before Dáil Éireann. In anticipation of the passing of the Bill, staff from my office have met with the director general and other senior RTÉ officials to

discuss practical steps we can take now to ensure that interim audit work in anticipation of the 2026 financial statements can commence at the earliest possible time. The focus of this early engagement is on overall systems and controls and the broader operating environment of RTÉ. Review of detailed financial or governance records or other data depends on the audit provisions of the Bill being enacted and commenced. I will keep the committee informed of developments in this regard, as required. I apologise for my non-broadcast-quality voice this morning.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. McCarthy. Before I ask the director general to make his opening statement, I want to acknowledge the offer he made to come before our committee this morning. It was an offer we were only too glad to accept. The last time Mr. Bakhurst appeared before the committee was in 2023 and I am conscious that the necessary legislation to bring RTÉ under the remit of the Comptroller and Auditor General, and to ensure there is proper scrutiny from the Committee of Public Accounts, is making its way through the process and is due to move to Committee Stage in September. That legislation is necessary. It is critical to ensure that the serious issues we will discuss today at length can be properly and forensically reviewed through the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and properly scrutinised and held to account by the committee.

Mr. Bakhurst has engaged with the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General in advance of this legislation going through and I am sure that openness will be shown here today. I am sure if there are any other issues that may be of concern in RTÉ, which will, ultimately, come out through the auditing by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and potentially end up here before the committee, that Mr. Bakhurst will be open and transparent with members today.

I ask Mr. Bakhurst, as set out in the letter of invitation, to deliver his opening statement, for which he has five minutes.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I thank the committee for the invitation to attend today. RTÉ fully recognises the committee's interest in the management of public funds and in the governance and accountability arrangements that underpin public service media. We welcome the opportunity to update the committee on the significant reforms undertaken over the past few years, the progress made in strengthening governance and oversight and the steps being taken in advance of the extension of the Comptroller and Auditor General's remit to RTÉ.

RTÉ's latest attendance at this committee was in October 2023. I am pleased to assure committee members that since that time significant governance reforms have been undertaken, the new direction strategy is being implemented, there has been a strengthening of our financial position and a new organisation culture is being formed. In 2023, public trust in RTÉ fell to a record low. Thanks to the work I have just outlined, and the dedication and commitment of colleagues in the organisation and, indeed, the independent sector, we have made good gains in trust restoration, with public perceptions of the value that RTÉ offers to society now at a level higher than before the crisis.

The reforms undertaken since 2023 have not been about governance for its own sake; they have been about restoring trust, strengthening accountability and ensuring that RTÉ can continue to deliver value to the public. Significant progress has been made, although important work remains to be done. We are committed to completing that work and to ensuring that RTÉ

operates to the highest standards of transparency, governance and public accountability. We have completed almost 80% of the expert advisory committee recommendations from 2024. The remaining elements are being implemented and embedded through enhanced assurance mechanisms, with completion expected during 2027.

On the HR front, the substantial review of employee classifications is also almost complete. RTÉ's policy of employment first has extended to on-air presenters, with the transitioning of more than 30 presenters to employment, refining approval protocols and aligning all contractor decisions with employment legislation and best practice. Parallel progress has been achieved in concluding PRSI classification matters with the Department of Social Protection, with 90% of cases finalised and key appeals successfully informing future determinations. New processes in operation should ensure that kind of ambiguity never arises again. The new remuneration policy, which incorporates the expert advisory committee's recommendations, was formally approved by the board earlier this year. More work lies ahead to ensure that our remuneration framework, aligned with the organisation's new role and grade review, is clearer and offers clear pathways for those who wish to progress further.

Historical employment and contracting arrangements within RTÉ evolved over many decades and, in some cases, lacked the consistency and clarity that would rightly be expected today. Addressing these legacy arrangements is complex, particularly in an organisation with over 160 employment grades and multiple categories of engagement. Nevertheless, the RTÉ leadership team remains committed to resolving outstanding issues transparently, ensuring compliance and providing a fair and consistent framework for staff and contractors alike.

In terms of where we are strategically and financially, we are now in the second year of the new direction strategy. A formal transformation programme has been devised and continues to be executed with oversight from the RTÉ board. We have continued to develop our digital offering. The RTÉ Player is now attracting record numbers, we have just launched our new news app, with 3.1 million downloads to date and approximately 700,000 unique users a week, and in the coming months will be launching our new audio app, which will feature new podcasts as created and commissioned by our podcast unit.

RTÉ has reversed the trend of reporting deficits and strengthened our financial position. This result has been driven by tighter cost controls and supported by our new commercial strategy, which has driven digital revenue and is paying dividends. It is underpinned by the multi-annual funding commitment that was made in 2024. That certainty has enabled proper planning and contracting and we appeal very strongly that a similar commitment be made in 2027 when this next comes up for review. As highlighted by a recent review undertaken by Coimisiún na Meán, there remains a recognised funding challenge for public service media in Ireland. The commitment to the first multi-annual funding agreement was a critical step in addressing this funding volatility.

For its part, RTÉ is delivering, as evidenced in the formal performance commitments which we have supplied to the committee. RTÉ met 96% of its performance commitments in 2025, compared with 90% in 2024.

This reflects continued improvement in the organisation's ability to translate strategic objectives into measurable delivery. Our capital investments and strategic projects work is on budget and on track. The new HR system was tendered for last year and is expected to be

completed in early 2027. This will be a valuable tool in generating better quality real-time data and reporting on a range of HR-related issues.

It is also worth highlighting that all of this work continues within a robust structure of oversight, reporting and accountability, as illustrated in the briefing note supplied. The C and AG has formally commenced the audit of RTÉ's financial statements, with effect from 1 July 2026, in anticipation of the enactment of the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2026. Strengthened governance structures, enhanced financial controls, expanded audit and risk oversight, improved reporting arrangements and greater transparency are all intended to ensure that RTÉ is fully prepared for this important change in accountability.

RTÉ continues to offer a valued public service. Access to news and current affairs, national culture, sport, content in the Irish language and the broader provision of programming of public service value form the bedrock of the New Direction strategy and the promises made by RTÉ in relation to the funding agreement made in 2024. RTÉ delivered 45 of the 50 most watched television programmes in 2025. It serves over 2 million radio listeners each week and, along with local radio, it is jointly the country's most trusted news source. Alongside this, we continue to invest in Irish language content and provide a wide array of free-to-air sports, original drama and investment in the independent production sector. These outcomes demonstrate the public value that RTÉ continues to provide. The momentum around organisation transformation continues. We are committed to ensuring that RTÉ remains relevant and viable and a key part of life in Ireland.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Bakhurst. We will suspend the meeting at about 12.45 p.m. for a break of 15 minutes or thereabouts. We will resume shortly afterwards. I now open the floor to members. The lead speaker today is Deputy Boland, who has 15 minutes. All other speakers will have ten minutes. If time permits, we will allow members back in for a shorter second round of supplementary questions.

Deputy Grace Boland: The witnesses are all very welcome. I am very glad to hear the radio figures. It is clear that video has not killed the radio star. That is very positive. In an age of misinformation and disinformation, trust in media sources has never been so important. We are three years into these reforms but I am not hearing a credible plan for RTÉ to sustain itself. What does that look like? What will RTÉ look like? Will it continue to need to rely on State funding?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: As we know, in the case of RTÉ, public service media is funded by both public funding and commercial funding. That has been the case for decades. We are driving commercial funding as hard as we can but, in the end, in our view, public service media is a public good and requires public investment. The Deputy touched on trusted news and current affairs programming. An awful lot of what we provide is not commercially attractive. It is a public service. In my view, it is a really important part of what a public service media organisation provides to society. There is a decision for every society to make, which is-----

Deputy Grace Boland: What is the number RTÉ will be going to the State with in 2028?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have not started discussions about that. The key thing is that, when we were given the multi-----

Deputy Grace Boland: It is two years out.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy Grace Boland: Surely RTÉ has made some assessment as to what it is likely to-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are currently in the middle of working on a five-year plan as to what we need for the organisation to deliver the rest of the strategy.

Deputy Grace Boland: Is the plan that there will always be a need for a substantial amount of funding from the State?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is a question for-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Can RTÉ reduce its costs?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We can, yes.

Deputy Grace Boland: After three years of reform, I am not hearing the plan.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The plan at the moment is that we will need public funding. We will need funding from either the licence fee or a similar source of public funding.

Deputy Grace Boland: Will the amount of public funding be reduced as RTÉ gets its house in order?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There are choices to be made by the regulator, the Oireachtas and the Government. We have a very wide remit to deliver, much of which costs quite a lot of money but makes no money commercially. This includes Irish-language content, arts and culture, news and current affairs, investigative journalism and high-quality documentaries. None of those are cost free. They need some sort of public funding. Whether that public funding comes via the current licence fee arrangement with some direct funding or via a new way of funding the organisation will, in the end, be a question for the Department, the Oireachtas and this committee. However, we will need public funding unless we drastically reduce our remit, which is not our intention at the moment.

Deputy Grace Boland: Let us get into the organisation. I understand that there is another external consultation ongoing into the review of the organisation, the news production media division and other divisions. When and why were those consultants appointed?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We said we would review every part of the organisation to see how it is operating, how efficiently it is operating and what we need to do to future-proof it.

Deputy Grace Boland: When were these consultants appointed?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The news consultant was appointed a few months ago. He has nearly completed his report.

Deputy Grace Boland: That had not been done previously. There had been no review of the news organisation. Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There had not been an external review of the news organisation previously. There is currently a review of our operations part of the organisation under way.

Deputy Grace Boland: Will the final report be published?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We do intend to publish a version and to give a version to the staff.

Deputy Grace Boland: It will be published publicly.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy Grace Boland: In the procurement of such services, does RTÉ comply with the same rules as other State organisations?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, absolutely.

Deputy Grace Boland: It is fully compliant.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, we are fully compliant.

Deputy Grace Boland: On procurement in general, something the committee considers is whether any element of a Department's or agency's procurement is non-compliant. Does Mr. Bakhurst have an assessment of the level of non-compliant procurement in RTÉ? Every agency has some level.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have a very strong procurement function. All of the-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Does Mr. Bakhurst have a number for me?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Do we have any non-compliant procurement? As far as-----

Deputy Grace Boland: RTÉ would be the only organisation or Department to come before this committee that did not.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not think we do. I think we have a very-----

Deputy Grace Boland: I would appreciate it if RTÉ were to write to the committee to follow up.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We will come back to the Deputy with that but I am not aware of any non-compliance. We have a very strong procurement function. That probably frustrates some people in the organisation because it takes a bit of time.

Deputy Grace Boland: What is the optimal number of employees?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That depends on the remit and the introduction of new technologies, including AI. Under the New Direction-----

Deputy Grace Boland: I am struggling here. After three years of not hearing about a proper financial operating model or plan, I am not hearing a target number of employees.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am sorry but, with respect, that was all published alongside our New Direction strategy. If the Deputy were to read that strategy, she would see-----

Deputy Grace Boland: I am not hearing figures. I am not hearing the numbers.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I can give the Deputy the figures. They were in the New Direction strategy. We said that 400 people would leave the organisation over the course of the strategy.

Deputy Grace Boland: Where are we with that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: As of the end of last year, 100 had left.

Deputy Grace Boland: How many availed of voluntary redundancy last year?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sixty-seven took voluntary redundancy and 30 exited through retirement or resignation and were not replaced.

Deputy Grace Boland: When did RTÉ submit the voluntary redundancy scheme for this year to the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It has been a process. The first thing the Department asked of us was an assessment of last year's scheme and how it had operated, to ensure the governance was properly carried out, which we-----

Deputy Grace Boland: It is now July. When did RTÉ submit it?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Is the Deputy asking about that document or the-----

Deputy Grace Boland: No. When did RTÉ submit the application for 2027?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We submitted it on 17 June.

Deputy Grace Boland: That is a bit late.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. We needed to do the assessment of last year's scheme first.

Deputy Grace Boland: How many people is it envisaged will avail of redundancy under the scheme?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are going to try to maximise the number we can get out.

Deputy Grace Boland: What is the number?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It will be between 40 and 60 in the next one.

Deputy Grace Boland: How are we ever going to get to 400?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We will get there over time. We are confident. We said there would be up to 400 and we will get-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Why is it being done piecemeal at a snail's pace?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is the only way to do it unless you go with compulsory redundancies, which we are not prepared to do.

Deputy Grace Boland: Mr. Bakhurst is saying that people are not applying for redundancy.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, people did apply. We had 300 applications last year. The reason we are doing it over a period of time is that, as you change-----

Deputy Grace Boland: It does not really add up.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry; as you change the organisation, you cannot let people go until you put some content out into the independent sector. That cannot be done overnight. You cannot put stuff into the independent sector until people have exited the organisation. It has to happen over a period of time as you change the organisation.

Deputy Grace Boland: The transformation programme is becoming a permanent programme.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, it is a five-year strategy, as was requested of us.

Deputy Grace Boland: Let us move on to outsourcing as against in-house production. Does RTÉ prepare full business cases comparing the costs of in-house production against the costs of outsourced production for every single programme that is outsourced?

Does RTÉ publish those business cases?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We do a business case for each programme but, as the Deputy will be aware, public value is not only a question of cost, which is extremely important, but also a question of delivering the best quality programme for our audiences, so there are a number of factors that go into those decisions. It is not simply the cost because the value of something is not just how much we pay for it; it is what the value is to the audience as well. The answer is that for each individual major programme that is outsourced, or major area that is outsourced, we absolutely do a business case.

Deputy Grace Boland: For example, as regards "Up for the Match", was there a cost-benefit analysis of-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, there was.

Deputy Grace Boland: What was the result of that? How much money is RTÉ saving by outsourcing?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are not saving money. We are doing an enhanced programme live from Croke Park as opposed to a studio-based programme this year.

Deputy Grace Boland: Is that necessary? Is it actually costing more to outsource?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: This one is costing a little bit more but, as I said to the Deputy-----

Deputy Grace Boland: At a time when RTÉ-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, may I just have a chance to answer the question, please? You take creative decisions on what is best for the audience. "Up for the Match" has not changed for a number of years. It is a programme that is pretty successful. We think it could be more successful and more ambitious, so the way we have done that is to put it out for ideas to the independent sector. There was a proper process that was gone through and a request for ideas. We chose the very best creative idea, and that is live from Croke Park. If you do an outside broadcast, OB, it inevitably will add a bit of cost to it, but it will be a better programme for the audience. That is the objective.

Deputy Grace Boland: It would be very important that RTÉ write to this committee and give us an overall figure in terms of all the programmes that have been outsourced and whether there is any cost saving to RTÉ in the outsourcing of those programmes.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The overall costs are published every year by RTÉ in our independent production unit report and they would be available-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Of outsourcing.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. Those are all the programmes we commission from the independent sector.

Deputy Grace Boland: What is the cost saving?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, what is the overall cost?

Deputy Grace Boland: I asked Mr. Bakhurst what the cost saving is. I want to know what the cost saving is of outsourcing these programmes.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Programme by programme, it is impossible to say. You commission a new drama. There is not a cost saving necessarily on-----

Deputy Grace Boland: When you do a cost-benefit analysis-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We do.

Deputy Grace Boland: -----you assess how much it costs-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We do, but it is not-----

Deputy Grace Boland: -----to in-house it and you assess how much it is going to-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, but it is not solely about whether it is a cheaper programme. We are not in the business of being cheap as chips. We are in the business of providing high-quality content at increasingly-----

Deputy Grace Boland: But my understanding is that part of outsourcing these was to achieve some cost-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No.

Deputy Grace Boland: -----reduction or cost-efficiency.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is coming in the legislation that we are going to be required to outsource 25% of our independent productions, so-----

Deputy Grace Boland: So there is no cost saving to the taxpayer whatsoever.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There are cost savings on some of them; there are not cost savings on all of them. It is not the only correct-----

Deputy Grace Boland: I want to know what that total figure is, whether it is-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The total figure for independent productions last year was €47 million.

Deputy Grace Boland: Yes, but I want to know whether it is a minus or a plus to the taxpayer on the cost-benefit analysis.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: As I have just tried to explain to the Deputy, some individual projects are cheaper and some are more expensive. In the end, this is about weighing up how much it costs and whether it is-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Okay, let us move on.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, let us not move on because-----

Deputy Grace Boland: No, sorry. We are moving on.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am trying to answer the Deputy's questions.

Deputy Grace Boland: I want to move on to transport and hospitality. Is there a framework as to the use of limousines and why someone would be offered a limousine as opposed to a taxi?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, and we would not necessarily call them limousines. They are professional drivers. There is a framework. You have to have a business need for it and it is approved by the individual finance-----

Deputy Grace Boland: It is a documented business case.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. There are a number of categories of eligibility.

Deputy Grace Boland: Is the procedure one that any employee of RTÉ could find so they would know whether-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It has to be signed off within the programme team, yes.

Deputy Grace Boland: RTÉ does not have a written procedure as to the use of taxis and limousines.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, but there are criteria that are-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Why does RTÉ not have a written procedure?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Because it is well-known as to what they can be used for. There is a-----

Deputy Grace Boland: That is not good enough. You have to have clear written procedures to avoid abuse.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There is no abuse of this, and it is very carefully overseen by the finance-----

Deputy Grace Boland: But how do people know?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Because each one of those has to be agreed by the senior person in the programme and, ultimately, agreed by finance.

Deputy Grace Boland: Are any employees of RTÉ ever eligible for limousines?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, not normal employees. We might take presenters out to a particular deployment where we have to send a car for them, which can be a taxi.

Deputy Grace Boland: Why a limousine over a taxi?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is not a limousine. It is a professional driver over a taxi. Because it would be an assigned-----

Deputy Grace Boland: The cost difference is huge.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is not huge, actually. If you book a taxi and it has to wait for a few hours, it is not necessarily a huge difference in cost. The Deputy will have seen from the documents we have provided that our spend on professional drivers has gone down 50%, roughly, in the past three years, so there is a tight control-----

Deputy Grace Boland: RTÉ is in a crisis.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy Grace Boland: It is supposed to be tightening its belt, so I am not going to applaud Mr. Bakhurst for that.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, but I am just demonstrating that we are tightening our belts. In addition, as regards professional drivers, the vast majority are for things like guests for "The Late Late Show" who might fly in, for example. They would be high profile-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Are taxis not sufficient for them?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, they are not. We are not a tin-pot broadcaster. We are a professional broadcaster. If you are going to attract top talent and top guests, you have to provide a decent service when they get here.

Deputy Grace Boland: What are these non-taxable hospitality vouchers-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not know what-----

Deputy Grace Boland: -----that employees avail of? There is about €2.5 million in non-taxable hospitality vouchers. Can anyone speak to them?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am sorry, I do not know what the Deputy is asking.

Deputy Grace Boland: I do not know what they are either. That is why I am asking Mr. Bakhurst.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, I do not know what the Deputy is asking about there.

Deputy Grace Boland: What?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not know about €2.5 million in hospitality vouchers. I do not know what she is asking about.

Deputy Grace Boland: Mr. Bakhurst does not know where €2.5 million is going.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: There is reference in the hospitality section to staff vouchers. Is that the figure?

Deputy Grace Boland: Yes.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It is €2.059 million.

Ms Annette Malone: I am not a hundred per cent sure, but that might have been from the pay award we negotiated with the unions. There was a staff voucher given as part of that pay award.

Deputy Grace Boland: These are non-taxable vouchers issued to employees. What is the procedure around that? What is the framework? The witnesses cannot even tell me where €2.5 million is going.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: In terms of hospitality-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Sorry. There was a substantial increase over 2023. It was €1.2 million in 2023 and increased to €2.4 million in 2024.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: As part of the overall pay agreement, we issued a voucher to staff, which, as the Deputy knows, a lot of companies do because it is very tax efficient.

Deputy Grace Boland: Sorry, a voucher for what?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It was part of the pay agreement. It was an agreement with the unions in terms of the overall pay deal.

Deputy Grace Boland: Then why is €319,000 of that down here as business?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Some of those would involve staff who would get hospitality vouchers to use in the RTÉ canteen if, for example, they have guests in or children in for a particular programme or whatever. They can use that to pay for food and drink inside RTÉ or, for example, for guests who come in for some of the big programmes where there is hospitality.

Deputy Grace Boland: This is a continuing liability, so is there a framework around the use of these vouchers?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, there is a framework.

Deputy Grace Boland: A written framework?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy Grace Boland: Can Mr. Bakhurst please provide that to the committee?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, we can.

Deputy Grace Boland: In terms of Montrose, what is the plan?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The plan, which we are in the middle of trying to deliver at the moment, is that we are going to downsize in Montrose to one end of the campus and try to dispose of the rest of the campus. We are going to be in a smaller premises on Montrose within the next six or seven years, hopefully.

Deputy Grace Boland: When will we see the plan?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are finalising the plan. We are going to take it to the board finally in the coming weeks. It has been a year and a half in progression. We have taken on property consultants and architects to do the plan and to get it properly priced and so on.

Deputy Grace Boland: RTÉ might update the committee-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We absolutely will do so. This is going to be a significant thing for RTÉ because we do want to downsize and we want to reduce overheads, and that will be the appropriate thing to do as the organisation gets smaller. At the same time, we will be looking to sell a significant amount of the campus at Montrose as well in due course, which we obviously need to get Government permission to do. We have already entered into early discussions with the Land Development Agency about that.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I thank the witnesses for coming before us. I want to start with TV licence payment and non-payment figures. Could the witnesses tell me the number of households that should be paying the TV licence, legally speaking, who are not currently, as both a total figure and a percentage?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I will give the Deputy the percentage figures. As he will have seen from the paper, there are three categories of people you would be looking at. There is the TV licence evasion rate, which is around 18%, and then there are the households that say they either do not have a TV or are using broadband to connect to the TV, which is a significant loophole in this country that overall, between them, has grown significantly. Those figures are 20% now.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Mr. Bakhurst is saying 18% of those who should be paying their TV licence are not.

That is a significant understatement of the rate of non-payment, which is a combination of people not being able to afford to pay a regressive tax and a conscious boycott. I will give Mr. Bakhurst my figures. He can tell me where I am wrong from his perspective, and we can dig into it. The total number of potentially liable households in the State is 1.97 million. A total of 11% of those do not have TVs. That is minus 217,000. That leaves us at about 1.77 million. The Department of Social Protection pays for about 500,000 licences. That leaves us at about 1.25 million. A total of 768,000 people in 2025 paid for a TV licence. That leaves about 485,000 not paying who are eligible. The rate of non-payment rather than being 18% is 39%. Where have I gone wrong with that figure?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The numbers that we get are from An Post so the numbers we have provided are from An Post which collects the licence fee. It has given us the percentage and numbers regarding those who are not paying the licence fee or say that they are a non-TV home.

Deputy Paul Murphy: It starts off at about 2 million and lose those who do not have TVs---

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The Deputy went through those figures quite quickly there-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: We start with about 2 million. About 217,000 do not have TVs. That leaves us with 1.77 million. The Department of Social Protection takes care of 500,000. We know 768,000 people pay the TV licence. That leaves about 485,000 who are not paying. A total of 485,000 out of 1.25 million is about 39% rate of non-payment.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The discrepancy might be the 11% that Deputy said do not have TVs. It is nearer 20% who either do not have TVs or access it via broadband.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Yes. Is Mr. Bakhurst is saying that if a person has a TV that accesses the television channels via broadband, he or she is not eligible to pay the TV licence?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is the law of the land.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Is Mr. Bakhurst saying that the Department, which issues ads saying, "If you have a television, you must have a TV licence", is wrong? These ads are played regularly on RTÉ. It says very clearly that if you have a TV, you must have a TV licence.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. It is shorthand, but the details are as I have given to the Deputy.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Is Mr. Bakhurst saying that the *tvlicence.ie* website, which states that if you have a television, "it is your legal obligation to have a valid TV licence" is wrong?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: If a person has a TV and access TV via the TV set, then yes. It is hard to distil the message into-----

Mr. Adrian Lynch: As the Deputy knows, it is a technical term of having the standard mode of reception in the TV and so on. Most of those homes that apply to be no TV are the people who are watching on tablet, player and so on. This-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: Let us forget about the tablet and player; this is about people with a TV. If I have a TV and I access web-only services and pay the TV licence, do I get my money back? I listen to all these ads telling me that if I have a TV, I have to pay a TV licence. The Government website says very clearly that if a household has a TV that it has to pay a TV licence. Do I get my money back?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is not a question for us. We do not do the TV licence. It is a question for An Post and the Government, but I mean-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: You do not get your money back, do you? Let us be honest.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: If people are in that position, they should that they do not access TV. A lot of people do say that. They have the wherewithal to say it.

Deputy Paul Murphy: RTÉ is misstating the law in order to make-----

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Can I make a point around that?

Deputy Paul Murphy: Sure.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: From a messaging point of view, you have got to be as clear as you can be. What this demonstrates is that technology has moved beyond the current legislation and how we capture it. That was gone into in detail in the Future of Media Commission. It was the biggest review of public service media in decades. There are all sorts of anomalies within the system. We all know that. From a messaging point of view, you cannot have all those nuances, I am sure the Deputy will appreciate, in a simple piece of commercial messaging.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I believe RTÉ is misstating the nuances and I believe the reason it is doing it is to make the non-payment figures look less bad than they are. The Broadcasting Act 2009 states: "'television set" means any electronic apparatus capable of receiving and exhibiting television broadcasting services broadcast for general reception...". The key point is "capable of receiving and exhibiting". People do not have to be accessing TV via it, but the device needs to be capable. Any TV is capable of receiving these services.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: First, we do not collect the licence fee. Second, there is no incentive for us to misstate the figures and so on. We do not control the figures. What would the incentive be-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: The incentive is to make it look like there is not a massive boycott of the TV licence happening, which is very clear.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The figures-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: Almost one in two people are boycotting the TV licence for one reason or another rather than one in five.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The figures are not provided by RTÉ. They are provided by An Post.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Interestingly, RTÉ changed its briefing. The original briefing that we got said one thing in terms of it. It stated "According to Nielsen that the estimated population of the proportion of households who are no TV homes stands at 424,000 or 20.8%." RTÉ updated its briefing to change that, because that is not accurate, to distinguish between 11% that are no TV - and we all agree that they do not have to pay the TV licence or legally they are not meant to pay the TV licence - and then it said that there are 10% who have a TV but receive their signal through broadband.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The number still stands. We changed that because there is a nuance to how Nielsen describes it. The same point still stands. Either of those categories do not have to pay a TV licence. That is the reason they are not paying it.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Is it the Department's position that if a household has a TV and it is broadband only contrary to all the ads, it is not required to pay a TV licence?

Mr. Adam Larragy: It is subtly in the definition of the web TV. The Deputy cited the definition of a "television set". The Act provides for exemptions. Two exemptions are set out in ministerial order. Exception one is a size exception, for example, small devices. The second exception is a technology exemption. A device capable of accessing television services by means of the publicly available Internet only would not be liable. In that category of web TV, that is probably subtly there for the individual while they might be accessing TV only via broadband, the television set might still be capable of receiving service. It might have digital TV tuner and could get Saorview. Regarding the individual's liability, it is for the individual to check if he or she has a liable television set. These are figures coming from a survey. When we get to the individual level, people would have to check. That is the position in terms of the exceptions.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Department does not accept that necessarily that the 11% or 10% who are described by Nielsen as being web-only that they are all exempt from it. If they go into a shop and buy a regular TV and they do not hook it up to any TV service, nonetheless if it has the capacity, they are meant to pay it.

Mr. Adam Larragy: The overall category in the Nielsen study is useful. When we get down to the individual level, there is no data on the individual television itself. In fairness, it is a very important category because there will be a lot of people in that category whose television or the device that they have can only access services by broadband. There is a subtlety that within that category could be a certain number of people who, as the Deputy said, have purchased a smart TV with a digital tuner. When we get down to the granularity of the device, the issue is that these surveys are not a device granular survey. However, it is a very useful category to use because there will be a huge amount of those smart TVs and web TV households that have a TV that can only access via the broadband so it would not be liable. I would not want to give the impression that everyone within that category would or would not. We just do not know the types of TV sets that people have.

Deputy Paul Murphy: If I go into a shop and look at the TV sets, the vast majority of TV sets that are TVs rather than computer monitors have the capability of accessing TV regularly. Is that not the case?

Mr. Adam Larragy: A lot of them do. Not to go into brands, but there are different brands. It is much more common in the US for a TV to be sold that can only access broadband. In Europe, it more common that a Samsung TV, for example, will have the digital tuner on it, so you can plug in a-----

Deputy Paul Murphy: I wish to go back to Mr. Bakhurst. Does he agree with the recommendation of the Future of Media Commission that "a taxation-based approach offers the best prospect for a sustainable, future-proofed, equitable and publicly acceptable funding model"? In other words, we should do away with this regressive TV licence and we should properly fund public broadcasting - RTÉ and others - by taxation.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: This is never going to be a matter for RTÉ. It is going to be a matter for the Deputies in the Oireachtas and the Government. The Future of Media Commission's recommendations were extremely well-developed and thought through. The vast majority have been enacted. The Deputy touched on a point that is very important. There is a confusion about whether a licence is needed for some TVs. In the UK, if a person watches something via BBC iPlayer, they need a TV licence. Here if you watch something on the RTÉ Player, you do not.

Increasingly, we have got millions of people watching via the player, so there is a loophole there. There is no doubt that at the very least, what devices you watch it on and so on needs to be addressed.

The other thing I will say to the committee and to people is that it is called the TV licence but, do not forget, increasingly it pays for online content, the news app and radio content as well. It is not just about TV programmes. I know that it is based on the TV, as the Deputy spent a long time talking about, but it argues that it needs to be looked at to future-proof the legislation. Whether it is direct taxation, a household charge or a reformed version of the TV licence, it needs to be updated to reflect viewing habits.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I will go back to RTÉ's transport services expenditure. I know some of this has been touched on already. We are looking at the figures in the correspondence provided by RTÉ to the committee and there was nearly €250,000 spent on limousine services over the past five years. What types of cars are they? Are they all limousines?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. As I said before, they are not limousines. They tend to be either minivans, in the case of the orchestra and instruments, or they tend to be a good quality car. We do not specify the quality of the car-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Are limousines included in that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It depends. They are professional drivers-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: It is a "Yes" or "No" question.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, they are-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Surely, if RTÉ books a car, it specifies what type of car or category it needs.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We do not ring up and say, "Can we have a limousine?". We say, "Can we have a decent car with a professional driver?".

Deputy Joanna Byrne: RTÉ does not specify the type of vehicle at all.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I think that through procurement they tell us what kind of cars they will provide as a service.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Does RTÉ select which one-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. We say those are acceptable brands of car.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: That surely does not stack up. If RTÉ goes to book a car to bring a presenter, as Mr. Bakhurst alluded to earlier, who is being collected from the airport, if the driver turns up in a minivan that is able to facilitate equipment-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: They would allocate the type of vehicle depending on the job, so if it is-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: RTÉ does specify what type of car.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Obviously, we say if it is a car or a minivan-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Mr. Bakhurst just said that RTÉ does not.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, we do not say that it has got to be a BMW or Mercedes or anything like that. We say what type vehicle in terms of whether it is a van or a car.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Does the senior leadership team of RTÉ avail of limousine services?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Never, at all.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, not to the best of my knowledge.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Does Mr. Bakhurst?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, I do not. I am very happy with taxis and Ubers.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Coming to the taxis, we have been provided with correspondence for one taxi firm for 2025. Is that the only taxi firm that RTÉ uses?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We enter procurement for taxis and we have contracts with a couple of them, but we primarily use one firm.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: RTÉ has contracts with a couple of firms, but only the expenditure for one taxi firm was provided to us in correspondence.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is the one we primarily use after the last procurement rather than the other one.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Did RTÉ use an additional taxi firm in 2025?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There may be some Ubers or things like that, but this has been the firm that we use as RTÉ. This is the one that we go through to-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: There either was or was not. RTÉ was asked to provided the correspondence. We have been provided with-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have provided accurate correspondence to the committee.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: -----€318,000 worth of taxi services with one taxi firm, and no Ubers or additional contracts.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The taxi firm obviously contracts individual drivers but, yes, that would be correct.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Was there anything additional to the €318,000 on taxis for 2025?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, not on taxis.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I am going to move onto the World Cup qualifying match in Czechia. I know we covered some of this when Mr. Bakhurst attended the media committee, but this committee sought additional information from RTÉ in advance of this sitting. I have to put it on record, as I did publicly last week when the correspondence was presented to us, that I take great exception to the correspondence provided by RTÉ where it stated that given this was the first time that Ireland sought to qualify for the FIFA World Cup since 2002, there was a strong public interest in this match. That comment is a huge disservice to Irish footballers from the past. I am sure they would attest to Mr. Bakhurst that they sought to qualify in every competition. I know that Mr. Bakhurst is going to come back to me with something, but it is in black and white-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: All I am going to say-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I think RTÉ has let itself down with poorly worded communication.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The wording might have been better. What we meant was that they have not qualified since 2002.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I understand what RTÉ meant but that is not what it says.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I understand that.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I have to pull that up as a football fan.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, that is fair enough.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I would be letting the Irish footballers that I support down if I did not. Can Mr. Bakhurst tell me how much RTÉ pays for the UEFA Champions League rights a year?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, we cannot say that. It is commercially sensitive.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Why?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Because we have to compete for those rights and if you start saying how much you are paying, then people will outbid or underbid you for those rights.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: When RTÉ is audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We will make that available to make sure there is value for money, absolutely. We look forward to doing that.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: It is my understanding that RTÉ pays €3.5 million a year for these rights to a competition that no Irish teams play in. As a football fan, I feel that money could be better spent on broadcasting and promoting our domestic league. Has Mr. Bakhurst anything to say on that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. As the Deputy knows, we bid for the FAI rights and unfortunately we lost the FAI rights, which we wanted to get. We spend a huge amount of money on televising the Irish national teams, women's and men's.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I am not necessarily talking about the Irish national teams here. I am talking about domestic football.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: In terms of the Champions League, there is a huge audience demand for it and, in terms of value for money for the licence fee, we are now the only country in Europe where people get free-to-air Champions League coverage, which the audience really values-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I am going to come to that.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Our focus is always on the audience and what it values. It delivers very significant audience numbers for months throughout the year.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: It depends on what audience RTÉ is facilitating. The League of Ireland was forced to move away from the State broadcaster because RTÉ refused to show games on a weekly basis.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, that is not true.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: That is true.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, it is not true.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I feel that is a really sad indictment on RTÉ-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, we were outbid on the FAI rights. We did not get a chance to bid for matches every week.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Did RTÉ not get a chance?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. We did not. We understood that the rights were going to be shared out as previously. We put in a significant bid and the next thing we knew was that we had lost the rights.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Does Mr. Bakhurst get where I am coming from? We had Shamrock Rovers Football Club in qualifying matches last week and this week and they were not shown on our State broadcaster. We have Bohemian Football Club starting its European football adventure this evening and that is not being shown on our State broadcaster. All the while, if I am correct with these figures, and I stand to be corrected but it is in and around this, we are paying €3.5 million. We are paying that money to UEFA for Champions League football that no Irish football teams are playing in. Only seven games in the FAI Cup are shown on RTÉ. This is in comparison to TG4, which shows 17 women's premier division and women's FAI Cup games on a fraction of the budget that RTÉ gets from the State, and we have got Virgin Media showing 36 games and doing an incredible job trying to promote our league.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: As I said, we were outbid on the FAI rights. In the end, we have to strike a balance between-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: No. There is no balance here. There is absolutely no balance.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, can I answer the question?

Deputy Joanna Byrne: It is not comparable in any way, shape or form. I put it to Mr. Bakhurst that it is not the role of a State broadcaster funded by the taxpayer to pay €3.5 million for Champions League rights to UEFA, which is facilitating the terror state of Israel, might I add, to play in international competitions. Mr. Bakhurst said it himself; there is not one other European country that pays for these rights funded by public money.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, I did not say that.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: You did say that. You did because I picked you up on it when I said I would come back-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. I said we are the only free-to-air-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Exactly.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: In every other-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: We are the only State broadcaster that buys the Champions League's rights. No other country in the world would spend taxpayers' money to watch English teams playing football week in, week out-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: They are not just English teams. They are European teams.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: -----while ignoring its own domestic football.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We do not ignore it.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: You do.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am sorry. We lost-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I argue with Mr. Bakhurst that RTE does ignore it. If we look at the UK, for example, international football is shown on the BBC - no Champions League.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Correct.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: What is the difference?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The UK licence fee payers are not provided with the same service people are here.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: It is shameful.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is not shameful.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I ask you to take away from this-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, can I just make a point here? We are currently showing 104 matches from the World Cup with enormous audiences across TV and-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I am not talking about the World Cup.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am talking about it and I-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: That is not the point of my dispute, Mr. Bakhurst.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is because Ireland is not in the-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I am specifically talking about the League of Ireland and a domestic game that I and thousands of other people show love and support towards on a weekly basis. We are being neglected by our State broadcaster.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We tried to-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: The League of Ireland has been neglected by our State broadcaster.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We tried to bid for the FAI games and we were outbid and we were not given a chance to bid for-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I do not believe that is correct. If that is the case, RTÉ should go back and rebid, stand up as our State broadcaster and support the League of Ireland and domestic football in this country.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: When we get the chance to bid for the games again, we will bid for them.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: I want to move onto the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill. As Mr. Bakhurst knows, I am a member of the media committee and was part of the engagement on that process. What steps is RTÉ taking to prepare for the legislative changes that are due to come?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There is a whole range of them.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: What are they?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are preparing across the organisation for legislative changes, in particular the spend with the independent sector we have to prepare for. We are preparing for the arrival of the C and AG. We had an initial meeting with him. There is a whole range of preparations going on for the Broadcasting Bill. Does Mr. Lynch want to say any more?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: It obviously depends on which aspect because there is so much in that Bill that is significant.

There are work streams on each part. We have been engaged, obviously, with Mr. Larragy on an ongoing basis for the last year to look at the implications, what needs to be put in place and so on.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Will RTÉ continue to be audited by a private firm as well as the Comptroller and Auditor General?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Yes.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: For what reason?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have to be because we have a commercial wing and that is not within the Comptroller and Auditor General's remit. Part of our discussion with the C and AG's staff is how they will closely work with the private audit firm and, we hope, not duplicate where they can avoid duplicating.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: All right. Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: May I just add one point on the sports rights?

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Yes.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: The vast majority of public service media companies in Europe bid for the Champions League. The BBC would love to have the Champions League. The rights cost in the UK is somewhere north of £1 billion. That is really important to say. It gets significant audiences and people pay their €12 a month. For a certain demographic, namely, 15- to 34-year-olds this is a really strong connection with RTÉ and that has to be said. As the Director General said, we were in a very competitive bidding process, like all these processes, to get those domestic rights, and we lost. That is the reality.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: If you will indulge me in this for a minute, Chair-----

An Cathaoirleach: Just briefly.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: -----on Mr. Bakhurst's comments on the bidding for the League of Ireland fixtures, can he provide us with any documentation on that to prove RTÉ did not refuse to show a match a week, and that was the breakdown?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. I do not think it was-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: That is what Mr. Bakhurst said.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, I know it is what I said. We bid to show the same amount, the same sort of split with Virgin Media we had previously had and that was our understanding of what the outcome of the process was going to be. Then we were just told "No, sorry, we have got to bid to show them every Friday night and you are out of it".

Deputy Joanna Byrne: Does Mr. Bakhurst know how many thousands of people support League of Ireland clubs every Friday night?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not know exactly, no.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: It is a huge number. Mr. Bakhurst may want to educate himself. It is the highest participation sport in the country. I stand over the comments I made to him. I really feel the domestic football community and the League of Ireland family are neglected by RTÉ. Can Mr. Bakhurst provide any documents on the bidding process-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I will see what we can provide that is not commercially sensitive but I-----

Deputy Joanna Byrne: -----to the committee, please?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, absolutely.

Deputy Joanna Byrne: If not we will be following up on it. I thank the Chair.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I thank the witnesses for being here. To come back to the voluntary exit programme, am I correct that the organisation must get to 400 in that programme by 2028?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Up to 400, yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Is it correct that the voluntary exit programme only started in 2025?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Correct.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Mr. Bakhurst said that 67 were done in 2025. When he was before the Oireachtas media committee in May, he said RTÉ had not yet submitted the business case for 2026? Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is correct. We had submitted the review and a letter saying we were going to reply but we had not put the business case in.

Deputy James Geoghegan: The business case was then submitted on 17 June.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Now the witnesses are saying they are looking for between 40 and 60. That is not including retirements.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is correct.

Deputy James Geoghegan: So RTÉ will have fewer people through the voluntary exit scheme in this calendar year than in the previous one, notwithstanding the fact there are 300 applications.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We hope to exceed that amount, but you have to put in an estimate of what you think you can get out given the changes that are going on within the organisation, and that you can afford to get out as well because, to be clear, this is paid for out of the overall funding as well. There is not special money that comes with it. We pay for it out of the overall funding of RTÉ. We need to know what we can afford to get out in any given year as well.

Deputy James Geoghegan: For argument's sake, let us take 2025, 2026, 2027 and 2028. Four times 60 is 240, so where is the 400? How is RTÉ getting to 400 if it is going at this rate?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: When we published the new direction strategy, it said up to 400. This is about cost containment, so it will come either from our prox bill or from our non-prox bill in terms of cuts that we will execute elsewhere.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Mr. Lynch is walking back the 400 number.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: No, not at all.

Deputy James Geoghegan: He just did there.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: No, I am making a-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: He did it very eloquently, as we have seen in his appearances at previous meetings of this committee-----

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I thank the Deputy.

Deputy James Geoghegan: -----but he did walk it back.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I did not walk it back, actually.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Could he clarify then whether RTÉ is getting to 400 by 2028 or not?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: To explain that what I would say, and as the Director General has said, this is a voluntary exit scheme, so-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: With 300 live applicants.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: -----in the first year we had 97 out, in the next two years we are looking for 60 plus ten and ten-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: In the first year, Mr. Lynch said RTÉ had 67, not 97.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: It was 67 plus 30 suppressions is 97.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Let us not confuse matters. Is the 400 to do with voluntary exit programmes or is it to do with-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, to be clear on this, this is about-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: Please be clear, really clear.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I will be as clear as I can.

Deputy James Geoghegan: It cannot be that complicated.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: This is about exiting 400 people over the period and we have always said this is a combination of the voluntary exit scheme and retirements, resignations and closing roles. We had 30 of those last year which we closed. In many ways, those are the best in terms of the-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: The 400 represents both retirements-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: -----and people who have applied to the scheme.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: And closing roles of people who retire or resign, yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: And on the current pace the organisation is going to get to about 240 on the VEP.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: What is the retirement number?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have about 170-odd due to retire over that period.

Deputy James Geoghegan: That was my next question.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: This is not a linear process where we can say, year by year, it is going to be a certain amount because along the way during the strategy there are going to be some

very big decisions to be taken about particular things such as the future of "Fair City", and so on. As I said, we need to be very careful each year that we only let those people go where the output is either being stopped or is being done externally. I would much rather do it in one go rather than over four or five years but it is not like that.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Does Mr. Bakhurst anticipate then that there will be a year, be it 2027 or 2028, when the number of voluntary exits will be much larger than in 2025 and 2026?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is my anticipation, yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: What will that largely relate to? Which area of RTÉ will it be, or will it be a mixture of all areas?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It will be a mixture of a number of areas. There are a number of big calls to take. As I said and as people know, one of them is about the future of "Fair City" and what we do with that.

Deputy James Geoghegan: When Deputy Boland was asking about reviews, Mr. Bakhurst mentioned RTÉ was carrying out two, namely, the news organisation review and the operations review. Maybe he can elaborate. Would the operations review currently taking place feed into those big decisions he is talking about on future voluntary exit programmes?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It will feed into that because part of each of the reviews is looking at what is best practice but also looking at where there are opportunities for efficiencies and changes we can make, whether teams are the right size and there are other new technologies we could introduce to drive efficiency.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Which of the reviews does Mr. Bakhurst think are more significant to the voluntary exit programme? Is it the news organisation review or the operations review?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: At the moment probably operations. I say that because we have always made clear during the strategy that news and current affairs will always be made in-house. From what I have seen the reviews so far and certainly from what I have heard from staff and managers, the core operation in the newsroom is a very efficient, digital-first operation so if we carry on doing that in-house, there is limited room, probably, for efficiencies there whereas there might be more room elsewhere. I should add on reviews that we have done a radio-audio review that we did not bring a consultant in for because it was more straightforward and we felt we had the right people to do it in-house. We look for opportunities and if we have the right people to do it in-house, we can do it in-house.

Deputy James Geoghegan: On the operations review, am I correct that is being carried out by a Bruce Baron?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Correct.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Is he currently in operations at the BBC, or he was?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: He was, I believe.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: He was formerly in BBC operations.

Deputy James Geoghegan: He was in the BBC. Is Mr. Bakhurst aware of members of staff at RTÉ having concerns about this review? Is that something that has come to their attention?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is.

Deputy James Geoghegan: What does Mr. Bakhurst have to say on that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: All we have said is we will publish this review. There will be concerns but we need to look at how efficient the organisation is. There are always going to be concerns-

Deputy James Geoghegan: A big part of Mr. Bakhurst's arrival, if he does not mind me saying, was all about cultural change, transparency and people in the organisation buying into the organisation.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: So my question was first whether he is aware of those concerns-

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: -----in relation to the Bruce Baron review.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Second, what has he to say about those concerns?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Mr. Lynch is overseeing it. Yes, we have had a number of letters from SIPTU members in different parts saying they are concerned about the review - primarily that it was, in some cases, not communicated to them properly by their managers, which I accept. I was talking to the staff engagement group about this exact matter yesterday. In the end-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: I am sorry, but when Mr. Bakhurst says he accepts, is he saying his managers underperformed in not communicating correctly to the staff in relation to the Bruce Baron review?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There are probably one or two managers who should have done more to communicate the review and what it was about.

Deputy James Geoghegan: How have we arrived at a situation like this, where, once again, cultural change is reportedly taking place in RTÉ, yet a series of workers within the organisation, Mr. Bakhurst's managers, for whom he is responsible, are not implementing the kind of culture Mr. Bakhurst says he wants in the organisation? I want to address this to the CEO. How can this happen under his watch? He cannot keep coming back and apologising for another culture failure.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am not coming back and apologising. I am saying that change is very difficult and there are members of staff who feel threatened by it. I totally understand that and I meet-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: How will that be remedied?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is being remedied. When we hear that things are not being communicated, we will ask why this is the case. I know that in some areas-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: That is not a remedy. I am not saying "things". This is a specific issue. There is a review currently being carried out by Bruce Barron. As I understand it, he appeared on live studio floors without members of staff knowing who he was or what his role was.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not think the Deputy's briefing on that is accurate. Mr. Barron has been given a remit to look around, see how people work and talk to them. The review in news and current affairs was-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: Is it not the difficulty-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, can I just speak?

Deputy James Geoghegan: No, you cannot, because I ask the questions. Is it not the difficulty-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am trying to answer your question.

Deputy James Geoghegan: You can answer the question; just let me frame it. Is it not the difficulty that Mr. Bakhurst has acknowledged that his senior managers did not communicate to staff properly about this Bruce Barron review and that they have concerns in relation to it? Mr. Bakhurst is saying that my briefing is incorrect but if there is no transparency for the people who work in the organisation as to what the purpose of the review is, of course rumours and whatever else will emerge in relation to it. Mr. Bakhurst has to accept that is what happens when the culture of transparency dies.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: As I said, I accept that in a couple of areas there should have been better communication by the managers, but-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: What is the remedy for this specific issue in respect of the Bruce Barron review? What is the remedy for the challenge that Mr. Bakhurst has identified?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Interestingly, when I met the staff engagement group yesterday I was told by one person from operations that it was very well communicated to them. Their suggestion was that we send a similar communication out now to explain what the review is about to the whole of operations, so that we can make sure everyone has it, rather than relying on individual managers to brief them properly, which is what we did rely on.

Deputy James Geoghegan: If I understand correctly, Mr. Bakhurst is saying that it was well communicated to one part of the organisation.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, by one or two of the managers in operations.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Why was it done differently by other managers?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We devolve responsibility to junior managers. I cannot go and brief all members of staff-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: Is it the junior managers' fault for not divulging the information correctly?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am not going to throw any individual members of staff under the bus but it should have been better communicated in some areas. I accepted that when I met the staff yesterday. It was well communicated in other areas. In terms of the news review-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: Is this operations review now over?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, it is ongoing.

Deputy James Geoghegan: For the staff who felt it was not communicated to them well, which Mr. Bakhurst has acknowledged, what level of understanding about this review will they now receive?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: As I said, as of yesterday, the idea is that we will try to give the communication that was well received by the other part of operations. That is what I would like to do. Mr. Lynch-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: Mr. Lynch is bursting to get in.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: For example, the news review was announced at a town hall-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: I was talking only about the Barron review. I ask Mr. Lynch to deal just with the Bruce Barron organisation review and not the news review. That is an issue I will come back to.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: There are two steps to the answer because they are interrelated. About 380 people work in the news division. The consultant met over 200 of them on a one-to-one basis. What was the thinking behind that? The consultant has done lots of news rooms around Europe. He said to me that one of the keys-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: I have not heard any concerns about this review, so I do not know why Mr. Lynch is talking about the good review. I am asking him to talk about the Bruce Barron review.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: That is fine but I want to make a key point here.

An Cathaoirleach: As briefly as you can, because we are over time here.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I do not know why Mr. Lynch cannot deal with it.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I will if I am allowed to answer. The consultant said that the key thing was that junior members of staff needed to be involved in this. This was why he talked to 200 people. That went fine. Obviously, there was a communication disconnect in terms of the operations. Part of that is the fact that not everybody in operations is on email. We have gone back and spoken to the managers. There was very clear email communication which reflected the terms of reference of the review. We have now gone further and shared the terms of reference of the review with the union as well, for everybody to see. There is complete transparency regarding what the review is about.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Will the witnesses share the terms of reference with the committee as well?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Sure.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: How long has this review been ongoing?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The operations review?

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It has been under way for a few weeks.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: How was the tender process initiated?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I will ask Mr. Lynch to answer that as he actually ran it.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Both of these reviews are under €50,000 so it was a request for quotation, RFQ, and they were put out to the marketplace. There was full procurement in both cases. It is not a case of expensive consultants coming in who are costing hundreds of thousands of euro. It is actually a case of sourcing people within the marketplace who have the expertise and understanding to go into the news room or operations. They are not about simply slash-and-burn rationalisation. This is about multi-skilling and the future. It is not simply about operational efficiency.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: How did Mr. Lynch go to the market place to find the best-suited people?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: It was through a number of different avenues. One was the European Broadcasting Union. This represents public service media companies across Europe. It is key because it has a very good network. That was one way. It was just through networks, trying to find who would be good. I had never met either of the individuals before. I want to be clear about that. It was a matter of sourcing people with expertise. If someone is going into a news room, for example, with 300 experienced journalists-----

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I understand that. When is the report on this review expected?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: The news one will be done in August and the production and media services one will be done in September.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I assume those will be shared with the committee once they are published.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: No problem. I am very happy to.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Mr. Bakhurst said that RTÉ is not a tin-pot organisation. I think that, of all the adjectives that have described the organisation's expenditure in recent times, that was probably not one with which RTÉ was labelled. However, it is the nature of the questioning and the work we do in this committee. In the *Irish Examiner* today Louise Burne confirms that the Minister has said that under no circumstances will there be a second three-year rolling programme. It struck me that Mr. Bakhurst and the Minister seem to be communicating via the media over the past couple of days. What is the nature of Mr. Bakhurst's relationship or engagement with the Minister?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I have a good relationship with the Minister. I have not been communicating via the media. I put out a statement yesterday because there was one report in one newspaper that was wholly inaccurate. We wanted to correct it before we appeared before the committee. We did get bids for interviews and I said that I was not going to do any interviews before the committee, as I thought it would be discourteous, but-----

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Had Mr. Bakhurst heard the Minister's sentiments before reading about them this morning in the *Irish Examiner*?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I have not read about them in the *Irish Examiner* yet. As I say, we have not even started discussions with the Minister or his officials yet.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: There is no need to discuss them. He said that under no circumstances will there be an additional three-year rolling programme. Where does that leave Mr. Bakhurst in terms of the organisation's commercial standing to make up that potential deficit?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: As I have said before, the multi-year funding deal has been critically important for us having the confidence to deliver the strategy. I have said before to a number of senior politicians that it is a five-year strategy. We need to know what the income is year to year if we are going to make significant investments in digital and if we are going to make significant commissions in expensive things like high-quality drama and buying sports rights. Having some degree of security and certainty is critical to the successful running of the organisation. By the way, it drives enormous efficiencies when we can sign three-year deals for programmes or four-year deals for outside broadcasts, or whatever. It is the most efficient way to operate.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Mr. Bakhurst mentioned the risk of AI determining the number of jobs in RTÉ to attain the perfect employment level. What jobs will AI take at RTÉ?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is not entirely clear yet. Obviously, it is a very-----

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Is Mr. Bakhurst open to considering AI?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have to be open to it. We have to embrace every new technology. I say that alongside saying that I have deep respect for the quality of the people working there and their abilities in doing their jobs. In the end, particularly in areas like journalism, we will always have human oversight of journalistic decisions. However, already there are some processes where-----

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: What does "human oversight of journalistic decisions" mean, as opposed to "human journalists"? What is "human oversight"?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It means that we have editors, journalists and producers who are doing the work. They may use AI tools but, in the end, the humans will do the journalism. We are not going to generate our journalism by AI but it is already a useful tool which we use in some areas of news and current affairs.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: How many jobs has AI replaced in RTÉ?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is very hard to say. It is probably a very insignificant number so far, but that is because we are taking a relatively measured approach to it.

We are using it in things like subtitling but some of that is done by outside companies. We are looking at where the technology is robust and delivers high quality but weighing that up against the need to maintain trust in what we do. Sometimes that means not using AI and using properly qualified people to make the judgment.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Mr. Bakhurst said 70 people took up voluntary redundancy last year.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It was 67.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Apologies. Up to yesterday, how many people had been recruited into the organisation?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have recruited 11 people. Over the last nine to 12 months, there have been a number of different recruitments. I might bring in Ms Malone on this. We have recruited 11 new people in skill sets and, in fact, one of them, from risk and compliance, is sitting here. These were things we had to do because of the expert committee reports on areas we needed to improve. A number of those jobs are in technology.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: What about on-air personnel?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I would say one, and that was quite recently on a podcast. Sorry, it is two because we added one on 2FM as well when someone left.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Were there any internal attempts at recruitment before it went external?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. We always look first internally before we go externally.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Was there an official process with interviews and expressions of interest?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Ms Malone will answer this.

Ms Annette Malone: One of the recommendations, as Deputy Farrelly is probably aware, is that we run an expressions of interest process. We ran one for 2FM in 2024 and we got huge interest in it, with 650 applications, of whom 120 were invited in for a pilot and screening. Four individuals have come through that and are on our schedule at the moment, which is great. We have new blood, fresh faces and new voices on 2FM. We ran a second one last year for Radio One and news and current affairs. Again, we got in excess of 550 applications, primarily for "Liveline" when we were replacing the presenter, and for some vacancies in news and current affairs. We broadened that one out because we included other genres such as sports, arts and music. We have used that process for replacing-----

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: So 550 people applied for "Liveline"?

Ms Annette Malone: No, there was a combination of expressions of interest for Radio One and news and current affairs. Then we also included all of the other genres, such as sports, arts and music. Some people applied for everything and some people applied for specific genres. This has provided the shortlists being used to look for panels of presenters. On Radio One, unfortunately, we had to replace one of our presenters and that came through that process, as did "Liveline". We have also used it for podcasts. Recently, we ran a separate one internally to ensure we captured sports because it might have got lost in the Radio One and news and current affairs list.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: That went to an external candidate.

Ms Annette Malone: Sorry, which one?

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: The sports one.

Ms Annette Malone: Yes.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Ms Malone just said it was an internal process.

Ms Annette Malone: No, we had captured sports in the original expressions of interest last year but-----

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: But those applicants were not on a panel for future sports appointments.

Ms Annette Malone: Those individuals who applied in that expression of interest, and I apologise if I was not clear on this, were included but to be 100% sure that we captured everybody internally who might have been interested in it, we ran a separate internal one to ensure everybody who wanted an opportunity in sports had it. It was the combined two together that were looked at for the sports podcast presenter role. They went through the same process using weighted criteria and everything else that has been used. Those panels will be in place for two years and we have committed to do a full review and take it back to the remuneration and management development committee in the first quarter of next year. It has been a very successful process for us.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Have Mr. Bakhurst and the Minister met about the proposals for Montrose?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I have spoken to his officials about it and I briefly mentioned it, among other things, to the Minister about which direction we are heading in, yes.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Has Mr. Bakhurst put forward a business case to him and the Department of public expenditure on a cost-benefit analysis of what he proposes to do by way of cutting back on-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have not got to that phase yet. We have a business case but we---
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Deputy Aidan Farrelly: There is a business case?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: What is the benefit? I presume a serious amount of this will now be outsourced to renting independent production facilities. How much of that cost will be saved by selling a portion of Montrose?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: When we put in a business case we looked at this. We do not need all of the buildings at Montrose any more. Many of them are underused, actually, because of outsourcing over previous years and flexible working. We do not need many of the buildings. As Deputy Farrelly will know, five of them are listed. Many of them are 60 years old or more.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I mean the rental costs that RTÉ will now accrue by going to other locations for long-term production.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: What we looked at was the cost of refurbishing the whole site. Cost avoidance is a big win because it would cost €350 million plus to refurbish buildings we do not

actually need over a long period. The idea is not to go to rent but to move down to one end of the site. We still own the site. We need to refurbish the building but we would do so and still own it.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: Will Mr Bakhurst furnish the committee with this business case? It would be really useful for us.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It has to go through the proper process with officials at the Department but we will give it to the committee, absolutely, at the right time, if that is all right.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: When does Mr. Bakhurst envisage that to be?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It will be in the coming months. It has to go through our board. It has not gone through our board yet, although the board is fully aware of what we are doing.

An Cathaoirleach: We will now take a short break.

Sitting suspended at 12.45 p.m. and resumed at 1.07 p.m.

An Cathaoirleach: Before I call our next speaker, Mr. Bakhurst wants to make a clarification and give some further information on non-procurement. I think he got some figures over the course of our suspension.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I thank the Chair for that. I was asked a question earlier about non-compliant and non-competitive procurement, which I have the numbers for here. In 2024, there were eight suppliers that were either non-compliant or non-competitive and in 2025, there were also eight suppliers in those categories. In both cases, that was around 0.5% of the cumulative purchases we made. It was a relatively small one, but obviously there were individual cases for some of those. I just wanted to give the committee those numbers.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Bakhurst for that. I call Deputy Dolan.

Deputy Albert Dolan: I thank the team at RTÉ for being with us today. On that non-public procurement compliance, we as a committee would have absolutely anticipated there would be some level of non-compliant public procurement, as we have with all State entities, but we ask bodies and organisations to make sure they endeavour to reduce that to the lowest possible amount. It is about providing confidence to the State and to wider entities that if somebody procures something, it is done in a proper manner. It also provides confidence in public contracts. I just wanted to highlight that.

At the outset, I will say there are many people in the RTÉ organisation who work very hard to provide fantastic content, an incredible service and great journalism, and who endeavour to get that out there. Before we started this engagement today, I was thinking of some of the big names who have retired over the past few years and would have given a lifetime of service to RTÉ. When you think about the lifetime of service so many people who go into RTÉ give, their commitment to the role and how proud they would be to say they work for RTÉ, it has been an incredibly difficult time for the organisation since the 2023 debacle and the uncovering of a lot of very poor governance that was ongoing.

At the outset, I note a media report yesterday stated that TV licence sales declined by 200,000 in the past four years. Then you have 300 RTÉ staff applying for the redundancy. They are

essentially looking for the exit door. What has Mr. Bakhurst done in the past three years to turn that around and rebuild morale in the organisation?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I thank the Deputy and I welcome this opportunity because this has been one of the core things I and the leadership team have been trying to do between us, which is to rebuild morale inside the organisation. It is obviously very challenging in the middle of very significant changes and very rapid transformation in the organisation.

We have done a number of things. First of all, at the heart of it is that staff felt they were not properly communicated with by the director general or by the leadership team. We have introduced very regular town halls, where I appear. We give a briefing to staff on the biggest things going on in the organisation. There is time, in every one of those town halls, for questions and answers at the end. We take questions and answers in advance as well. I know members of the leadership team have their own town halls with their own teams in radio, TV or the audience area.

We have introduced a significant amount of investment in learning across the organisation and that also-----

Deputy Albert Dolan: On all of that, it is all welcome in respect of trying to improve communication to rebuild morale but I feel that does not connect. If I was working in RTÉ and saw how some of the recruitment processes have been done in recent years to bring in external talent to head up divisions, I would be sure there were people within Mr. Bakhurst's organisation who felt overlooked or really let down by how it was not felt that the talent was already within the organisation. Especially when RTÉ has such financial pressures, how does Mr. Bakhurst square that off with going out to the market and trying to pay top dollar for top talent?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: All the competitions we have now are done internally and externally. For the key roles, particularly senior roles, we have to get the very best people to lead the organisation and we have been extremely lucky with the people we have managed to recruit and bring in who have got huge and, in some cases, international experience. They bring a skill set that we did not have inside the organisation. People want to have the opportunity to apply and have their chance to do the interview if they get to that stage. In every case for the people we have brought in, if you ask people, they would see now exactly why we brought those people in because they bring a new way of thinking. Frankly, the organisation needed that at the highest level. We needed a new way of thinking and a new approach.

Deputy Albert Dolan: I am not suggesting that RTÉ cannot bring in new people from outside but is there not a value-for-money proposition in employing people internally who already have a working knowledge of how RTÉ functions? They have an understanding of the organisational structure and systems and they already represent the RTÉ brand while having prior service. It is something I thought I would highlight.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I will say that at least one of the members of the current leadership team came in at a particular time in their career but also at a significant discount to what they were earning in the commercial sector because they wanted to join in the turnaround of the organisation and they believe in public-service broadcasting. We do not always pay top dollar-----

Deputy Albert Dolan: I am conscious of the time. I want to move on to another issue. This is in regard to the FIFA World Cup qualifier in Czechia. Some 41 staff travelled to Czechia for the World Cup qualifier. What was the total cost of that exercise?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The total cost was €57,000.

Deputy Albert Dolan: Okay, so that was €57,000 and 41 people travelled-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Then we have the rights on top of that. That was the cost of that team.

Deputy Albert Dolan: How many people did RTÉ have to send to the World Cup?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: How many have we sent to the World Cup now? We have sent six.

Deputy Albert Dolan: Okay. I have to compliment RTÉ. The coverage has been fantastic, with 104 games. I see it coming up on my Instagram feed through RTÉ Sport. It is fantastic but how on earth can RTÉ send only six people and they manage to cover the entirety of the World Cup but it had to send 41 people to do one World Cup qualifier?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is because the two things are very different. The teams out at the actual World Cup are purely commentary teams. We have not done our presenting or other programmes from out there.

On the Czech thing, we would really welcome a chance to talk about this. First of all, you can see the numbers of people consuming the coverage of the World Cup, which the sports and operations teams have done a fantastic job of delivering, has driven record numbers on RTÉ Player and on-----

Deputy Albert Dolan: The question is, did RTÉ need to send 41 people to Czechia and how was the decision made to send that many people?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The decision was made in a number of areas. First of all, we wanted to present from out there because there were Irish fans there and we wanted to get the voice of Irish fans as part of the coverage. The Deputy will see from the World Cup; it is pure commentary. There is no-----

Deputy Albert Dolan: Even at that, say RTÉ sent the same six people out to the World Cup qualifier and then it sent two teams of three people out on the streets meeting people. That is 12 people. Where is the extra 30 required?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: To be crystal clear, this qualifier was the biggest game that Ireland had for probably a couple of decades. It was a major national event. It is part of our job to reflect that. When we took this decision, part of the decision about some of the teams we sent - particularly for some of the radio programmes - was because we were closely liaising with our commercial director, who said that this was a huge public service event and it needed to be covered properly but also that we could drive considerable commercial revenue by having bespoke teams out there for individual radio-----

Deputy Albert Dolan: Does Mr. Bakhurst not understand how sickening it would be for the public at home looking at this to think that 41 people were sent to the World Cup qualifier because Ireland was playing and it was a great day out for the RTÉ team-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, can I just-----

Deputy Albert Dolan: -----but only six went to cover the entirety of the World Cup and they are doing a great job?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No because it is entirely different. As I said to the Deputy, this was about actually presenting programmes-----

Deputy Albert Dolan: Give me the justification for 41 heads having to go to Czechia.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It was to present individual programmes, and connect with parts of the audience we do not connect with quite often to get the voices of real Irish fans.

Deputy Albert Dolan: I have told Mr. Bakhurst how RTÉ could have done that with 12 people, so why did it need 41 people?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: You could not do it with 12 people.

Deputy Albert Dolan: They were not all presenting.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. I want to be fair to the people we sent there because they were all hard-working RTÉ staff. There was not a single person who went to Prague - even though one or two of us were invited - who went on a freebie, a nice-to-have, a jolly or whatever. All those people who went there worked extremely hard across a number of days. If you look at the total cost - €57,000 for 41 people, which includes flights, hotels, food, transport, taxis and everything - it was provided at good value. We have had zero criticism from the audience on this. One or two people have been a bit fixated about it. We have had zero criticism. In fact, we have had the opposite. Not just the numbers but the response from the audience about the coverage across all the platforms was extremely positive. In the end, as I said to the Deputy, RTÉ has, as he is well aware-----

Deputy Albert Dolan: I am conscious of the time. I think the disconnect here is that RTÉ got a bailout from the Government. It got massive-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, it was not a bailout. It was public funding.

Deputy Albert Dolan: -----public funding. The issue is that the public believes that RTÉ should be as nimble and agile as possible. I agree with Mr. Bakhurst. I accept that €57,000 was not a crazy number to send 41 people abroad. It was fairly agile but I wonder if it required the 41 people. I want to move on to one last point before we finish-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: On that, we could have not presented "Liveline" or RTÉ 2FM from there. We could have cut the numbers back but in the end, we would have cut our commercial revenue. The commercial revenue paid for this many times over. That is all I would say to the audience watching this.

Deputy Albert Dolan: Okay. I have a last point before I finish. We learned today that "Up for the Match", which has now been outsourced, is going to cost more than it was costing. How on earth is that decision consistent with prudent financial management? If there was any show that RTÉ presents that is successful, that people get excited about and want to watch and tune in for, it is "Up for the Match", and its format has been functioning. Does Mr. Bakhurst believe the format of "Up for the Match" was failing, or what justification can he give for RTÉ spending more money than it was previously spending on "Up for the Match"?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The Deputy is right. The format has been functioning for many years but you do need to look at how you refresh programmes. Presenting it from Croke Park, the heart of the GAA, on the night before is extremely attractive as an audience proposition and is much more ambitious creatively. In the end, it absolutely has to provide value for money but one thing we look at in terms of value for money is whether this is delivering something that is high-quality and will benefit the audience. It is a creative decision.

Deputy Albert Dolan: Here is my last question. Why did RTÉ have to outsource that when it already has hundreds of highly talented people working for it who were successfully delivering the programme? If it is just a venue change, why did RTÉ have to outsource it? Why could it not do it itself?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: First of all, whenever we use an outside broadcast, we have a contract. We do not do that ourselves. We have a contract that has been the same for years. All outside broadcasts are done through contractors. The second thing I would say is the Deputy almost answered the question himself. We have a World Cup going on. We have 104 games and we had the sports department flat out. It would be very similar people who would be working after the match, so there was also the availability of staff after that, and summer holidays and so on. We had huge GAA games as well, by the way, at the same time. Our sports department has steam coming out its ears. Part of it is about who is available to do it, but another part of it in the end is that we take creative decisions as to whether this will potentially be a better programme. I do not know until we see it. If it is great, we will do it again. If it is not great, we will not do it again.

Deputy Albert Dolan: I thank Mr. Bakhurst for his engagement.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I welcome the witnesses back to the committee. The first thing to acknowledge is that RTÉ is certainly in a very different place from where it was two years ago when the representatives were last with us. We should acknowledge that. We always like at the beginning of hearings to acknowledge good work that is being done, even if we tend to focus on the areas where issues arise.

I want to clarify two items. Regarding the League of Ireland bidding, am I correct in stating that Virgin Media did not outbid RTÉ on it but that RTÉ would not commit to broadcasting one game every week? Will Mr. Bakhurst clarify that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are happy to provide details to the committee on this, but the process as I understood it at the time, and I have just conferred with Mr. Lynch about it, is that we bid, alongside Virgin, at a competitive level for the existing package, which was half and half. It was like a joint bid. The next thing we knew, we got a call from the FAI saying we had failed and that Virgin would be taking all the games.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: So it was not put to RTÉ that it must enquire and it refused.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. We had no chance to come back on it. It was a done deal.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Will Mr. Bakhurst confirm the figure for the Champions League? Was it €3.5 million?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. I am sorry, we cannot.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: We cannot confirm that but it was less than €3.5 million.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Will Mr. Bakhurst confirm or estimate the figure for the advertising revenue that accrues from the broadcasting of those matches, or has RTÉ segmented it that way?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Of the Champions League?

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We can, but it would be a rough one because there are two things. There is the spot advertising and sponsorship around the games themselves and then there is the overall impact it has on RTÉ's share across the year, which is significant, and that would be harder to put a number on.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I echo the points Deputy Byrne made earlier in regard to the game. Part of the reason we have great attendances at league games is that they are not on TV, but that option should be available. I think-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We were very disappointed, and I have said that to the FAI, that we did not have a chance to get the FAI games. We are still doing the FAI Cup, but we would have liked to do it.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: That may be an opportunity to return to. Can I just come back to our summer meetings two years ago? We issued a report. There were 21 recommendations dealing with the tripartite agreement, issues around the barter account and other issues. Have the witnesses examined those 21 recommendations? I imagine they did not go unread. Do they feel RTÉ is in compliance with a certain number of them? Will Mr. Bakhurst comment on that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Clearly, we examined them at the time and tried to make sure we were addressing all of them. Honestly, we have not looked at them in the last 12 months, but I am happy to go back and look at them. Ms O'Shaughnessy here is our new compliance officer and we could ask her to do-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Mr. Bakhurst might send us correspondence afterwards clarifying which ones he feels RTÉ is in compliance with-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Of course.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: -----and we might review that. A number of them were of particular concern to me. There was a commitment to the publishing of the receipt of gifts by RTÉ and to publishing staff salaries above €150,000. Where are we on both of those?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have a register of gifts, which is an internal register. People have to declare gifts over €50 and that is kept by our compliance team.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Is that available to RTÉ's auditor?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It will be. It is certainly available to the C and AG if he would like to see it, and if the auditor wants to see it, of course.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: What about the publication of salaries above €150,000 for all employees?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, we looked at that. It was a voluntary thing that we published all the salaries of the leadership team. We do not have to do that. I do not think any other semi-State does that. We publish every year bands of salaries in our annual report. We did look into whether we could publish salaries over €150,000 and we ran into significant problems with the GDPR. We wanted to do it but the first few people we spoke to said no, that it was their private information and that we could not do it. The external legal advice was that we could not do it.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Was it a mistake for Mr. Bakhurst to make that commitment at the committee?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I did not make that commitment. I think it was the chair at the time who made the commitment that we would try to do it, and we did try to do it.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Okay.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I think Siún Ní Raghallaigh said that at the time, but we did look into trying to do it and that was the obstacle we ran up against.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Maybe we will move on. I think the committee was given financial documentation for the barter account up until, let us say, 2023. That account was closed.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, the barter account is not closed but it is run entirely differently. If you run advertising, you have to have a barter account, which is about selling unused advertising. The thing that is completely changed is that it goes through the central accounts, it is all accounted for, and the money is moved every month from the barter account into the central accounts. It is only used for general funding of RTE. It is not used to buy anything else.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I cannot remember off the top of my head the scale of the transactions back and forth, in and out of the account, but if Mr. Bakhurst is suggesting it is being used in a very different way, it is likely that it is a much smaller account than it previously was.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Possibly, except the money is just used in a completely transparent and different way now. It is probably several hundred thousand euro a year, depending on how much unsold advertising we have.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: So, the chief financial officer has full oversight. It is part of the annual accounts and so on.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Correct. As does the board, yes.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I understand the nature of barter accounts is that you basically trade without money with other organisations. Am I right in saying that in some cases advertising such as cheap low-cost advertising, the JML-type ads, were also being fed into that barter account? Is that still happening?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I would not have the detail. I will have to get back to the Deputy on that. The main object of it is to trade unsold advertising.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: That is my point. RTE has unsold advertising that is coming into the account. What is going out, Mr. Bakhurst feels, is fully compliant with-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. The unsold advertising comes in. It is offered to the agencies. They might buy it at a discount. We have to obviously pay to sell that advertising differently, but any money that is raised from it comes directly into the central accounts.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: The next area was the area of agents. I think I am right in saying that Mr. Bakhurst said RTÉ would no longer deal with agents. Is that the case?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, I said I would not personally deal with agents - one agent in particular. Of course we have to deal with agents - that is part of the business - but they are dealt with by my colleagues in the legal department.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I recall the conversation differently in that RTÉ was going to no longer deal with talent agents and it was going to try to deal directly with people who were effectively its permanent presenters.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We do try to do that as far as possible but it is obviously everyone's right to have an agent if they want to. As we said earlier, more and more presenters now are actually employees rather than on contracts, so we have fewer of these to deal with.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Is RTÉ engaged in any other commercial arrangements with presenters? I refer to RTÉ, a presenter and a commercial partner. Is it subject to, effectively, a tripartite agreement with any other presenters?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: If the Deputy means Renault-style, no, we are not. I have made that really clear. There are no side letters and no side deals. We pay them to present and that is that.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Am I right in saying there were proposals to have dual sign-off on contracts and so on? The non-sitting of RemCo was the biggest issue. Will Mr. Bakhurst confirm the number of times RemCo has sat since 2023?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I will ask Mr. Shortt to come in on the number as the company secretary. I will say every single presenter contract over €100,000 now comes through the full leadership team, which was not the case before. Then it has to go to RemCo for approval.

Mr. Robert Shortt: RemCo sat 13 times in last year's calendar year. It has sat ten times this year to date.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: That is a substantial culture change.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I think if the Deputy spoke to our board members, he would find they are sitting on a lot more committees now than they were.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: It is challenging to recruit board members in that environment sometimes as well.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is challenging enough, yes.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Does Mr. Bakhurst have a final cost for the investigations RTÉ had to undertake as a result of the events that were subject to the PAC report? A number of external consultants were used. Does Mr. Bakhurst have a number for that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, but I can try to get it for the Deputy. As he says, it was over a period of a couple of years and there were a number of different outside consultants and legal firms. We can try to get a best estimate-----

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: It is a collective number that can easily be calculated.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is a significant enough number.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: It was a cost to RTÉ.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, 100%.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Since 2023, are there any outstanding legal cases with staff as a result of terminations? A number of staff stepped down over that period. Does RTÉ have any outstanding cases or are all of those resolved?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We always have a number of cases going through the WRC.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I mean cases that relate to that time period.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: For 2023 I do not think we have any outstanding cases, and certainly not high-profile ones.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I know the kind of question the Deputy is asking, and the answer is "No".

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I turn to the former chief executive, Ms Forbes. Are there any outstanding cases relating to her?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: She is the former director general.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: My apologies.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, we do not.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: There are no outstanding commercial arrangements with her and no outstanding relationship between RTÉ and Ms Forbes.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Correct.

Deputy Joe Neville: I thank the witnesses for coming. I know these meetings are never easy. My first question is a high-level one. What is the RTÉ budget for 2026?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The overall budget?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: It is €405 million.

Deputy Joe Neville: How much of that will be licence fee?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: One moment, we want to give the Deputy the exact number.

Deputy Joe Neville: Even on a high level, of the €405 million, how much of it-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The licence fee is approximately €180 million.

Deputy Joe Neville: That is nearly half.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Is the Deputy talking about total public funding? That is €240 million.

Deputy Joe Neville: No. I am going to try to break it down. What is the overall budget? Mr. Lynch said it was €405 million. Then the licence fee is €180 million. Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: If you take into account Department of Social Protection TV licences, then yes.

Deputy Joe Neville: I am just thinking about licences.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: The estimate at the moment is €185.21 million.

Deputy Joe Neville: What is the commercial revenue?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Commercial revenue is €158.2 million.

Deputy Joe Neville: What is the remaining €60 million or €70 million? Where does that come from?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Another €54.79 million is the estimated top-up.

Deputy Joe Neville: That is what I want to get to. I wanted to clarify the whole picture in my head. We have €55 million of a top-up. That has been arranged for 2025, 2026 and 2027. Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is correct.

Deputy Joe Neville: Those amounts are set out. What do the witnesses believe will happen in 2028?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: In terms of what?

Deputy Joe Neville: I am sure RTÉ does three- and four-year rolling plans.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: We are in the middle of our five-year model work right now for projections. We do not have a final figure for 2028 yet.

Deputy Joe Neville: Obviously, RTÉ will be modelling out. There is a delta between what it is able to raise and the licence fee. If the €55 million is brought in to fill the licence fee gap we discussed earlier, what will that figure be by 2028?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is a matter for negotiation. We are working at the moment on the five-year plan that-----

Deputy Joe Neville: I know it is subject to negotiation with the Government but even based on RTÉ's own model-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: As a best guess, it would depend on whether we are looking at an increase in line with the CPI.

Deputy Joe Neville: By the time we get to 2028, it may be €65 million.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, it depends on what the CPI is.

Deputy Joe Neville: That is within reason. I am trying to estimate forward. The best guess would be €60 million or €65 million. Do the witnesses feel RTÉ will be going back to the Government for support?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We absolutely need to have discussions with the Government, which we have started, but not yet formally, about future public funding because it is a public intervention. As the Deputy says, €158 million is commercial and the rest is public funding. Whether that comes from licence fee or direct funding is a political decision.

Deputy Joe Neville: There is a difference. People willingly paying the licence fee is one thing, but a separate State subvention is another. I asked the Taoiseach yesterday in the Dáil what his view was on the funding model. He said there have been different views in the Chamber. What is Mr. Bakhurst's view on what the funding model should look like?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It genuinely would not be for me to say that. All I would say is it would have to be a funding model that, ideally, can fund a quality public service media organisation that has the right amount of independence and complies with the new European legislation, the European Media Freedom Act. When we got the three-year deal I said to the Government that we would not come back during those three years and ask for any more money beyond what the Government had agreed in its headline numbers. Within that, there is a slight variance in direct funding depending on how the licence fee is performing. We do everything in our power to try to persuade people to pay and advertise to show them they are getting value for money. Our audience research shows-----

Deputy Joe Neville: We are seeing a continuous slippage in that licence fee.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Unfortunately, that is the case around Europe. The BBC has exactly the same issue at the moment.

Deputy Joe Neville: I was going to ask about that. If the BBC is saying it, it is obviously an issue, and that is fine too. I want to tie back in with something else that was said earlier in relation to the figure of 400 people. I want to clarify if that figure is between redundancies and people leaving organically, or is it a combination of both?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is a combination of the two.

Deputy Joe Neville: The 400 number is a combination of the two. Roughly, how many of those people will RTÉ be able to flex out organically? How many will be redundancies?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Because it is a voluntary exit scheme, it depends on how many people apply and how many people we can exit. We know we have 170-odd retiring over the next period of time. We will see how many we can get out of that because that is a much more cost-efficient way to reduce the size of the organisation.

Deputy Joe Neville: Yes, absolutely. Does having an almost rolling redundancy plan mean that people are not leaving organically in between? A lot of people will not leave unless they get a redundancy. Can everyone apply? If I were leaving a job for a new job and I was an employee in RTÉ, could I leave in the morning and ask for a redundancy before I leave? How is that working?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, there is a window in which people can apply. None of the leadership team is eligible to apply, but anyone else in the organisation can apply in that window.

Deputy Joe Neville: What is the window?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It depends on when it opens. We normally give six weeks or so for people to apply.

Deputy Joe Neville: They will know it is coming.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, absolutely.

Deputy Joe Neville: RTÉ will probably not have anybody leaving organically outside of those windows.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We will because we get retirements and resignations.

Deputy Joe Neville: What about outside of retirements?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We get some resignations, but not many.

Deputy Joe Neville: That is what I was wondering. That might impact. I think Mr. Bakhurst said that 97 people left last year and 11 joined.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There were 11 new recruits, yes.

Deputy Joe Neville: There were some high-profile ones. How does RTÉ dictate the salary levels for some of the new high-profile presenters? What is the baseline for judging what they are entitled to? A new head of podcasting came in maybe two weeks ago. How does that work from a salary and HR perspective?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I will talk in general terms-----

Deputy Joe Neville: That is fine.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Generally, if we are looking to bring someone in from the outside, we ask how much value they have to the audience, what would we pay if we appointed someone internally and what more does the person bring. In some cases, we work closely with our commercial director, particularly in the area of podcasts, about what commercial revenue this could deliver. Those would all be factors in deciding the salary.

Deputy Joe Neville: With a role like that, would the head of sport be aware or would the head of radio? Would the head of sport be aware when RTÉ is doing sports podcasting?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy Joe Neville: They would sit in on those interviews.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Not necessarily.

Deputy Joe Neville: It is just when you are trying to let people go, then you have people internally who might like that position as well.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The head of sport was obviously aware of the process and Patricia Monahan spoke to him about it throughout.

Deputy Joe Neville: He was happy with that, was he?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We had some applications from within sport.

Deputy Joe Neville: There was no one in RTÉ Sport. It was felt that getting someone from the outside was preferable.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, it was the decision of the head of audio, the head of podcasting and the commercial director combined. It was signed off by the full leadership team.

Deputy Joe Neville: I also note, because it came out in the news yesterday, that RTÉ will have the same presenter for "The Late Late Show" next year. This is timely from a news perspective. Once again, with salaries-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It was not deliberate.

Deputy Joe Neville: Yes, exactly. What would be the salary for someone in a position like that? What about transport costs, perks and associated costs? Are all those costs rolled up into the full contract? Do they have to go with them themselves, or is there a separate portion for them?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: They would be rolled up into the contract. It depends on the individual and what we think is appropriate in terms of transport or wardrobe costs for presenters. In terms of the salary itself, I said in 2023 that no one would earn more than the director general and no one is employed directly on more than the director general earns.

Deputy Joe Neville: I am not talking about barter accounts, but is there no separate element of there being a cost associated with this role that is treated separately to a direct cost?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, there might be because they get wardrobe, for example.

Deputy Joe Neville: I mean outside of wardrobe.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There may be some transport costs although not significant ones, and that full package would have gone through the leadership team and the remuneration committee as well.

Deputy Joe Neville: I want to touch on something else. I think the RTÉ Player has actually got very good. I have used it quite a lot recently. I always used it, especially for all the matches. On that model, could it be RTÉ is making it so good that people who might not be liable for a licence are availing of it? Is that possible?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is possible, yes.

Deputy Joe Neville: Does that make strategic sense?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Strategically, there is no doubt that we have to do it because that is where the audience is going. We gave the figures for the Czech game. The player is now delivering equal numbers to RTÉ 1 and RTÉ 2 quite often on these big events. It is certainly where the young audience is going. I am pleased at what the Deputy said because we have actually invested a lot in it.

Deputy Joe Neville: Even the ads. The whole platform is much stronger.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. There is undoubtedly that dimension to it, so when the Department is thinking about future structure of funding and whether it is the licence fee or

not, if it is a licence fee, in my view it has to be device neutral because increasingly the audience is using the player to access our material.

Deputy Joe Neville: Mr. Bakhurst said some of those in the sports department had steam coming out of their ears because of the amount of work. Take “Up For the Match”, for example. Unfortunately, since I was young, Kildare has not been there. I think Daithí Ó Sé is doing it. He would not necessarily be on the sports team. What members of the sports teams would be there? It is an entertainment production as well. I was just curious about that. What elements would be involved?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: For “Up for the Match”?

Deputy Joe Neville: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is a mixed team, as you would expect, of entertainment and sport. Some of the presenters will be sport and some will be other presenters now.

Deputy Joe Neville: Okay. I thank Mr. Bakhurst.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: The witnesses are all very welcome. They have said they have made certain reforms in RTÉ and the Comptroller and Auditor General has been helping with them. Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, I would not categorise it like that.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: How does the Comptroller and Auditor General feel the reforms that were supposed to be undertaken are progressing?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: I would not be willing to venture an opinion until I have done some audit work.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Okay. How does Mr. Bakhurst feel himself? Does he feel RTÉ has got through the reforms? Has it made a lot of changes?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have made a huge amount of changes. It is a very different organisation and it is very different for audiences, it is to be hoped, in terms of the player, the news app and so on. There will be more of that to come. It is a massively different organisation but there are more changes to make. There has certainly been an enormous amount of change on the governance side. Just look at the number of remuneration and management development committee meetings or the way the board operates with the leadership team and the communication with staff. It is work in progress and we are ambitious to make it a brilliant place to work but also a brilliant place for audiences.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: On transparency, how did Mr. Bakhurst feel when the Minister, Patrick O'Donovan, approached him saying that he did not feel there was transparency about the protests that were aired on RTÉ? Was there a conversation with the Minister?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I did not have a conversation with the Minister.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Who had the conversation?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am not aware anyone in RTÉ-----

Deputy Cathy Bennett: He said RTÉ had a conversation with him.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: He may have had one in news, or his advisers may have done that. It would be quite common, yes.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: That would be quite common?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, from all political parties. When I was head of news, I used to speak to party leaders and party members all the time. I did not agree with them a lot of the time.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: So, party members from political parties come to RTÉ and ask them what to air and what not to air.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: TDs, yes. They will venture an opinion and we should listen because sometimes they are right but I would say mostly they are not, respectfully.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Does this coincide with the reduction in funding and that RTÉ is not going to get funding after 2027?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, I do not think so.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Mr. Bakhurst does not feel hard done by or anything?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Future funding is going to be critically important to the future success of RTÉ and I would hope that people would consider that in the context of the importance of RTÉ and public service broadcasting to the country, whether that is news and current affairs or whether it is live events like the World Cup and so on which bring huge entertainment to people's lives. We are dependent 60% on public funding.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: If RTÉ is not going to get the public funding, I suppose it has a model. Has it some kind of business plan going forward? Mr. Lynch said there was a five-year plan that he was starting to work on. What is the plan in relation to selling property? Is there a plan?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Selling property?

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Selling property, yes.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I can talk about that because I have probably been as much involved as Mr. Lynch. Mr. Lynch can talk about it if he wants. The plan on Donnybrook is that we will string down to one end. We will invest in what is called stage 7, which is near Nutley Lane. Once we have done that, we will sell the rest of the land. We need to find a way properly to finance that with a loan to do it. We looked at all different options. We could move off the land but then we would not own our property anymore. We would probably be renting and I do not think that is the right solution for the national broadcaster.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Did RTÉ do a cost analysis of that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have done cost analyses until we are blue in the face, yes.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: What does that say? Would renting or owning its own property be more beneficial?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Renting off-site versus having our own on site would be relatively comparable, but in the end, if you own your own thing, in 20 years you still own it.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: That is okay. Did RTÉ bring that cost analysis to the Minister's attention?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It has not gone to the board yet. It will be but we will brief officials about it soon.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: On the EU audiovisual media services directive in 2018, RTÉ was fined. How much was it fined for not implementing that?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: That was a payment made by the Department.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Okay.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Not by RTÉ

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Not by RTÉ. Who had to pay that? The Department?

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: The Department. It was paid from the Vote. It was one of two cases last year – two Departments – where I drew attention to a payment for late transposition of an Act.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: It had to pay €4.3 million.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: It was €4.3 million in this case, yes.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: What were we not doing right? Did it come from RTÉ?

Mr. Adam Larragy: It related to the transposition of the audiovisual media services directive. That included new provisions to regulate video-sharing platform services like TikTok or YouTube. That was given effect in Irish law through the Online Safety in Media Regulation Act 2022.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: So in Ireland that was not done right.

Mr. Adam Larragy: There was a delay in the legislation, and the legislation set up a new regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, and it had to make an online safety code and other series of regulatory codes such as the media service code. Therefore it was only really closed off after the legislation was passed, the new body was established and the new body put in place the regulatory framework.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Is that a fine we will incur every year if this is not-----

Mr. Adam Larragy: No, it has been closed now.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Where did the €4.3 million come out of? Whose Vote?

Mr. Adam Larragy: The Department's Vote.

Mr. Seamus McCarthy: Vote 33.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Another waste of taxpayer's money. RTÉ changed auditors between 2023 and 2024. Why?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We had to go out for procurement. In the end Deloitte did not apply so we chose from the shortlist and appointed Mazars.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Why did they not apply?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not know. I think it had done it for a few years. I think it is best practice anyway to change auditors after a number of years.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: It was not a disagreement with RTÉ?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Not at all, no. We had a good relationship. They were very good auditors.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Okay. On all the staff who were made redundant from RTÉ, was there ever an apology or anything given to those staff for what happened? Why were they all made redundant?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Which ones, sorry?

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Mr. Bakhurst mentioned earlier.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The ones who took redundancy?

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It was voluntary redundancy, so they chose to leave the organisation.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Okay. I will continue on that. What are the plans for “Fair City”?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We have done a very extensive feasibility study of the future of “Fair City”. We will downsize the site and at some point we are going to have to move it off site if we want to carry on doing it. We have done an extensive piece of work on that which is nearly finished to look at the future of “Fair City” and what it would cost.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: What is the future?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not know because we have not decided yet.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Okay.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: What I would say is, because a lot of people work on it, it is an incredibly important programme to RTÉ.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: How many people work on it?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: About 80 or so.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: What is the cost yearly?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: It is €14 million.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is a significant decision about whether we carry on and if we carry on where we do it.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Deputy Boland mentioned earlier there is a voucher scheme and it cost €2.1 million. What are those vouchers for?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That was the staff vouchers. Every member of staff got €1,000, apart from me.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Why would every member of staff get €1,000.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It was part of the overall pay agreement with the unions.

By giving the staff a voucher, we got another six months to negotiate a pay deal for two years, which we did, successfully. It was part of the overall pay deal, so when we agreed the level of the pay deal, the voucher was taken into consideration. Also, I was quite in favour of it because it is a tax-efficient thing, which the State has enabled, but also, if we give €1,000 to each member of staff, it means the lower paid get proportionally more than the highly paid. There was only one member of staff who did not get it.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: RTÉ has outlined the staff salaries in a chart. Is that chart correct? I felt there were a few discrepancies in the chart regarding the staff members. There was a discrepancy in relation to two people who were on the incorrect pay band. Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Which one is the Deputy talking about?

Deputy Cathy Bennett: It was the on-air presenters and the leadership. Mr. Bakhurst had noted on the pay bands that G. Lee and D. Maloney were two who were on the incorrect band.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: They were not on the incorrect band. I think they were in the top ten. The fact was that when we took the decision about Derek Mooney and putting him in the top ten, it would have affected their position, but it did not affect their salary.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: In relation to contractors and employees, there was a huge variance in the pay going to a contractor, which was €250,000, compared with any of the other salaries. Does that incentivise people to be on contracts in preference to working for RTÉ?

Ms Annette Malone: That grid shows all the salary scales. That one refers to the personal contracts, which are a band ahead. We have three manager scales and then personal contracts. They are all employees in RTÉ. The contractor population is different. There are no scales for the contractors.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Did the witnesses have media training today before they came in? No. They are just natural.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. We had a couple of meetings to brief us on the areas with Vivienne Flood, our public affairs person, and with Neil O’Gorman, who is the head of communications, but no media training.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Was there a cost for that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. They work for RTÉ.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Does RTÉ spend a lot of money on consultants?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, but not media ones.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: How much did it spend on consultants in 2024?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I would have to check that.

Deputy Cathy Bennett: Actually, I have it here on the sheet.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We do spend a lot on consultants. It is the right thing to do because--

Deputy Cathy Bennett: I think RTÉ spent €2.44 million.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It seems like a lot, but individually, there would be very big jobs-----

Deputy Cathy Bennett: It is a lot for anybody. I think it looks a lot.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Believe me, I do not want to spend that much, but that includes all legal advice and financial advice. We might bring in one of the big four companies to look at tax affairs or whatever. Each one of those pieces of work costs a not insignificant amount of money, but we go through procurement.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I thank the witnesses for being here. I will start with the overall position. Mr. Bakhurst issued a statement yesterday that the overall package was €725 million, that RTÉ would be able to work within that, and that there would not be a need for any additional funding outside of that. Mr. Bakhurst stands over that position.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, 100%.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Within that, it is also true to say that the funding the State has given, and will have to give this year and next year, over and above the licence fee collection, is going to have to increase.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is right. That was part of the overall. If we look at the numbers, which are €225 million, €240 million and €260 million, it was always going to have to increase.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: For example, in 2025, it was €41 million, or thereabouts. This year, it is going to be somewhere in the region of €56 million.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, €55 million.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: That is about €15 million additional.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The thing about that is it would have been a slightly bigger increase except RTÉ successfully invested in a commercial entity that we sold for nearly €4 million. That money has gone back into public funding, so it has reduced the level of public funding.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Will Mr. Bakhurst tell us a little about that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We had a 13.6% stake in a company called Vizor. The company was set within 2rn at RTÉ. We just kind of posted it and supported it for a number of years, and then last year, it was bid for by, I think, an American company. We took 13.6% of the overall money, which we-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: That was a success.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It was a commercial success, yes, and a couple of million off the public money.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Projecting forward to 2027, that overall envelope earmarks €260 million to come from the State in a combination of licence fee collection and State funding.

Realistically, even if the licence fee collection stood still, we would be looking at somewhere close to €75 million-plus in direct State funding in 2027.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, it will go up by another €20 million.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: How realistic is the licence fee revenue projection? Mr. Bakhurst said it would be €185 million this year, and it was €183 million in 2025 - I am rounding off the figures. We know it is declining. How is RTÉ increasing it in its projections?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Part of that increase is down to the free licences that are paid for.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: By the Department of Social Protection.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The actual sales and licence fees go up and down month to month, but the general trend is downwards. We will do everything we can in terms of marketing and so on to support that, but there is a downward trend, and that is not unique to Ireland, I have to say.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: From 2022 to 2025, €38 million less was collected in licence fees, which is 17% down. We are continuing to see that downward trend. I am questioning how realistic the licence fee collection projection is for 2026 and 2027.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I think it is realistic, but it is not set in stone. This was always the argument-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I am sorry for interrupting. If it does not stand up in 2027, the State is going to have to step in to provide more of that additional funding to reach the €260 million. Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, but that was the point of multi-annual funding. When we were just dependent on the licence fee, and it is worth saying that the price of the licence fee to the audience has not increased since 2008, so-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I understand that.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There has been zero increase. Obviously, evasion has gone up, and the number of no-TV homes has gone up, but that was always the point - the importance of multi-annual funding - so the organisation knows year to year what it is getting and we are not subject to the vagaries of the TV licence fee.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I understand. However, in 2027, it is likely that if the licence fee reduction continues in terms of the overall collection, the amount the State has to step in with to bring it up to €260 million is going to have to increase.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, that is the agreement.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I think that was the point being made yesterday in some of the reporting.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. I think a different point was being made. It was that we were going to go back and ask for more of a bailout, as it was called. First, it is not a bailout, and second, we are not asking for any more than what the Government has already agreed. That was really important to me. When we were lucky enough to get this multi-annual funding,

which has been so important, the agreement between me, the then Minister and, for that matter, the Taoiseach was that if we got this funding, we would reform RTÉ, which we are doing, and we would not come back and ask for any more money on top of that public funding, which we are not doing.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I need to move on because of the time. Deputy Neville asked earlier how much it costs to run RTÉ, and the answer was €405 million for this year. How does that compare with 2023, when issues started to arise? How much did it cost to run RTÉ in 2023?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I have last year's figure, which is €353.2 million.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It has gone up by over €50 million.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I want to be crystal clear about this. There are a few elements to this. The cost of running RTÉ, staffing, overheads and so on is absolutely static and, in fact, it has gone down year on year. The extra money has gone into things like investment in the player and investment in independent productions and high-quality drama, which is what we said we would do.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I understand that, but there has been more than €50 million of an increase in running costs for the organisation from last year to this year. At a time when RTÉ is introducing these significant reforms that Mr. Bakhurst referred to, it is costing €50 million more.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: We had a three-year plan as part of the funding settlement, so we knew what our budget was coming into 2026 and we planned accordingly for that. The cost drivers are anything from investment in the player to cybersecurity. Things like the cost of computing have gone up significantly, and we know it is up by about 45%. The spend on the independent sector is going up by about €8 million. We have our pay deal of 2.5%.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I do not have time to drill into it. I think it will come as a surprise that RTÉ is making a big argument around reforms, cost savings and so on, but the actual budget has gone up by €50 million.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. It should not be a surprise because the budget has been agreed as an increase each year. The point of that was that we could invest in things like digital.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Is it not the case that the organisation should be trimming costs and reducing its overall outlays?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are trimming costs all round. We have reduced the cost of a huge number of things.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: But RTÉ is spending more.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is spending more because the audience is getting more. They are getting more-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Mr. Bakhurst is saying that RTÉ is expanding its services.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. For example, RTÉ typically would have made one or maybe two high-quality dramas a year.

We will have four in the coming year. The audience is getting more. They are getting a new audio app. They are getting more content on the player.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: If we are expanding services, does that mean we are seeing a similar increase in commercial revenue?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: With regard to commercial revenue, the environment out there is very challenging. Our commercial team has done very well to show an increase in it.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Will Mr. Bakhurst give me the figures for commercial revenue in 2025 versus the projected revenue for 2026? If we are spending €50 million-----

Mr. Adrian Lynch: It was €156 million in 2025 and is projected to go up to €158 million in 2026.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Will Mr. Lynch repeat those figures?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I should have brought my glasses. It was €156,095,000 in 2025 and will go up to €158,567,000 this year.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Despite all of the investments and the expansion of services the witnesses are speaking about, we are not seeing much of an increase in commercial revenue. It just does not seem to be adding up.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Compared to the market, we are seeing a significant increase in commercial revenue because the rest of the market has gone down. We are bucking the trend.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: The increase in actual revenue is very marginal despite the fact that €50 million more is being spent to run the organisation.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Looking at the overall advertising market, of every extra euro generated in the last decade, 60 cent to 70 cent has gone to tech companies. As the Deputy will know, even for local radio stations, the entire domestic advertising market is completely squeezed.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I do not mean to be rude but I have to move on because I am caught for time. On staff numbers, what is the overall staff headcount now?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Right now, with the World Cup, it is 1,710. People come in but will be gone. That is-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It is 1,710. What was it in 2023?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I do not know what it was in 2023 but, at the end of 2024, it was 1,744.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It is quite a marginal reduction.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: To be crystal clear, it is worth saying that there are a significant number of people on temporary contracts for the World Cup. At this time of the year, the number also includes people like the 16 interns who will be in the organisation for a few months but who will then be going. The headcount now cannot be directly compared with a December headcount.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: What will be paid out in staff costs, such as salaries and allowances, this year and what was paid out in 2024?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I am sorry; what is the question?

Deputy Séamus McGrath: What is the cost of staff, including salaries, allowances and so on? I am trying to ask whether there has been a significant reduction in staff costs.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: We never know the outturn at this point. We do not know what the outturn will be yet. Last year, our bill was approximately €176 million. With pay increases and so on, the budget this year was greater than that. At the moment, in the year to date, we have saved €5.5 million on our approximate bill. There are a couple of things involved. Coming into this year, in January, our headcount was 1,653. There were a number of open roles, which are not unusual for us to carry. That number coming into the year was about 100. It is important to say that.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I am getting caught for time. I want to move on to one or two other bits. In recent months, when the presenter list was updated, it also came to light that two well-known presenters who have left the organisation, Claire Byrne and Ray D'Arcy, will continue to be paid for a couple of months despite no longer working for RTÉ. Will Mr. Bakhurst explain how that came about?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I agreed that. We took them off air for different reasons. Claire Byrne was leaving. We wanted David McCullagh to come on air without her going straight to Newstalk. That was partly a commercial decision.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: She was paid close to €50,000.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, but it was a commercial decision about establishing David McCullagh.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: She made herself available to work.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: If we had wanted her to work right up until she went to Newstalk, she would have, but we wanted to get David McCullagh on air. The second thing is that they had contractual relationships. There were different reasons why Ray D'Arcy did not carry on broadcasting but he had a contractual relationship so we thought it was the right thing to do to pay him according to his contract.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Mr. Bakhurst can see why it does not sit well with the public for almost €100,000 to be paid-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The Deputy might say that but these are decisions about trying to do the right thing commercially and ethically.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I am not saying the presenters did anything wrong but RTÉ took the decision that they did not have to continue to work.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. Because presenters are employees, we thought it was the correct thing to do.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: At the time of the Derek Mooney issue, Mr. Bakhurst said that RTÉ was paying a price for transparency. Does he regret using that phrase?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Not for a second. In fact, many members of the public have told me that it was entirely right. We did not do anything wrong. We surfaced something, said so publicly and saw what the response was.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Transparency is what is expected, however.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I know it is what is expected. I am not saying-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: The consequences that come from it-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am sorry but, to be crystal clear, I have been driving for transparency every day of my life in this role. When you deliver transparency and get a result like this from some individuals, that is very disappointing.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Mr. Bakhurst accepts there was a story there, however.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Of course, there was a story there. There was a story but the way some people responded-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Derek Mooney not having been on the presenter list and how that was handled annoys the public to this day.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It annoyed me too but we found it-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: How is it paying a price for transparency when there was a story there?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We found it, we put it out publicly and said what we were doing to address it. We could have just left it, if we had wanted to. We took legal advice. It was-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Yes, my final question-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am sorry; the Deputy has not given me a chance to answer. If we uncover anything, we will address it. We will come out publicly and say what we have uncovered and how we have addressed it. If the price we pay for that is a bit of a pile-on, I think that is unfair.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I will move to my final question. Mr. Bakhurst mentioned the potential sale of part of the site at Donnybrook. Does RTE own any other properties that may be put for sale?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. We have property in Cork.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Is it just Cork?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is just Cork at the moment, yes. There is also the site in Moydrum but that is not for sale. That is a different transaction.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: If RTE were to sell its Cork property, does that mean there would not be a studio in Cork?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are looking for a better premises in the centre of the city because we want to expand our operations in Cork. As the Deputy will know, our facility on Fr. Matthew Street is rather old and dilapidated. We looked at refurbishing the facility but it was

prohibitively expensive. We have now been looking for a year and a half. There are not that many properties there. We are currently back on track.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It is not a diminution of services in Cork.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is the opposite, as the Deputy will be pleased to hear.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It is the opposite. That is good.

An Cathaoirleach: I have a number of questions myself. It is important that any witness who comes before the committee is open, fully transparent and accurate in the information they provide to the committee and therefore put into the public domain. I will ask Mr. Bakhurst to reflect on some comments he made in response to Deputy Joanna Byrne's questions regarding the League of Ireland. I would like clarification on a number of comments. Mr. Bakhurst doubled down. He said it was a joint bid. Will he give us some information around that statement?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We can provide the information.

An Cathaoirleach: Was it a joint bid?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We bid for half the games and Virgin bid for half the games. That was the initial bid.

An Cathaoirleach: It was a joint bid. Collectively-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am not sure about the exact terminology but we each bid for half of the games. That was the existing relationship and we understood it was going to be the future relationship as well.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: By way of clarification, it was not a joint bid in the sense of two parties coming together to bid.

An Cathaoirleach: It was not a joint bid.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Separate entities bid simultaneously.

An Cathaoirleach: Mr. Bakhurst said that RTÉ was financially outbid on a number of occasions.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, what I said is that we put our bid in on the understanding that there was going to be same sort of arrangement. We were then told that a deal had been done and the games were going to Virgin.

An Cathaoirleach: That deal was made on the basis that Virgin could provide 36 weeks' coverage.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not know the basis on which the deal was made.

An Cathaoirleach: RTÉ would only cover 18 matches.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: It is important to clarify that, in any of these competitive tenders, a number of factors are considered in deciding who will be successful. You do not necessarily know what any of the other parties are doing. In this instance, Virgin had a certain bidding

strategy and we had another. Virgin was successful and secured the rights. As the director general has said, we were incredibly disappointed to lose the rights.

An Cathaoirleach: "Joint bid" was the incorrect term to use.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It might be better to look at them as simultaneous bids.

An Cathaoirleach: There were simultaneous bids. The term "outbid" is also highly questionable.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We lost the tender and were not given a chance to increase our bid.

An Cathaoirleach: RTÉ might provide us with more information regarding the bid.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We can, yes.

An Cathaoirleach: I will touch on the issue of Montrose. It was mentioned that there have been some discussions with the LDA. Will Mr. Bakhurst give us some information in that regard? What acreage remains within the campus in Montrose?

I think over 8.64 acres was the previous sale to Cairn Homes for €107.5 million. How many acres remain in Montrose?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I will have to come back to the Cathaoirleach on the exact acreage, but the discussions have been that we would keep, let us say, 7 acres, which is the modern building down by Nutley Lane and a little bit of land around it. The rest of the land would be sold.

An Cathaoirleach: How many acres would remain?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I would have to come back to the Cathaoirleach on the exact amount. I do not want to give him the wrong number.

An Cathaoirleach: Is there a value of the entire site at Montrose?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. It has not got that far yet. We have had an estimate from Savills, but we have not had any kind of offer yet from the LDA. There has been an initial discussion.

An Cathaoirleach: What is the estimate from Savills?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It depends on if the LDA buys it or if it is sold on the market, but market-----

An Cathaoirleach: If the LDA buys it, what is the value?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We do not know yet because the LDA has not made us an offer.

An Cathaoirleach: If it goes on the open market, Mr. Bakhurst does not have a value on it.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We will not know until we put it on the open market, but there is a big-----

An Cathaoirleach: There would be an estimate there.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We will have to come back to the Cathaoirleach on the estimate. The estimate changes all the time. It is significantly more on the open market than with the LDA, obviously.

An Cathaoirleach: Are the discussions with the LDA at an advanced stage?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, they are not. We have had a couple of discussions with it. The point is about the land that is available. There are five listed buildings on the land that is available. However, there is the potential to build several hundred accommodation units on that land.

An Cathaoirleach: I will move on to the Barron review that is being carried out. Did that go out to tender?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, it did.

An Cathaoirleach: I am certainly not questioning Mr. Barron's experience or knowledge. He has spent many years working within the BBC, so he comes with a wealth of experience. Is he still working within the BBC?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, he has left the BBC.

An Cathaoirleach: He has finished there. Mr. Bakhurst spent some time in the BBC. How many years did he work there?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I worked there for 23 years, mainly in news and current affairs.

An Cathaoirleach: During Mr. Bakhurst's there, I think Mr. Barron worked within news----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I did not know him when I was there.

An Cathaoirleach: Mr. Bakhurst did not know Mr. Barron and had no engagement with him whatsoever. Mr. Lynch pointed out that he had never met Mr. Barron. Had Mr. Bakhurst met him prior to being appointed to-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. I was not involved in the tender.

An Cathaoirleach: Would Mr. Bakhurst have had engagement with him in the BBC?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. To be crystal clear, I did know Mr. Sam Whipple, who did the news review for a period in the BBC, but I have not seen him for 20 years.

An Cathaoirleach: I want to move on to the issue of bogus self-employment, which I think had been rife within the organisation. It was a huge injustice to many people within the organisation over many decades. Will Mr. Bakhurst briefly give us the up-to-date position? I know that a comprehensive piece of work has been done retrospectively within the organisation. How many rectifications have there been?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I will give the Cathaoirleach the headline figures, and if Ms Malone needs to come in, she will. The Department of Social Protection identified 705 cases. A total of 90% of those have now been resolved, one way or the other. Ms Malone can give the numbers in terms of how they were resolved. We have paid the PRSI in respect of those whom it was found should have been employees. We have paid over €5 million in PRSI back

payments for a number of years. Some of the remaining 10% of cases are sitting with the Department for it to make a decision on them. There is a small number that are going through a legal process because the people were employed through companies to do the work. We have not managed to reach agreement with the Department of Social Protection, so it has gone to the courts.

An Cathaoirleach: How many employment cases arising from scope section or social welfare appeals office determinations are before the High Court?

Ms Annette Malone: Four cases are before the High Court, two of which are limited companies and two of which are individuals. In relation to the numbers, 205 cases of the 705 came back as class A and 434 came back as class S. Sixty-six cases are outstanding, of which a number are limited companies. There is a small group of sports contributors within that group. As the Cathaoirleach knows, we have been on an extensive journey since our full engagement on this between Eversheds, the implementation of our employment first policy, scope and now with the recent Supreme Court judgment on Karshan. We have done quite a lot of work in this area. We had a lot of work to do. We are concluding that. We had always agreed that we would take a lens and look back as well to ensure that we had captured everything, particularly with the Karshan lens on it now. Under the employment first policy, we have classified a lot of roles that are now employment first, particularly around presenters. We have transitioned more than 30 presenters into employee roles where previously they would predominantly have been contractors. A huge body of work has been done in that space. We also did the retrospection agreement with the trade union group to try to resolve some of the issues there.

An Cathaoirleach: Mr. Bakhurst gave a figure of €5 million for PRSI payments. Were any other payments made on foot of those reclassifications?

Ms Annette Malone: That is the PRSI liability that we have paid out to date to the Department of Social Protection. We have had a number of challenges at the WRC and a few are still down there, as well as at the Labour Court. To date, those cases were found in favour of RTÉ. Some of those cases are being appealed to the Labour Court at the moment, so I will not speak to those. It would be inappropriate to do so while they are before the courts. With respect to our retrospection agreement that we agreed with the trade union group, that had been offered out. As my predecessor said previously, the vast majority of individuals under Eversheds had accepted that, but some of these cases before the WRC and Labour Court may be individuals who have taken their cases, which is their right, and we respect that.

An Cathaoirleach: An amnesty was provided by Revenue last year. Did RTÉ avail of that amnesty for misclassification to rectify people's employment status?

Ms Annette Malone: I would need to double-check that with our chief financial officer, CFO. We have been in this process for so long. We have been working extensively with the Department of Social Protection since 2020.

An Cathaoirleach: That would be fairly straightforward. If there was a process of engagement with Revenue regarding that amnesty, I would have thought that it would be information that the witnesses-----

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I believe that we did not partake in the amnesty.

An Cathaoirleach: In terms of the retrospective recognition of employees' PRSI, Ms Malone made reference to agreements with unions, etc. Obviously, there is a big issue there. It was an injustice for many people. They have had their employee status rectified now, but that does not provide them any rights in terms of pension entitlements from their many years of employment or other employment rights, for example, holiday pay, maternity leave or whatever it is. How can Ms Malone say that there has been full restitution for workers without addressing those core issues for many employees, the figures of which have been furnished here?

Ms Annette Malone: We engaged in an industrial relations process on what was a complex industrial relations matter. We brought in two independent experts to oversee that process and engage with our trade union group in relation to that whole process. In any industrial relations agreement, you are trying to find a satisfactory agreement that can resolve some of the matters, but it is not a legal agreement or framework. It is trying to achieve some of the results of that.

An Cathaoirleach: In tandem with the regularisation of PRSI, for example, was there an evaluation of the cost to RTÉ of rectifying the core issues of pension entitlements and other employment rights that flow from the status of being an employee as opposed to a contractor?

Ms Annette Malone: It is my understanding that what we have accepted the PRSI class A classification liability. That does not translate into giving people employment rights, including retrospective employment rights. Our industrial relations agreement was to try to resolve some of those matters.

An Cathaoirleach: I am asking a specific question. Was an evaluation carried out on how much it would cost the organisation to rectify those issues in terms of pension entitlements retrospectively?

Ms Annette Malone: I am new to this role, but from my recollection of what had been done at the time, there was a top-line consideration of it, but our whole-----

An Cathaoirleach: What was that top-line consideration? Does Ms Malone know?

Ms Annette Malone: I do not have that figure. I would have to double-check that detail.

An Cathaoirleach: Mr. Bakhurst said if that issue had been addressed, it would bankrupt the organisation. I am trying to arrive at how a statement like that could be made and where the evaluation process-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: When I was briefed on it at the time, it was an extremely significant figure and that is what I was told - that RTÉ could never afford to pay-----

An Cathaoirleach: What is that significant figure?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not know. I have never had the figure but I was told that when I asked.

An Cathaoirleach: How can you make a public comment like that, that it would bankrupt the organisation, without actually knowing-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I was told it would be multi-multi-millions.

An Cathaoirleach: How can Mr. Bakhurst make a very serious statement like that, that rectifying people's rights and entitlements in terms of holiday and maternity pay, pension

entitlements and all of the other rights that stem from that would bankrupt the organisation? How can the head of the organisation make a statement like that without knowing the figure?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That was the advice I was given at a high level at the time when I asked about it. I did ask about it because a number of colleagues asked me about it who declined to be part of the Eversheds process. When I asked about it, they said we cannot do retrospection for everyone. First of all, we cannot break the collective agreement which was entered-----

An Cathaoirleach: You took them for their word on that without seeing the actual figures, the costings-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: You could do a calculation quite quickly in terms of the number of people available and if you went back 20 years and looked at holiday pay and pension entitlements, it would be tens if not hundreds of millions.

An Cathaoirleach: But Mr. Bakhurst does not know that because he has not had sight of it.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I took professional advice.

An Cathaoirleach: Nor before making a statement like that did he see it fit to get that.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: All I asked was can we afford it and they said no, it would be prohibitive; we cannot afford it.

An Cathaoirleach: You might furnish us with those figures and what process was carried out to arrive at those headline figures you mentioned.

I have full consent to talk about the next issue I will raise. It is about a former colleague in RTÉ, Seán Rocks, who sadly passed away last year. I have been communicating with his widow, Catherine Bailey, who, along with her family, has been treated appallingly by the organisation given the huge contribution Seán gave not just to RTÉ but to public service over many years. Where are things at now in terms of the misclassification of Seán's employment within the organisation? What efforts has Mr. Bakhurst taken to address the real injustice served upon not just Seán and his legacy but the implications it has for Catherine and their family? What engagement has Mr. Bakhurst had to try to address this issue? It is reflective of the way RTÉ senior management deals with workers in RTÉ.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I have had considerable engagement over a number of months since Seán unfortunately died.

An Cathaoirleach: Considerable engagement with whom?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: With colleagues inside the organisation and with Catherine Bailey and people acting on her behalf.

An Cathaoirleach: What does that considerable engagement with Catherine Bailey look like?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I have spoken to her a couple of times and I have said I am happy to see her but she has not asked to see me again yet.

An Cathaoirleach: I think Catherine has met Mr. Bakhurst on three occasions.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is probably correct.

An Cathaoirleach: There has been no conversation around the issue with Catherine-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, but we have had-----

An Cathaoirleach: -----on any of those three occasions. Considerable engagement would be an extension of the truth.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: To be fair, Chair, she has also written a considerable amount of correspondence which we have responded to. It is not just face-to-face meetings, of which there have been three.

An Cathaoirleach: I think those communications have been unsuccessful.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Correct.

An Cathaoirleach: There was an attempt to try to have the core issue addressed within the WRC. What approach did RTÉ take in relation to that attempt to try to address the issues?

Ms Annette Malone: A submission was sent to the WRC under the industrial relations Act. The decision by RTÉ was not to attend under the industrial relations Act on that matter.

An Cathaoirleach: A solicitor's letter went out to say it was not going to engage in that process. Why was that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It was an incredibly sad event and my heartfelt feelings go out to Catherine and the family. We have taken a lot of time to look at this. It has been considered at board level as well as by me and the leadership team. The issue is this: first of all, he was not misclassified; he was on a presenter contract for the last 15 years of his career so he was correctly classified. The second thing is I have asked the extent of the payout Mr. Rocks's widow would have received, which, in terms of RTÉ life assurance, is not insignificant and, in terms of the likely amount she could have got from the pension fund which would be typical on this occasion, it is a not-insignificant amount. The Chair has had permission. I have not got permission to talk about that any further but I did look into the quantum of the payout she would have received.

An Cathaoirleach: The core issue here is employment and what-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, the core issue is that we have a number of staff, unfortunately, who die every year who are on different types of contracts. Many of them have allowances, as did Seán Rocks. They know the terms, as do I. I have an allowance. I know it is not pensionable and it is not covered by life assurance. If we make an exception for one employee, we would, quite rightly - I want to be fair to all employees and to Catherine and Seán but I have to be fair to all employees and not give special treatment to individuals when we have looked into it.

An Cathaoirleach: I know. I am saying this is probably reflective of the attitude and approach by RTÉ in relation to the staff-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, it is not a fair assertion to make, Chair; it really is not.

An Cathaoirleach: I will make this point - it is broader than financial things. This is a misjustice. Despite repeated attempts over many years by Seán to regularise his status, the categorisation in which he was employed within RTÉ, it fell on deaf ears. We are now in this situation. I do not want to negotiate all of this here in public. I ask that there be meaningful engagement with the family. Perhaps an agreed mediator could be put in place to try to address this as opposed to in here in public. I refer to all other attempts to try to have this issue addressed and a resolution found. I take on board the other issues Mr. Bakhurst mentioned in terms of other or former employees and all of that. I ask that that process be agreed to. I am not asking Mr. Bakhurst to commit to that here but I ask if it could be looked at to put a mediation process in place with an agreed mediator to have a look at the issue and try to come to a resolution of some kind. Can that be looked at?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We will consider it.

An Cathaoirleach: RTÉ will consider it. Okay.

We will move on. If agreeable, we will open it up to a short round of supplementary questions. We will try to keep it to five minutes each, if that is agreeable to our witnesses. I call Deputy Boland.

Deputy Grace Boland: I want to go back to my original questioning in terms of the operating model and financial costs. What has transpired throughout is that it will cost €50 million more to run RTÉ this year than did last year. At the end of last year, RTÉ had 1,653 employees with 100 open vacancies - that is approximately 1,750. Headcount is not being slimmed and neither are financial costs. Three years of reform and the organisation is not getting fiscally smaller; in fact, it is getting bigger. I just do not understand where we are going. I do not see a plan.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I would like to address that. We are slimming headcount. The numbers the Deputy has are correct but headcount is coming down. We have said it will come down. We are controlling our-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Mr. Bakhurst will not give me a figure to what. The redundancies, retirements and outsourcing still mean RTÉ will have a 1,750 headcount this year. I just do not see it.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The headcount is coming down and staff overheads are coming down.

Deputy Grace Boland: By what? By ones and twos?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No-----

Deputy Grace Boland: What is the point in the redundancies, retirements and outsourcing if headcount is not brought down?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Can I just be clear about this? We exited 97 people from the organisation. As Ms Malone touched on, we had about 30 people under the scope process whom we had to make employees and were on contracts before. We took on 11 new people only since we exited those people. They are in areas like compliance and risk and technology, which we had to do for the strategy.

We are controlling costs extremely closely. When the annual accounts-----

Deputy Grace Boland: They have gone up by €50 million.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Can I finish please? When the annual accounts are published in a couple of weeks, they will demonstrate that we are managing our finances extremely robustly.

Deputy Grace Boland: Where is the plan to slim it?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The plan is what we have said.

Deputy Grace Boland: The plan is that the State is going to fill the gap.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. That is-----

Deputy Grace Boland: It is.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is the plan because that is what was agreed by the Government, thankfully.

Deputy Grace Boland: What about post 2028? RTÉ is not even trying to reduce it.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are-----

Deputy Grace Boland: RTÉ is just expecting that the State will step in.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I am sorry but this is ridiculous. Of course we are reducing costs and overheads. We have given the committee one example. Headcount is only one example. I have provided numerous other examples. We have reduced overtime-----

Deputy Grace Boland: By how much has the headcount reduced in the last three years?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: In the last year, it has reduced by 97. We had 97-----

Deputy Grace Boland: No, it has not.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It has.

Deputy Grace Boland: It has not, effectively, based on the figures Mr. Lynch provided.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. Mr. Lynch has given a figure for right now, which is in the middle of the year when we have people working on the World Cup temporarily, as well as interns and others who have been recruited. The number to look at will be the one at the end of the year. The number also to look at will be how much we have saved from those people exiting. We are saving over €6 million per year as an organisation because we have a smaller workforce. We are actually, month on month, making between €500,000 and €1 million savings on overheads of staffing because of the way we are controlling costs and staffing.

Deputy Grace Boland: It is being spent elsewhere because the costs are going up and up.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, we are spending money elsewhere-----

Deputy Grace Boland: I want to briefly ask about-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, no, this is really important. Costs have gone up but we are spending in line with the strategy. As we said under the strategy, we will spend more money on the independent sector. We will spend more money on high-quality drama, live sport, which

the audience loves and comes to us in huge numbers for, investigations and Irish-language and children's content.

Deputy Grace Boland: Is that backed up by audience figures increasing or decreasing?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is 100% backed up by audience figures. We will give the committee the figures-----

Deputy Grace Boland: Is that over the last three years?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Absolutely. We will provide the figures for live sport over the last two or three years.

Deputy Grace Boland: I mean generally.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, overall. We are maintaining. The numbers on the player have gone up by 100% in the last year during this period. The numbers on linear are holding steady against a market in which linear is falling dramatically.

Deputy Grace Boland: RTÉ is spending more, however. The numbers are holding steady, but RTÉ is spending more.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, because we are bucking the trend of what everyone else is doing.

Deputy Grace Boland: I have 50 seconds left. Mr. Bakhurst said RTÉ is outsourcing the "Up for the Match" programme because it wants to make high-quality programmes with outside productions. What message does that send to the employees of RTÉ? Is it saying they do not make high-quality programmes?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, that is completely misinterpreting what I said. I said that we take a view on whether the quality of individual programmes can be enhanced. With "Up for the Match", we are trying something different. There is a whole range of programming that RTÉ staff produce day in, day out, whether it is news and current affairs, sport, radio or shows such as "The Late Late Show" and "Fair City". They are either extremely cost efficient or extremely high quality and they do a brilliant job. We are not undermining them but what I am saying is that the independent sector also has new ideas about the way to do things. If we are going to be part of Ireland's successful creator economy, this is what we should be doing.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: If I could make one other point, "Up for the Match" is part of a programme of work looking at how we would facilitate exits from RTÉ in terms of what was available from an operational capacity point of view and how we would exit people as part of the voluntary exit programme, VEP, 2025. That is important to say.

Deputy Grace Boland: I still have an issue around the headcount because last year, in 2025, I was told it was 1,744. At the end of last year, it was 1,653 with 100 open roles, which actually totals slightly more than that figure of 1,744. Today, Mr. Bakhurst is saying RTÉ has 1,710 staff, including those working on the World Cup. That means we have more. I do not understand.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: If we had no VEP scheme, we would also be carrying those 97 employees because the open roles would be rolling anyway. When it comes to the figure of 1,653 with 100 open roles, a portion of those new roles is to support our risk assurance and

EACs in terms of finance. We also have a structural challenge in that we have become a broadcaster and a streamer. We have to build out our technological infrastructure on our front end to have relevance in the next decade. We have those pressures to accommodate as well.

Deputy Grace Boland: We are not really slimming.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: No, but we have an agreed work plan as part of our three-year strategy. We knew our budget for 2026 would have increased public funding to €260 million. We are working to that to deliver all the changes we need to the back- and front-end technology, our audience proposition and the reform of the organisation.

Deputy Grace Boland: In terms of modelling for 2028, I assume RTÉ is building models based on various assumptions as to how much the State might give RTÉ. If the State says that it is going to give RTÉ €10 million less in 2028, have the witnesses come up with ways to be able to run the operation and reduce costs by €10 million, €20 million, €30 million or €40 million?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Of course there are going to be sensitivities done in the modelling that we do. In all of these things, however, we must remember that RTÉ delivers a significant number of services to audiences. When it comes to a decision to cease a service or whatever, the people who are most unhappy about that are the audience. Even in the context of the World Cup, the committee has heard that six people have travelled for that. As a simple example, the direct cost of the World Cup is €1.4 million. Divided by 104 matches, that equates to a spend of €13,000 per match. We are very focused on value for money in terms of our delivery.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I thank the witnesses for staying on. I will start with Mr. Bakhurst on one point. Am I right in saying that the board recommended an increase of about €50,000 to his salary? Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: So I am told, and so I have read.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I would say Mr. Bakhurst knows more than that. That request went to the Minister for approval. Is that the process?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That is right.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Turning to Department officials, has the Minister approved that request?

Mr. Stephen Ryan: First, the pay range was set and agreed by the Government. There is a pay range for each-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: That underpins the request.

Mr. Stephen Ryan: Yes. Within that, the board is required to make a business case setting out how that would be addressed. It came in with a proposal and the Minister reviewed it. He has agreed a level and recommended that to the Minister for public expenditure because both Ministers are required to sign off on it.

Deputy James Geoghegan: When did the Minister for communications make that decision to send it to the Minister for public expenditure?

Mr. Stephen Ryan: I think it was formally submitted at the end of March or the start of April. It was around Easter time, or just before it.

Deputy James Geoghegan: The Minister for public expenditure has not made a decision on the pay increase. Is that correct?

Mr. Stephen Ryan: Yes. I understand that any recommendation from any of the commercial State bodies right across the system, of which there are 26, must get approval from that Minister. I think the Minister, Deputy Chambers, will be looking at quite a few of these requests.

Deputy James Geoghegan: He has to make one big decision on all of them.

Mr. Stephen Ryan: Obviously, they will come in at different times. They are probably staggered. There are different Departments and different inputs in question. Obviously, we are there when it is being submitted, but it is a matter for the Minister for public expenditure.

Deputy James Geoghegan: There was some suggestion that the delay in the contractual negotiations with Patrick Kielty were somewhat related to a decision to increase Mr. Bakhurst's pay because he has made it clear that no broadcaster will get paid more than anyone in senior management. Can Mr. Bakhurst say anything about that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That was not the main factor at all, actually. It was simply about having detailed negotiations with Patrick Kielty to fit in with his career outside RTÉ in the UK. We wanted him for a certain length of time with a certain number of shows per year and so on. It was really about working through the details. That was what caused it to go on for a little while.

Deputy James Geoghegan: To what extent, if any, does it impact Mr. Bakhurst that his line Minister made a decision in March approving the recommendation of the board, but we are now in July and Mr. Bakhurst has no outcome to that decision?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The Deputy should ask my bank manager. There is a process. I know these things take time. I respect that.

Deputy James Geoghegan: On the LDA piece and the lands, RTÉ sold a big chunk of land in 2017 for about €100 million. In size, how do they compare with that chunk of land?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: This will be significantly less because land values have gone down.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I am talking about the size of the land.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The land is smaller. Off the top of my head, it is probably 13 acres.

Deputy James Geoghegan: It is 13 acres.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, that is what we are looking to sell now.

Deputy James Geoghegan: The other site that was sold was 9 acres.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I think the previous one was 20 acres. This one is smaller than the one we sold. Obviously, it has buildings on it, so it is less valuable.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Mr. Bakhurst mentioned a couple of hundred units.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is more than that. There are several hundred units.

Deputy James Geoghegan: As Mr. Bakhurst knows, there has been a lengthy delay in the development on those lands. It is something like 300 or 400 housing units. Does Mr. Bakhurst have a figure for how many housing units could be accommodated?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The estimate we received, from either Savills or an architect, was in the region of 700 units, potentially.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Mr. Bakhurst made the point that there would be a big difference between LDA sale versus open market sale.

That will make a huge difference to RTÉ. The decision was taken in 2017, I think, before the LDA had been established. From memory, Dublin City Council put in a bid at the time, but the site went to the private market. How is it foreseen that the discussion will go? I ask this because there is a big difference between the revenue RTÉ will receive from the disposal of the land versus the Exchequer demands the organisation may have, if those are going to keep increasing. I am referring to other than the global context where we need more homes and the LDA needs more homes from a governmental perspective. From RTÉ's perspective, how is this issue viewed?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I think we have to deal with what is in place now. The big issue for us is that if we do try to progress this, it will be about how we most effectively borrow the money we need to invest in the building down the end before we can free up the rest of the land to sell it. That is a discussion we need to have about whether this would be a commercial loan or a Government loan that we can pay back from the sale of the land for housing or whatever. These are things we need to explore, but the first step was to talk to the LDA, as is correct, to see if it has an interest in the land.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Would the disposal of those lands impact RTÉ's current funding demands? Mr. Bakhurst said RTÉ is going to look for another three-year round of funding. I think there was criticism of the fact that a lot of the €100 million that RTÉ gained from the last sale went towards current expenditure rather than capital investment. It just funded the day-to-day operations of RTÉ. How would Mr. Bakhurst split that discussion?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The plan is that any proceeds from the sale of the land will go into refurbishing the building we are going to move into.

Deputy James Geoghegan: It would be a capital swap with no impact on the Exchequer----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Correct.

Deputy James Geoghegan: -----demand.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Well-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: Obviously, the sale, whether this is via the LDA or the private market, will determine that.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, but we may need to talk to the Government about whether it can facilitate a loan to enable that investment before we sell the land because the timing is difficult.

Deputy James Geoghegan: With the indulgence of the Cathaoirleach, because other members did get an additional two minutes, what is the net headcount reduction figure out of the 400? I am talking about the net figure that RTÉ is currently at.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: What does the Deputy mean by the net figure?

Deputy James Geoghegan: We have heard gross figures of there being 47, 67, or whatever the number was, of voluntary exits-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Does the Deputy mean the FTE figures?

Deputy James Geoghegan: Yes. RTÉ has to get to a headcount reduction of 400. That reduction is presumably a net reduction of its overall headcount.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We can give the Deputy a number now, but it is not really comparable at this time of the year. We need to compare year end with year end because, at the moment, to give an example, we may have probably 30 extra people on short-term contracts doing the World Cup. We got 16 interns in on short-term contracts.

Deputy James Geoghegan: To meet the metric of the 400, which is a key metric in terms of cost for the funding programme that RTÉ has been provided with by the Exchequer, RTÉ will have to demonstrate that it got to 400.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We will have to, yes.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I thought Mr. Lynch was walking it back a little bit when he said it was up to 400. Right now, can Mr. Bakhurst not tell us where RTÉ is at with that 400? Where is RTÉ at currently in the lifetime of the plan in respect of the 400?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: All I can say is that we exited 97 people and we have had to recruit 11 people. We also had to make those various contractors staff as part of that.

Deputy James Geoghegan: I will briefly ask the Department a question. Does it hold RTÉ to account in respect of this funding agreement? The Exchequer is providing moneys. As the licence fee revenue goes down, the Exchequer has to provide more moneys to meet the €750 million granted, but the Department has obviously demanded of RTÉ that it meet a headcount reduction of 400. How does the Department take a hold of this issue?

Mr. Stephen Ryan: The Department and the Minister would not have sought any reduction. The reduction in headcount is a commitment and objective within RTÉ's own strategy. There has not been a figure-----

Deputy James Geoghegan: A figure on the funding has not been given.

Mr. Stephen Ryan: No headline figure has been set by the Government and by the Department. We must also remember that while RTÉ is a public body, the staff are not public servants. The key to this was that within the strategy itself, RTÉ made its commitment to reduce the size of the organisation and to transition more programming into the independent production sector to deliver on that. When RTÉ comes in with a business case, it has to set out the numbers. The terms and conditions of the VEP are agreed, the numbers it hopes to achieve, what the savings would be and how long it would take to realise them. When RTÉ comes in with those figures, they are still voluntary. We can only move with what they get delivered.

Deputy James Geoghegan: If I ask another question, I will be killed, so I will shut up. I thank the witnesses.

An Cathaoirleach: Deputy Geoghegan asked for two minutes, and I gave him three and a half minutes.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Hopefully, I will not take the Deputy's time, but I think it is important to add that we regularly report to NewERA on the progress of the strategy, and this includes the headcount. It is very focused not just on the headcount but also on overall cost reductions. Headcount is only one part of that. It is also focused on the areas we need to invest in under the expert committee report. We are regularly tested by NewERA. It is almost every six weeks.

Deputy James Geoghegan: Is NewERA under the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport?

Mr. Stephen Ryan: No. It is a part of the National Treasury Management Agency, NTMA. RTÉ, TG4 and other bodies are designated as NewERA bodies under the NTMA legislation. Its function is to provide advice, financial, commercial and actuarial, to Ministers.

Deputy James Geoghegan: It is the Department of Finance that is the parent entity.

Mr. Stephen Ryan: Yes.

An Cathaoirleach: Mr. Lynch wants to come in briefly.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I will just add to what the director general said. To answer the Deputy's question, in terms of net headcount and everything like that, it is important to say that in terms of the last three-year modelling we have been doing, we have had lots of different models. Why are we reducing the FTE figure in RTÉ? It is because we want to deliver savings. What will be the expected savings over this time? Out to 2029, I think it is about €89 million.

On how we are getting there, it is going to be a combination of factors. It is going to involve cost reduction. There will also be a reduction in terms of our overall prox bill. We had different numbers about what it means at 330 or 340. This is why, most importantly, we said that the number would be up to 400 in the strategy document we published. As we do our five-year model now, we will be looking at what will happen if this moves, and then what happens to that. We are going to have ranges. The most important thing, and what we are held to and made accountable for in terms of our engagements with the Department and NewERA, is constantly around our profit and loss account, but also our cash and how the overall package is being managed within the agreed framework for the three years.

It is very important to make this clear. Otherwise, everybody gets obsessed with the FTE figures. It is about the delivery of the overall number and ensuring we are not coming back looking for more public money.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Lynch. On a point of clarification on the subject of the previous land sale at Montrose, I think Mr. Bakhurst said the figure was considerably higher than the 8.64 acres. Annual reports from the time say it was 8.64 acres that were sold. Was additional land sold? I ask for a brief comment.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I do not know the exact acreage, but it was somewhere in that zone.

An Cathaoirleach: A size of 8.64 acres is what is reported.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: Yes. The price was-----

An Cathaoirleach: It was considerably higher than that, as Mr. Bakhurst said, although I know it predates his time.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: The land we sold then was greenfield, but the land we are selling now has listed buildings on it and that is a problem for the LDA. It brings the value down.

An Cathaoirleach: It was just to get clarification.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I can give the committee the acreages. We will write to the committee because-----

An Cathaoirleach: It is just to clarify that there was not additional land above-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: That money from the land sale has always been ring-fenced for capital projects.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Bakhurst for that information.

Deputy Joe Neville: What was the highest single salary paid to a presenter in the history of RTÉ and in what year was it paid?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: I am going to take a guess, and I could be wrong, and I am going back to about 2008 and 2009. I think it is Pat Kenny, and I think it is in the zone of €900,000.

Deputy Joe Neville: Okay. Even up to later years, we had salaries of €400,000, €500,000 and €600,000, I assume. It is now being said that the benchmark is set at €250,000. Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Not the benchmark-----

Deputy Joe Neville: I am sorry, it is the ceiling. The limit is €250,000.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, the ceiling.

Deputy Joe Neville: That includes Mr. Bakhurst's own salary. I was not aware, and Mr. Bakhurst said he was not aware - he was aware, obviously - of his own salary increase. With that, does this mean that the limit increased for presenters as well?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There is not a plan for that, but I have always said no one should earn more than-----

Deputy Joe Neville: Mr. Bakhurst's increase lifts the limit for everyone.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It could do, but it will not affect that many people if it does.

Deputy Joe Neville: I am just asking-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: This was something I imposed and it was unilateral. It was that no one should earn more than the director general. It was never, necessarily, about the €250,000. It was just that nobody should earn more than the director general, so if my salary goes up, then the cap goes up.

Deputy Joe Neville: With the announcement about the presenter yesterday, will his salary of €250,000 be confirmed or will it be increased?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: He will be within the salary cap at any point.

Deputy Joe Neville: Out of curiosity, the salary has been agreed. Is that correct?

Mr. Stephen Ryan: The proposal is made by the chair within an overall upper limit agreed by the Government.

The Minister has recommended that it be over a three-year period. The entire process for commercial State bodies is a three-year period within which-----

Deputy Joe Neville: Will it be backdated to when it was requested?

Mr. Stephen Ryan: Not to when it was requested. I think the payments for all CEOs in commercial State bodies are effective from the date of the final approval.

Deputy Joe Neville: The date of the final approval.

Mr. Stephen Ryan: That is my understanding for public expenditure.

Deputy Joe Neville: So then other amounts can be increased.

I want to change topics to something that has not come up at all. I know we talked a lot about the World Cup and the League of Ireland. RTÉ covers many GAA matches really well. There has been a lot of national conversation about GAA+. I fully understand that GAA+ is fully owned by the GAA. Would RTÉ have shown more games if it could have done so and the GAA had given it more? Is RTÉ willing to show more GAA matches on a free-to-air, taxpayer-paid-for entity?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: If Declan McBennett, the head of sport was here, he would point to the huge increase we have had over the last few years in the number of games being shown---
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Deputy Joe Neville: I know it has increased. It was three games a year when I was a kid.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are always ambitious but also respectful of the fact that the GAA is trying to run its own commercial enterprise. We have rights at the moment and there is an agreed framework about them. They will come up for renegotiation quite soon, so we will see where we are on that. As the Deputy knows, we sold our stake in GAA+.

Deputy Joe Neville: How much did RTÉ sell that for?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Some €3 million.

Deputy Joe Neville: I thought that might have been what Mr. Bakhurst referred to earlier with Deputy McGrath, but that was-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We sold that for €3 million. That money has been earmarked for regional investment. It will help us with Cork if we do that. The rationale was that it was a good offer. The GAA wanted us to get out of it. From my point of view, I did not want that conflict of interest. I wanted to do public service, free-to-air broadcasting, and not have to ride both those horses at the same time.

Deputy Joe Neville: It was conflict.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It was tricky enough.

Deputy Joe Neville: It was slightly compromised, to an extent. A conflict of interest, almost.

My opening question to RTÉ last time was about the budget, which is €405 million for 2026 and €350 million for last year, which is an increase of €55 million. I know RTÉ's subventions have increased, which Mr. Bakhurst referred to in response to Deputy McGrath too. He said RTÉ was doing an element of investment for that €55 million. How much of that would we call capital expenditure, on the player or facilities? Will Mr. Bakhurst break down that €55 million, within reason, and then say how much of it is potentially for salaries or any other uplift? When I say salaries, I mean running costs.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I can give some headlines on that. We spend around €10 million a year on capital. That is buildings and general capital expenditure. There are individual projects, such as the HR project, which was a couple of million euro, which we are in the middle of introducing. Those come and go each year. Very little of the uplift will go on salaries.

Deputy Joe Neville: I would say current expenditure more so than salaries.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We will be spending more on things like expensive drama. The idea is that most of this will appear on air or on screens for the audience to enjoy the content. That might mean we can afford a little more live sports rights, which the audience would love us to do. Do not forget that every time sports rights come up, there is quite significant inflation. If we want to get the next Rugby World Cup or whatever, the cost of sports rights go up every cycle. They do not stay the same. Very little of it will go on running costs and staff apart from the agreed increments that people get and the agreed increase that we have already done for a couple of years.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I thank the witnesses for staying for so long. I want to clarify the overall figures which Deputy Neville touched on. The budget for this year is €405 million. Outturn for last year was €353.2 million. What was it for 2024?

Mr. Adrian Lynch: In 2024, it was €362.221 million.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It went slightly down from 2024 to 2025, by about €9 million, but it shot up from 2025 to 2026.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: You have to remember that 2024 had the Olympics and the Euros, so there were two significant special events, and the general election.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Many will find the €52 million increase this year over and above last year, at a time when the organisation is coming before us saying it is reducing headcount and trimming costs, yet having a 15% or 16% increase in running costs, just does not add up. I ask the witnesses to clarify the commercial revenue again. I think they said €156 million earlier.

Mr. Adrian Lynch: This year or last year?

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Both, if the witnesses do not mind.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Commercial revenue for 2024 was €158.1 million. Commercial revenue for 2025 was €158.6 million.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It is quite static.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: A marginal increase, but relatively static.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: If RTÉ's commercial revenue is only marginally increasing and its actual running costs are significantly increasing, the financial-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is important to-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Just let me finish, please. The financial hole is getting bigger. That is the bottom line here.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, because when we got the multi-year funding, it enabled us to do a number of things. One is to significantly increase the spend on independent content. The audience is seeing more drama and more documentaries. "Traitors" was in 2025. We did not have that previously. These are multi-million pound projects.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I understand that.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is really important to say that the extra money is delivering directly to the audiences, allowing us to buy increased sports rights-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: To what end? It is not resulting in extra revenue. That is not my point.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Revenue is part of what we do. The commercial team has done a very good job holding up-----

Deputy Séamus McGrath: From a cost-benefit analysis, RTÉ is investing this additional money but it is not bringing in extra revenue. How can that-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We are not a commercial broadcaster. We are a public service broadcaster. We put extra money into Irish language, culture, arts and investigative journalism.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It is a very significant jump in 12 months.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, but it is showing on-screen for the audiences. It is not all about commercial decisions. We would never do any Irish language content and we would shut down Raidió na Gaeltachta if it was about commercial decisions, but it is not. It is about providing public service. Raidió na Gaeltachta costs many millions of euro a year and it is hugely valued. It does not make much money. It makes some, but not much at all. There are some things which are commercially very attractive, including "Traitors", the World Cup and so on.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: The financial hole is getting bigger, with what is coming in commercially compared with what is going out.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is not a hole. This is the level of public funding that the Government agreed for three years, which we have budgeted for. If we wanted to, we could cut the programming spend by €20 million, but that would not benefit audiences.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Mr. Bakhurst does not like the phrase "financial hole", I respect that, but the need for public funding is increasing.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is not increasing beyond what the Government has already agreed for three years. It has increased - agreed - and that was critical to delivering for audiences and being ambitious as an organisation, and to drive through change. Things like the voluntary exit scheme in itself cost in excess of €6 million to exit those people. It will take us a year to recoup that money.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: On staff costs, Mr. Bakhurst said there are more than 1,700 at present. I know they vary, some are temporary and so on. How many staff are earning over €100,000?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We can get the figures but they are in the annual report.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Do we have an estimate? As senior managers in the organisation, can the witnesses give us an estimate?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We would have to get the number for the Deputy.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: It has been reported in one newspaper that there has been a 36% increase in staff earning over €100,000 in the last five years.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I think we answered those questions at the joint committee. Much of that increase was driven by these being earnings rather than salaries, so they include pensions and allowances too, over €100,000.

It is in the annual report. I can point the Deputy to the page of that.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Do we have the figures?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, but it will take me a little while to compute. They are in different bands. That is all.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Fair enough, but the information is there.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: On the World Cup qualifier matches, as mentioned by Deputy Dolan, the €56,000 outlay and the 41 members of staff or individuals who were involved in RTÉ's broadcast, on reflection, does Mr. Bakhurst think that could have been less?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It could always have been less but we would not have got the same amount of content and commercial revenue.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: The fact that the entire World Cup is being covered by six people travelling.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is comparing apples and pears. We have no presence on the ground apart from commentators at the World Cup. We have a commentator, a co-commentator and a producer for each game they do on the ground.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: One match versus 140 matches.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes, but it is an entirely different matter. Look at the range of programmes that were presented live from Prague around that game which the audience loved and raved on about.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: On reflection, does Mr. Bakhurst think there was any scope to reduce the number of people who went without compromising the quality of the broadcasting?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, not without compromising quality.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Mr. Bakhurst stands over that.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. We could reduce the quality or reduce the programme.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: On the expert advisory committee, Mr. Bakhurst said they are 80% in terms of implementation. What are the key elements of the remaining 20%?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I will bring in my colleague, Ms O'Shaughnessy, who has sat here very patiently and who oversees this.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: I am sure Ms O'Shaughnessy is delighted that I asked the question.

Ms Eleanor O'Shaughnessy: There are two reports: one on governance and culture and one on HR. In respect of governance, there are about seven or eight left outstanding, which relate to risk and compliance activities. To expand on that, in effect that relates to bringing on additional capability to deliver some of that. It is to do with building out risk assurance, risk reporting and, similar on the compliance side, to further extend the compliance activities around compliance governance and compliance reporting. That is primarily where the open items are from a governance and culture perspective.

Deputy Séamus McGrath: Thank you.

An Cathaoirleach: I have a few concluding questions. On the Ireland game in Czechia and the coverage, without doubt it was one of the biggest matches we have been involved in, but the fact is the biggest team there was not the Irish soccer team but the team from RTÉ. It is the visual impact that has on perceptions for people who have seen an organisation that has been through the mill over the last number of years between barter accounts, tickets for UEFA Cup matches and all sorts of things for people. The level of expenditure throughout and what people are seeing is feeding into that sense of not trusting the organisation and not having confidence in the organisation, and I think that is feeding into the continuing drop-off in people voting with their feet and not renewing their TV licence. I would argue, and many people would argue, in my view correctly, that whatever commercial benefits were to come from RTÉ's coverage of that game was going to come anyway given the sense of public interest in that game.

(Interruptions)

An Cathaoirleach: How can you say that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I know for a fact that because some of the individual programmes were sponsored by commercial sponsors, if we had not sent some of the team specifically and they had not gone, then we would not have got the money.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay. You might give us a breakdown.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not want to name the sponsors. It would be unfair to them. I can get you a breakdown from our commercial department. I spoke to our commercial director about this and he said, across the piece, if we had not done the amount of coverage we did, it would probably have cost us multiples of tens of thousands of euro in commercial revenue we would not have got as a result of that.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay, but it is the visual thing. Forty-one people is overkill.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Can I just appeal one thing? It is very easy. Broadcasting is quite labour intensive. You will see from the list of people who went that there were no freebies. There was no one on some sort of fun trip. Everyone who went there worked extremely hard and it is dispiriting for them to hear the criticism. They know they worked hard. They know they delivered.

An Cathaoirleach: I am not criticising any individual or anything like that.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, but as a whole they feel criticised.

An Cathaoirleach: The same objective, in my view, could have been achieved with less.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I would appeal to serious commentators to take a look at the overall picture, which is the level of audiences, the level of public interest, our commitment to big national sporting events and the commercial revenue as a whole, before you start getting into whether it is 41 people or 35 people. I appeal to people to look at the whole picture.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay. You might furnish us with some more. I know we did get some facts there.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sure. We will give the committee what we can.

An Cathaoirleach: I want to touch on the decision to write down €3.6 million for the failing IT system within RTE, something we have not had an opportunity to discuss at this committee. While it came as a surprise to many, I think it is correct to say it came as a surprise to yourself as well as director general of the organisation. IT projects, failed projects and overspends are something that we have given a lot of time and focus to within this organisation. We will be bringing forward a report following a comprehensive piece of work we have done. Where is the system now at this point? I think it was for the HR unit.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. The one that was written down did not deliver. That was finished. That was years ago. We are currently in the middle of installing the new system, which is an Oracle system. Ms Malone is chair of the steering committee for that. It is on target timewise and cost-wise.

An Cathaoirleach: What is the cost of the project?

Ms Annette Malone: I just need to double-check the total cost. I will come back to you with that. I would not like to give you the wrong figure here today.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I think I might have it here, actually. I actually brought a list of all our capital projects here. With the exception of one capital project, and we review this every

month at the leadership team and it then goes to the audit and risk committee, every single one of them is financially on target or coming in under.

An Cathaoirleach: You might furnish us with that.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I would like to give it to you, actually, because it does show that we are handling big projects properly. The HR systems upgrade is approximately €6 million.

An Cathaoirleach: It is €6 million, it is on budget and it is due to be delivered-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is due to be delivered in early 2027.

An Cathaoirleach: What learnings were taken from the failed system? How did that go so wrong? Was it the scope? What went wrong?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is slightly at the back of my mind because it is a while since we have spoken about it. I think it was the scope. We went for an overcomplicated bespoke system which dealt with both finance and HR. In the end, one of the lessons is to buy something off the shelf and do not try to adapt it too much, if possible. I think there were problems with the internal staffing around it. We did not have enough people working on the project, if you like. I also think that when it started to go wrong, the organisation took the decision a couple of times to put in more money and effort rather than stop it.

An Cathaoirleach: Not enough people or not enough people with the necessary qualifications?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Both. I think the people who were on it had the qualifications. We were just understaffed internally. Then there was another problem with the actual installer, which has been a big issue for this. With the current one, we went out twice to tender for procurement because we went through one process and we lost confidence in who was going to install it, so we went out again a second time and we got a different company installing it. That company is great, but an incredible amount of work was done on references, who they had worked for, which systems they had installed, had they done it successfully, had they done similar systems in the public sector and so on. There was a lot of time taken before the project to make sure we had the right product and the right installers, which is critical.

An Cathaoirleach: I am sure a review was carried out following the failed system-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: There was.

An Cathaoirleach: -----and write-down of €3.6 million. You might furnish the committee with that, if that is agreeable. It would be very useful for our focus on the issue.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I think we may have given it to the Oireachtas joint committee already so we can give it to you as well.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay. That would be extremely useful.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, just to say, on this list of projects here, the one that is above budget is we installed regional fibre circuits in all our premises to update them. The reason the project is above budget is because we found that Raidió na Gaeltachta needed more business reliability after the storms, so we put in an extra circuit. That explains the overspend on that because we decided to spend the extra money.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay. Just some quick concluding questions. We have the figures for the amount spent on travel and subsistence in 2023 and 2024.

What was the total amount spent on travel and subsistence in 2025? Do we have that figure?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not think we have it. I will have to come back to the committee with that.

An Cathaoirleach: Could you come back to us and provide a breakdown between international and domestic expenditure for 2024 and 2025?

I wanted to touch on the issue of limousines, or whatever term you used for cars-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Sorry, but I have the figures. Is the Cathaoirleach asking for the figure for 2024?

An Cathaoirleach: For 2025.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We do not have the figure for 2025.

An Cathaoirleach: You might furnish that to us.

On the usage of limousines or whatever term you used, do any presenters have contracts that require that particular service? Is it written into any contracts?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not know if there are any existing contracts-----

An Cathaoirleach: Did Mr. Lynch mention this?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: We just said that the contract that includes the service is for Patrick Kielty.

An Cathaoirleach: Patrick Kielty. It is written into his contract that he has a limousine.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is not a limousine. It is a car.

An Cathaoirleach: A car with a person to pick him up at the airport, I would imagine, and bring him to-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I believe it is so he can do the Friday night show and then go on to work in Belfast the following day for the BBC. It is to enable him to do both.

An Cathaoirleach: So a driver picks him up at the airport and brings him to Belfast.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I do not know about the airport, but the driver picks him up at RTE and takes him towards Belfast.

An Cathaoirleach: Do we have a cost for that?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Not yet, no.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that part of the overall contract?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is part of the overall contract but it is not included in his salary. He is provided with a certain clothing allowance and transport.

An Cathaoirleach: You might give us some details on that. Is he the only presenter?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: To my knowledge. We will go back and check. I do not think there is anyone else.

An Cathaoirleach: You might come back to us.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Not in their contracts anyway. They do get transport but I do not think it is written into their contracts.

An Cathaoirleach: That is interesting. The information we got refers to the new contract that is in place and the salary cap that is tied to the director general's own salary. Would I be correct in saying there is an add-on or a build-around?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No, it is not an add-on or build-around. It is part of Mr. Kielty's contract.

An Cathaoirleach: It is a benefit.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is a benefit, yes, but some presenters have clothing allowances and other things written into their contracts, separate from their salaries. They are small things. They would get two or three suits a year or something like that.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay. It would be good to see the value.

You mentioned a very high cost for the provision of taxis. You outlined the rationale for that, which I understand in some circumstances. Apart from for their daily business, do staff utilise taxis?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: No. Staff are-----

An Cathaoirleach: Coming to work or-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Under the agreement with the union, staff are entitled to taxis if they are working antisocial hours, such as very early in the morning or very late at night.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay.

You mentioned earlier that you use Uber. Would your usage be covered by the figures?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Mainly taxis. It would be yes, for taxis in general. I think so.

An Cathaoirleach: I believe you get an allowance of €25,000 on top of your salary.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Correct.

An Cathaoirleach: What is the purpose of it?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is called a car allowance but it is just a general allowance.

An Cathaoirleach: You get a car allowance and have unlimited usage of taxis, which is separate.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Yes. I do not use that many, though, but I do use some.

An Cathaoirleach: Do you think that is right?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: If I used a car to come here today, I would probably pay more for parking than I would for-----

An Cathaoirleach: The €25,000 is called a car allowance?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: It is called a car allowance. It is actually a-----

An Cathaoirleach: Yet you have unlimited use of taxis.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I came in with my colleagues today.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Can I just be clear about car allowances? We are reducing their number. They are called car allowances. They are not necessarily for cars. I do not know why they are called car allowances. They are allowances that people get in the organisation. We have reduced the number significantly. No one-----

An Cathaoirleach: Do you think it is right that someone in receipt of a car allowance should have unrestricted use of taxis and Ubers-----

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: So long as you use them carefully and for business.

An Cathaoirleach: -----which is an additional cost to the organisation?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: So long as you use them carefully and for business reasons, yes. I have worked hard enough, I think; I need to maximise my-----

An Cathaoirleach: And you get paid well enough too.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: I get paid pretty well.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay. That concludes the questions. Obviously, there is an important piece of work starting now in terms of the involvement of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the extension to ensure there is proper oversight. I am sure this will be an ongoing process before the Committee of Public Accounts. At the outset of the meeting, I said this was an opportunity to be open, honest and frank because, inevitably, the forensic work that the Comptroller and Auditor General's office carries out when auditing Departments or agencies means that, if there are issues, they will come out in the wash. This was an opportunity to front-load any of those issues. Once the Comptroller and Auditor General embarks on that work, hopefully sooner rather than later, hopefully everything will be above board and proper.

There are bigger issues in terms of the future funding of RTÉ, and those issues are outside the remit of this committee, but inevitably the expenditure of that money will come under our focus. There are huge issues in this regard.

I have a concluding question. I know that 89% of staff within the organisation voted no confidence in its direction. I would say that is an extension of a vote of no confidence in Mr. Bakhurst's leadership within the organisation.

Public confidence is at rock bottom. We see that with the fall-off in the number of television licences. A big piece of work is needed within RTÉ to recalibrate to regain the confidence of staff within the organisation and of the public.

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: Can I respond to that?

An Cathaoirleach: Absolutely. You may make the concluding comments on that. Where do you think confidence is, both in terms of the public, given all the issues we have discussed here and the concerns around expenditure, as well as the concerns expressed within the workforce of RTÉ?

Mr. Kevin Bakhurst: First, the figure of 89% was 89% of SIPTU members, not of the overall staff, and the unions do not represent anywhere near all the staff. However, we take concerns on board. We have a good relationship with the unions and we will discuss that. I know there are concerns among some of the members, and we need to deal with that. There is a lot of change going on. I think that is a reflection of the amount of change.

In overall terms, the Cathaoirleach said public confidence is low. That is not necessarily true. We measure public confidence with a rolling audience measurement tool from RED C. Trust in the organisation has risen quite significantly in the past year or so after reaching rock bottom in 2023. It is on its way back, but be under no illusion: we know there is much more work to do. It is about me and the leadership team showing that RTÉ is delivering brilliantly for audiences, delivering value for money and being transparent.

I was at a European Broadcasting Union conference in Prague last week or the week before and was talking to colleagues from other organisations there. RTÉ is in a really good position in terms of European public service media. We are lucky to some extent because there is a consensus in this country that public service media matters and, hopefully, the country is prepared to invest in it. We will drive commercial revenues as hard as we can. We all do the job because we believe in the role of public service media. We want RTÉ to be recognised by everyone in this room and outside for the organisation that it is becoming, which is a very good, modern public service media organisation.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Bakhurst. That concludes our engagement for today.

I thank the director general and other representatives of RTÉ for attending today. I also thank the officials from the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, along with the Comptroller and Auditor General, for their attendance once again.

Is it agreed that the clerk will seek any follow-up information required and carry out any agreed actions arising from the meeting? Agreed.

The committee will meet again on Thursday, 16 July 2026, to hear from witnesses from the National Transport Authority and Iarnród Éireann.

The witnesses withdrew.

The committee adjourned at 3.19 p.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, 16 July 2026.