



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

**DÁIL ÉIREANN**

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*  
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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# DÁIL ÉIREANN

*Dé Máirt, 17 Meitheamh 2025*

*Tuesday, 17 June 2025*

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 2 p.m.

***Paidir agus Machnamh.  
Prayer and Reflection.***

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## **Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions**

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** We have had more than a decade of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael presiding over a housing emergency and now the Government proposes to force ripped-off renters to carry the can for its failures. The Government's plan for the private rental sector is really Fianna Fáil's rent hike Bill. It can spoof all it wants; the only certainty from this move is rent will increase for every renter. It is only a question of when.

The average length of a tenancy is three and half years and many are much shorter, so the impact of this plan will be felt very quickly. All renters will be subject to large hikes over time. Those moving into new build properties will be hit with massive market rent from day one, while those who move frequently for work or education and regularly enter new tenancies will be absolutely hammered. We are talking about construction workers, healthcare workers in training and students who already struggle to find affordable accommodation being fleeced over and over.

Fianna Fáil's rent hike Bill is a bonanza for the big property funds, the vultures and corporate landlords. It is a blueprint to boost the profit of the big boys and screw over renters. That is the Government's plan. It is doing this during a persistent cost-of-living crisis where people are being hit with price hikes right across the board. In the past four years, the cost of the weekly shop has sky-rocketed by €3,000 per year for many families and renters are forking out an additional €7,000 a year on average in rent.

Where does the Taoiseach think people get the money? Everything within the Government's back-of-an-envelope plan is a jumble of contradictions. It is the product of a panicked Government at sixes and sevens, desperately seeking to defend a plan which more resembles a last throw of the dice gamble than an actual solution. It has been blunder after blunder. The Government had to change the press statement announcing the plan because it made such a mess of things. The Taoiseach said one thing, the Minister said another things and the left hand did not know what the right hand was doing. Nowhere in the announcement on Tuesday, or in the days that followed, was there any mention of Government immediately bringing forward legislation to extend rent pressure zones, RPZs, to the entire State. The Government was content to wait until March and expose renters to big hikes. By Thursday, lo and behold, the Government had changed its story and it was adamant that it was always its intention to bring

forward that legislation. Taoiseach, pull the other one. The Government is only being done now because it was called out on it.

Such is the mess now that we have Government TDs briefing against the housing Minister for, in their words, producing a plan that he cannot explain and that they cannot understand. I am happy to explain it to them. This is Fianna Fáil's plan to hike up rents; that is it. That is the bottom line. Cíntíonn Bille Fhianna Fáil chun cíos a ardú go rachaidh an cíos in airde do gach cíosaí. Níl orainn ach fanacht. Ní feidir leanúint le seo.

The only way to undo the damage is to go back to the drawing board. By all means, extend RPZs to the rest of the State and to areas that should have never been left out in the first place. However, the Government has to drop the rest of the Fianna Fáil rent hike Bill. It is a crazy plan and renters simply cannot take any more.

**The Taoiseach:** I reject completely the Deputy's assertions. She is guilty of severely exaggerated commentary on the reform of the RPZs announced last week. The bottom line is that as a result of those reforms, renters will have stronger protections than ever before. All renters will be covered by RPZs. It will be interesting that the first item on the agenda of our RPZ reforms will be something that Sinn Féin will have no choice but to support. Despite all the bluster and hype, Sinn Féin TDs will go into the voting lobbies to support the very first measure of the reform package we announced last week.

It is interesting that Dr. Michael Byrne, who is a lecturer in political economy at the school of social policy, social work and social justice in UCD and who works with Threshold, has said the security of tenure measures announced last week are really significant. He said that, arguably, they are among the most robust protection for tenants in Europe. I am not saying that and no one on the Government side is saying it; it is someone has been involved in the area for quite some time. That is the case, because we have an effective end to no-fault evictions, where the landlord has four or more tenancies. New tenancies will now be guaranteed for six years. Tenancies with smaller landlords generally have a minimum duration of six years. With limited circumstances - more limited than before - smaller tenancies can end. I look forward to Sinn Féin either opposing those measures or surely having to vote for the additional protections we are going to bring forward. What will happen is that the contrast between the Sinn Féin hype and hyperbole, and what will happen when we put these legislative pieces through the House, will be a yawning gap. Surely Sinn Féin will have to vote for these additional protections.

The more fundamental point is that Sinn Féin has proposed a rent freeze for three years, which would damage supply. Overall, Sinn Féin's policy objective is to reduce the rental market. The party has an ideological hostility to the rental market and to the private market, more generally, in terms of construction. A freeze on rent increases would mean that no one could claim for maintenance costs or even the cost of inflation. Who is going to invest in new units with Sinn Féin's policy, because its solutions are simply wrong? Its whole proposition is incoherent.

The only way we can deal with the housing crisis is to dramatically increase supply. We have increased it from 2020 onwards to about 30,000 thousand units per year. Up to then, we had 20,000 per year. We want to get to 50,000 per year. We need public investment, which we are doing, as the State is the largest investor in the housing market at the moment, and we need substantial private sector investment. Sinn Féin has to acknowledge that. I know members of Sinn Féin have been out protesting and saying this is an emergency and so on. I agree; it is a

crisis that we need to deal with as a society.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** At least the Taoiseach admits it.

**The Taoiseach:** It begs the question, though, as to how Deputy McDonald could, to date, oppose up to 1,700 housing units in her own area, in Clonliffe College, and likewise in Cabra. If the Deputy is saying it is an emergency across the country, how come it is not an emergency in her constituency or in the areas where her party objects?

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**The Taoiseach:** She simply cannot have it both ways. This duplicitous approach to housing has to end. What we need from Deputy McDonald are concrete solutions on how we increase supply so that we can get a situation where we can build 50,000 units a year.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** It might interest the Taoiseach to know that, far from having an ideological objection to rental accommodation, I was raised in rental accommodation. Imagine that.

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy's party's policies-----

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** I have no ideological objection. As a matter of fact, I am determined that renters, whether long-term renters, as is the case with my family, or shorter term renters, which is the more normal experience, are not fleeced and gouged in the way that is currently happening. I do not know how blunt or clear we have to be with the Taoiseach, but renters now pay thousands of euro more than just a few short years ago, and all the additional costs due to the cost-of-living crisis.

The Taoiseach can stand up and bluster and cast aspersions at me all he likes, but he is in government, he is the Taoiseach and it is his housing Minister who is proposing a Bill that will have one definite effect, namely, higher rents for renters.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The time is up. I thank the Deputy.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** I appeal to the Taoiseach-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank Deputy McDonald and call on the Taoiseach to respond.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** -----not to do that. Renters have had enough.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** The Taoiseach must have some decency and some consideration for people who are struggling.

**Deputy Timmy Dooley:** Deputy McDonald has none.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy. The time is up. She should allow the Taoiseach to respond.

**The Taoiseach:** I am not talking about Deputy McDonald personally; I am talking about the Sinn Féin Party.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Blah, blah, blah.

**The Taoiseach:** The Sinn Féin Party's policy objective over time is to reduce the size of the private rental sector.

**Deputy Dessie Ellis:** That is not true.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** That is not true.

**The Taoiseach:** If Deputy McDonald looks at her policies in recent years, they have been designed to suppress supply in the private rental market. We have built more social houses in the past four years than have been built since 1975.

*(Interruptions).*

**The Taoiseach:** Some 36,500 new social houses were built.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Who is in government?

**The Taoiseach:** In 2023, 12,000 social houses were delivered and 10,500 were delivered last year.

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** You are benchmarking against your own failures.

**The Taoiseach:** These are record numbers of social housing delivery.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** There are record rents.

**The Taoiseach:** Deputy McDonald says her party can go to 30,000 overnight. She has not outlined how she would get to 30,000 overnight.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** It will increase rent.

**The Taoiseach:** The measures and reforms proposed last week will cap rent for all existing tenants to 2%. Deputy McDonald knows that.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** It will increase rent. The Taoiseach knows that.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Taoiseach and call Deputy Bacik.

**The Taoiseach:** Rent increases for any new tenancies, post-2026, will be linked to the CPI.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Taoiseach. The time is up. I call Deputy Bacik of the Labour Party.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** The Taoiseach does not care about renters. We have got his answer.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** After the general election, all the briefing from the Government was that it was ready to take what it called "difficult decisions" to fix this housing disaster. In recent weeks, it has certainly been difficult to watch his Government's chaotic decision-making - its U-turns, drip-feeds and hasty rewrites of flawed press releases. Undoubtedly, the Taoiseach and the Minister, Deputy Browne, have made decisions as difficult for renters as they could possibly have managed. Last week, and again just now on Leaders' Questions, he gleefully said the Government took the Opposition by surprise with the pronouncements on RPZs.

**The Taoiseach:** I did not say that.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** He made it sound like it was a “gotcha” moment for him.

**The Taoiseach:** It was last week that I said that.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** It is hardly gotcha. Of course, we welcome decisions that are taken by the Government that we believe will fix the housing crisis. We support the extension of RPZs across the country, but not a hollowed out version of RPZs that offer no real protections for renters. This was not a gotcha moment for landlords because last week he gave them a generous nine months’ notice of his mooted plans. The net effect of that was obvious. Some signalled their intention to hike rents quickly before their investment property came within an RPZ next March. Others, opportunistically, started making plans to issue tenants with a notice to quit - racing the clock before the new rules came in. Concerns were immediately raised about this last week by my colleague, Deputy Sheehan. Labour Party representatives heard from frightened renters around the country. It is clear the Taoiseach and his backbenchers heard it too because, suddenly, there was to be emergency legislation this week to give effect to the difficult decisions on RPZs without delay. We know the Bill will be rushed through tomorrow but there is still very little clarity for renters. There is very little clarity for any of us. We have learned that there is to be no special protections for students or short-term renters. This has been incredibly difficult for renters. It remains difficult. People are living in fear of evictions, of rent hikes and of an uncertain future. It is the Government’s chaotic drip feed of housing policy changes which is causing this uncertainty and confusion. That is why at 6 p.m. people from across the country will be gathering outside Leinster House for our national Raise the Roof housing demonstration.

**A Deputy:** Yes, that is what it is for.

**A Deputy:** It is all about protests.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** People will gather to send a strong message to the Government. It is time for a radical reset of housing policy. No more incoherent policy changes. We need to see the radical reset the Housing Commission has called for because only the State has the deep pockets necessary to underwrite the construction of homes at the scale that is needed. The Government must scale up its effort and ambition, not waste time and money on “Bertienomics” era tax breaks for developers or ineffectual apartment design changes.

One promising policy that we welcome is an overhaul of the Land Development Agency, LDA. We have been calling for this for years in Labour. We want to see the LDA become effective. Rather than trying to catch the Opposition off guard or trying to govern by gotcha, why will the Government not take on board other urgent and ambitious proposals for reform and fix the housing crisis? Why will it not adopt our policy on protections for renters?

**The Taoiseach:** I will first say to the Deputy that since the Government came in a number of months ago in January, we have approved an extra €700 million in respect of projects and programmes for social and affordable housing. We passed the national planning framework, which will enable local authorities to zone far more land for house construction. We brought forward proposals on legislation to extend and renew planning permissions in order to give continuity and ensure that those planning permissions can be realised. We brought in the RPZ reforms that were announced last week, which the Deputy is now attacking. In the same breath and the same comment, the Deputy talks about a radical reset recommended by the Housing Commission.



This was recommended by the Housing Commission - a reform of the RPZs. Which is it? What aspects of the Housing Commission is the Deputy saying we should and should not implement? The Housing Agency was asked to do a review of RPZs following on from the Housing Commission. It did its review. We have adopted one of the proposed areas - as in reforming the RPZs, not getting rid of them as the Deputy said I would. We are not doing anything like that; we are strengthening protections for renters.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Driving up rents.

**The Taoiseach:** Very significantly protecting protections for renters which Deputy Bacik is clearly ignoring in her commentary. While at the same time, in terms of new investment and new units, which we do need, there has to be a clear policy certainty and stability in the market so that people can invest. After 2026, linking new units to the consumer price index, CPI, and a right to reset after six years is the crucial piece that will allow inward investment in to get supply up. If we do not get supply up, then the rate at which prices will moderate will be slower. It is as simple as that. The Deputy will not bite the bullet. She will not make the difficult position. She is in opposition. I accept that.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** We cannot. We are not in the Government.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** It is your job.

**The Taoiseach:** She will not support anything that in any way she perceives to be injurious to her electoral base or might cost her a few votes. That is the prism through which she is looking at our housing crisis. I recall that she is the person that said she will build 100,000 per year----

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** Where is the 40,000?

**The Taoiseach:** -----through some new-fangled national State building agency, the details of which are few and far between. The Deputy has not produced solutions. We have built more than 30,000 per annum over the past number of years.

**Deputy Ged Nash:** Captured by civil servants-----

**The Taoiseach:** In the first quarter of this year, housing completions were close to 6,000. The actual number was 5,938. That is the highest since the record in 2011, bar the spike after Covid-19. There is a lot of delivery happening. The land market activity on residential zoned areas is up. There is a great deal of activity there. We have to keep going and get the job done.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** Anybody watching will be wondering when the Government is going to take political responsibility for the housing crisis. He is the Taoiseach and is in government. His party and Fine Gael have effectively governed together for the best part of a decade and yet, he is resorting to throwing critiques at the Opposition for not building homes. We are in opposition. The Labour Party, as the Taoiseach well knows, produced a costed, detailed plan on housing and on the transformation of the Land Development Agency into a State construction company because only the State has the deep pockets that can underwrite the risk of construction. That is what I am hearing from builders and developers. The Taoiseach knows that to be the case. He knows he does not have a leg to stand on when it comes to defending his housing policy. Last year, the Government thought it would deliver 40,000 new builds. It came far short of that. Renters, those who aspire to home ownership, those who are couch surfing and living

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in their childhood bedrooms, not to mention the 15,000 people in homelessness, know the Government does not have a leg to stand on when it comes to housing policy.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** The Government has to take responsibility and deliver the homes people need.

**The Taoiseach:** I have no difficulty in taking responsibility. We are taking decisions.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** To drive up rents.

**The Taoiseach:** The Deputy is criticising decisions. She said, “We are in opposition”. The Labour Party could have been in government-----

*(Interruptions).*

**The Taoiseach:** -----but it did not have the courage.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** You did not give us a chance. You had done the deal with Michael Lowry.

*(Interruptions).*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputies either want the answer-----

**The Taoiseach:** You and many in your party did not have the courage. Why? It was because-----

**A Deputy:** You had done the dodgy deal.

**The Taoiseach:** Look, it hurts. I have the floor.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** You have 30 seconds, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** I accept what I just said hurts the party. I note Deputy Kelly is not here. To be fair to him, he wanted to go into government, but the others did not-----

*(Interruptions).*

**The Taoiseach:** -----and the reason they did not want to go into government was that they are afraid of the people alongside them.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Answer the question, Taoiseach

**The Taoiseach:** You were afraid to jump in case they would not jump and *vice versa*.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Answer the question, Taoiseach

**The Taoiseach:** I have no difficulty in taking responsibility, but maybe it is time Deputy Bacik took some responsibility and fleshed out her details.

**A Deputy:** We will have to clean up your mess.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Whitmore of the Social Democrats.



*(Interruptions).*

**Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy James Lawless):** You made some mess yourselves.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** The big man who will not answer a question.

**Deputy James Lawless:** You would be dying for Opposition.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy. Please allow the Social Democrats to take their Leaders' Questions slot.

**The Taoiseach:** But they have all joined forces now.

**Deputy James Lawless:** The joint Opposition.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Please-----

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** When it comes to housing, can the Government get anything right? It has been planning these rental reforms for months and yet it made an absolute hames of them last week. Even the Taoiseach's Cabinet colleagues could not make sense of them. They were quoted in the media talking about not understanding the rules. For the avoidance of any doubt, there was one simple thing these reforms were to do, and that was to drive rents higher.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** That is because driving record rents even higher, according to the Government, is somehow going to bring rents down. Make that make sense. No wonder the Taoiseach's Cabinet colleagues are utterly bewildered.

The Taoiseach has claimed repeatedly that housing is the Government's biggest priority. Yet, when it comes to policy announcements, they are chaotic and sloppy. Even today, the Minister conceded that students and those on short-term rental contracts will not be protected from the rental reset, which is an absolute disgrace and it goes against what was said last week.

The Taoiseach also said the Government wants to extend the rent pressure zones across the country, but it did not even have the legislation ready last week to do so and he did not have the answers last week when he was asked in the Dáil about it. The truth is that the policy is a shambles and the Government is making it up as it goes along. It has no coherent plan and just one guiding principle, that is, to design a housing policy that extracts the maximum profit for investors.

The Land Development Agency was set up in 2018. Now, seven years later, the Government is finally talking about giving it greater compulsory purchase powers. The Social Democrats demanded this from the outset but successive governments preferred to have a toothless tiger, a Land Development Agency that was prevented from acquiring the land it needed. Once again, the Government had to be dragged kicking and screaming into doing the right thing. It is completely unclear now whether these powers will be accompanied by a new budget. Perhaps the Taoiseach could clarify that in his response.

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I am acutely aware that every time we discuss housing in this Chamber it feels hopeless and that is because we are usually discussing failed policies of the Government. It does not have to be like this. The problems we are facing now are because of the wrong political choices being made, but the Government can make the correct political choices. However, that will mean it will have to admit that what it was doing was not working and agree to a complete reset of policy where the Government prioritises people who want to own their homes and not investors. It is clear that not once was that mentioned. Of all those rental homes the Government is proposing will be developed, none will be able to be purchased to be someone's home.

I urge the Taoiseach to listen to the Opposition. We have concrete solutions.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** We offered the State savings scheme that would free up €160 billion, potentially, on deposit in Irish bank accounts.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy Whitmore.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** I ask the Taoiseach to please take those suggestions on board.

**The Taoiseach:** I reject the use of language like “chaotic” and all that. It is a good sound bite, but that is all it is - a sound bite with no substance behind it. The bottom line is that the reforms announced last week will enhance protections. The Deputy says it will drive up rents. Every existing tenant will have their rent capped at 2%. There will be no increase. Does the Deputy acknowledge that? Not one of them has acknowledged that. No existing tenant will have their rent increased. We want new units built. Very few apartments have been built. We have a problem there and we need to attract private sector investment in to get the supply up. Any new tenancies post March 2026 or any new units built will be capped at the CPI. Tenure has increased dramatically in terms of protections - no-fault evictions essentially for almost all tenants, but particularly for those with four or more. These are significant protections over and above what was there before the reforms announced last week and yet they get the decried and attacked. Basically, it is as if rhetoric will win out in the end from the Opposition's perspective.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** That is not true.

**The Taoiseach:** There is no real detailed teasing out of issues or discussion of issues in here on Leaders' Questions - it is get up and have a go. The Deputy mentioned the proposal around the SSIA, a savings and investments scheme. She must acknowledge that it would take some years before the necessary funds would be available. The State itself is investing hugely with about €6.8 billion in capital on housing in 2025 and that will probably rise. That is not counting the State investment on the current side with HAP and so on. The State investment in housing right now is well over €7 billion. We have the fourth largest construction activity in European Union of 27 member states. There is a lot of activity in Ireland but we have had a growing economy in the last decade and very significant population growth. We have an issue in meeting the housing demand. That is a crisis for the younger generation. We acknowledge that. I am very focused and the Government is very determined and very focused. We are taking decisions every week on housing and will continue to take more and more decisions.

The LDA has made an impact. The Government from 2020 to 2025 gave it power and resources, and legislation. We are now giving additional roles to the LDA as it has built up capacity. However, we are not hanging around for CPIs - CPIs can take time. We need to hit

the ground running in respect of any additional reforms that we have. We are absolutely determined to get to 50,000 per annum. Rent freezes will not do that.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** Yes, the Government is taking decisions, but it is taking all the wrong decisions. That is the problem and that is what we are saying to it. It needs to completely rethink its policy and needs to start prioritising people who want to be homeowners, people who want to be able to afford the rent rather than the investors. That is the crux of the problem. The Government's policies are being directed by the investors. The Taoiseach spoke about never having a real opportunity to tease things out here. That is because every time he comes into this Chamber all he does is spend his time deflecting, gaslighting or blaming the Opposition when it is his responsibility to put in policies that meet the needs of our people. People are not being fooled because they are the ones who are living through this housing crisis. They are the ones who cannot afford rents. They are the ones who cannot afford their own home. They are the ones who are retired and are worried about whether they might be made homeless. Those people can see exactly what the Government is doing and failing to do. They will not forgive it for that.

**The Taoiseach:** The Government's focus has been on housing supply. The Government has dramatically increased the level of public sector investment. We had record numbers of social houses built in the last four years. One would need to go as far back as 1975 to get an equivalent level of social housing built.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** That is because successive governments did nothing for 20 years.

**The Taoiseach:** We have built up to 36,000 social houses since.

**Deputy Jennifer Whitmore:** There are record house prices and record homelessness.

**The Taoiseach:** We have also supported affordability.

**Deputy Pádraig Rice:** They are €400,000 in our own constituency.

**The Taoiseach:** For example, the help to buy scheme and the first home scheme are significant supports for first-time buyers. I know the main Opposition party, to which the other parties have all aligned, wanted to get rid of the first home scheme-----

*(Interruptions).*

**The Taoiseach:** -----and wanted to get rid of the help to buy scheme. It wants to get rid of those two schemes for first-time buyers. In addition, we have produced very significant grant support for people who want to renovate and live in a derelict house, for example, or in a vacant house. This is not investor led. This is people-led investment and support that we as a Government have introduced and will continue to support the younger people who are seeking to get a house, either to buy or to rent, at an affordable price.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** We are talking about housing and targets. As Opposition Members have stated, the targets are not being reached. Let us not get into the semantics of whether they will be reached, because what will stop them being reached is infrastructure. We have a situation in Clonsaugh where planned housing is going to be delayed due to a lack of water services. In this context, it was interesting to listen to the ESRI chairman, Mr. Sean O'Driscoll, who is a member of the new infrastructure task force. Credit to the Government

for setting this up. However, the fact that Mr. O'Driscoll came out on the record and spoke in a personal capacity shows a certain element of trepidation, at least on his behalf and possibly among other members. He addressed issues such as judicial reviews and planning delays. He said the bar for judicial reviews was far too low. He spoke about the need to extend the Part 8 planning permissions enjoyed by local councils and to tell the EU that Ireland had an infrastructure emergency to overcome regulation and red tape.

What I would like to focus on is the need to secure multi-annual funding for utilities and major projects. I am referring to water services, our national grid and some other areas. It was said that tough, brave and exceptional decisions were needed. We need a commitment. The CEO of Uisce Éireann and the managing director of ESB Networks are on this task force but there is no sign that the required legislative changes are going to be agreed by the 1 July target. The Minister, Deputy Chambers, has reportedly said that nothing is ruled in or out and everything is on the table. Can I get a commitment from the Taoiseach that, for the first time in the history of the State, we will have a proper structure of multi-annual funding? We see local councils with a three-year rolling capital programme. Why can we not set out a five-year rolling capital programme for infrastructural projects such as water and the grid?

I am digressing slightly, but we talk about AI technology. That will use a lot more energy when we have many more data storage companies coming in, and the income potential of that. We cannot have that and also have electricity supply and build houses. We have the potential to be a major energy exporter in terms of converted hydrogen and stored electricity, which also feeds into the housing situation. Will the Taoiseach commit that the Government will agree to set out a multi-annual funding structure, which will also give certainty to the training colleges in order to start recruiting the homegrown staff we need?

**The Taoiseach:** First of all, "Yes" is the answer. We will. Utilities need certainty. Utilities can be a great enabler of both housing and infrastructure. The national development plan will reflect the prioritisation of water in particular, expansion of the grid and public transport along with road infrastructure. The Minister, Jack Chambers, has established an infrastructure division within the Department of public expenditure and a team of sectoral experts has been seconded from key agencies to the division. That division is already focusing on the electricity, water and transport sectors. It is focused initially on the preparation of an evidence-based, systematic assessment of the barriers impeding timely infrastructure development. It is engaging with key stakeholders to identify those critical barriers. It has begun a public consultation, which was launched on 6 June. A stakeholder engagement event is scheduled for 18 June in Athlone. It will also examine what reforms have been successfully introduced in other jurisdictions that may be applicable in Ireland. The Minister, Deputy Chambers, will provide a report to the Government by the end of July on what have been identified as the most significant barriers slowing infrastructural development, and we will work on those. I will say this, though, in terms of judicial reviews. I believe all planning should as far as humanly possible be decided on in the layers of planning institutions we have established - local authorities and An Bord Pleanála. Ultimately, planning should not be decided in the court but people are applying to the courts the length and breadth of the country. Governments cannot abolish the law. In the Planning Act, it was interesting. We did try to streamline the law and the whole area around judicial review. There was a lot of opposition in the House to it. People wanted to reduce the impact of the Planning Act that we took three years to get through this House. People were adamant that rights came before anything else in some quarters, in other words, the eternal question of the common good versus personal, individual rights. Given the population growth in this country,

given the housing need in this country, I think the overall common good should triumph, given the situation we find ourselves in.

We have very good examples, by the way, of very good infrastructure that has been delivered on time and on budget, but we never hear of those projects because they are not newsworthy, really. When they get done on time and in budget, that is the end of it. No one really wants to talk about them. It is the ones that are over budget and behind time. Take the Shannon water scheme. The Government has approved that but there will be opposition. Public representatives have said they are going to oppose it. It is essential for the midlands, it is essential for Dublin, that we get that project through but there will be opposition.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** To follow up on transport infrastructure, Mr. O'Driscoll mentioned, for example, the impact in terms of future jobs at Apple because of the road interlink and public transport links. It is a similar thing with Galway in terms of the ring road. As someone with a green background, I acknowledge the need for the ring road but obviously there is a need to put more investment into public transport alternatives in the first instance. This action plan is coming by 1 July, which means the Cabinet will be deciding, I hope by the recess, what the priorities are going to be for the next couple of years in respect of the task force. If multi-annual funding is not firmly on the table at that stage, we might as well say "Goodbye" to the whole thing and it will be, as Mr. O'Driscoll said, just another talking shop. I hope that, between the Minister, Deputy Chambers, the Taoiseach and the rest of Cabinet, multi-annual funding will be put firmly at the heart of this plan so we can get moving on what is required.

**The Taoiseach:** Absolutely, funding and reform. The funding will be made available through the national development plan. The issue will be whether we can get societal buy-in to a lot of the required infrastructure. That is the big issue. The Deputy mentioned the ring road in Galway. His former colleagues in the Green Party were very much against roads. That is just a fact; that is their political view. Even in government, it was problematic in terms of some road projects. Look at the Macroom-Ballyvourney bypass. The impact that has had environmentally and on road safety has been extraordinary in terms of the impact on the communities living in the various towns along there - it has been quite extraordinary - as well as improving connectivity and road safety.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** Will the funding be multi-annual?

**The Taoiseach:** I think we have had too simplistic a debate on roads from those on the environmental pillar who see roads as just a total non-starter. We need better debate around these issues because they can also have beneficial environmental impacts.

## **An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business**

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach(Deputy Mary Butler):** I move:

Tuesday's business shall be:-

- Motion *re* Presentation and Circulation of Revised and Second Further Revised Estimates [Votes 11 to 19, 23, 24, 26 to 30, 32 to 34, 39, 42 and 43] (*without debate and any division claimed to be taken immediately*)

- Social Welfare (Bereaved Partner's Pension) Bill 2025 - Financial Resolution



*(without debate)*

- Motion *re* Third Report of the Standing Committee of Selection *(without debate)*
- Finance (Local Property Tax and Other Provisions) (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Second Stage) *(to conclude after 3 hours and 34 minutes)*

Tuesday's private members' business shall be Motion *re* Emergency Action on Housing and Homelessness, selected by Sinn Féin.

Wednesday's business shall be:

- Finance (Local Property Tax and Other Provisions) (Amendment) Bill 2025 - Financial Resolution *(without debate)*
- Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Second and remaining Stages) *(Second Stage to conclude after 3 hours and 34 minutes and any division claimed to be taken immediately; Committee and remaining Stages to conclude within 60 minutes)*
- Mental Health Bill 2024 (Committee Stage, resumed, section 43) *(if not previously concluded, to adjourn either at 9 p.m. or after 2 hours and 30 minutes, whichever is the later)*

Wednesday's private members' business shall be the Motion *re* Public Transport Experience, selected by the Independent and Parties Technical Group.

Thursday's business shall be Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) Bill 2025 (Second Stage) *(if not previously concluded, to adjourn after 3 hours and 24 minutes)*.

Thursday evening business shall be the Second Stage of the Healthcare (Transparent Payments) Bill 2022, sponsored by Deputy Darren O'Rourke.

**Proposed Arrangements for this week's business:**

In relation to Tuesday's business, it is proposed that:

1. the ordinary routine of business as contained in Schedule 3 to Standing Orders shall be modified to the following extent:

(a) the Dáil may sit later than 10.48 p.m.;

(b) the time allotted for Government Business shall be extended in accordance with the arrangements for that business, with consequential effect on the commencement time for private members' business, which may be taken later than 6.12 p.m.; and

(c) private members' time shall in any event be taken on the conclusion of the Second Stage of the Finance (Local Property Tax and Other Provisions) (Amendment) Bill 2025, with consequential effect on the commencement times for the items following in the ordinary routine of business, namely, Parliamentary Questions to the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, and topical issues;

2. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Presentation and Circulation of Revised and Second Further Revised Estimates [Votes 11 to 19, 23, 24, 26 to 30, 32 to 34, 39, 42



and 43] shall be taken without debate and any division claimed thereon shall be taken immediately;

3. the proceedings on the Motion for a Financial Resolution relating to the Social Welfare (Bereaved Partner's Pension) Bill 2025 shall be taken without debate;

4. the proceedings on the Motion *re* Third Report of the Standing Committee of Selection shall be taken without debate; and

5. the proceedings on the Second Stage of the Finance (Local Property Tax and Other Provisions) (Amendment) Bill 2025 shall be brought to a conclusion after 3 hours and 34 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) the arrangements for the first speaking round shall be in accordance with those contained in the table immediately below (to be read across, not down);

(b) on the conclusion of the first speaking round or where speeches conclude before the 3 hours and 24 minutes have elapsed and no other member is offering, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed 10 minutes, whereupon proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion; and

(c) members may share time.

	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>
<i>Mins</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>SD</i>	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>IPTG</i>	<i>Gov</i>
<i>Mins</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>
	<i>SF</i>	<i>ITG</i>	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>OM</i>
<i>Mins</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>

In relation to Wednesday's business, it is proposed that:

1. the ordinary routine of business as set out in Schedule 3 to Standing Orders is modified to the following extent:

(a) the Dáil may sit later than 9.30 p.m. and shall adjourn on the conclusion of the weekly division time; and

(b) the time allotted for Government Business shall be extended in accordance with the arrangements for that business, with consequential effect on the commencement time for the weekly division time, which may be taken on the adjournment of the resumed proceedings on the Mental Health Bill 2024: Provided that where the proceedings on that Bill conclude within the allotted time, the weekly division time shall be taken on the conclusion thereof, with consequential effect on the time for the adjournment of the Dáil;

2. the proceedings on the Motion for a Financial Resolution relating to the Finance (Local Property Tax and Other Provisions) (Amendment) Bill 2025 shall be taken without debate;

3. in relation to the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2025, the following ar-

rangements shall apply:

(a) the proceedings on Second Stage shall be brought to a conclusion after 3 hours and 34 minutes and the following arrangements shall apply:

(i) the arrangements for the first speaking round shall be in accordance with those contained in the table immediately below (to be read across, not down);

(ii) on the conclusion of the first speaking round or where speeches conclude before the 3 hours and 24 minutes have elapsed and no other member is offering, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed 10 minutes, whereupon proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion;

(iii) members may share time; and

(iv) any division claimed on the Second Stage proceedings shall be taken immediately; and

(b) the proceedings on Committee and remaining Stages shall be taken on the conclusion of the Second Stage, and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 60 minutes by one question which shall be put from the Chair and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage; and

	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>
<i>Mins</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>SD</i>	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>IPTG</i>	<i>Gov</i>
<i>Mins</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>
	<i>SF</i>	<i>ITG</i>	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>OM</i>
<i>Mins</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>

4. the resumed proceedings on Committee Stage of the Mental Health Bill 2024 shall be taken on the conclusion of the proceedings on the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2025 and, if not previously concluded, shall be interrupted and stand adjourned either at 9 p.m., or after 2 hours and 30 minutes, whichever is the later, and shall not be resumed on Wednesday.

In relation to Thursday's business, it is proposed that:

1. the ordinary routine of business as contained in Schedule 3 to Standing Orders shall be modified to the extent that topical issues may be taken earlier than 7.24 p.m. and shall in any event be taken on the adjournment of proceedings on Second Stage of the Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) Bill 2025, or where those proceedings conclude within the allotted time, on the conclusion thereof, with consequential effect on the commencement time for Second Stage of the Healthcare (Transparent Payments) Bill 2022 and on the time for the adjournment of the Dáil; and

2. in relation to the proceedings on the Second Stage of the Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) Bill 2025, the following arrangements shall apply:

(a) subject to subparagraph (ii), the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be interrupted and stand adjourned after 3 hours and 24 minutes and the order of speaking and allocation of time shall be as follows:

(i) the arrangements for the first speaking round shall be in accordance with those contained in the table immediately below (to be read across, not down);

(ii) where speeches conclude before the 3 hours and 24 minutes have elapsed and no other member is offering, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed 10 minutes; and

(iii) members may share time; and

(b) the proceedings shall not be resumed on Thursday.

	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>Lab</i>	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>
<i>Mins</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>SD</i>	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>IPTG</i>	<i>Gov</i>
<i>Mins</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>
	<i>SF</i>	<i>ITG</i>	<i>Gov</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>OM</i>
<i>Mins</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>20</i>

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Are the proposed arrangements for the week's business agreed to?

**Deputy Duncan Smith:** Not agreed.

**Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn:** The Chief Whip will have been party to an email from us regarding Committee and Remaining Stages of the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill tomorrow evening. Sixty minutes just does not cut it. We are going to need two hours. I am asking that the Government allow two hours for that. Whatever way the Government does that, we need to have at least two hours.

**Deputy Duncan Smith:** I support Deputy Mac Lochlainn's request. There is also an issue of workers' rights within our very House in terms of the broadcast unit workers who are being paid well below the average pay for skilled work in that industry and who, in the summer recess and at Christmas, do not get paid and have to sign on or get alternative employment. This is something a majority of the Members in the House support and-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I do not mean to interrupt, but I think that is a matter for the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

**Deputy Duncan Smith:** I think it is a matter for everyone in this House. I do not think it is anything we can stand over.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy. I call Deputy Gibney.

**Deputy Sinéad Gibney:** Under Standing Order 35(3), I wish to move an amendment to the Order of Business. Grocery prices are currently out of control and are continuing to soar. Compared to 2021, families are now spending about €3,000 more in the supermarket. Along with all the other increases we are seeing in the prices of energy, rent and houses, this is having a devastating impact on families who are having to choose between heating and eating or simply struggling to put food on the table. We need statements and we need them this week. We

would like to see them on Thursday afternoon. We need to hear what the Government is going to do to tackle this.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** We need statements on education. Primary schools are going through a serious crisis. I met with representatives of the INTO last week, as others probably did too. We need to look at class sizes, but the capitation grant was the big issue. Basically, schools cannot pay the electricity bill. If we cannot at least give them proper funding to allow them to continue their proper functions as primary schools, then the State is failing. We therefore need a debate on education in the Dáil.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** I certainly do not agree with the Order of Business. We need to reflect on what is happening in the Middle East. We have had an unprovoked attack by Israel on Iran and the language around this is simply shameful.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** It is an unprovoked attack on a sovereign, independent country and we are not talking about it or making space for a debate. This is an attack by a rogue state, which the Government has agreed is committing genocide, that has now gone into Iran, and is suddenly the moral conscious in relation to nuclear armaments, which Iran does not process-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** Israel is not even a member of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy Connolly, please respect the timeline. I call Deputy McDonald.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** I propose an amendment to the Order of Business under Standing Order 35(3) for Thursday afternoon-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Please state the amendment.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** I believe we need time for statements on the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza. Today, Israel has slaughtered-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Please state the amendment, Deputy.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** -----51 Palestinians at a food distribution point in Khan Younis. Israeli tanks fired shells at hungry-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I ask the Deputy to state the amendment.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** -----and desperate Palestinian refugees queuing for aid.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy-----

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** This is now a daily occurrence. It is diabolical-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy McDonald-----

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** -----and it is sick and it is a genocide.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** -----please state the amendment.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** We need statements on this matter and to ensure no arm of the Irish State is complicit in this genocidal, diabolical act by Israel.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank Deputy McDonald. I call the Government Chief Whip.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I have heard what the Whips said. Regarding what Deputy Mac Lochlainn said, an additional 60 minutes will be provided for Committee and Remaining Stages of the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Bill 2025. Second Stage of the Bill will be 214 minutes, or 3 hours and 34 minutes, and a further two hours will be provided for the Committee and Remaining Stages, which is a total of 5 hours and 34 minutes tomorrow afternoon.

I am hearing what all the Deputies are saying about additional statements. We might have to look at having sittings on Fridays because there is just not enough time - three days a week - to facilitate everything required.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** I second that.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** That is fine.

**Deputies:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Mary Butler:** I am already very much minded to have legislation Fridays in the next few weeks. We can discuss it at the meeting of the Business Committee on Thursday. I will not be accepting the proposed amendments.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Chief Whip will not be accepting the proposed amendments.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Why does the Government not want to have statements on Gaza?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Are the proposed arrangements for the week's business agreed to?

**Deputies:** Not agreed.

Question put: "That the amendments proposed to the arrangements on the Order of Business are hereby negatived and the proposed arrangements as amended by the Government Chief Whip for the week's business are hereby agreed to."

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 88; Níl, 66; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Aird, William.</i>	<i>Bacik, Ivana.</i>	
<i>Ardagh, Catherine.</i>	<i>Bennett, Cathy.</i>	
<i>Boland, Grace.</i>	<i>Brady, John.</i>	
<i>Brabazon, Tom.</i>	<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	
<i>Brennan, Brian.</i>	<i>Byrne, Joanna.</i>	
<i>Brennan, Shay.</i>	<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	

<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	<i>Coppinger, Ruth.</i>	
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	
<i>Butterly, Paula.</i>	<i>Crowe, Seán.</i>	
<i>Buttimer, Jerry.</i>	<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Malcolm.</i>	<i>Cummins, Jen.</i>	
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	<i>Daly, Pa.</i>	
<i>Cahill, Michael.</i>	<i>Devine, Máire.</i>	
<i>Callaghan, Catherine.</i>	<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	
<i>Carrigy, Micheál.</i>	<i>Farrelly, Aidan.</i>	
<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	
<i>Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.</i>	<i>Gibney, Sinéad.</i>	
<i>Clendennen, John.</i>	<i>Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.</i>	
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Connolly, John.</i>	<i>Graves, Ann.</i>	
<i>Cooney, Joe.</i>	<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Cummins, John.</i>	<i>Hayes, Eoin.</i>	
<i>Currie, Emer.</i>	<i>Hearne, Rory.</i>	
<i>Daly, Martin.</i>	<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	
<i>Dempsey, Aisling.</i>	<i>Kenny, Eoghan.</i>	
<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	<i>Kenny, Martin.</i>	
<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	
<i>Dolan, Albert.</i>	<i>Lawless, Paul.</i>	
<i>Donohoe, Paschal.</i>	<i>Lawlor, George.</i>	
<i>Dooley, Timmy.</i>	<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	
<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	<i>McDonald, Mary Lou.</i>	
<i>Fleming, Seán.</i>	<i>McGettigan, Donna.</i>	
<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	<i>McGuinness, Conor D.</i>	
<i>Gallagher, Pat the Cope.</i>	<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	
<i>Geoghegan, James.</i>	<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	
<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	<i>Newsome Drennan, Nata-sha.</i>	
<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>	<i>Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.</i>	
<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	<i>O'Donoghue, Robert.</i>	
<i>Heneghan, Barry.</i>	<i>O'Flynn, Ken.</i>	
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	<i>O'Gorman, Roderic.</i>	
<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	<i>O'Hara, Louis.</i>	
<i>Keogh, Keira.</i>	<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	



<i>Lahart, John.</i>	<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	
<i>Lawless, James.</i>	<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	<i>Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.</i>	
<i>Martin, Micheál.</i>	<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	
<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	<i>Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.</i>	
<i>McCarthy, Noel.</i>	<i>Quaide, Liam.</i>	
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	
<i>McCormack, Tony.</i>	<i>Rice, Pádraig.</i>	
<i>McEntee, Helen.</i>	<i>Sheehan, Conor.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	<i>Sherlock, Marie.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Séamus.</i>	<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	
<i>McGreehan, Erin.</i>	<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	
<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
<i>Moran, Kevin Boxer.</i>	<i>Wall, Mark.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	<i>Ward, Charles.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	
<i>Moynihan, Shane.</i>	<i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Michael.</i>		
<i>Naughton, Hildegard.</i>		
<i>Neville, Joe.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Connell, Maeve.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Meara, Ryan.</i>		
<i>O'Shea, John Paul.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>		
<i>Ó Cearúil, Naoise.</i>		
<i>Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.</i>		
<i>Ó Muirí, Naoise.</i>		
<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>		
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		
<i>Timmins, Edward.</i>		
<i>Toole, Gillian.</i>		
<i>Troy, Robert.</i>		
<i>Ward, Barry.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Duncan Smith.

Question declared carried.

*3 o'clock*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** We now move on to Questions on Policy or Legislation. I call Deputy Mary Lou McDonald. I ask Deputies to leave the Chamber quickly and quietly.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** The Government has made a bags of the sale of the State's shares in AIB, although it tries to spin it as a success. This was a botched deal for the taxpayer from day one. In its rush to get the bank back into private hands, the Government has cost the State €5 billion. This is the money that would have been generated simply by holding onto the shares. In 2022, when the Government began the sell-off, shares in AIB stood at €2.32. Today they stand at €7. The Government was told at that time that this increase in value was very likely but it still chose to plough ahead and effectively throw this money away. We know what comes next will be gold-plated salaries and bumper bonuses for the top brass at AIB. Government incompetence in this is astonishing. When is the Government going drop the spin and accept it has botched this up? More to the point, how does the Taoiseach explain this €5 billion loss to Irish taxpayers? Remember them? They are the ones who bailed out this and other banks.

**The Taoiseach:** Increasingly, Deputy McDonald's use of language-----

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** Never mind my language, answer the question.

**The Taoiseach:** -----is lacking any credibility. We have words like "botched", "made a bags of" and "astonishing". There is nothing astonishing about it. I pay tribute to the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, who has handled this very well. Approximately €29 billion was invested and €29 billion has been recovered. We have a fully functioning bank. Europe-wise, legislation and the regulatory environment have been transformed. They have been transformed in this country also. In my view, of Bank of Ireland and AIB are two healthy, functioning banks, which is good for the country, in order that we can modern banking and payments systems that can underpin our economy and society. Most commentators have a different view from that articulated by the Deputy.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** I want to raise the pressing issue of institutional abuse. We know that survivors deserve justice and fair redress but for far too long institutions, and religious-run orders in particular, have been able to evade accountability for abuse carried out under their watch. Last year, we saw the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church recording more allegations of abuse than in any other year since it was established. We know there is still a great deal of historical legacy that needs to be tackled. Many disclosures have been made, in no small part due to the courage of many survivors who have come out publicly. I am thinking in particular of Mark and David Ryan, the brothers who precipitated the powerful "Blackrock Boys" television programme. I note the sad passing of Mark Ryan in September 2023.

We know that religious orders have moved or are moving their assets to lay-run trusts, out of the reach of the survivors to whom they owe redress. Nearly a year has passed since the

then Taoiseach and now Tánaiste, Deputy Simon Harris, committed to working with me and the Labour Party to ensure our Bill would be passed. We have a Bill that would end that cynical invasion of accountability. Will the Taoiseach give a commitment that the Government will look again at passing the Bill?

**The Taoiseach:** Where is the Bill at the moment?

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** It will be introduced.

**The Taoiseach:** You are proposing to introduce it. We will certainly examine it and look at it positively. We believe that the religious orders, first and foremost, should be accountable and contribute redress, even though this will never compensate for the appalling abuse inflicted on any individual or group of persons. Compensation or redress can never do so, but they constitute an aspect of accountability. Certainly, we are interested in exploring every avenue to make sure that there is accountability.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** I will write to the Taoiseach.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** Like the Taoiseach, I believe Israel is carrying out a genocide in Gaza. Given that is the case, what are we doing allowing uninspected flights involving private jets linked to military contractors and carrying dual-use goods to transit through Shannon Airport en route to Israel? These flights are not covert. They are documented and trackable. The Taoiseach might be aware that under EU customs law, Ireland is obliged to carry out risk-based inspections. This includes flights using known arms routes. Right now, Ireland is clearly not complying. The moral failure speaks for itself, but we are potentially in breach of EU VAT enforcement rules, which raises serious questions. Today, my colleague Senator Patricia Stephenson and I have written to OLAF, the EU's anti-fraud body, and to the Attorney General to seek legal clarity on the Government's position for non-inspection of these flights. If the Taoiseach does not have an answer today, he might commit to providing a written response to me on this matter to explain what steps, if any, the Government is taking to ensure that Ireland is meeting all its legal obligations when it comes to the inspections of aeroplanes.

**The Taoiseach:** The Government does fulfil its legal obligations. In respect of aviation, there are international conventions that the Government and all other governments have to adhere to regarding inspections or state flights as opposed to commercial flights. The Government is adhering to and observing those obligations. I have not seen the Deputy's letter to the Attorney General. If it is okay, I will ask him to forward a copy of the letter to me.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** Yes. I would appreciate a response.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** I raise the serious matter of the closure of a dental practice in Oranmore, County Galway, more than three years ago. Approximately 200 patients and families have been left in an utter predicament and have been subjected to partial treatment, no treatment and so on. They have engaged. All of the TDs at the time had a meeting with the Dental Council. There is utter frustration and anger that the people involved have been left in this predicament. They are asking for a number of things. The first and most basic is that the Dental Council would come before the health committee. They are also asking for the gaps that exist in relation to the monitoring of practices be looked at. Obviously, the orthodontist involved had serious health problems. I am not going into that; we will take it as a given. However, the consequences of this mean families were left with nothing. It is three years later. Other colleagues and I have raised this in the past and done our best. We have got nowhere.

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The families are still struggling for accountability in respect of what happened.

**The Taoiseach:** I presume the Deputy has approached the HSE on the matter. If she could forward the details to me or the Minister for Health, I will certainly follow it up with the Minister and HSE. Was it a private practice?

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** It was.

**The Taoiseach:** The public health service has some remit there-----

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** It is almost an identical concept.

**The Taoiseach:** ----- and the HSE would too.

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** Tom McHugh was the assistant chief officer of the A-Block in Portlaoise Prison. The block houses the most dangerous criminals in the State. He was asked to investigate drug trafficking in the prison. He carried out his job and reported the information to the management. One morning, a prisoner, who was an enforcer for a well known criminal gang and was well known for knife crime, told the governor that three staff approached him and asked him to cut Tom McHugh up. The Naughton report vindicated that particular situation, but since then Tom has been living in fear. He has undergone a number of near life-threatening attacks and has received threats on a near daily basis. He is off sick and is unable to work. He is facing poverty. He has made a protected disclosure. He has been left to hang with no support from the State after serving it in a difficult situation. Will the Taoiseach make sure that he has an income until his protected disclosure case is heard?

**The Taoiseach:** There is a set procedure for how protected disclosures are dealt with. I am not familiar with the full details of this case. I do not know whether the Deputy has raised it with the-----

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** I have raised with two Ministers for justice and two Taoisigh.

**The Taoiseach:** With the Ministers for justice. That is fine.

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** You are the third Taoiseach with whom I have raised the matter.

**The Taoiseach:** I cannot intervene in every case, but I will ask the Minister for justice for his perspective on this to see what the situation is and what help can be given.

**Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan:** On 8 June, *Sunday Independent* journalist Mark Tighe wrote an article with the headline, "FAI 'too slow' to act over allegations of former national team manager's behaviour towards female footballers". The article alleged a number of things. The first was that the FAI agreed a financial settlement with its former director of public relations to keep details of his complaints from becoming public. The second was that despite the FAI stating publicly that it only learned of the allegations in early 2024, its former director of public relations made what he thought was a protected disclosure, alleging that it knew of these concerns in May 2023. This is important because the person at the centre of all these allegations was allowed to coach in the period from May 2023, when the former chief executive queried who he was, the point at which he was stood down by the association in March 2024. My concern here is safeguarding protocols and whether they were adhered to. Having seen the same evidence as that of the journalist, I have serious concerns about the FAI's actions and have written to the chair of the sport committee, the Minister for sport and the FAI to that effect.

Is the Government and Sport Ireland satisfied with the time lapse between the matter being brought to the FAI's attention in May 2023 to the standing down of the coaches at the centre of this controversy in 2024?

**The Taoiseach:** I thank Deputy O'Sullivan for raising this very serious and important issue. It is important to detail the timeline of events and steps taken by the Football Association of Ireland regarding these allegations. As the Deputy said, and as is my understanding, an internal email was sent by a former FAI CEO in May 2023 regarding rumours relating to a former coach and alleged historical inappropriate behaviour.

This is the subject matter of a current Garda investigation and it would be inappropriate for me to comment in any greater detail than that other than to say that once the FAI received the formal complaint in January 2024, it acted swiftly and contacted An Garda Síochána and Tusla in accordance with mandatory reporting requirements and its own safeguarding and child welfare regulations. Following the revelations, the FAI introduced an anonymous reporting mechanism to allow players and others to flag concerns and report inappropriate behaviour and to raise a concern to-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Taoiseach.

**The Taoiseach:** -----an independent complaint-handling firm. I will raise this matter with the Ministers for sport and for children, obviously.

**Deputy William Aird:** Community care workers and home carers are essential to Ireland's healthcare system, supporting older people and those with disabilities to live independently at home. Increasing demand means carers are working under tight schedules with limited hours per client. It is essential they have proper training in all areas of elder care and must have good communication skills to support clients and families.

Many carers work through private agencies but oversight varies. This raises concerns about the quality and accountability. There are many issues here: workload, pay, travel expenses, standards of care and absenteeism. We need to reform the community and homecare system. We need to improve working conditions and training regulations and we must standardise the level of care for people being minded at home.

**The Taoiseach:** I appreciate Deputy Aird raising this very serious question. I agree with him. Approximately 24 million hours-----

**Deputy Mary Butler:** Some 24 million hours have been delivered this year.

**The Taoiseach:** -----of home care were delivered last year. This is all the more reason for a proper regulatory framework to govern it. We intend to place this on a statutory footing in terms of home care entitlements and so on. However, training and supports are vital. Quality of healthcare must be at the centre of this and the legislation will be published shortly.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** The Taoiseach said earlier utilities need certainty and so do people. Residents and businesses in Ballymahon and Ardagh in Longford have had enough. Last year, Ardagh's water supply failed 13 times and there were five more failures this year, excluding storm-related outages. It is a long-standing problem and is unacceptable. It is upending the daily lives of ordinary people, families, farmers and businesses.

Despite countless complaints and reports to Uisce Éireann, answers are scarce and solu-

tions are even scarcer. The communities feel ignored, neglected and that their water needs are an afterthought. Investment in rural water infrastructure is vital. Towns and villages like these cannot continue without a basic, safe and reliable water supply. They are not looking for miracles; they are looking for a clear plan and timeframe for when their water service will be restored to something reliable. Is the Taoiseach in a position to give those towns and villages that commitment today?

**The Taoiseach:** First, there will be increased investment in water. I have had discussions with Irish Water in respect of some rural towns or where there are certain developments where bespoke arrangements have to be arrived at between developers, for example, who could develop waste water treatment facilities and supply in accordance with guidelines issued by Irish Water and subsequent inspections-----

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** There is not.

**The Taoiseach:** I know that but I am saying this will have to happen.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** But there are none.

**The Taoiseach:** The demand is growing all the time and we must develop innovative ways of meeting that demand.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Child poverty in Ireland is reaching crisis levels. The Children's Rights Alliance annual report revealed a staggering rise in the number of children living in consistent poverty. We must ensure families have the financial support they need to ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive.

I very much welcome the Taoiseach's comments yesterday in which he stated that nothing is off the table when it comes to social welfare payments for reducing child poverty. Last week, the Taoiseach would have seen the ESRI reported that introducing a means test second-tier child benefit payment of €285 per month could lift 55,000 children out of poverty.

Can the Taoiseach confirm the Government will seriously consider implementing this targeted second-tier benefit to support Ireland's most vulnerable children and families? To alleviate concerns and provide certainty to parents, can the Taoiseach also confirm there will be no reductions to existing child benefit payments in budget 2026?

**The Taoiseach:** I am sure the Deputy will understand I am not in a position to outline the budget today - that will be in October. I have made it very clear since my appointment - and I have spoken to the Minister for Social Protection - that child poverty is a key priority of Government. I have asked for specific proposals in relation to it in the forthcoming budget. I said yesterday that nothing is off the table. Obviously, it must be considered in the broader public expenditure limits that will be set and envelope for the budget but I am determined to target resources at those children who are most vulnerable so we can lift children in those circumstances out of poverty.

**Deputy John Connolly:** I raise the recent report by the Department of Transport regarding the cost of congestion in the regional cities of Waterford, Cork and Galway. The report highlighted the cost of congestion in Galway will double between now and 2030, from €54 million currently to €107.4 million in 2030, which is an astronomical figure.

In the following decade, from 2030 to 2040, the cost for Galway is expected to stabilise to



€106.9 million. This stabilisation is based on the assumption the Galway city ring road will be operational post-2030. We heard already during Leaders' Questions how the Taoiseach values this project and wants to see it being promoted.

Despite this, Galway is still projected to be the city with the highest cost of congestion in 2040 - higher than Cork and Waterford. The report states the planned interventions - other than the road - are not sufficient to offset the increase in congestion in the city centre and wider metropolitan area. The report also highlighted the rate of public transport usage among commuters was five times the rate in Dublin as opposed to the regional cities.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Thank you, Deputy.

**Deputy John Connolly:** This reflects insufficient scale and coverage of public transport. The Taoiseach needs to examine the NTA and its role in regional cities.

**The Taoiseach:** The cost of congestion in Galway is particularly high and the failure to get the ring road system through has been a significant contributing factor to this. It is currently with An Bord Pleanála but we need that ring road developed, and parallel with that, investment in public transport. There is investment under way in public transport in Galway both rail and through the NTA but I take the Deputy's point. Much consultation takes place. The NTA, in its BusConnects approach, creates much angst out there and then hence a lot of consultation. Then it takes a long time before we can get an agreed position. The Deputy has raised these serious issues which point to the need to try to get consensus. There needs to be consensus in Galway on public transport and the ring road issue.

**Deputy Mark Ward:** There are reports the Citywest complex in Saggart will be purchased by the State to become a public IPAS centre. Citywest currently accommodates 2,000 people seeking refuge. It is deeply disappointing residents and elected representatives only heard this from newspaper reports. Deputy Ó Broin and I have contacted the Minister for Justice to try to get answers on behalf of residents and none have been forthcoming.

We are strongly of the view no decision should be made about the future of Citywest without real and meaningful engagement with local residents, community and elected representatives. Following a meeting with the Saggart Village Residents' Association, we have written to the Minister urging him to have a meeting with the local community as a matter of urgency to discuss their concerns. Is the Government considering purchasing Citywest as a public IPAS centre? Can the Taoiseach ask the Minister to meet the people of Saggart?

**The Taoiseach:** Last year, the Government initiated a policy of purchasing or establishing State-owned centres as opposed to relying entirely on the private sector, which has been criticised a lot by the Deputy's party and the Opposition more generally, in terms of housing asylum seekers pending adjudication of their asylum applications. In respect of City West, it is fundamentally a value-for-money consideration as to which makes greater sense, namely to continue to lease indefinitely for years or to purchase. I will ask the Minister for justice to engage with the Deputy. I will alert him to the fact that he has raised the issue.

**Deputy Mark Ward:** Has the decision been made?

**An Ceann Comhairle:** This is not a back-and-forth. I call Deputy Danny Healy-Rae.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** The cost of building a new house is somewhere around €400,000

for a young couple or whomever. One third of the actual building cost comprises VAT, other taxes and levies. Will the Government consider doing anything about that?

Would it be possible to increase the first-time buyers grant if people were incentivised to build smaller houses, like we used to do in the 1970s and 1980s. I refer to any house under 1,350 sq. ft in area built at that time. I am not saying that we should base the bar around there, but maybe somewhere in between. People are building houses that range from 2,500 sq. ft. up to 3,000 sq. ft. Every square foot costs somewhere between €250 and €300. This is increasing the cost of houses. People are burying themselves in debt. The Government should incentivise them to build smaller houses by giving them another grant in addition to the first-time buyers grant. I ask the Government to consider doing so.

**The Taoiseach:** On costs, we waived the development levies for a significant period. This resulted in unprecedented levels of commencements over the two years prior to this year. The commencements in 2023 and 2024 were significant. There was a massive increase because we waived the development levies for a restricted period. After that, we have had a lower level of commencements. The Government is doing a range of initiatives on housing. Everything is being kept under constant review. I will look at the Deputy's proposal, but the help to buy scheme and the first home grant are quite generous as matters stand. Combined, they give significant supports to first-time buyers. We will certainly examine the proposal.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** The waiving of the levy is gone now.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** It is not a back-and-forth, Deputy.

**Deputy Duncan Smith:** I want to raise an issue that is having an impact on many of us on both sides of the House but is manifesting quite acutely in my town of Swords. I refer to the deteriorating nature of the public engagement on the part of Irish Water with public representatives, both local and national. At Swords wastewater treatment plant, intermittent outages are impacting a lot of residents and Fingallian's GAA club. I have been trying to engage with Irish Water but I have not been getting answers. I have been trying to get an on-site meeting for six months. I was told that the company does not do such meetings, even though I have attended two over the past ten years. It does not do the reputation of Irish Water any good. We are solutions focused in trying to solve these problems. Will the Taoiseach to engage with Irish Water and bring his powers to bear in order to ensure that it re-engage with local politicians in order to help us solve issues and allow us to communicate effectively with our constituents?

**The Taoiseach:** Irish Water should engage with the Deputy on the issue. It should engage with Oireachtas representatives on issues of similar significance to that in his constituency. I will certainly convey my views to Irish Water in that respect.

**Deputy Liam Quaide:** A total of 159 healthcare workers with long Covid have been in receipt of payments over the past four to five years. Those payments are in recognition of the fact that they contracted the virus in high-risk settings such as hospital wards at the peak of the pandemic. They were often without adequate PPE. They have paid an enormous price in the form of symptoms such as debilitating post-exertional malaise. This can mean that a person might struggle to lift a cup of tea after what most of us would consider mild exertion or having to go back to bed with exhaustion after their children to school. Their quality of life has been ruined by this condition, and they are not able to work. Despite the sacrifices that these healthcare workers made on our behalf, they now face the loss of financial security at the end

of June because this payment will be coming to an end. Many were infected in early January 2021, following the so-called meaningful Christmas, during which restrictions on movement were crudely lifted by the Government against the advice of public health experts. Will the Government provide these workers with an occupational injury scheme that will remove financial insecurity from the many burdens they carry?

**The Taoiseach:** I am familiar with the issue. The payment was extended on a number of occasions previously. I will talk to the Minister for Health in respect of this. I will have to check if it would be possible to do a separate ring-fenced occupational scheme. However, I doubt it because doing so would open up precedents for a range of other schemes. These workers put themselves on the line for the country and its people during a very trying time. I have always advocated on their behalf regarding maintaining the existing payment as long as we possibly can. I will talk the Minister for Health in that regard.

**Deputy Ken O'Flynn:** This month's update on the M20 Cork-Limerick project outlines plans for a new tolled motorway, with a barrier-free, distance-based tolling system, stretching from Blarney to Limerick. I want to specifically raise the concerns of the communities of north Cork, particularly those in Mallow, Blarney and surrounding areas, who fear that they may be penalised for everyday local travel. Given the lack of viable transport and alternatives in the region, will the Taoiseach give a commitment to the House that no tolls will apply on the stretch of motorway between Blarney and Mallow? If he cannot give such a commitment today, will he outline what measures will be taken to protect local residents from an unfair burden?

**The Taoiseach:** There has been a long-standing commitment to the M20, and we are making progress. The route design is due to be published today, I think.

**Deputy Ken O'Flynn:** It came out yesterday.

**The Taoiseach:** Which is good. We will go stage by stage. This is a key piece of infrastructure. We will examine the issue of tolling and the impact on local populations in particular, because there can be a significant impact on those who travel short distances to and from work, etc.

## **An Bille um an Aonú Leasú is Daichead ar an mBunreacht (Cearta Vótála i dToghcháin Uachtaráin), 2025: An Chéad Chéim**

### **Forty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Voting Rights in Presidential Elections) Bill 2025: First Stage**

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** Tairigim:

Go gceadófar go dtabharfar isteach Bille Acht chun an Bunreacht a leasú.

I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Constitution.

I am delighted to introduce this Bill. The purpose of this Aontú Bill is to ensure that all adult citizens living in Ireland, North and South, will be entitled to vote in presidential elections.

This is a really important Bill. It is a great opportunity for the House to be able to make this change. I encourage all the political parties to get behind it in a cross-party manner.

The Bill is also important because we have a presidential election coming up very shortly, namely in October. It is not likely that we will be able to get a referendum done and dusted before that happens, but it could be possible to hold a referendum on the day of the presidential election in order to make sure that all subsequent presidential elections will be reflective of the views all citizens in Ireland, North and South. Incredibly and shockingly, Irish citizens in the North of Ireland can stand in and win a presidential election and they can be President of Ireland, but they still cannot vote in presidential elections. Mary McAleese was a very strong example of that contradiction that lies at the heart of our political system in this regard.

Imagine the sheer joy that would exist among Northern nationalists if they could share equally in the democratic process of this country for the very first time since 1918. It would be a phenomenal opportunity for the people of the North of Ireland to be able to do that.

This is not a zero-sum Bill. Sometimes, when we talk about constitutional issues, it feels like we are giving rights to one person and taking them away from another. This Bill would take no rights at all away from our unionist brothers and sisters in the North of Ireland. Most political parties have stated, at some stage, that they support this project, and the citizens' assembly voted in favour of it. What is stopping us from doing this? It is not up to Westminster to make this decision. Westminster does not have a say and neither does Stormont. The only body that has a say over whether or not this progresses is this House, first and foremost. We have a say as to whether a constitutional referendum should take place. If one is held, it would then be up to the people of Ireland to make a decision. Right now, we are withholding the right to vote from Irish citizens in the North of Ireland - some 700,000 Irish citizens, which is quite incredible.

Opinion polls show that there is support for this. Opinion polls in the South show there is support for a united Ireland. Opinion polls in the North of Ireland show that support for remaining within the Union and a united Ireland are quite close at the moment. This Bill does not even go as far as trying to look for a united Ireland, but it is a real and practical step towards the democratic self-determination of this country.

It is not an unusual proposal: many other European countries have the same policy. France and Poland allow citizens to vote who are not resident in their particular jurisdiction.

On foot of Aontú announcing this particular Bill, Sinn Féin proposed a motion in Stormont calling for the same objective. I welcome that. The motion was carried by a majority of MLAs in the North. That is significant. The majority of parties here say they support it; the majority of MLAs in the North say they support it and opinion polls say the majority of people in this jurisdiction support it. We really need to make sure that we are in step and in sync with the people.

The reason it is not happening is because of narrow political self-interest. Some parties are putting narrow self-interest ahead of bigger objectives. It has been said that perhaps Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael do not want to see 700,000 Northern nationalists voting in a Presidential election, potentially because they do not function in the North of Ireland. Both are regional political parties and do not have representatives or organisations operating in the North of Ireland. If they want to get over that particular hurdle, I would encourage Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to open up cumannns and to give Irish citizens in the North of Ireland the right to be members of

their political parties and to function in them. It should not be the case that we do not allow for an election to happen because perhaps we will not like the result of it. That is a profoundly undemocratic action to take.

The Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, does have the potential to create a significant legacy for himself by taking this Bill off Aontú, making it a Government Bill and supporting it at the earliest opportunity. This would be the first and most significant increase in the franchise for Irish self-determination in 100 years. I urge parties to support the Bill.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Is the Bill opposed?

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler):** No.

Cuireadh agus aontaíodh an cheist.

Question put and agreed to.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

**Deputy Peadar Tóibín:** Tairgim: "Go dtógfar an Bille in am Comhaltaí Príobháideacha."

I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Cuireadh agus aontaíodh an cheist.

Question put and agreed to.

## **Presentation and Circulation of Revised and Second Further Revised Estimates: Motion**

**Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (Deputy Jack Chambers):** I move:

That, notwithstanding Standing Order 222 of the Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann relative to Public Business or the Resolutions of the Dáil of 1st April, 2025 and 21st May, 2025, the following Revised Estimates and Second Further Revised Estimate for Public Services for the year ending 31st December, 2025, be presented to the Dáil and circulated to members on 17th June, 2025, being a date later than that prescribed for the presentation of Estimates:

Vote 11 — Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (Revised Estimate).

Vote 12 — Superannuation and Retired Allowances (Revised Estimate).

Vote 13 — Office of Public Works (Revised Estimate).

Vote 14 — State Laboratory (Revised Estimate).

Vote 15 — Secret Service (Revised Estimate).

Vote 16 — Tailte Éireann (Revised Estimate).

Vote 17 — Public Appointments Service (Revised Estimate).

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- Vote 18 — National Shared Services Office (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 19 — Office of the Ombudsman (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 23 — An Coimisiún Toghcháin (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 24 — Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Second Further Revised Estimate).
- Vote 26 — Education and Youth (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 27 — International Co-Operation (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 28 — Foreign Affairs and Trade (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 29 — Climate, Energy and the Environment (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 30 — Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 32 — Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 33 — Culture, Communications and Sport (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 34 — Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 39 — Office of Government Procurement (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 42 — Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (Revised Estimate).
- Vote 43 — Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (Revised Estimate).

Question put and agreed to.

### **Social Welfare (Bereaved Partner's Pension) Bill 2025: Financial Resolution**

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Dara Calleary):** I move:

That the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 be amended in the manner and to the extent specified in the Act giving effect to this Resolution to provide that amounts to be paid on the bereaved partner's contributory pension and the bereaved partner's non-contributory pension under the Social Welfare Acts are to be deemed to be earned income for the purpose of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 and subject to taxation in accordance with section 126 of that Act.

Question put and agreed to.

### **Third Report of the Standing Committee of Selection: Motion**

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler):** I move:

That Dáil Éireann, pursuant to Standing Order 33, and with effect from 18th June, 2025,



approves the Third Report of the Standing Committee of Selection, copies of which were laid before Dáil Éireann on 12th June, 2025, and discharges a member from a Committee and appoints a member to a Committee accordingly.^

Question put and agreed to.

## **Ceisteanna - Questions**

### **Cabinet Committees**

1. **Deputy Ivana Bacik** asked the Taoiseach when the climate action plan progress reports for the remainder of 2024 will be published by his Department. [16740/25]

2. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach when the climate action plan progress reports for the remainder of 2024 will be published. [29328/25]

3. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach when the climate action plan progress reports for the remainder of 2024 will be published by his Department. [29591/25]

4. **Deputy Malcolm Byrne** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on climate action, environment and energy will next meet. [29735/25]

5. **Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on climate action, environment and energy will next meet. [29736/25]

6. **Deputy Shane Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on climate action, environment and energy will next meet. [29737/25]

7. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on climate action, environment and energy will next meet. [32103/25]

8. **Deputy Barry Heneghan** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on climate action, environment and energy will next meet. [32403/25]

**The Taoiseach:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 8, inclusive, together.

The Cabinet committee on climate action, environment and energy oversees the implementation of the programme for Government commitments on the environment, climate action, energy and emergency planning. It considers the wide range of issues that require action in Ireland's transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient and sustainable future: a future in which we take full advantage of the renewable energy potential that we possess. It also oversees implementation of the climate action plan. The committee meets quarterly. The first meeting took place on 7 April and the next meeting is scheduled to take place in July.

The Department of the Taoiseach tracks the delivery of actions committed to in the climate action plan and publishes quarterly progress reports. Following approval by the Government, progress reports and detailed tables of actions completed and delayed are published online. The progress report for quarters 3 and 4 of the Climate Action Plan 2024 was published in April and shows an overall implementation rate for the year of 64%, with 80 of 125 actions completed in

2024. Significant milestones achieved in the period include: nearly €3.8 million in grant funding for 15 projects in Ireland's midlands as part of the EU's just transition fund; the launch of 65 Connecting Ireland transport routes; the approval of the terms and conditions of Ireland's second offshore wind auction; the installation of solar panels in more than 1,000 schools; the establishment of a national certification-accreditation system for eco-driving courses in the haulage sector; the publication of an electricity demand-side strategy; and the incentivisation of large energy users to participate in flexible demand initiatives.

Actions that were not completed during 2024 have been carried forward to be reported upon, together with the new actions agreed as part of Climate Action Plan 2025.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** There is a real concern that we will be simply unable to meet our targets. Figures from the CSO, published last week, show 22% of Ireland's electricity in 2024 was consumed by data centres and that demand had increased by 10% in one year. We recently saw the Secretary General of the Department of the environment raising concerns about the potential conflict between expanding data centres and meeting housing needs, particularly due to climate targets and energy demands. It seems that Ireland must now import significant amounts of electricity to power these data centres. The demand from data centres is driving increased natural gas usage in Ireland and soaking up any additional renewable energy as it comes online.

How do we square the circle? Everyone accepts that we must ensure the retention of jobs and that we have become a digital leader, but how can we sustain this level of growth? Is it credible for Ireland to keep allowing so many data centres to locate here? We, and others, have called for moratoriums until we can see how to square the circle.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** There are some indications that, for example, data centres themselves can drive change and ensure they become net zero but we need the Government to take the lead on this.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy. I call Deputy Coppinger.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** We are not seeing that happen currently.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** Is this a government of climate deniers? Has the Government just given up any pretence of trying to deal with the climate crisis? We are due to reach a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 23% rather than 51%. We are not going to reach one third of the targets for agriculture. We have the worst emissions in Europe. We are now the dirty country of Europe.

Half of Dublin's electricity is going on data centres. One of the Ministers of State, Deputy Michael Healy-Rae, proposed to put forests on peatland – something that has been called environmental vandalism by an academic. The dairy herd has increased in the past ten years by 53%. All of the things that are necessary to address climate change are not being done. It seems that it is just a case of let rip. The super rich globally have allowed investment by banks in fossil fuels to increase. Some of the Taoiseach's own Deputies are profiting from AI, but he cannot continue to worship AI and data centres at the expense of the environment.

**Deputy Malcolm Byrne:** Up to 25% of Ireland's coastline is facing the serious problem of coastal erosion and the proportion in counties Wicklow and Wexford is higher. The Taoiseach

will be aware that I represent an area that stretches from Brittas Bay to Morriscastle. We have some of the finest beaches in the country, but many of them, most notably Courtown and Kilmi-chael, are in serious danger. We need to look at addressing this from a climate point of view and at beach replenishment. There is the threat to adjoining lands and infrastructure, nesting areas and coastal biodiversity. We can learn from other countries such as the Netherlands. Of concern to me as well is that the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment's own statistics show that, between 2017 and 2024, the number of homes at risk in our coastal areas grew from 1,445 to 2,279. I ask that this issue be a priority.

**Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil:** The EPA recently identified 115 risks to Ireland from climate change. These range from disruption to Ireland's energy system, as we saw recently with Storm Éowyn, to damage to Ireland's built environment from extreme wind and weather events. Will the Taoiseach clarify if the Cabinet committee on climate action will address this report and provide updates on it? Furthermore, we have heard talk of data centres, etc. The private wires Bill needs to be prioritised and be brought before the House as soon as possible.

**Deputy Shane Moynihan:** Core to our transition to a green economy will be ensuring that the workforce has the skills necessary to enable it. A recent SOLAS report shows that, of all the jobs in the workforce, 75% require some sort of green or sustainability-based skill and that there are more than 400,000 people in employment in green occupations. Green jobs are an area of growth for the future, especially as Ireland embraces its position as a leader in climate action and developing the renewable energy industries that underpin it. Will the Taoiseach outline to the House the proposals and progress the Government is making on embedding green skilling, not only in the green and renewable sector, but across the economy to ensure we transition to a green workforce and identify that sweet spot for Ireland between the green and digital revolutions?

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** This Thursday, workers in Bord na Móna Recycling, the country's only remaining publicly owned domestic waste collection service, will go on strike. The company's recycling arm is being sold off to a privately owned company called KWD Recycling. This State sell-off not only jeopardises workers' terms and conditions, but also makes a mockery of the Government's consultation on reform of Ireland's approach to waste management. If the Government is open to changing the system, why on earth would it sell off the last publicly owned body involved in the sector?

The privatised approach has not worked; it is not fit for purpose. It has hampered efficiency, driven up emissions and exacerbated local traffic congestion, and prices keep going up. I see at first hand how badly served this city is, including my own constituency of Dublin Central, by this approach. Last year, Dublin City Council spent €71 million on street cleaning, involving collecting 3,000 tonnes of illegally dumped bags, providing recycling facilities, landfill recovery and waste enforcement. The system is broken and needs to be fixed. Bord na Móna drove economic development in the midlands. It was supposed to be central to the just transition to a green economy. Rather than protect the State's involvement in this, why has Bord na Móna had its assets stripped? When will we have again a publicly controlled, affordable and sustainable waste management system in Ireland?

**Deputy Barry Heneghan:** I heard a Member of this House say that this Government is anti-climate change measures. I ask her to look at the programme for Government. I am a recently qualified mechanical engineer who helped to contribute to the programme for Government. Another Member spoken about the private wires Bill. Yes, 50% of Dublin's electricity is

used by data centres, but what do the Members propose we do? Are they just going to whinge and whine? I propose we bring in the private wire legislation as quickly as possible and make the data centres bring in-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy is to question the Taoiseach.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** These are Taoiseach's Questions, not questions to the Deputy.

**Deputy Barry Heneghan:** I am sorry, but I did not interrupt the Deputy. Maybe the data centres develop their own on-site energy and help us reach our climate goals.

**Deputy Mary Lou McDonald:** What is wrong with Deputy Heneghan?

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** We all know the enormous work that needs to be done on flood protection and flood mitigation. In my county, there have been many promises regarding the CFRAM. Even in the part of Dundalk that I live in, there is a significant flood risk. Accepting these works are going to be done, there is still an issue with insurance and insurance companies in terms of flood protection and people attaining mortgages. At one stage, Louth County Council and others were willing to provide the information that the area no longer suffered flooding, but that has not happened, so we need mitigation measures for these people.

**The Taoiseach:** First of all, I thank the Deputies for raising those issues. Deputy Bacik raised the question of how we square the circle as regards data centres and AI. There needs to be a balanced debate in this House on this question because digitalisation and the green economy are both pathways we have to pursue. There is no question about that. I would take issue with Deputy Coppinger's statement that we have to stop "worshipping" AI and "worshipping" data centres. Nobody worships anything, but we do have a realistic assessment that AI is going to have an extraordinary impact on the world of employment and how society is organised. If the Deputy wants to put her head in the sand, then she should put her head in the sand, but that will not advance the country. It will not advance employment. It will not advance society itself. We have to engage and be leaders in AI.

Deputy Bacik referenced the moratorium. That is problematic, too. We have had an effective moratorium for the past two to three years on data centres. There have been some contracted into, which will come on stream later in the decade, but AI will use an awful lot more energy, by definition. We have a challenge between now and 2030 or 2031, that period by when, I hope, our offshore wind farms will have gone through planning and all the rest of it and we can have had minimal objections and got the wind farms built. That will power our energy needs in the 2030s. It is between now and then that we certainly have a challenge and we certainly have an issue in terms of squaring the circle. The Government is working on that. It is not a choice between housing and data centres. Every person on the street has a need for data centres, by the way, in terms of our everyday activities and so forth. The idea of trying to paint them as the big bad entity, as it were, in this context does not make sense.

Deputy Byrne raised an important issue. I attended the UN ocean summit recently hosted by France. Ireland is increasingly making a significant contribution to the international debate on the oceans. Regarding coastal erosion, I invite the Deputy to make a submission to the Minister for public expenditure. I certainly will be doing that. I will talk about and raise this issue at central government level. I believe that, on adaptation, we need to do far more in terms of capital provision for adapting to climate change. Climate change is here and now; it is not something that is going to come in ten years' time. It is affecting flooding. It is eroding

coastlines. It is putting homes in danger. It is affecting food production patterns and so on. I believe that, in the next national development plan, there has to be ring-fenced funding for the cost of climate change to enable us to adapt to protect. It would be useful, knowing that the Deputy has been successful in the past in making various submissions to various bodies, if he could likewise make a submission in this regard. It is important.

Deputy Ó Cearúil spoke about the risks and private wire legislation, which Deputy Heneghan has raised consistently, to be fair. The Minister, Deputy O'Brien, has initiated the sustainable use of public and private assets, SUPPA, group. There had not been a lot of work done on it before that, if I am honest. Now, he has instructed the Department to prepare the legislation. I have spoken to the Attorney General and work is under way in respect of a private wires dimension to this, which will be very important and will give greater flexibility to companies and so on. Storm Éowyn illustrated the risks.

Regarding Deputy Moynihan and skills, there is a significant degree of work going on. The Minister of State, Marian Harkin, has particular responsibility for the area of green skills. Skillnet, which the Deputy knows is a business-supported network for skills development in companies, has funding available to it in respect of green skills. It is present in further and higher education. There has been a lot of transition from people in the fossil fuels industry to the renewable industry. It is an extremely important area that we are very much focused on.

In respect of Deputy McDonald's question on the Bord na Móna recycling unit, the industrial relations mechanisms are there. I will ask Bord na Móna to engage on the issue. I will speak to the Minister about it also.

Deputy Heneghan raised the issue of private wires, which is in the programme for Government. As I said, the Minister, Deputy O'Brien, is preparing the legislation and has instructed his officials to do so.

Deputy Ó Murchú raised the issue of flood mitigation. Flooding is a big issue. We have a lot of consultation on and objection to flood relief plans, infrastructure developments and so on to prevent flooding. We need to accelerate them and we ask people, if they could, to hold off on the objections. It is extraordinary the degree to which some very worthy projects have been delayed. The objective is to protect people's homes, businesses and farmlands from being flooded, yet there is an inordinate delay in the planning process and so on in getting them done.

The insurance issue is ongoing. I dealt with it again last week. The State supports by compensation where flooding happens. The insurance companies have a responsibility and they need to step up to the plate in respect of it, particularly in areas where flooding infrastructure has been put in place. We still hear reports that some insurance companies do not offer policies after that has been done.

## **Departmental Reports**

9. **Deputy Ivana Bacik** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on his Department's interdepartmental group report on the Dublin city task force recommendations. [22232/25]

10. **Deputy Séamus McGrath** asked the Taoiseach for an update on the Cork city task force. [25116/25]



11. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on his Department's interdepartmental group report on the Dublin city task force recommendations [26976/25]

12. **Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan** asked the Taoiseach for an update on the Cork city task force. [29738/25]

13. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on his Department's interdepartmental group report on the Dublin city task force recommendations. [32307/25]

14. **Deputy Mark Ward** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on his Department's interdepartmental group report on the Dublin city task force recommendations. [32435/25]

15. **Deputy Tom Brabazon** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide details on the implementation of the Dublin city task force recommendations through his Department. [32469/25]

16. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on the implementation of the Dublin city task force recommendations through his Department, and on his plans to apply the task force model to other areas in need of revitalisation. [32473/25]

**The Taoiseach:** I propose to take Questions Nos. 9 to 16, inclusive together.

As agreed by the Government, the Department of the Taoiseach has convened an interdepartmental group to examine the recommendations made by the Dublin city task force. The goal is to make Dublin city centre a more thriving, attractive and safe cityscape and a desirable location to live, work and do business in and visit. To deliver on these missions, the task force identified ten big moves that it recommended be addressed.

I met Mr. David McRedmond, CEO of An Post, who chaired the task force, in April to discuss the IDG's work to take forward the task force's recommendations. The IDG is currently finalising its report, which will be the subject of a memorandum to be submitted to the Government next week. Following this, further consideration will be given to how best the task force approach could be deployed in other cities, towns and regions, as outlined in the programme for Government. Regarding the memo to Government, there is obviously then a further context, which is the national development plan.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** The Deputy has a minute and a half, as we have fewer Deputies than questions.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** I have two questions about the task force. We see a huge number of issues in Dublin that need to be addressed urgently. There is a deteriorating public realm, vast numbers of vacant sites and derelict buildings, mouldy and damp social housing, including issues with social housing complexes in my constituency, and a lack of joined-up thinking about keeping spaces safe.

Given the need for funding to be put in place to implement the recommendations of the task force, will the Taoiseach consider allowing local authorities to levy a hotel bed tax if they wish in order to raise funds to be invested in local infrastructure? That is my first question.

Second, will the Government ensure the maintenance of face-to-face public services? I speak in particular about postal services. It is somewhat ironic that the chief executive officer



of An Post was the independent chair of the task force, yet An Post has been closing postal services in Dublin city. I speak particularly about Rathmines post office, which was in an iconic 1934 building in the heart of Rathmines. We have just learned it is to be closed by An Post, with the service to be moved elsewhere and, apparently, the building to be put up for sale. This sends an unfortunate signal to communities. We are seeing face-to-face public services close and iconic public realm buildings being put up for sale to the private sector. That is a loss to the community. We have seen the loss of Citizens Information Board face-to-face services, and this in turn has a negative impact on the public realm. What does the Taoiseach propose to do about this?

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** I raise the Cork city task force. As we know, the programme for Government provides for the establishment of a task force for Cork city. Like all urban areas, Cork city needs renewed focus, funding, resources, collaboration between key stakeholders, and short-, medium- and long-term planning. I hope the task force will address issues around public realm, streetscape, urban design and investment in our urban design in Cork city. Safety on the streets of Cork city is a significant issue. This not only relates to Garda numbers, but also to how the city is designed and laid out. That is critical when it comes to safety issues, as are connectivity, transportation links to the city, vacancy, dereliction and so on. Can we get an update on the establishment of the Cork city task force? It is important. Cork City Council will play a critical role in this as it moves forward and I hope we can get a clear, concrete indication today about the establishment of the task force, which is in the programme for Government.

**Deputy Mark Ward:** The Dublin city task force and Dublin City Council recommended that a single waste management company should provide bin collection services, with a further recommendation that, in the long term, waste services should be taken under the control of Dublin City Council. This is positive and will be welcomed by householders across Dublin. The Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment and Climate Action made a similar recommendation. The wholesale privatisation of bin services in 2012, which was opposed every step of the way by Sinn Féin, has been a complete and utter disaster for Dublin. It has led to a wild west situation, where up to a dozen bin companies charge ever-increasing prices for a service that is not fit for purpose. Waste management companies are operating like a cartel. Will the Government's task force on Dublin tackle the privatisation of waste management and bring it back to public ownership?

**Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan:** Back in February, Deputy McGrath and I raised the issue of the city task force with the Taoiseach, who confirmed that proposals were being developed and, once finalised, would be submitted to the Government for consideration. As yet, no formal announcement has been made regarding the establishment of a task force in Cork city. We are well into the term of this Government at this stage. I listened to Mr. Sean O'Driscoll this morning on my way up to Dublin. He spoke about many things the Taoiseach and I have spoken about here over the years, including getting rid of roadblocks, cutting through the malaise of planning and getting things delivered. I have concerns about what I am hearing about the task force, including its composition. I have spoken previously about the lack of political representation that is proposed to be on it. Nonetheless, can we just get on with the job of establishing the task force? If the Taoiseach can provide any clarity on that, we would appreciate it.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** It has now been 239 days since the recommendations of the Dublin city task force were published and 145 days since the programme for Government, which included a commitment to these recommendations, was agreed. The recommendations are aimed at rejuvenating Dublin city centre, focusing on the public realm, safety and overall

experience. Such is the lack of tangible progress in initiatives such as revitalising O'Connell Street, increasing residential density and improving public safety that the task force's ten big moves are beginning to look like ten wasted opportunities or, more shamefully, ten election promises that have been quickly forgotten. Without dedicated funding and a clear roadmap for delivery, the task force's recommendations will remain another shelved document rather than a catalyst for real change.

The workers and students of Parnell Square and the residents and business owners of Frederick Street North want to know when the Government will announce ring-fenced budgets for the task force recommendations, when the inner city communities will begin to feel the revitalisation the task force aims to achieve and when there will be a decisive shift from recommendations to robust action.

Across the State we need to see community safety partnerships up and running with the right model, membership and resourcing. Time is of the essence.

**Deputy Tom Brabazon:** I also wanted to raise this matter. I welcome that the task force is there and has been proposed. There is some concern at city council level about the task force's level of funding to achieve the goals it sets for itself, which are welcome, including the creation of an attractive, safe streetscape and a desirable location to live, work and do business in and visit. Many of my constituents on the northside of Dublin have voiced the view to me that they are afraid to come in to the city. Some of the work done by the Minister in providing more gardaí for the city centre at Store Street and Pearse Street is welcome, including by the public in general, but there is a sense that some of the problems have been displaced to the suburbs as a result and some of the areas now under construction and those that have been constructed in the past 15 or 20 years, certainly on the northside in my experience, are going down the road of suffering from the same problems as the north inner city. We will have to look at that in a bigger, more holistic way.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I know that, as a Cork man, the Taoiseach will join me in saying how great Dublin city is, but as great as it is, we certainly have challenges, especially in the city centre. The task force report was an important way of identifying those challenges.

*4 o'clock*

The challenge now will be delivering them. Within the Dublin City Council structure, there certainly seems to be the appetite to establish a dedicated vehicle to deal with the issues relating to derelict sites and also to fund improvements and additional services, for example, the business improvement district scheme which applies an additional levy on ratepayers in the city, something that Fianna Fáil introduced at the time. I am not opposed to a tourism levy and introducing legislation would allow the local authorities to decide whether they want to apply one. At this point we need certainty on funding for the task force. Whether that comes from central government or whether we are going to enable local government to raise the funding, one way or the other, funding is the crucial step needed to deliver the task force.

**Deputy Barry Heneghan:** Regarding the task force, I welcome what Deputies McAuliffe and Brabazon said about north Dublin. What steps are being taken to make development of residential space above shops in Dublin's inner city easier? There are major issues with licences for fire safety.

Is there any update on the proposed late-night licensing reforms and the Give Us The Night

campaign? Young people in Ireland feel they are not welcome in Dublin city as we saw recently with Drury Street being closed off. If we want the city to be revitalised, the young people of Dublin need to be encouraged to come in. If the late licences go to 6 a.m., we will still have one of the earliest in Europe, but it would encourage people in.

**The Taoiseach:** Did the Deputy say 6 a.m.?

**Deputy Barry Heneghan:** Yes, 6 a.m. We should bring it up. In Berlin it is 24-7.

**The Taoiseach:** Deputy Heneghan is full of energy.

I thank all the Deputies for raising various issues. Deputies McGrath and O'Sullivan asked about the Cork city task force. The docklands have been the main development focus in Cork city for some time. Under the urban regeneration and development fund, URDF, some years ago €400 million was allocated to Cork for the docklands and the Grand Parade new library. Considerable progress has been made in the docklands, but not so much on the city library. I met representatives of Cork City Council recently to discuss these issues. Cork City Council is anxious about the city centre. Along with the Land Development Agency, LDA, and others, it is delivering on the docklands which is becoming an engine of real power and growth in the city of Cork. I believe it is coming forward with further proposals on the Grand Parade and on the library, which will be transformative. We always need to be conscious that the existing agencies will be crucial - Dublin City Council, Cork City Council and Cork County Council. Regarding Cork city, a lot of money will be channelled through the National Transport Authority, for example, the BusConnects proposal. The route for the light rail has been published. The N28 has been sanctioned. That will potentially come to about €490 million with all the knock-ons and so on. There will also be other infrastructure development.

The task force will come back with proposals for the city. It needs to look at how we reimagine cities of the future. We tend to look at it through the prism of the past and what cities used to be like, whereas we need to look at what they will be like or what we think they will be like in the future. We need a different mix with stronger residential focus in city centres in the future with less of the big anchor retail tenant type. There might be more niche quality hospitality and retail. I would a new task force for the city of Cork to try to reimagine the city centre, the core of the city, for the future as opposed to trying to do everything across the entirety of the city. We will come back with proposals on that.

We have been working on the Dublin city task force and the idea is to bring to the Government a memorandum that has substance. Everyone has raised the issue of funding.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** The hotel bed tax.

**The Taoiseach:** Deputy Bacik raised that; I apologise. I am not opposed to that because I like the concept whereby we acknowledge funding is required and propose a mechanism. It will not fund everything. We will not be awash money.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** I think it will be €12 million.

**The Taoiseach:** A very minimalist levy could yield ongoing revenue that would be of significant use for Dublin City Council to get things done. That is an important principle because increasing numbers are coming in, impacting on services and so on.

I think David McRedmond has done a good job overall at An Post. He has modernised it

and he has-----

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** The closure of services.

**The Taoiseach:** It is not his remit. There have been issues with people retiring and so on. It has not been an easy one. Government has had to intervene and step in with €10 million to support postmasters and will continue to intervene to support postmasters. I want to put on record that I think overall and in difficult circumstances he has done a good job.

Deputy Ó Murchú asked about the public realm. They are not ten wasted opportunities.

Deputy McAuliffe made a proposal around a special purpose vehicle. We are actively looking at that in terms of the presentation of the memo. Temple Bar and other initiatives that have had an impact involved legally created special purpose vehicles that had authority to get things done and did actually deliver a lot in their day. We are examining that in respect of the outcome of the Dublin task force.

The public realm needs enhancement and Deputy Brabazon focused on that as well in terms of a safe streetscape. It is worrying that in the modern era, an increasing number of people are expressing fear of going into city centres, not just in Dublin but also elsewhere. The Minister, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, told me there was a significant group of European officials in last week and they thought Dublin city was great. I agree with Deputy McAuliffe that Dublin is a great city, but a lot of stuff is happening that gives people a sense of fear of going into the city centre at night.

Regarding the issue Deputy Heneghan raised, I think the Minister, Deputy O’Callaghan, is progressing that. I will check with him. There has been a seesaw approach to late night openings. Licensing laws are notoriously difficult. We need to consider all the patterns of behaviour that have changed.

**Deputy Barry Heneghan:** They boost the economy.

**The Taoiseach:** People are doing different things and are behaving differently. That said, I will come back to the Deputy with where that legislation is at.

## National Security

17. **Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil** asked the Taoiseach the role the new ministerial council on national security has in developing measures to tackle cyberthreats; how these will be delivered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [18017/25]

18. **Deputy Ivana Bacik** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on the progress of the national security strategy. [26917/25]

19. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on the progress of the national security strategy. [29592/25]

20. **Deputy Ryan O’Meara** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on the progress of the national security strategy. [29817/25]

21. **Deputy Tom Brabazon** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on the progress

of the national security strategy. [29818/25]

22. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Taoiseach for an update on the progress of the national security strategy. [31327/25]

23. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on the progress of the national security strategy. [32104/25]

24. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on the progress of the national security strategy. [32308/25]

**The Taoiseach:** I proposed to take Questions Nos. 18 to 24, inclusive, together.

The Programme for Government 2025, *Securing Ireland's Future*, sets out a number of commitments relating to national security and defence, and work to give effect to these is well under way. The establishment of a ministerial council on national security is a key commitment in the programme for Government and it will function to enhance central co-ordination on strategic national security matters.

I chaired the first meeting of the new council on 21 May 2025. The council received a detailed, up-to-date briefing on the current security situation from An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces, and also on current cyberthreats.

The council meeting also reviewed commitments relating to national security and defence set out in the programme for Government and re-emphasised the importance of delivery of these commitments.

It is clear, in light of the worsened security situation in Europe and significant changes in the nature of the security challenges we and our partners face, that accelerated and increased investment in the State's security and defence services will be required in the coming period.

The council received a detailed report from the national security committee. It considered current challenges in the international environment, including the war in Ukraine and conflict in the Middle East, and the implications for Ireland; the ongoing work on the reform and modernisation of the Defence Forces; the continued development of the State's cybersecurity capabilities; and the ongoing work to strengthen and modernise our security-related legislation.

The preparation of a draft national security strategy is ongoing and it will cover the range of national security issues that are being considered by the ministerial council. Work is also under way on a revised cybersecurity strategy and responsibility for the National Cyber Security Centre now rests under the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration. This is another important programme for Government commitment, which better aligns the Department's national security responsibilities. The ministerial council will meet again after the summer.

**Deputy Naoise Ó Cearúil:** The Taoiseach will recall that in 2021 the HSE experienced a cyberattack. The estimated cost to the HSE was in the region €102 million. The upgrade costs on its security amounted to an estimated €657 million. With the rise of artificial intelligence, we are now seeing far more sophisticated cyberattacks. I have asked the Deputy Malcolm Byrne, the chair of the Joint Committee on Artificial Intelligence, whether the committee could look at cyberattacks, particularly from an AI perspective. Is the ministerial council on national security assessing how cyberattacks will change with the rise of artificial intelligence? AI is far more sophisticated and has changed dramatically over the past number of years. It will



continue to change. It will not be static. The ministerial council meets once every two or three months. It might get to a stage where it needs to meet a little more frequently.

**Deputy Ivana Bacik:** In December 2022, I wrote to the Taoiseach, who was the then Tánaiste, and the then Taoiseach, former Deputy Leo Varadkar, seeking updates on the national security strategy and also seeking briefings for Opposition leaders on national security, as is standard in many countries. That was in the context of Russia's brutal war in Ukraine, the cyberattack on the HSE and reports of Russian spies in Ireland. Since then, desperately sadly and tragically, we have seen 20 months of Israel's genocidal bombardment and onslaught upon the people of Gaza and, most recently, an escalating war in the Middle East with Israel now openly attacking Iran. I urge restraint, as I know the Taoiseach has done, from both Israel and Iran. I ask this because EU foreign ministers are to meet with southern neighbourhood countries next Monday, 23 June. I understand those countries include Israel. In light of what Israel is doing on the world stage and in Gaza, will Ireland be participating in that meeting with Israel? Has the Taoiseach called for Israel not to be included in that meeting?

Closer to home, I also want to ask about a story that has been highlighted by my colleague, Deputy Alan Kelly, on concerns about the control of firearms in Ireland, in particular with how the Garda Commissioner handled the incident around a controlled delivery to a vulnerable young man. Deputy Kelly has also raised issues with holsters and the storage of weapons in Garda headquarters. Is the Taoiseach satisfied with the Commissioner and with An Garda Síochána's handling of these matters?

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** What is our country's security strategy going forward? It seems to be so tied in with the EU that we cannot assert our own so-called values and beliefs. For example, the Taoiseach says there is a genocide on Gaza, as does the Tánaiste. Ursula von der Leyen says it is Israel defending itself. It was an incredible statement that was put out over the weekend, after Israel had bombed Iran, to say that this was Israel defending itself. We have also seen 330 Palestinians murdered at food sites, which are now becoming known as execution sites, backed by the US. This is the policy of the EU Commissioner. Has the Taoiseach taken her up on that? Has he challenged what she said and demanded that Ireland break ranks with that?

In regard to our military spending and EU policy, we are going to be spending an incredible amount on fighter jets and so on, bringing us into contact with companies that are directly involved in the genocide in Palestine, such as Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and Airbus. Last year, the Taoiseach said we would not be buying Israeli equipment. There is Israeli equipment in the Airbus helicopters. That is a complete change from what was promised. The Taoiseach gave a commitment on this. Our foreign and security policy is now becoming more militarised. We are going to increase spending to €3 billion in the next few years, spending money on armoured vehicles and spending €100 million on fighter jets and €40 million on advanced missile systems known as javelins.

**An Leas-Cheann Comhairle:** I ask Deputy Coppinger to conclude.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** We are doing all this to impress the EU but it is not what the Irish people want.

**Deputy Tom Brabazon:** As the Taoiseach will be aware, in 2019 the Government proposed to develop a national security strategy. The new strategy at that time aimed to set out a whole-



of-government approach on how the State could protect its national security and vital interests. Over a period of five years, from 2020 to 2025, the current and emerging threats have changed significantly and the threats have increased significantly, particularly given the international context in which we find ourselves, to which other Deputies have alluded.

I welcome that national security is given such a high profile, with the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste, the Ministers for foreign affairs, Defence, Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, the Secretaries General of those Departments, the Defence Forces Chief of Staff, the National Cyber Security Centre director, and the Taoiseach's and Tánaiste's chiefs of staff also attending meetings. It is crucial that the council keeps abreast of this issue and meets regularly to keep on top of the continuing threats.

I welcome the fact that the State has announced a contract to develop a new sonar system which will be a towed sonar capability. When attached to an Irish naval vessel, it will assist the Defence Forces with monitoring subsea areas in Ireland's exclusive economic zones. It will help with fisheries, drug and other criminal detection.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** We have had the disgraceful action by the genocidal entity, Israel, with its escalation of attacks on Iran. This draws into question the EU-Israel association agreement and we need to see movement on that, post-haste. We already knew that. The occupied territories Bill obviously has to be delivered and apply to services. Beyond that, what is the plan? The Taoiseach might not agree with the Sinn Féin legislation to stop the State and the Central Bank from facilitating the sale of Israel's war bonds, which are used to finance the genocide. In regard to national security strategy, how does it take into account the cyberthreats? We are dealing with issues with spy software such as Predator and Pegasus. What resources, capabilities and legislation do we require? Where is the crossover between the National Cyber Security Centre, the Defence Forces and the Department of justice? We want something that works. We all welcome the fact that we will have sonar capacity. We need to ensure our undersea cables are secure.

**Deputy Mark Ward:** In response to a parliamentary question to my colleague Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire last month, the Taoiseach said that the development of Ireland's first national security strategy is still ongoing, almost seven years after a Government commission called for it. The report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland recommended the immediate establishment of a strategic threat analysis centre, headed by a full-time national security adviser. This was a much-needed and welcome development but it is extremely disappointing that it has not developed to any great extent beyond this announcement. It is long past time that the Government got serious in the area of security and defence. We have a recruitment and retention crisis in our Defence Forces. Key personnel are leaving the Defence Forces and we need to put a halt to this. We need to ensure our Defence Forces are protected and invested in. In a time of ever-increasing global instability and of irresponsible and dangerous rhetoric by those in positions of great power, such as Ursula von der Leyen, it is more important now than ever that Ireland stands for peace and neutrality and has an effective security strategy in the face of the dangerous militarisation agenda driven by power, greed and war.

Almost seven years after a Government commission called for Ireland's first national security strategy, will the Taoiseach give a firm timeline and a direct answer on its delivery?

**The Taoiseach:** I thank the Deputies who have raised issues. I will make a general comment. This question related to the national security committee, national security council and

national security strategy, not foreign policy. This is welcome. I established a national security council as Taoiseach to try to bring greater democratic accountability on matters pertaining to national security. It is up to people to raise what they like at different times. However, there is a logic in trying to focus on core security issues as opposed to foreign policy issues which we debate elsewhere in the House, just to make that overall point.

Deputy Ó Cearúil was first. On cybersecurity, the National Cyber Security Centre is coming in under the Minister for justice. This is a welcome move. The centre was under communications, climate and all that area. It belongs to a national security framework and it will be under the Minister for justice. The director is on the national security council. The Deputy's point is well made in terms of the rise of AI and the impact it will have on more sophisticated and perhaps more regular cyberattacks on companies and State enterprises. We have to be extremely vigilant. Cyber warfare is the biggest problem we have in cybersecurity. Many companies face cybersecurity attacks on a regular basis. We have to build up expertise. We also have to work with others. We cannot do it on our own. We have to work with other countries on cybersecurity in terms of expertise and sharing experiences. When the cyberattack on our health service happened, Poland and the United Kingdom were on to us immediately. Poland had experience with the Conti group, which carried out the attack on our health service. There will be collaboration with other countries and we do need constant engagement with other countries across the European Union and beyond in respect of cybersecurity threats to all law-abiding states. I just want to make that overall point.

On Deputy Bacik's points, I am not going to comment on Garda operational issues. The national security council committee will not be dealing with operational matters of An Garda Síochána in terms of what happens on a day-to-day basis. It is looking more at threats to the State from third party actors, which could be countries or individuals who could be doing certain things that could endanger or cause a risk to the security of the State. On the issue Deputy Kelly raised, I responded in the Dáil and the Minister for justice is responding as well. In terms of that meeting which the Deputy did raise again last week, I will ask the Minister for foreign affairs and will have to come back to the Deputy on it.

Deputy Coppinger raised what are essentially foreign policy issues. Our security strategy is not beholden to the European Union. It is very much fundamentally about national security, protecting our own citizens from any undermining of our security, via cyber security attacks, subsea cable attacks, hybrid attacks, misinformation on social media, or terrorist attacks, although they are low in terms of possibility here, but nonetheless all those areas-----

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** The Taoiseach mentioned the Middle East. That is why I mentioned it.

**The Taoiseach:** ----are subject to potential threats in terms of national security. We have been very consistent at European Union level in terms of our position on the right of Palestinians to their own state. We have called out the war crimes and the blatant, flagrant abuses of international law by Israel in Gaza and indeed increasingly now in the West Bank, which is a cause of great concern. We will not be spending money on fighter jets for a long time, for quite some time. Our immediate focus is on radar. We have purchased C295s. There will be a further strategic lift airplane purchased very shortly. We are building up our investment but we are coming from an incredibly low base as a country. The Deputy's language was around the militarisation of Ireland but we are a long way off that. We need to have a sense of perspective and balance in this debate. We do need to invest in our Army and Naval Service. Maybe the

Deputy's party does not believe in armies or navies and that is a legitimate position to have. Perhaps that is the Deputy's position. I believe we need an Army, a Naval Service and an Air Corps and we need to invest. They need the best of equipment because they go on peacekeeping missions and they share that equipment with other countries like Poland at the moment in Lebanon, and with Hungary, so they need to have interoperability in weaponry.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** And the Israeli equipment?

**The Taoiseach:** We cannot just label all defence as some sort of appalling activity or sector. It is necessary for the protection of citizens.

I will come back to Deputy Brabazon on the timelines around the national security strategy. It is important. My Department is co-ordinating this. There is a national security secretariat in my Department. It is now putting together inputs from all the different Departments, including the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Defence; justice; and environment, climate and communications; An Garda Síochána; the National Cyber Security Centre; and the Defence Forces. We are going ahead with the smaller radar.

In response to Deputy Ó Murchú, I have made my comments in terms of Israel. That is more in the foreign policy domain and will not come under the national security council or committee. I take the Deputy's point that cyber threats are a big concern. The National Cyber Security Centre is now under the Minister for justice, as I said. I take Deputy Ward's point that there is a need to bring this to a conclusion and to develop and publish the strategy.

### **Finance (Local Property Tax and Other Provisions) (Amendment) Bill 2025: Second Stage**

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

The local property tax is due for revaluation on 1 November of this year. I am introducing this Bill to make a number of important changes to the structure of the local property tax so that they can take effect from this date, in line with the commitment given in the programme for Government.

This tax was introduced in 2012. The design of it was considered by an interdepartmental group chaired by Dr. Don Thornhill. It became payable in 2013. This was the largest extension of self-assessment in the history of the State. It is now well embedded within our tax system. It has broadened our tax base, and has now brought in approximately €6 billion for local services since its introduction in 2013.

This year will mark the second revaluation of LPT since it was introduced. The first one occurred in 2021. In July 2021, the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2021 was enacted and made a number of important changes. These included a revised method for calculating LPT liabilities, regular revaluations and the bringing of new properties into the LPT charge. It ceased certain exemptions, increased income thresholds and decreased the interest rate for deferrals and included a number of administrative and technical reforms. These changes had a significant impact. More properties were brought into the scope of the tax which broadens the base. The 2021 Act provides for the inclusion of new properties for LPT purposes

on 1 November each year. In 2020, there was €480 million collected in LPT. This increased to €521 million in 2023, an increase of 9%. The Act also provided that the next revaluation would take place on 1 November 2025.

According to the Central Statistics Office, property prices have increased by more than 20% nationally since November 2021. The largest growth in property values has been experienced in Border, midland and western regions, with average inflation of 33% recorded. Average property price growth in Dublin, for all types of residential properties, was 18%. The programme for Government commitment in relation to LPT was to “ensure fairness and stability in Local Property Tax payments and continue to retain revenue collected locally in the same local authority.” Analysis from the Revenue statistics branch has shown the expected yield from LPT under 2021 valuations for this year would be €566 million. If revaluation of properties were to proceed without any amendments to the bands or rates, the yield from LPT would increase by one quarter. Approximately 70% of properties would move up at least one band.

In light of the programme for Government commitment, and to avoid a significant increase in LPT liabilities for householders, this Bill proposes to amend the charging structure for LPT, and to make a number of other important administrative and technical amendments. Section 7 is the most noteworthy aspect of the Bill, which is the provision to amend the charging structure of LPT. The new approach maintains the number of bands at 20, with all bands being expanded by 20%. Revenue modelling predicts that 96% of homeowners will remain in their existing band. The basic rate of LPT, which applies to all properties valued up to €1.26 million, is to be reduced from 0.1029% to 0.0906%. This will result in an increase in base LPT charges because the LPT charge is calculated on the basis of the midpoint of the valuation band, and midpoints increase as a result of band widening. The fixed charges for bands 1 and 2 will be increased from €90 to €95 for band 1 and from €225 to €235 for band 2. Properties valued between €1.26 million and €2.1 million will be charged at 0.0906% on the first €1.26 million, with a subsequent 0.25% on the balance of a midpoint value in excess of €1.26 million. Properties in band 2 will be charged on individual property values as before, namely 0.0906% on the first €1.26 million, 0.25% between €1.26 million and €2.1 million and 0.3% on the balance.

The changes we are making are fair and progressive. LPT charges will increase by 5% or 6% for homes valued under €1.26 million. Homes valued between €1.26 million and €2.1 million will see their base charges increase by 7% to 14%. The increases are modest but will yield an additional €45 million in revenue that will provide important funding for local services.

Section 10 provides for an increase in the income thresholds for LPT deferrals to be increased to €25,000 for a single person or €40,000 for a couple. It also provides that the income threshold for a partial deferral be increased to €40,000 for a single person and to €55,000 for a couple. The 2019 interdepartmental review of LPT recommended that these income thresholds be reviewed regularly with reference to movements in the consumer price index, wage growth in the economy and changes in fixed-income payments by the State. These changes have been made considering all these factors and the high inflation of recent years.

Section 8 proposes a change to the local adjustment factor, LAF. Local authorities have discretion to adjust the LPT rate collected in their areas up or down by 15%. The Bill as published would allow local authorities to vary the LPT upwards by up to 25% from 2026 onwards. This will provide local authorities with greater flexibility in relation to the LPT yield for their respective areas. I wish to highlight that I intend to bring forward an amendment to this section on Committee Stage. The Minister for housing has outlined the significant administrative

challenges for local authorities if the changes come into effect for 2026. The amendment I will propose will defer the introduction of the increase to 25% for one year to 2027.

In a revaluation year, local authorities are required to notify the Revenue of their LAFs by 31 August. As county councillors do not meet in August, this means decisions must be made by the end of July. Before the LAF meeting, local authorities are required to hold a public consultation of 30 days, prepare a report on this consultation and a financial report for elected members a week before the meeting. Given the likelihood of when this Bill will be enacted, enough time would not be available for local authorities to undertake the public consultation required on the increase to 25%, hold the necessary meetings and notify the Revenue with the time now available. Additionally, many local authorities have made the LAF decision for next year under the current provision of a maximum increase of 15%. In light of the time available, it is not now possible for them to revoke the previous decisions made and conclude a new LAF process. For these reasons, and after consultation with the Minister, Deputy Browne, I intend to seek a deferral of this provision by one year on Committee Stage.

I also wish to highlight a second amendment of a more technical nature that I intend to introduce on Committee Stage. This concerns the partial relief on LPT for a property adapted for use by a person with a disability. The Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 provides for a reduction of €50,000 in the chargeable value of a property for homes that have been adapted in this matter. This is equivalent to the differences in LPT valuation bands between 2013 and 2021. The policy objective of this is to ensure that disabled homeowners whose properties have realised an increase in value due to necessary adaptations having been made are not liable to a higher LPT charge as a result of these changes.

While the bands were widened in 2021 to €87,400, the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2021 did not introduce a corresponding amendment to the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012. This was due to a drafting oversight. When this was identified, my Department requested the Revenue to allow a reduction in the chargeable value of €87,500 on an administrative basis to ensure a reduction of one valuation band for impacted taxpayers, and that has been the practice since then. As part of this Bill, the valuation bands will be widened to €105,000. The second amendment I am proposing will reduce the chargeable value of a property by this amount for homes that have been adapted in this manner and where the conditions are met. This will ensure that the administrative practice in place since 2021 will be put on a legislative footing. It will also ensure that homeowners with a disability who have had their homes adapted to make them more suitable and whose homes are worth more as a result of these adaptations can avail of a reduced valuation band and, ultimately, pay the LPT charge that would be due if they had not made the necessary adaptations.

Returning to the main provisions of the Bill, sections 4, 5 and 11 relate to the six-year exemption from LPT for homes damaged as a result of the use of defective concrete blocks. The six-year exemption currently only applies to properties in counties Donegal and Mayo, as provided for in the Dwellings Damaged by the Use of Defective Concrete Blocks in Construction (Remediation) (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2020. However, the scheme has now been amended to include counties Clare, Limerick and Sligo since the LPT was last amended in 2021. These sections will ensure that homes in these additional counties eligible for the scheme are also eligible for a six-year LPT exemption.

Section 9 allows eircodes to become a mandatory field in LPT returns. This will help in eliminating errors such as written correspondence issuing to the wrong property as a result of



identical or similar addresses.

Section 6 sets the duration of the upcoming valuation period to five years, commencing in 2026 and ending in 2030, with future valuation periods also lasting five years. This will help to provide certainty to homeowners on their LPT charges, while ensuring properties continue to be revalued on a frequent basis. The next revaluation will be on 1 November 2030.

The Bill also contains two sections that relate to other taxation matters. The Finance (No.2) Act 2023 introduced defensive measures in relation to outbound payments of interest, royalties and distributions, including dividends, to jurisdictions on the EU list of non-co-operative jurisdictions for tax purposes and no-tax and zero-tax jurisdictions to counter aggressive tax planning. The passing of this legislation was listed as one of the four tax-related matters in Ireland's national recovery and resilience plan, NRRP, and was the final one to be completed. My Department subsequently notified the European Commission of the implementation of the reform. During its preliminary review of the legislation, a potential avoidance issue arose and an amendment was identified that would broaden the criteria whereby entities are considered to be associated with and, as such, inside the scope of defensive measures.

Section 12 provides for a technical amendment to extend the definition of "associated entities" to include entities that are associated by reference to the ownership or control by the same individuals, or individuals connected with those individuals, within the meaning of section 10 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. This update to the legislation will ensure it operates as intended and future NRRP funding requests will not be hindered.

Deputies will also know that I introduced a financial resolution in April this year to extend the temporary reduction in VAT on gas and electricity charges. This was due to expire on 30 April and revert to the original 13.5% rate from 1 May. The financial resolution extended the measure to 31 October 2025. The Bill provides the required legislative basis to underpin the financial resolution. As previously outlined, the estimated cost of this extension was €85 million. I will handle all VAT-related issues after that point as part of the normal budget process.

It is important for this Bill to be enacted before the summer recess. This is to ensure Revenue has enough time to implement the necessary IT changes to support the changes this Bill is making. It is also to ensure Revenue has enough time to contact the approximately 1.4 million property owners to advise them of their obligations in respect of evaluation. In light of the tight timelines for passing this Bill, I wrote to the Chair of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, and the Taoiseach to ask for a waiver of pre-legislative scrutiny for this Bill. I thank the Chair for granting this waiver.

Together with my Government colleagues, I sought to deliver on our programme for Government commitments to ensure fairness and stability in local property tax, LPT, payments. By asking property owners to pay a small amount more, we project this will deliver an additional €45 million in yield for LPT which will go towards local services. It will give homeowners and local authorities stability and certainty regarding LPT for the next five years. I thank the Deputies for their attention to this Bill and I look forward to hearing their contributions across the evening.

**Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:** I dtús báire, regarding this legislation as well as a number of other pieces of legislation produced by the Government this week, there has been a protocol in this House that legislation is produced two weeks before it is brought before it in order to allow



us and the public to look at that legislation, especially in the case where there is no pre-legislative scrutiny. In this instance, this Bill was produced last Thursday or Friday. The copyright Bill, which is coming up on Thursday, was produced on Friday. This affects all Deputies, not just me, in our ability to do our work. That time issue needs to be addressed.

This issue may have been flagged for years. Maybe the Minister will address that. In this instance, this is a cost-of-living measure because the Government is attacking those people who often cannot afford it. Someone owning their own home does not necessarily mean they have ready income or can afford this jump, even if it is only a modest or small amount, as the Minister has said. It may be a small amount if one stays within that threshold or band. The vast majority of homes in this city will jump substantially, however. They will jump up one, two and, in many instances, three bands. That is a huge increase for those people, especially for those who do not have additional funds or have already been hit hard by the cost-of-living crisis. The cost of fuel and food is substantially increasing, as is basically the cost of living in every way. The cost of material, if someone needs to fix up a home, has increased. In my area of Dublin 12, one of the auctioneers was boasting recently about the houses sold, although I am not giving out about the estate agents as they are only doing their job. For example, for anyone who knows Dublin 12 and Dublin City Council homes, a house on the Galteymore Road in Dublin 12 listed at €365,000 was sold for €490,000. That is an increase of more than 25% in the space of a year. It is not the only house advertised that is going that way. That is the scale of the jump. When the valuations happen, everyone in Dublin will be moved up two or three bands. That is the effect of it. While the Minister may say in his presentation that it will only be an extra €5 or €10, when you look at the bands, people will be jumping up quite a substantial amount. That is what people will be liable for.

Local authorities are not benefitting from this measure. They have never benefitted in this city. In the past, there was the equalisation fund where Dublin property owners paid - or deferred if they wished, but they ultimately paid - money which did not all go to Dublin City Council to provide services. In fact, it went to other councils throughout the country. The equalisation fund or system was gotten rid of. The increase has not happened since. The officials in Dublin City Council have been complaining continuously, even since the equalisation, that when the increase in funding comes, the grant from central government is reduced accordingly. It is hard luck if Dublin City Council receives an extra €20 million because the funds it will receive from the Government will be reduced by the same amount or more. That means the services it hoped to deliver from the property tax income cannot be delivered, particularly for houses, roads and community services. That is why the condition of some roads across the city is deteriorating and community services, and some positions which are vital to those services, are under threat. It is why Dublin City Council struggles to manage its budget when it comes to maintenance services. It does not have any additionality for the tenant in situ scheme. It does not have additional funding to deal with the shortfall from Government funding to purchase properties that are being advertised.

At this stage, or at any stage, this is a retrograde step. A different approach to taxation that does not include taxing the family home is needed.

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** For the people of my constituency of Cork North-Central, another property tax hike just represents an increased bill they have to pay in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. In County Cork, according to a *daft.ie* report, house prices have increased by more than €75,000. That is not the fault of Cork City Council, Cork County Council, the people buying those houses or the tenants themselves. Rather, it is failed Government housing policy

that has driven house prices to sky-high or record highs. The Government has not been able to get the supply right in housing. It has driven house prices up. The market is now running unchecked, charging whatever it wants.

There are people living in the family home who have no intention of selling. The value of their homes is that they are safe places to raise their families. It is their home. This Government is commoditising their home for money and not respecting what it is. In the eyes of the Government, the vulture funds and the big speculators and developers, housing is a commodity. We look at housing as being people's homes. That is the difference between the Government and Opposition sides of the House.

In County Cork, the local property tax is going to increase this year. People are paying this unfair tax but they cannot even get the local authorities to carry out work. This happens right across the State, not just in Cork. Footpaths need repairing and lighting needs to be upgraded and newly installed. Parks and playgrounds need work. We have no regional park on the north side of Cork city, none. Yet, people are paying the property tax.

To give an example, areas like Kerry Pike and Whitechurch have close to a 100% payment rate of the local property tax, but they cannot get investment in footpaths or lighting. Those people tell me they are working hard, have bought their own homes and have done everything right. When they turn to the local authority to look for money, however, it says it does not have the money because it is not getting enough funding from central government. There is an estate in Whitechurch called Castlewhite where the estate has not been taken charge of by the local authority. The residents are paying people to cut their grass and to maintain their green areas, even though the local authority should maintain it. However, the local authority has not taken it into charge because it does not have the money to do it, so Cork County Council is doing a Pontius Pilot and washing its hands of the situation. Those residents are paying their local property tax and then double paying to have the work carried out. How can that be fair?

The Minister's Government colleagues are blaming local authorities. The local authorities are the big bad wolf but the fact is - the Government never mentions it - that local authority funding was slashed after the financial crash of 2007 and 2008 and staffing levels and funding were never returned to where they should be. Government Members come in here and say local authorities should do this and that, but the local authorities have to produce balanced budgets every year, and if they do not have the income coming in from the local property tax, rates or housing rents, which are the only three forms of income for most local authorities, then they cannot provide the services that are required. Areas are crying out for parks and playgrounds that the local property tax should be paying for but it is not because local authorities do not have the funding to provide those. To make them the villain is wrong.

As Aengus said a minute ago, just because people have a house that has a value does not mean they have the ability to pay. There are areas I represent where people are living alone, they might be widows or widowers, and the value of the house might be one thing but they are living on the State pension, so any increase on them is another strike in the cost-of-living crisis.

I will conclude before my colleague contributes. I will give a terrible example. Tower is an area in my constituency where there is a bridge, called Tower Bridge, which has no pedestrian crossing and only one car can get across at a time. For years, people have been crying out for a pedestrian crossing, perhaps one hanging off the side of the bridge. Hundreds of thousands of euro have been collected in development charges but there is still no bridge so that children can

get to and from school. They have one of the highest levels of local property tax in the State, yet the people of Tower cannot get footpaths, pedestrian crossings or the bridge that is needed.

We should be looking at properly funding local authorities but the Government has devastated those over the years.

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Leas-Cheann Comhairle as ucht an deis labhairt ar an ábhar seo. Cuireann muid in éadan na cánach maoine tithíochta seo. Tá muid ina éadan go huile is go hiomlán. Achan bhliain, léiríonn muid an dóigh le deireadh a chur leis an cháin seo. Is é an rud atá sa Bhille atá os comhair an Tí anocht ag teacht ó Fhianna Fáil, Fine Gael agus na Neamhspleáigh atá ag tabhairt tacaíochta don Rialtas ná go n-ardófar an cháin seo ar mhuintir na tíre. Níl aon teach sa tír seo a fheicfidh an cháin ag dul in ísle. Rachaidh sí in airde d'achan ceann acu. Tá gach ceann de na bands ag dul suas. De bharr go bhfuil an costas tithíochta ag dul in airde faoin Rialtas seo, beidh cuid acu á ndíol ag leibhéal níos airde.

Sinn Féin opposed the local property tax in every year, as the Minister well knows. We account for phasing out this local property tax. We present the Government with an alternative way of doing things and it rejects that every time. It is a way of scrapping the property tax without costing local authorities any revenue.

There is a fairer way to tax. Sinn Féin is committed to taxing wealth to reduce the burden on ordinary workers and families in delivering high-quality infrastructure and public services that are so badly needed right across our State. Despite the family home being turned into a financial asset by successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments, the family home should not be treated in the way that it is by this Government in terms of wealth. For example, many of these homes have mortgages and some were in negative equity for many years, yet the Government looked at it as just simple wealth and an item that could be taxed. Sinn Féin believes in taxing wealth but one has to recognise that the family home has a particular position in the Irish State. It should be on net wealth that we tax, not tax where there are mortgages that are equivalent or similar to the amount of value that is in the property.

Some argue, as the Government has, that the way to tax wealth is to go after the family home. We completely disagree. Taxing real wealth is not easy but it is what we truly need. Lobbing a tax on the family home is just a simple cop-out and is what we have seen from Government after Government in recent years.

For many, it does not matter what the family home is worth because they are not selling it. It is a necessity of life. It is where they live and where they bring up their children. I need to be careful with my language here but just look at what Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have done with the family home. It is like Trump looking at Gaza and he just sees real estate. The Minister looks at people's homes, the place where they bring up their families, and he asks how he can squeeze those families and how much money can he get out of them. That family does not care if their home was €200,000 five years ago and is now valued at €300,000 today. It is where they are raising their family and where they have scrimped and saved to be able to purchase or build the home in the first instance, yet the Government just sees it as a cash cow to be taxed. Under this proposal, every single house in the State will end up paying more tax.

The reality is this Government has pushed us in a direction of the financialisation and commoditisation of homes. It has taken what is a necessity - what should be a right - and transformed it into an asset and made it out with winners and losers. Its failed housing policy has

pushed up prices higher and higher right across the State. That has not been to the benefit of ordinary workers who just want a home to live in, but of the Government's friends who keep it in high places. It has benefited the developers, bankers and investment funds, and the Government's answer is to tax ordinary workers every single time. The irony is not lost on those workers that, on the day the Minister has announced that every house in the State will have to pay more tax, be it €500 or €250, it makes no difference, he has also announced he is giving bankers bonuses and bumper salaries. That is what this Government stands for. For the family that lives beside me in west Donegal or the family that lives beside Deputy Gould down in Cork who are scrimping and saving and going to the credit union to try to pay for the recent bills, such as the electricity bill, the Minister has just handed them a higher bill on their property. And what has he handed the CEOs of the banks in this State? He has handed them bonuses – pay that now goes above €500,000 – and in doing so he has lost the State €5 billion. Never has a finance Minister in all my time lost so much money for the State. If he had just held onto the shares in AIB, we would be €5 billion better off today. Oh my God, that has happened under prudent Paschal, the fellow who will not give the increases we need for disability payments, special needs allowances or those who needed the additional support of one-off energy credits this winter, but when it comes to bankers' bonuses, it is a case of "Come knock on my door, it is a free for all". That is what Fine Gael does, definitely when it has Fianna Fáil in government with it.

We are in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. People are struggling to put or keep a roof over their heads. People are struggling with the cost of childcare. The Government promised that, within its first 100 days, it would provide a roadmap for delivering €10-a-day childcare, which is another promise it has failed to deliver. People are screwed over by high energy bills, among the highest in Europe, and the Government sits idly by, yet its priority is to make sure every single home pays a bit more local property tax. There is simply no let up for people.

The Government will tell us it can do nothing about inflation but it forgets to say that it is going to raise the cost of local property tax, petrol, diesel, home heating oil and gas because the Government controls a lot of prices in this State. This is another example of how it is screwing people over again royally. What we should be doing is abolishing local property tax and not increasing it, regardless of whether that increase is €5 or €250. That is what is required in this legislation. We will table an amendment to bring that about.

The Minister spoke about revaluation. You would swear he was doing us a favour here and trying to soften the cough because of the revaluation. The revaluation in the local property tax is a political choice by the Government. It does not need to happen. The revaluation does not need to happen and we should not have it in the first place.

*5 o'clock*

We should abolish this tax. It reflects the failures of Government in respect of housing policy.

Let us look at the numbers. The Minister told us the revaluation will happen in November this year. However, he said that until last year house prices had increased by 23%. They are still increasing, by the way. Therefore, by the time the revaluation takes place, prices will be above that threshold. In Donegal, prices have increased by 35%, but the bands only increased by 20%, because the Minister needs his little squeeze on households. The Government needs to squeeze householders a little bit more, while the bankers get bonuses and pay of over half a million euro because that is what Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments do.

I will hand it to the two parties; they are bloody consistent. When it comes the buddy móra in this country, there is always a nice listening ear. Last week, I asked the Minister's party leader if he does not listen to the people who are struggling and find it difficult to pay for a basket of groceries at the end of the week. Does the Minister not listen to the families who are crippled with a second mortgage in childcare costs or are screwed over by petrol and diesel prices and the carbon taxes that increase every year and which the Government plans to increase further? The Government then comes along with a proposal that increases taxes.

The Minister can dress this up all he wants. The reality is that the local property tax for a person in my county relates to a property worth €190,000 in 2021. Property values in Donegal have increased by 30% since that time. The current price is €247,000. People in Donegal will pay another €140, not another €5, in property tax. That is what the Government is delivering to people in my constituency. It is absolutely wrong in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis and, indeed, at any time. We should abolish the local property tax. That is what Sinn Féin is committed to and will do. That is the type of amendment we will bring forward to the Bill.

**Deputy Ged Nash:** The Labour Party will amend the Bill on Committee Stage. I can assure the House that we will not amend it on the basis that we want to see what is a modest charge on properties abolished. It is extraordinary that every time we debate the principle of the property tax in this House there are parties who purport to be on the left in Irish politics which say they oppose it. They oppose it for their own reasons, and I respect that. In my view, parties are not entitled to refer to themselves as a social democratic or socialist party if they do not agree with the principles of taxes on assets. This is a modest charge. Few people like paying tax, but people are compliant. They understand the necessity of the tax and it is now an embedded feature of our political and tax-raising systems in this country.

I am always struck by the uneasy alliance of the far left, Sinn Féin and parties which describe themselves as being on the right in Irish politics, such as the likes of Independent Ireland, where people seem to agree that property taxes are something that should be abolished but rarely make sound proposals in terms of how we should replace the several hundred million euro on which we rely every year to run our local services.

It speaks to the heart of the report published a couple of short years ago by the Commission on Taxation and Welfare. It said that taxation from property and wealth is low and should increase. We know that some of the most significant forms of wealth in this country are held in property. The commission recommended that the yield from capital gains tax, capital acquisitions tax and taxes on land and property should be substantially increased. The commission also recommended a site value tax be applied to all land not subject to the local property tax. This measure was also in the Labour Party's election manifesto, but it is one this Government is yet to move on.

A site value tax as a replacement for the outdated system of commercial rates ought to be up for consideration. The commercial rates system is full of inequities and is, quite frankly, an anachronism in the context of a modern economy. The idea of a site value tax would, of course, require detailed consultation on the design and modelling of the interaction with the local property tax and residential zoned land tax.

The commission was clear on the local property tax. It called the local property tax a well-functioning tax, the yield from which should be increased materially. The commission also recommended that tax incentives should not be used in order to stimulate the supply of housing,



another thing this Government seems to have contrasting views on.

I am reassured by comments made by the Minister in previous months that tax incentives in respect of the supply of housing are something that ought not to be considered. I hope that is something he will follow through on. We remember all too well the impact such forms of incentives, as they were described, had on our economy and banking system. They led, for example, to the financial crash. The commission recommended that the overall yield from wealth and capital taxes, including property, land, capital acquisition and capital gains taxes, should increase materially as a proportion of overall tax revenues. Herein lies our issue with the Bill.

We agree that working families in average family homes who are already being impacted by the cost-of-living crisis should be saved from very large hikes in their local property taxes as a consequence of rising property prices. We absolutely get the point. While the ability to pay must always be at the forefront of any tax raising system, it is clear that this country does poorly in terms of taxes on fixed assets and capital. The Bill will not do a huge amount to improve that record.

The Labour Party's issue with the Bill is with how it operates at the higher end of the scale, where there is scope for even higher yields from wealthy property owners with a demonstrably greater ability to pay. Property values go all the way up to €1.75 million before they are taxed on their actual value. Even then, the same rate is applied as any other property for the first €1.05 million of that total value. The remainder is taxed at 0.25% and 0.3%. It is fair to say that people in that category with very large assets at the high end of the spectrum are also likely to be cash rich. Wealthy asset holders get away lightly in our tax regime comparatively, while ordinary working people carry a significant load.

The local property tax is an opportunity to address that balance and use the increased yield from those with abundant resources to give working people a break, whether by using the resources we have to reduce the cost of living and invest more in public services or, over time, reduce the proportion of tax that working people pay.

A second and equally important issue we have to keep an eye on when we look to reform the local property tax is the funding of our local authorities. The Labour Party welcomes the broadening in the Bill of the discretion available to local authorities in the setting of the local property tax from 15% to 25%. This was a commitment we made in our election manifesto late last year. However, this expansion of local authority discretion, as I understand it from the remarks of the Minister, will be delayed until 2027. For this to mean anything, the Government parties, that is, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael need to tell their council members around the country to exercise this power positively for the betterment of their local authorities and the people they serve.

It has been the experience across the country that, more often than not, representatives of Government parties in local authorities are not prepared to increase the property tax to provide additional resources to fund public services in an area or, in fact, want to reduce the local property tax. Too many times, this has led Labour Party councillors, working with Green Party, independent or Social Democrats councillors, to argue against this situation.

We also have to be careful that the core yield of the tax is not undermined to such a degree that the extra discretion makes no real difference to the funding of local authorities. We should all aim to ensure that the financial independence of local authorities in Ireland is strengthened.

A key principle of local government reform must be that councillors have greater control of



their finances and more discretion for local priorities, alongside the power to raise revenue. We should also consider introducing a legal guarantee that all of the local property tax raised in a local authority is retained there, independent of other revenue streams, including from Government, and ensure that decisions of the local property tax are made at the same time as the annual council budget. We also believe we should be providing more revenue-raising powers and more discretion to local authorities to raise revenue along the lines, for example, of proposed tourist levies, a better way of collecting vacant and derelict site taxes and increasing the discretionary level of the local property tax.

While we are looking at local authority finances, the resources generated and raised from the imposition and collection of derelict site levies ought to be improved. One way of doing this would be to pursue an approach I have been proposing for many years, which is to give the powers that local authorities have at present to collect revenue from derelict sites levies to the Revenue Commissioners. The Revenue Commissioners would then be obliged to funnel those resources directly back to the local authorities. At present, property developers and property owners who can afford to leave their sites derelict, whereby those sites appear on derelict site registers, are not taking the responsibility seriously. All too often, they are deliberately evasive when the bills hit the mat and they are simply not paying the levies. As I understand it, if the Revenue Commissioners were to collect properly all of the derelict site levies that would be available, the yield would amount to €24 million or €25 million. This is not an insignificant amount of money. The resources being collected at present are exceptionally small.

The most recent figures for LPT were published by Revenue in April 2025. They showed that for the LPT year 2025 to date, Revenue has engaged with more than 1.4 million property owners in respect of 2.02 million properties, representing a 97% return compliance rate, and €346 million has been collected to date. I will not argue for one minute that this form of taxation or any other form of taxation is popular but compliance is high and compliance is important. One of the reasons compliance is high is that the local property tax is collected by the Revenue Commissioners. Therein lies my argument for giving responsibility for the collection of the derelict sites levy to the Revenue Commissioners.

According to the Central Statistics Office, property prices increased by a national average of 24% between November 2021 and March 2025. Property prices have had a greater proportional increase outside of Dublin, with more than 30% property price growth recorded in the Border, midlands and western regions. However, average property prices in Dublin for all types of residential properties also increased by 18%. While these increases will have little or no impact on the resources available to families simply living out their lives in an average family home with no desire to sell, they are a huge boon for those wealthy property owners and property flippers who see the property market as a ladder, with rungs on which to climb and, hopefully, seeing their asset appreciate always over time. While we need to protect the first group from major hikes in the local property tax, the second group does not need this protection and, in my view, can afford to contribute more.

The Government estimates that 96% of property owners will stay in their existing bands as a result of the Bill and it will yield an extra 8% in revenue over a period when property values have risen by one quarter. In my view, all of this means we have a missed opportunity to take a greater yield from those who will ultimately profit from the boom in property prices and use that extra revenue to give ordinary working people a well-earned break.

There is some consolation in the Bill for working families and their struggles with the cost

of living. The Labour Party welcomes the extension of the 9% VAT rate on energy bills but, at the same time, we continue to make the case for a greater tax take from the runaway profits of some of the energy companies that are still posting supernormal profits. Moving the threshold for deferrals of tax in line with inflation is also a welcome element of the Bill from the Labour Party's point of view. This is fair and we look forward to amending the legislation on Committee Stage when it appears before us.

**Deputy Barry Ward:** Broadly speaking, LPT is a good thing. When it was introduced I welcomed the fact that it was part of a model to allow local authorities throughout the country to become self-financing and self-supporting. However, I have significant problems with the way it was put together and what the Bill does. In the first instance, local property tax was established to make local authorities self-funding. In reality, it has not achieved this to any substantial extent. I come from a background of 11 years on Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, the local authority area in which the highest rates of local property tax are paid in the country.

There is, of course, a perception out there, and I know it gives some people great glee to suggest, that Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is a very wealthy local authority. In fact, this is not the case. The vast majority of funding for local government comes from commercial rates. We do not have a substantial commercial rates base in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown. We are by some distance the poorest local authority in Dublin and compare with county councils throughout the country rather than our bigger brothers and sisters in Dublin. The annual budget for Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is approximately €280 million or €290 million. Dublin City Council's budget is more than €1.2 billion.

Looking at our commercial rates base, which is a little over €50 million per annum, Fingal County Council takes more than €80 million from Dublin Airport alone, just one ratepayer in its area. South Dublin County Council has a large commercial hinterland around the M50 which generates massive commercial rates for it. In this instance, we are looking at a local authority where local property tax costs its residents large amounts that benefit the council little enough because it is not a very populous area, and it ends up being a relatively poor local authority.

In 2012, when this was put together in anticipation of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, the idea was always that local authorities would have the right to vary the property tax up or down by 15%, according to their needs or whatever way they chose to interpret it. Notwithstanding the fact this right was given to local authorities, and notwithstanding that it was always anticipated that local authorities such as Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council would be able to reduce the burden on their residents, and that other local authorities where property prices were lower, particularly small rural counties, could increase it correspondingly to benefit the coffers of the county council, there has been implicit and explicit criticisms - explicit in this Chamber in the course of this debate - of those local authorities that choose to recognise the fact their residents pay more than they need to, or more than they should, in the context of their earning capacity, when those local authorities reduce the property tax accordingly. Not only this but there have been consequences for those local authorities with regard to central Exchequer funding, which is cut because they are seen to have not played ball by reducing the local property tax when, in fact, the entire system is apparently designed to allow them to do this.

When I look at Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council this is exactly the problem. When I was on the council we consistently reduced it by 15% because it was the fair and reasonable thing to do. Our residents, the people who live in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, pay vastly

more than somebody in the Offaly, Carlow and Longford county council areas, in fact, more than somebody in any other local authority area we could pick around the country. They are disproportionately penalised. Now we have a situation where, notwithstanding the significant increase in house prices of 25% over recent years, notwithstanding the fact the Government is doing its damndest to prevent those increases in costs, and notwithstanding the fact there is a clear public policy objective of not having property prices continue to rise or continuing to rise at the current rate, we now have a situation where the Bill will specifically penalise those householders who may not have traded property, are not flipping property and are not wealthy people but who have a house that is of a particular value. They will now have a greater property tax burden.

For one stream this is fine if they can pay it but what happens to the elderly retired person who has a fixed income? We know that person's income has not gone up by 25% in recent years. What happens to a person in a job where their pay has not substantially increased? Their local property tax bill will increase. The Minister might well respond by stating most people will stay within their band or that where there is an increase, it will be double digits. That is fine but what happens if somebody inherits a family home in an area where property prices are substantial? Their bill will substantially increase because the property is valuable. The reality is that it does not reflect their ability to pay the bill. It does not reflect that there may be no change in their circumstances.

I understand the rationale behind LPT and I am in favour of it as a notion. The way we do it through the 2012 Act and this amending legislation is blunt and unnuanced. It does not reflect people's ability to pay. It does not reflect the disparity in property prices throughout the country. It does not acknowledge the fact that if you are a renter or local authority tenant, you have no liability. Beyond that, a local authority such as Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council also has to pay the local property tax for social housing in the county. In addition to the individual burdens being placed on individual households, the Bill will also further disadvantage local authorities such as Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council because they will have a bigger local property tax bill to pay with regard to their social houses. When we are pushing those local authorities to build more social houses and acquire social houses - an area in which Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown has performed well - they now get a further smack in the face in this Bill regarding their outgoings for local property tax. Could we not look at local property tax with a more reasoned, fairer eye that actually reflects the ability of the people involved to pay those taxes?

**Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere:** Fianna Fáil supports the Bill, which will provide for a new method of calculating the local property tax liabilities in advance of the new valuation period set to commence in 2026. The proposed changes to local property tax will mean that most homeowners will remain in their present valuation bands, which is to be welcomed. Base local property tax charges will increase a small amount in proportion to property values. A small number of properties will pay a larger amount than before, either as a result of moving valuation band or due to their existing high value.

What I am most pleased about in this particular proposal is that the next valuation period will last for a period of five years. This will give certainty to homeowners throughout the country, including in my constituency of Carlow-Kilkenny. The income thresholds for deferral of local property tax will be adjusted to account for inflation, wage growth and increases in State payments since 2021. This decision follows a recommendation made by the 2019 review group on local property tax. The existing thresholds will increase by between 30% and 40%,

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depending on personal status and whether the threshold is in respect of full or partial deferral. Additionally, a change has been made to the local adjustment factor, which allows local authorities to vary the amount of local property tax collected in their area.

I listened to previous speakers, particularly Sinn Féin Members on the Opposition benches. Sinn Féin has opposed property tax every single year since its inception. I note that Sinn Féin is very heavily represented on the Opposition benches this evening because it cares so much about the local property tax-----

**Deputy Máire Devine:** You can talk.

**Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere:** I was a councillor on Kilkenny County Council for ten years. Kilkenny County Council increased its property tax by 15%. The benefits that came to every single community in the county were unbelievable. Footpaths were upgraded and additional lighting was put in. There was investment in playgrounds and remedial grants, which went from €34,000 to €200,000. Each council had a discretionary fund which it could allocate to its communities. That 15% allocation increase to local property tax made a difference to the people I represent in every single community in my constituency and in County Kilkenny. It is important that this is noted.

While Sinn Féin has opposed every single property tax amendment that was brought forward in Kilkenny County Council and actually proposed to reduce the property tax by 15%, it never once-----

**Deputy Máire Devine:** Jesus.

**Deputy Peter 'Chap' Cleere:** -----came up with a concrete proposal as to how it was going to do this. Not once did Sinn Féin say which playgrounds it would shut down, which roads it was not going to fund, which libraries it was going to close or which community groups that get amenity grants in the constituency were going to lose funding as a result. All we are hearing from Sinn Féin is soundbite after soundbite. I will not sit here and take lectures from Sinn Féin on its economic policy. This Government does not have bags of sterling lying around. As a country, we have to make sure that each local authority has the opportunity, ability and capacity to make sure it is doing right by its county. The councillors in local authorities do a fantastic job, particularly in Kilkenny which I represent. They do what is right for their county and make sure many different projects in the constituency get looked after.

I want to make a couple of specific points regarding the property tax, one of which is regarding the revised method for calculating local property tax liabilities, with the upcoming valuation period lasting for five years. I mentioned this, but it is really important that we can give certainty and clarity to every single constituent that the proposed local property tax regime will stay in place for a period of five years. Notwithstanding that, local authorities have the opportunity to increase or decrease their local property tax band. I welcome that there is more scope given to local authorities and that each local authority will continue to have the option to either reduce it by 15%, if that is what the local authority feels is the right thing to do for its residents, or increase it by 25%, which would mean even more funding would be pumped back into the local communities. Each local authority is best placed to decide what would best suit its particular county or municipal district.

The widening of all valuation bands by 20% was mentioned. I would like to see the bands potentially increase a bit more to 25% or 30% if possible. The increase by €5 in the band 1

charge to €95 and the increase by €10 in the band 2 charge to €235 per annum are minimal. When we increased the local property tax in Kilkenny by 15% a number of years ago, concerns were raised by some people, but when they saw the benefit of what was being pumped back into the community, it was most welcome. When one can see the difference it makes on the ground, it is huge. The additional revenue gathered from the local property tax in each local authority goes to funding local services, community development through reinvestment in communities, amenity grants, festival grants and infrastructure improvement. Kilkenny was able to get way more roads done as a result of the local property tax. Way more footpaths were upgraded and more additional lighting was done in towns and villages throughout county, in places such as Graiguenamanagh, Thomastown and Callan. Many local parks, playgrounds and recreational facilities are funded through the local property tax. It makes a huge difference.

In addition, local property tax revenue can be used to promote business development and tourism. Kilkenny is the festival capital of Ireland. We are so proud of that. Every single weekend we have a festival of stature and note. Part of that is funded through the local property tax, as are library and cultural services. Schemes such as the painted town scheme help businesses. Local property tax is here to stay, but each local authority has to retain the right to do what is right for its particular county, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

**Deputy Sinéad Gibney:** While certain aspects of this Bill are welcome, such as the exemption adjustments and consideration for homes with defective blocks, it fundamentally fails to address some of the issues at the core of our local property tax system. These are issues that have long been raised by the Social Democrats. Our cofounder, Catherine Murphy, highlighted these issues from the outset. We would like to welcome it as a progressive tax. We support the local property tax and the protection of the tax base. This is something we campaigned on in the last election. We do not hide the fact that we support the protection and expansion of our core tax base. This should be a progressive tax as a tax on assets but, unfortunately, it is diminished because the system itself is so fundamentally flawed.

It is unfortunate that pre-legislative scrutiny has not been facilitated for this Bill. I appreciate the timeline that is being dealt with, but I believe a shorter pre-legislative scrutiny process could have been facilitated rather than the full eight weeks.

In his opening comments, the Minister said these changes were “fair and progressive”. Unfortunately, the system itself is not fair. I would go as far as to say that some of the changes proposed here are not fair or progressive at all. The two issues I want to focus on are decentralisation and disincentivisation. Ireland is one of the most centralised countries in Europe. The local property tax was meant to address this, but the way it has been set up means it has made little progress in giving local government more autonomy.

A 2023 report from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe found that Ireland was compliant in only eight out of 20 principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The report states “there is still a lot to be done before local self-government in Ireland is on par with other European countries.” Ireland was found to have one of the lowest scores under the local autonomy index, with Irish local government scoring a rank just above Hungary, the Russian Federation and Moldova. Some of the key concerns highlighted in the report include limited democratic decision-making powers, where Irish local authorities have limited powers, leading to a democratic deficit due to the “imbalance” between elected councillors and chief executives. Another concern was the insufficient financial resources and autonomy, where local authorities face financial constraints that hinder their ability



to provide essential services, with limited discretionary financial resources identified as a key obstacle. The report also noted the centralised local government system. The report states that despite some functions having been “transferred to local authorities”, they do not manage “a substantial share of public affairs”, indicating non-compliance with the “principle of subsidiarity”, which requires decisions to be made at the local level. A paragraph I will read from the conclusion of that report is quite bleak. It reads:

When the monitoring delegation visited the Custom House in Dublin, where the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage resides, it was informed that “local government had been administered and supported from this house for 200 years”. The house was used by the British as the location where local government in Ireland was controlled, but after independence also by the Irish central authorities. This was a telling way of expressing how central government views local government - something that is administered and not primarily regarded as self-governing units.

This same picture is reflected in the figures regarding taxes and expenditure. Eurostat collects data on the proportion of taxes raised and the amount of public spending by each level of Government each year. Ireland sits in second last position on both counts, just above Malta. More than 95% of tax revenues are raised by central Government and 93% of public spending is disbursed by central government in Ireland. This is the opposite of countries like Finland, Austria and Denmark. It is important to highlight all those countries happen to have some of the best housing systems in Europe while Ireland has one of the worst. This is a good indicator of the impact centralisation has.

With regard to the wider democratic considerations of that centralised model we have here in Ireland, it is not just limited to local property tax; it is a wider issue in our local government. It is not news that we have a severe democratic deficit in our local authorities. We must not only support councils with funding but also ensure the system empowers our democratically elected councillors. When we afford them so few ways to meaningfully impact the funding of the councils and the decisions on what the councils do, we open the door for people to resent democracy and lose faith in public representatives and the State itself.

The other element of this I wish to speak to is the disincentivisation created within the system itself. Local authorities with a surplus are still only permitted to keep 22.5% of their local property tax yield to spend at their own discretion. A council that collects a significant amount of local property tax to fund its activities does not reap the benefits. Those living in those areas do not see the benefits of the money being taken out of their pockets, or being put towards their communities in a significant way. All of us hear our constituents ask, “What am I getting for my local property tax?” Unfortunately, it is a question most of us really grapple with answering.

This tax can work and empower councils to make our communities better but the system is set up to breed resentment and a sense of futility. The more local property tax collected, the more central government funding is reduced. This means people cannot see the benefit of their local property tax.

Regarding local impact, one of the few things our democratically elected councillors can do is increase the budget of their councils but this system incentivises them to lower it, narrow our tax base and have less guaranteed funding for our communities. When an increase to council revenue does not increase the money available to maintain their communities and support their lives, people resent the collection of local property tax. Of course, councillors will be incentiv-



ised to lower it and undermine what little additional budget it will afford us. When the council has too much of a surplus, it must go back to central government.

The marginal increase in base levels is welcome but if we do not tackle the structure of how local Government is funded, none of this will work. We continue to tie local government's hand and purse strings and we will therefore continue to see people dealing with these most basic issues at a local level. We already see litter, lack of maintenance of paths, lack of community spaces and lack of services all due to a lack of funding.

I will mention briefly - and this is something we may pursue as an amendment on Committee Stage - the disproportionate element of this. This is something that was raised by one of our former councillors who tried to deal with it on a voucher basis. Essentially, what he called out was that the current 15% discount is applied in such a way as to benefit property owners with higher value properties. The net discount they are afforded is much higher. We would like to explore the idea that any discount voted by council should be directed towards lower property bands, or tied in some way to the average or make those people on the lower bands benefit more from the potential 15% discount than those in the higher bands. This is a disproportionate piece which removes the progressive nature of such a tax that is asset-based and instead puts it into the regressive category of taxes in the State.

As I said at the outset, there are parts of this Bill which we welcome but, unfortunately, at present, it is problematic in respect of those issues regarding the fundamental flaws in the system, maintaining that decentralisation, disincentivising and tying people into tax bands. I spoke to a colleague just before I came here who told me his band has not changed for nine years. The property market prices have changed significantly over time and probably nearly doubled in his particular case. This is a problematic spiralling of house prices and Government mitigating that in this fixed band issue within the band system.

**Deputy John McGuinness:** I listened carefully all contributions but to one in particular. Deputy Gould certainly struck a note with me in his description of local authority and local government, the spending of money and the delivery for constituents. He was right; we need to do something to adjust the balance in favour of the people we represent.

I also listened to another contribution. We all get these briefs but to come in here to read them out word for word and not have your own view on things does not say much about democracy or showing leadership. Members have made contributions and pointed to the benefits of the local spend and how the councils benefit our local communities but there is another side of the story. Last night in Kilkenny, there was a meeting about a road in south Kilkenny, which goes through Waterford, Kilkenny and on into Wexford. It is the most dangerous stretch of road in the country and is recognised as such. The local people - there were 400 or 500 at the meeting - wanted a number of things immediately. They wanted to see Garda presence increased along that stretch of road, with the appropriate cameras in place and visibility which would clearly show the driver they are entering a dangerous area that is has speed cameras and is being monitored. They asked for specific improvements, such as the cutting back of ditches, provision of a fence, fixing potholes and some realignment here and there. They asked for some speed in the delivery of the necessary works to make the N25 fit for purpose and to take the dangers away, which would all be funded by TII and Government. They were aghast to hear the presence of extra gardaí at that point on the road would be subject to constraints, with relevance to how the number of gardaí were being deployed around that area. The specific improvements the community asked for could easily be carried out, costed and done but that is

subject to approval by the council and TII and funding is an issue. They then moved onto the bigger TII project and the delivery of that motorway as fit for purpose. They were told this was also subject to finance. In 2021 and 2022, when the finance should have been delivered to that community to get the project under way, in terms of TII, the Government failed to deliver the money because it was dancing to a greener tune at that time. This has now passed and we are into a new regime.

To ensure he builds confidence with a community like that in south Kilkenny, the Minister needs to bring forward the €200 million or so that has been promised for next year. The Government needs to set it on course, to get delivery of the project to restore safety and to ensure nobody else dies on this road. A significant number of people have died on it. The Government needs to fast-track the delivery of the planning process, so that the bigger project is delivered. Relevant to this debate, the Government needs to make money available to carry out the improvement works that are essential now as a result of the fact that the road will not be delivered for eight years. It also must make sure that An Garda Síochána is well funded and well resourced to provide the safety that the community has demanded. That is relevant to this tax because people are looking at it - with local problems to the fore - and are not seeing the county council spend the money collected on the works they require to have safety restored in their community. That is a big issue, particularly as the Government is collecting a significant amount of money by means of this tax.

The Minister stated that an extra €45 million will be collected. I want him to look at how local authorities spend money that is collected. A considerable amount of it is wasted. There are benefits, including those enjoyed by communities and local projects are achieved. However, the value obtained in respect of this money is not being monitored. I have tried time and again to get the Government to introduce a Bill that would make the Comptroller and Auditor General responsible for the local authority audit. I want to see that happen.

In the context of the Bill, I want elderly people who own their homes, who are living in their homes and who have been affected by the increase in the value of their homes looked after. Even though some of those homes may have doubled in value, it does not mean that those who live in them will have the money to pay the new amounts that will be demanded every year. Nobody is interested in looking at that.

Revenue has a great collection rate. It is either 93% or 97%. How many people are we pushing further into poverty because they cannot pay their bills today? How many are pushing the payment of their bills to a later date? How many are living in fear because they think someone is going to come to take their house or cause them difficulties simply because they do not understand their circumstances? The Revenue Commissioners have offices in Kilkenny, Waterford and many other localities. However, they do not have staff available in their public offices to explain this tax to the people to whom I refer. They should be made to man those offices, provide a public service and explain to people what this tax is all about, particularly those who are not computer literate and cannot make their returns. These people should be assisted to understand what is meant by the word “deferral” or the fact that they can pay in instalments. The Revenue Commissioners need to come to the table on this. It is not good enough that they are being allowed to screw householders, collect 97% of the money and have total disregard for how those in a household might be feeling hard pressed in the context of putting food on the table or looking after the other bills they have to pay.

People are still living in fear that the vulture funds will come and take their homes. Others

fear that the banks will come and take their homes. Some of those vulture funds are not even taxed to the extent that they should be. Why not take the money from them? Why not take the money from the banks? The Government could then ensure, as it applies a reasonable property tax, that local authorities come up with a clear proposal to show how this money is being spent. The Government is putting the onus on local authority members to raise property tax because, no doubt, there will be plenty of chief executives who will want to do just that. They will be encouraging the members to do it now because we are so far out from an election. That is when the substantial increase is brought in. I rail against that because I want to protect those who are less well off, those who are suffering the consequences of this increase in terms of the bands and those poor people who are having to pay more and cannot meet their day-to-day needs. It is absolutely essential that the piece relating to the Revenue is put in place.

It is essential that where we see a scheme like that relating to the N25 in south Kilkenny that needs money now, the Government has an obligation to keep people safe, to reach out and to ensure that whatever the chief executive of Kilkenny County Council asks for is provided on the basis of a legitimate plan that will deliver safety and save lives. I do not see anything wrong in asking for that. I do not see anything wrong in putting the case to the Minister in respect of the changes that are absolutely necessary. What we are doing here again is picking the low-hanging fruit. We are insisting on taxing people because we know where they live, which means that we can apply the tax. What about all the companies here, there and everywhere that are paying nothing? Some of these companies are offshore or are not subject to the tax system here. We have to do more about them.

How much smaller would the increases be if we were determined to root out the outrageous overspending on projects in this country? How much money could we save? How much hardship could we prevent for the people we represent by spending that money in a more co-ordinated and strategic way to help those in society who are less well off? We are happy to proceed on the basis that we know where people live and to tax them as a result. Those who cannot be caught too easily get away with it. The system that spends or even misspends a fortune can get away with it. Successive Governments have looked on, sat on their hands, and done nothing to reform the system. What we should be talking about here is reforming the system, protecting the underprivileged and those who have nothing and making sure that those who have money pay in buckets.

**Deputy Ann Graves:** The local property tax is an unjust tax on the family home. It should never have been introduced. A home should never have been turned into a financial asset. It should be treated, not as a source of wealth but as a necessity. The original household charge was brought in during the crash when the troika came to town. Like many other measures from the time of austerity, it was supposed to have been temporary. Unfortunately, for struggling families, it has remained part of Government policy and has become part of the cost-of-living crisis for many working families. Pensioners and single parents are expected to pay the same tax as millionaires, simply because they have the same postcode.

Sinn Féin has been consistent in its opposition to this regressive tax. As a councillor on Fingal County Council, every year I tabled a motion looking for the full 15% allowable rate reduction, while also arguing that the LPT should have been abolished. Unfortunately, the ruling group in Fingal County Council, including Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party and some Independents, did not support this. In government, Sinn Féin would abolish the property tax and replace it with direct funding for local authorities. We would phase out this unjust tax and we have always accounted for this move in our alternative budgets. We are committed to tax-

ing wealth in order to reduce the burden on ordinary workers and to using this money to deliver quality infrastructure and local government services.

This Bill provides for local authorities to vary the property tax upwards by 25%. On paper, that appears to be beneficial to the local authorities. If a council decides to increase the home tax by 25%, it does not get to keep and spend the extra revenue raised. This funding remains only a small fraction of the overall council budget. Local authorities are starved of funding and no amount of tinkering with the property tax is going to change that reality. One of the central faults of the property tax is there is no ability-to-pay clause, which is very punitive for those on social welfare or low incomes. People can defer the payment of the local property tax if they meet certain criteria, but this is not an exemption and the bill eventually has to be paid, with interest.

According to the Central Statistics Office, property prices have increased by a national average of 23% since November 2021. People's incomes have not risen at the same pace, however. I will give some examples from Fingal. The average price of a house in 2021 was €320,000. Today, it is €445,000. That is the increase over four years. Properties for sale in a new development in Swords went on the market last week. A two-bedroom terraced property costs €485,000 and a three-bedroom semi-detached house is €595,000. That is absolutely shocking. It puts buying a house out of the reach of young couples and the average family.

Ultimately, the aim of this Bill is to raise an additional €45 million through the local property tax. We will continue to oppose increases in the local property tax at council level until we are in a position to reduce this household charge to the rubbish bin of history. We will call on other parties to support us.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** I will comment in due course on the Finance (Local Property Tax and Other Provisions) (Amendment) Bill 2025. The Bill is obviously being brought forward to raise more money. I wish to raise a couple of points to provide context.

The abolition of rates by Fianna Fáil in 1977 completely removed a sustainable source of funding for local government. While the election that year was won on the back of this move - in fact it was a landslide victory - not long after, the incoming Government increased taxes. I remember at the time watching my pay packet evaporate. The shortfall was made up by heap- ing more tax on top of workers. That was not the way to go. While there was a short-term benefit for the then Government in getting into power. Having power and control over taxation, it leaned harder on ordinary workers. Not having control of finance completely impedes the role of councillors and what they are supposed to do in performing their functions. Taking away the rates base in 1977 completely undermined local democracy.

There are a number of issues with the local property tax, including the fact that there is a lack of transparency as to how it is spent and allocated. Within local councils, the management take the lead in terms of how the money is divvied out. They tell councillors what they can and cannot do and why money must be put into this or that area. There is a certain amount of arm-twisting in terms of getting budgets through. In reality, councillors have very little say in the matter.

The other big problem with the LPT is the means of property owners. LPT, as it was introduced in 2012 and 2013, takes no account whatsoever of the income of the property owner. Somebody could be living in a house worth €500,000, €600,000 or €700,000, but they might be

on a single State pension. For example, a widow or widower could be living on a State pension and have very little disposable cash to use to pay the tax.

In County Laois last year, it was projected that there could be a possibility of raising €11.6 million via LPT. However, the total amount realised was €3.1 million. Residents must be told more clearly what they get in return. That is a real issue. We must remember that in many cases, people who own their own houses have already paid stamp duty and are paying high mortgages. In some cases, the LPT turns out to be a tax on debt. People still have to fork out for services, such as refuse collection, that were privatised. More and more families are having to dig deep into their pockets to fund the running of schools. I refer to just the basics such as keeping the lights on, the heating going, and basic work required in the school. That is what is happening throughout the country. At the moment, a lot of schools have overdrafts. INTO representatives told me and others here last week that a substantial number of schools are running into the red. That is not sustainable in the long term, and it must be addressed in the budget. There was a very modest increase in the capitation grant last year but it is still way behind what it needs to be for primary schools. That must be addressed in the budget.

I have concerns about the Bill. The exemptions for houses affected by defective concrete blocks in sections 4 and 5 are welcome. I also welcome the possibility of claiming a six-year exemption. The people who have been affected by that issue are facing enough difficulties. However, section 7 provides for a new charging methodology for the LPT. All valuation bands are to be widened by 20%, which looks okay on the face of it. However, the baseline for band 1 is being increased from €90 to €95, with the potential to increase by 25% on top of that. Band 2 is increasing from €225 to €235, again with the potential for that to be further increased. I read about another band with some interest. The basic rate is also set to be reduced from 0.1029% to 0.0906%, which will apply to properties valued up to €1.26 million. That could mean that somebody with a good income who is fairly well off and living in a house worth €1.25 million could do quite well out of the Bill in comparison with a family in a home worth €250,000, €300,000 or €400,000. I am not sure about the rationale behind that, but the way it is framed in the Bill, it looks like it will benefit the cohort of people who happen to be in houses worth up to €1.25 million and who also have very good incomes.

The other area of concern is that while the Bill allows for variations of up to 25%, that is to increase, but it only allows for reductions of 15%. If we look at the lists for recent years, we can see that many local authorities including in Laois, increased their rates by 15%. Will those who feel the brunt of the extra increases in terms of the changes to the bands and rates also face an increase of 25% in October when it comes to the budget? That must also be factored in.

In an ideal world, local authorities must be able to raise moneys. PAYE tax was increased dramatically - those who were working throughout the 1970s and 1980s will remember this – but the corresponding increase was for PAYE workers to take the hit when rates were abolished. Unfortunately, that destroyed the remit of local authorities and affected local democracy. In an ideal world, we would have sustainable funding at local level, while taking into account the needs of workers.

The key point about the LPT, as it has been framed in the past 12 years, is that no account whatsoever has been taken of means. That is simply not good enough. Means must be factored into it. There is also a lack of transparency in how the tax is spent. I would like to see improvements in that regard. I would also like to see councillors being given a greater say.



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I have one further point to make to the Minister about local government funding. In the past five or six years, a great deal of money has gone directly to projects chosen by the management teams of councils. I want to flag this issue for the Minister. It is a real problem. I have asked local councillors about projects I have seen commence, but they say they had no notice of what was proposed and that the relevant matters did not come before them for decision.

*6 o'clock*

It could be the Department of arts and sport or any Department that is lobbying money straight down to local authorities. However, the chamber of the local authority, which is the primary essence of local government, is being undermined. When one starts undermining local democracy, one starts undermining democracy overall. I have real concerns - I wish to say this sincerely to the Minister, and I said it to Phil Hogan in the Chamber in the first year I was here back in 2011 - about local government being undermined and people not seeing local government as valuable and relevant. They need to see what they are voting for be given that control. I can rattle off - I am sure other Deputies can as well - all of the different functions that have been taken away from councillors in the past 25 years. If we continue undermining local government in the way we have been doing over the past number of years, we are going to further erode peoples' trust in local government. It is the nearest form of government to the people. Generally, people know their local councillor. They can talk to their local councillor. Their local councillor has access to senior officials and us. The local councillor or a group of them can contact Ministers if they wish, which they regularly do. They have a right under the 2001 Act to make representations to statutory bodies, public bodies and semi-State bodies, such as the ESB, the HSE, etc. It has to be taken account for. We need to increase the role of councillors and local government instead of continuing to erode it.

One area that needs to be tackled by the Government at central level is how senior departmental officials - I am not too sure about how much Ministers see - are transferring moneys from their respective Departments straight to local authority staff, including senior management. Most of those people are good as well, but councillors do not have any say in how that is allocated, used or monitored. That is not a good thing to do.

That is my take on it. The weakness in the system is that lack of accountability and fairness because of the means of the householder not being taken into consideration. I wish to see the Government move to take that into account in future years.

**Deputy Shay Brennan:** I am grateful for the opportunity to address the House on the Finance (Local Property Tax and Other Provisions) (Amendment) Bill 2025. As a representative of Dublin Rathdown, I am acutely aware of the importance of the local property tax, both as a source of funding for our local authority and as a topic of real concern for homeowners and communities across the country. I wish to set out clearly why this Bill is not only necessary, but also fair, balanced and in the best interests of our citizens, local authorities and the future sustainability of our public services.

I will begin by recalling why the local property tax was introduced in the first place. The local property tax, established in 2013, was a critical reform in the wake of the financial crisis. It was designed to broaden our tax base, to provide a stable and predictable source of funding for local governments and to reduce our reliance on volatile transaction-based taxes, such as stamp duty. Since its inception, the LPT has delivered on these objectives. It has become the cornerstone of local government funding, supporting the delivery of essential services that ev-

every citizen relies upon every day. From the maintenance of our parks and green spaces to the upkeep of our roads, the provision of libraries, community centres and local amenities, the LPT underpins the very fabric of local life.

Perhaps the LPT's most important aspect is that it is a tax that is retained locally. The revenue raised in each local authority area is spent almost primarily in that area, ensuring that the communities see a direct return for their contribution. This principle of local accountability and local benefit is at the heart of the LPT system and one that the Bill seeks to strengthen.

As with any tax, however, the LPT must evolve to reflect changing circumstances. We cannot ignore the reality that property prices have risen significantly since the previous revaluation in 2021. According to the Central Statistics Office, residential property prices nationally have increased by approximately 24% over the past four years. In some areas, particularly outside of Dublin, the increases have been even more pronounced. Without reform, there would have been a sharp and sudden increase in LPT liabilities for many homeowners. This is an outcome that would have been neither fair nor sustainable. The Government has listened to these concerns and engaged with stakeholders, local authorities and the public to ensure that the system remains balanced, equitable and fit for purpose.

This Bill addresses these challenges head on. It contains a number of key provisions, each designed to ensure that the local property tax remains fair, proportionate and sustainable. First and foremost, the Bill widens the valuation bands by 20%. This means that the bands within which properties are valued for LPT purposes will be broader, allowing many homeowners to remain in their current bands despite increases in the property values. This is a crucial intervention that ensures that the vast majority of homeowners - an estimated 96% - will not see their LPT liabilities jump by more than one band. Many will see no change at all. To put this in context, while property prices have risen by approximately 24%, the widening of the bands, combined with the new base rate of 0.0906%, means that the average increase in LPT for most homeowners will be limited to less than 5%. For properties valued under €1.26 million, base LPT charges will increase by between 5% and 6%. This is a modest adjustment, one that is in line with property value growth and far less than the headline rate of inflation. For higher value properties, the Bill ensures that LPT charges are proportionate to their market value. Properties valued at more than €2.1 million will be charged on their actual value, with progressive rates applied to the different proportions of the property value. This progressive element is fundamental to the fairness of the system. It ensures that those who own more valuable properties contribute accordingly while protecting those on lower and middle incomes from excessive increases.

Another important feature of the Bill is the setting of the valuation period to five years from 2026 to 2030. This provides certainty and stability for property owners, allowing them to plan their finances with a certain degree of confidence. The next revaluation will take place on 1 November 2030, maintaining a regular cycle that reflects market conditions without causing undue disruption.

The Bill also addresses affordability concerns by indexing the income thresholds for LPT deferral. This means that those on lower incomes or with limited means will continue to have access to deferral options that reflect current economic realities. The thresholds have been updated to keep pace with inflation, wage growth and increases in State payments since 2021. This is a vital safeguard that ensures that the LPT does not become an undue burden on the most vulnerable in our society.

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The Bill empowers local authorities by allowing them to vary the LPT rate upwards by up to 25%, giving them greater flexibility to respond to local needs and priorities. The downward variation remains capped at 15%. Importantly, any additional revenue generated from these changes will be retained by the local authorities, ensuring that the benefits of this tax reform are directly felt in local communities through improved services and infrastructure.

As a TD for Dublin Rathdown, I wish to speak directly to the impact of these changes on my constituency. Dublin Rathdown is a vibrant, diverse community that is home to families, young professionals, retirees and people from all walks of life. It is an area with a strong sense of community, but also one that faces real challenges, whether it is in housing, transport or the provision of local amenities. The LPT has played a crucial role in supporting local services in Dublin Rathdown. It has funded the maintenance and enhancement of our parks and playgrounds. It has supported local sports clubs and enabled the delivery of community initiatives that bring people together. It has helped to maintain our roads, improve public lighting and support the work of our libraries and community centres. I have spoken to many constituents who recognise the value of these services, but who are also concerned about the potential impact of rising property prices on their LPT liability. This Bill responds directly to those concerns. By widening the valuation bands and limiting the average increase to less than 5%, we are ensuring that the vast majority of homeowners in Dublin Rathdown will see only a modest adjustment to their LPT bills, one that is fair, proportionate and manageable.

For those on lower incomes, the updated deferral thresholds provide a vital safety net. No one should be forced to choose between paying the LPT and meeting basic needs. The Government is committed to protecting the most vulnerable and this Bill delivers on that commitment.

I am aware that some in this House and, indeed, in the wider public have raised concerns about the LPT. Some argue that it is an unfair burden on homeowners or that it fails to take account of ability to pay. Others suggest it should be abolished altogether or replaced with an entirely different system. Let me address these concerns directly.

First, on the question of fairness, the LPT is a progressive tax by design. Those with more valuable properties pay more while those on lower incomes have access to deferral options. The widening of the bands and updating of deferral thresholds in this Bill further enhance the fairness of the system. The alternative of relying on transaction taxes or general taxation would be less predictable, less stable and ultimately less fair.

Second, on the ability to pay, the LPT is not only a tax on home ownership, but a contribution to the services that make our communities liveable. The updated deferral thresholds ensure that those who genuinely cannot afford to pay are protected. The vast majority of homeowners will see only a modest increase and, for many, the benefits of improved local services will far outweigh the cost.

Third, to abolish the LPT would be to undermine the financial foundation of local authorities. It would mean less funding for parks, libraries, roads and community services. It would mean greater reliance on central government funding, reducing local accountability and local decision making. It would be a step backwards, not forwards.

On alternatives, some have suggested that the LPT should be replaced with a site value tax or another form of property taxation. While there is merit in considering the long-term evolution of our tax system, the reality is that the LPT is a well-established, well-understood and

administratively efficient system. The changes proposed in this Bill build on that foundation, making the system fairer and more sustainable for the future.

It is important to situate the Bill within the broader context of our public finances. Ireland has made significant progress in recent years in restoring fiscal sustainability, reducing our debt burden and investing in public services. The LPT is a key part of that progress. It provides a stable, predictable source of revenue that supports local initiatives and reduces our reliance on more volatile revenue streams. In a world of increasing uncertainty, whether due to global economic shocks, climate change or demographic change, it is now more important than ever that we have a broad, stable tax base. The LPT is an essential part of that base and the Bill ensures it will remain fit for purpose in the years ahead. The Bill also delivers on the commitments made in the programme for Government, which promised to ensure fairness and stability in LPT payments, retain revenue locally and protect those on lower incomes. The Bill fulfils all of those promises. It is a balanced, responsible and forward-looking Bill that will serve our communities well.

I will turn to the principles that underpin the Bill, namely, fairness, stability and local empowerment. By widening the valuation bands, updating deferral thresholds and applying progressive rates to higher value properties, we are ensuring that the LPT remains fair and proportionate. Regarding stability, by setting a five-year valuation period and providing certainty for homeowners, we are ensuring the system is stable and predictable. Regarding local empowerment, by allowing local authorities to vary the LPT rate and retain additional revenue, we are strengthening local accountability and ensuring communities see a direct return for their contribution.

I urge all Deputies to support the Bill. It is the right thing to do for homeowners, local authorities and the future of public services. It is a Bill that balances the needs of today with the challenges of tomorrow. It delivers for the people of Dublin Rathdown and communities across Ireland. Let us work together to ensure the LPT remains a fair, sustainable and effective source of funding for our local authorities. Let us support the Bill and, in doing so, support the future of our communities.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** Sinn Féin has always opposed local property tax. We saw it for what it was. It was imposed at a time of austerity. It was not about services or fulfilling the needs of local authorities. It was literally about ensuring money was brought in because of the dreadful circumstances the State found itself in. It was about us following through on the edicts of the International Monetary Fund, IMF, and others.

When we talk about taxing wealth, we cannot think or talk about the family home. It must fall into a different category. I accept that some of the reason this will be carried out is on the basis of ensuring in November that the increases would be somewhat reduced, but with increasing house prices - we know about the significant issue of the housing crisis and its huge impact - people will consequently have to pay more tax on their properties. We are not necessarily taking into account their ability to pay. I accept that there are criteria people can meet to avail of deferrals, but deferral means it is still on the books. Someone has to pay and there will be a percentage - I believe it is 4% - accrual in interest. That in itself is not a solution.

I agree with what Deputy John McGuinness said. A huge question about local authority services is the old one of what people are getting. It is about the ability of the local authority to deliver. I might do something similar to the Deputy by raising a particular road, that being,

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the N53, which connects Dundalk with the N2 at Castleblayney. An upgrade is to happen and we await tendering and TII funding for that. It is for the stretch from Hackballscross to Rissan. There is a particular issue at the turn-off on the N53 for Crossmaglen. In recent weeks, there have been a number of smashes. A local pointed out to me that none of the smashes involved trucks, given their height. There seems to be a crest on the road that affects vision at a particular point. We cannot rule out that speed always creates a scenario, but there are certain issues that need to be addressed.

The ability to increase the LPT by 25% has some element of blackmail. It determines who will be screwed over. Is it the person who has to pay the LPT or will it be that we have reduced services? However, even if a local authority such as mine were to go for that 25%, no one in this room could think that would deal with all the issues that exist, such as housing maintenance, road upkeep, issues that impact on communities such as dumping, estate management or any of the other pieces the local authority is at least somewhat responsible for. We need to get real about how we deliver local authority funding and services.

In the 20 seconds I have left, I will point out - I hope the Minister will address it - that there seems to be a particular issue. St. John of God has its own an approved housing body and is able to deliver disability housing using the capital assistance scheme. It has a number of houses and is in discussions with Louth and Meath county councils. There are rentals at the moment for at least eight residents or so and it looks like the kibosh has been put on that. There seems to be an issue with the Department of public expenditure. I realise I am off topic with this, but this is my first opportunity to raise it and it might be the only one I have to deliver the message. I ask the Minister if this issue can be looked at. St. John of God has also told me that there is an issue with the capital advance leasing facility, CALF. It looks as though disability housing is being cut off. I brought it up with the Minister for housing privately, but it needs to be addressed.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** I have been listening to this debate with some interest. There have been various contributions and Deputy Gibney's would be the most similar to mine in this context. In essence, while this proposal has some merit if it were taken in an isolated way, it is basically tinkering around the edges because we do not have a European-style property tax in Ireland. The way to work this out is simply by looking at the budget for South Dublin County Council, my own council. Its budget for 2025 is an estimated €392 million. It generates an income of €227 million from a range of services and sources, including rents, fees, charges, loan repayments, grants and recoupment, much of which comes directly from the Government. Of the remaining amount, €133.5 million comes from commercial rates and €31.5 million from the local property tax, which is a drop in the ocean.

When I came back on to the council after being a TD in 2014, for the first five years of my term I consistently voted not to reduce the local property tax by the 15% allowable at the time. We had the somewhat surreal situation of a Fine Gael councillor on the one hand and a Sinn Féin councillor on the other hand both working together to save a few quid for the hard-pressed residents, but missing the fundamental point which was that the Government took with one hand and gave with the other. It would have meant only a small smidgen of extra money by choosing not to reduce it by 15%. The Government is obviously putting a challenge to local elected representatives in situations like that.

Elected representatives have seen the powers of local government diminished over the years in many cases and rightly so. We were prevented from material contraventions, for example,



because they were abused. There were very cosy relationships with developers and as such it could have been argued back in the day, before councillors were paid a reasonable sum, that the chances of corruption were quite high. Besides the legitimate donations, which I would personally disagree with, I do not believe that any of our elected representatives around the country are taking money now. However, the fact remains that they do not have the power. We need European-style local government with the power to raise real money.

Social Justice Ireland has suggested it should be a site-valuation tax rather than local property tax but we should really be reducing income taxes proportionately and allowing a proper workable local property tax where people can say, “That paid for services.” We have to make a decision. As we do not have that with this legislation, we need something bigger.

**Deputy Peadar Kirby:** The local property tax was introduced by Fine Gael and Labour to fill a massive hole in the budget that was created by Fianna Fáil crashing the economy during the banking crisis. The local property tax is in many ways a child of the economic catastrophe which was caused by the Fianna Fáil-led Government at that time. It was a Fine Gael and Labour austerity tool, which was introduced to find other ways of taking money out of people’s pockets at a time when the country was absolutely broke. It was designed to fill a gap that was created by the withdrawal of central government funding to local authorities. In fact, it was not promised new income for local authorities but just a straight swap of a local government grant that was given by central government over periods of times.

All tax comes from people’s pockets. No matter what tax people pay, whether it is income tax, property tax or VAT, it all comes from people’s pockets. Over the last couple of hundred years we have decided that progressive taxes are the best idea because the amount of tax people pay is based on the amount of income they have. However, the problem with property tax is that it is not progressive; it is completely ignorant of the level of income that comes into a family. For sure, there are significant proportions of the population where the property is valued at roughly the same proportion as income coming into the house, but there are major disparities to it. If we are honest, this Bill admits that the value of the property is completely disconnected from the incomes coming into people’s homes which is why the bands need to be reset. I have no doubt that the Government will also need to reset the bands in another number of years because the increase in house prices is continuing at such a trajectory that that disconnect will remain embedded within the system. That is a basic fault and problem with the property tax at the moment.

The other element in this is that the cost-of-living crisis is really hurting families at the moment. We have not had a proper debate about the cost-of-living crisis since the general election and the start of this Dáil. It is getting worse at the moment. People will have seen that the cost of petrol and diesel has started to creep up significantly. That is being pushed by the war between Israel and Iran. If Iran follows through with its threat to stop traffic going through the Straits of Hormuz, fuel prices will spiral in the next while.

Grocery price increases are quite incredible. The cost of groceries for families has increased by a third since 2018 and that trajectory is continuing. Even since April, we have seen a marked increase in normal staples, such as chicken. The CSO’s price watch monitoring indicated that 1 kg of chicken breasts could be bought in April for €5 and that is costing families €11 at the moment. The price of a pound of butter is now €5. In March the cost of a pound of butter went up by 76 cent. All that grocery inflation can be added to rental inflation at the moment. The cost of a new rental lease is now about €2,000 on average, which is an amazing price. Families are

put to the pin of their collar. Families are hurting. Families are curtailing their activities. There is enormous strain coming on families due to grocery inflation and other inflation.

I will admit that much the inflation that is happening is external to the Government. The Government does not have its hands on the levers of much of the inflation that families are experiencing. However, it has a direct influence on some of that inflation. Last year the Government took in €4.1 billion on fuel taxes, the highest fuel tax take ever in the jaws of a cost-of-living crisis, which is incredible. Normally the instinct would be to reduce the fuel taxes when people are hurting so much. Carbon taxes now surpass €1 billion and according to the Government's policy, it is set to continue increasing for the next five years.

The M50 tolls have taken €2.2 billion since 2008. That is another lever in the Government's hands. The Government took in billions of euro in VAT on the cost of construction. The Minister should consider reducing VAT on the cost of the construction, first, to reduce the price of houses and second, to stimulate market activity. That would do so in a manner that does not hurt people through increased prices or increased rentals in the future. It would have a similar effect that it is trying to get with its new rent-pressure zones at the moment.

The Government does have its hands on the levers of certain cost increases. The Government is a source of inflation for families and this is another source of inflation. I understand that its objective here is to try to ameliorate the costs that would have accrued to families if it did not touch those bands. However, the fact is there will be an increased cost coming on families in the future. If the house price increases continue, that will hurt families. This is a tax which is ignorant of the amount of income that comes into families' pockets and will add further to the pressure on families.

The other side of this coin is what value we get. I live in a great county, but it has seen its population radically increase. When my father was young, 60,000 people lived in Meath. When I was young, 100,000 people were living in Meath and now 250,000 people are living in Meath. With practically every central government investment into local authority delivery and provision, the Government has not kept up with population growth. As a result Meath County Council has one of the lowest incomes *per capita* of any local authority in the country and that is significantly hurting spending at the moment.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** Local property tax was set out to be tax for local authorities. I am not totally opposed to any tax as long as it delivers on exactly what it was meant to be. I will outline to the Minister exactly where it did not deliver in County Cork in recent years. A road at Allihies collapsed and there is no longer a lead road into that community. The council does not have money and has basically walked away from repairing the road. It would not happen up here where if a road collapsed, it would immediately be repaired. Of course, it would be of huge importance and I would agree with that. Councillor Danny Collins and I have been working with the people of Allihies. Even though they have all paid their property tax, they look over at this road that they can no longer travel on. The council has given up and walked away from it.

In Lyre, Clonakilty, a bridge collapsed almost ten years ago. I brought it up in one of my first weeks in the Dáil. I went to see it. It was a link road for the local community half a mile up on the Clonakilty Road. Again, the council walked away because it does not have the funds to build a bridge. The people of Lyre and Clonakilty ask what they have got out their property tax because we are not able to deliver. The very basics are not being fixed.

I was talking to Councillor Ger Curley yesterday, who is councillor for Independent Ireland, about the housing assistance payment, HAP. Why has the HAP not increased in relation to housing? This should come under the property tax. I am fairly sure it does come under the property tax. With the rent pressures zones, many people are telling me that in the past week auctioneers have been inundated with people walking away from letting house. That is another crisis in its own right. The HAP has not increased and people are finding it very difficult to make ends meet. They are paying the higher rates and the rates are getting higher but the HAP has not risen to meet that. Local property tax should have delivered in that area.

There are council rates and there are outside seating rates. It is a hit on the business person. VAT is a hit on the business person. My brother, Councillor John Collins, recently tabled a motion that rates should not apply to the businesses of Bandon at present because the streets are ripped up. That is fair enough because there will be a long-term benefit from it. However, the streets are ripped up so businesses are losing money hand over fist. When businesses are struggling, something should be provided and maybe local property tax should be looked at in that regard.

I was talking to Councillor Daniel Sexton in regard to play parks, which are amenities. The Leap local community is fundraising to build its own play park. In Skibbereen, people are looking to fund their own amenities. The local communities are delivering, not the LPT which was meant to deliver. This will continue. It is hard to support something when the people do not get their money back.

**Deputy Richard O'Donoghue:** I am the chairperson of the Committee on Budgetary Oversight, and I am delighted to be Independent Ireland's first chairperson. An invitation to the Minister to attend our meeting next Tuesday was sent by the clerk to the committee. We had facilitated the Minister, in that he could not make it two weeks ago. We changed people around and other people appeared before us. However, we got a note back saying the Minister's officials were not available on that date. I do not accept that. With all due respect to the officials, it is the Minister I want. If they are missing, that is fine. I want the Minister, Deputy Chambers, and the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, to attend our committee. It is a very important committee. We are talking about budgets and oversight. I hope the Minister will be in attendance, with or without his officials.

To return to the business at hand, the local property tax is a fund for the local authorities. I do not want to see the local authorities without the funding to carry out different infrastructure works within our areas. However, if the local property tax had to go tomorrow morning, there are still funds to replace it with what the Government has been taking from people building their own houses. The waiver for the planning contribution fee has been removed and it has been reintroduced. A person building a 2,000 sq. ft house has to pay between €5,500 and €6,000 to build their own house, on top of a local property tax. Four years ago, the charge was €120 per sq. ft. The Government at the time, on VAT alone, was making €34,500 from a person building his or her own house. Today, the same house, with the same square footage, costs about €200 per sq. ft and the Government takes €54,000. In four years, the tax take from somebody building their own house has increased by €21,600 based on a 2,000 sq. ft house. On top of that, people have now to pay the planning permission fees of €5,000 or €6,000 and a local property tax. The Government has increased the tax by €21,600 on top of the planning contribution fee. The increase has gone to almost €35,000 at a time when people are fighting inflation. A house that was costing €240,000 now costs €400,000. That is an increase of €160,000 that must be paid for the same house. Out of that, the Government has taken an increase in the tax take.

How much can people manage? Their mortgages are now gone to 30 years or 40 years in order to try to put a roof over their heads. We are talking about inflation. The local property tax could be done away with. The councils could be supplemented by the extra tax being taken at source. If a person is living in a town or village that has been without infrastructure for years, because with active travel the money is put back into the cities and not into the counties, there is not a level playing field. Send the money back out to the counties and look after the people with the extra taxes they are paying.

**Deputy Ken O'Flynn:** There are times in public life when a policy, however well-intentioned, by design, strays away from its original purpose. To my mind, the local property tax is such a policy. It is not fair and not a sustainable way of supporting local services. By its very practice, it is detached from the principle of equality and economic reality of many citizens. Let us speak plainly in this House. This exists today in our system and is a burden for some of our older citizens, men and women who have spent their lives buying or building their homes, raising families, contributing through work and taxes. In these cases, many, who have previously paid property levies in some way, shape or form prior to 1978, are suffering. In the 1980s, there were service charges in many local authorities and city councils. People have always been paying into some sort of system. Many of these people are now in retirement, often living on their own and their incomes are sharply reduced. They have already paid taxes on their property and on the houses they built. Their heating bills or refuse charges have not halved but quite often their income has halved. There is an argument at this stage that anybody over the age of 65 to be exempt from property tax, in particular those that are dependent on a fixed income. Just because somebody bought something in the early 1980s or late 1970s for IR£3,000 or IR£4,000, which has increased in value - in places like Cork city houses that went for IR£4,000 in the early 1980s are now valued at €500,000 or €600,000 - their income is €230 or €270 a week, depending on what social welfare is available to them. It does not make sense to me. Many people are struggling in large homes. They cannot downsize. They want to stay in their communities where they have family, friends and support but they are paying huge amounts of money on property tax for something they have already paid property tax on at some stage.

Equally, there is a disparity in how property tax is collected. At present, local authorities retain 80% of the tax and the other 20% is pooled into a national equalisation fund to support councils whose LPT income does not meet the base line. In principle, that can be justified but the tinkering around over the past number of years by Department of housing, which conducted a review in 2024, leaves more questions than answers when it comes to local property tax.

I agree with my colleague, Deputy Michael Collins. I do not believe there is a properly funded local authority in the country. If the Government offered an extra €10 million or €20 million, the reality is a local authority would not refuse it. We are underfunding our local authorities continuously and that has to be addressed.

**Deputy Malcolm Byrne:** I thank the Minister for bringing forward this legislation. The bigger debate we need to have is precisely that around the funding of local authorities. It is interesting that our debate is focusing on the question of the local property tax. The Minister will be aware that the overall budget for local authorities in the country is in the order of €6.7 billion annually. We are here debating the 6.5% of budgetary income that comes from local property taxes. We are very unusual in a European and international context. About 42% of local authority budgets comes from central government funding and 27% comes from a 200-year-old system of commercial rates. I am aware that the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage has announced a review of local government in terms of additional powers. If we are

to have that in place, we need to look seriously at the funding mechanisms. In particular, the question of commercial rates needs to be addressed. A 200-year-old system which is based on the floor space of a premises is completely unfair in this digital age. Amazon is the world's biggest bookseller. As an avid reader, the Minister will be aware that Amazon will only have to pay commercial rates on its warehouses, yet the independent booksellers who are located all over Ireland will be paying commercial rates within their local communities. That is similar throughout the system. The broader question of local government funding needs to be examined, particularly reform of commercial rates and basing them much more on turnover. We already do that to a certain extent with the telecoms companies. It needs to be widened.

On the question of a local property tax, 6.5% of the overall budget is very low in European terms. I can talk about what we did when I was a member of Wexford County Council. We took a decision nearly ten years ago to go for the maximum 15% increase. A very clear provision within that was that the 15% increase would be hypothecated for social and economic development within the county. It was never going to be put into the general funds for the council. It was used to generate funding towards supporting economic activity and the redevelopment of parks. Gorey town park was a particularly fine example. It was used so that we could get leverage on loans and so on. It worked particularly well. While there was certainly opposition, which I will come to in a moment, for most householders, after a while, when they realised it was less than €1 extra per week, they accepted that payment having to be made. I am conscious others may have referred to cases in which people may be asset-rich but income-poor or may have inherited a big house, which does cause a difficulty.

It is interesting that many of those who opposed the 15% increase in LPT were among the first to get into photographs for those projects that were funded by the local property tax. We have a very unusual situation in this country. Property tax is normally regarded as a means of redistribution of income and is championed by many left-wing parties across Europe. We have the unusual situation that the populist Opposition shares the views about the abolition of our property tax with the extreme right wing of the Conservative Party and members of Reform. It would not have been the first time Nigel Farage and leaders of Sinn Féin would have shared a platform on particular issues.

We need far more effective communication on how the local property tax is spent. South Dublin County Council has been particularly good on communication, almost breaking down to householders and constituents how it is spent. Similarly, in the case of Wexford County Council there have been efforts to show specifically the projects that have been funded out of that 15% increase. In that regard, I welcome the fact that the legislation now allows for variance of up to 25%. It is critical that this power remains with the elected members and that, ultimately, the elected members will always be able to have control. I would love to see a situation where we would go much further and allow elected members to have a far greater say over income generation and expenditure in our local authority budgets. I hope that will feature in the review the Government has instigated, led by the Minister, Deputy James Browne.

This is a very important Bill and there are a number of innovative aspects to it. This is only a small part of the overall question, however. The Minister might indicate in his response if he has any current plans to look at the current system of commercial rates as a method of funding local government, and to address the inequity that continues to exist there. We cannot continue to have a 200-year-old system which is basically how commercial rates continue to operate in the digital age.



**Deputy Mairéad Farrell:** I thought the other Member would have used his time. I will get to my own speech. I would love to address some of the nonsense about my own party but today I do not have the energy in me to start a fight. I will stick to the speech I have.

A Aire, I think there is a bit of an irony in what we are doing in dealing with this Bill, which is to nominally but not effectively reduce the cost of property tax that households will have to pay. The Minister has to reduce it because the coming revaluations in November would have increased the costs. As we know from the protest outside regarding the housing crisis, house prices have now been driven back up to above Celtic tiger levels, meaning households would have to pay even more property tax. There is something symbolic about this. The Government introduced a tax on people's homes, then worked overtime to increase the value of the property, only to have to introduce new legislation to reduce the tax it introduced. Despite this Bill, people will still be paying more because of the revaluations. According to the Central Statistics Office, property prices have increased by a national average of 23% since November 2021. Galway has been one of the worst affected places. Often when we talk about the housing crisis, we only hear about Dublin. The impact on people's lives in Galway is absolutely horrendous. According to one source, in 2024 alone, property prices in Galway were up 17% on average.

My party has opposed the property tax from day one, as the Minister knows. We oppose the idea that, in this day and age, someone should have to scrimp and save to get a deposit to try to make it out of a rent trap that has been set for so many, just so they can get a 30-year mortgage and pay off massive principal and interest, only then to be slapped in the face with another tax. I remember what the concept was when it was introduced. I heard the previous speaker describing all the fantastic things it funds in local services. It was a change that this was the way local councils were funded. It was moved over. I remember because I was in the city council at the time.

I look at Galway City Council and Galway County Council and all the things they simply cannot fund. One of the main things I deal with in Connemara is serious issues with different roads. Sometimes I get slagged about it because I am out looking at different roads and people are asking me if I am an engineer suddenly, looking at these roads. All of these roads have serious issues. There is a serious impact on public safety when it comes to dealing with them. I contact Galway County Council and more often than not, the issue is that there is no funding to deal with those roads. We know our councils are hugely underfunded. Galway County Council is particularly underfunded. It is incredibly frustrating constantly having to go back to constituents and tell them the money is simply not in place.

Tá fhios ag an Aire go maith nach bhfuilimid i bhfábhair na cánach maoiní seo. An fáth nach gcreidimid ann ná gur cáin é ar an teaghlach. Cáin is ea é ar an teach baile atá ag daoine. Dúradh linn ag an am go raibh sé seo ag teacht isteach mar gheall go gcuireadh sé leis an airgead atá ag comhairlí áitiúla, ach ar ndóigh tá a fhios againn go maith nach bhfuil sé sin fíor. D'aistrigh sé an bealach go raibh maoiniú á thabhairt go dtí na comhairlí contae agus na comhairlí cathrach. Níor chuir sé leis an maoiniú a bhí acu. Go rímhinic bhí mise amuigh i gConamara ag breathnú ar bhóithre. Aon uair a bhí mise i dteagmháil leis an gcomhairle contae, an rud a dheireann sé liom ná nach bhfuil an t-airgead aige leis na bóithre sin a dheisiú. Tá na bóithre seo fiordhainséarach. Ní aontaím leis seo.

**Deputy Barry Heneghan:** I rith an toghcháin, agus mé ag caint le daoine ag na doirse, bhí go leor daoine ag cuir ceist orm faoi seo. An cheist a bhí acu ná, "cá bhfuil an t-airgead ag dul?". Caithfidh bheith níos soiléire faoi na háiteanna ina bhfuil an t-airgead don LPT ag dul.

Is rud é sin gur gá dúinn díriú isteach air.

For most households, the message is pretty straightforward. Property values have gone up. In Dublin especially, local property tax will also go up. For houses valued at under €425,000, the increase is likely to be about €30 or €50 annually. That might sound fair on paper but the people whose doors I knocked on did not know where this money was going. That needs to be clear. We need to show the people paying the local property tax where exactly their extra taxes are going.

I have only recently been elected to this House. Working on Dublin City Council, I could see the centralised decision-making and standardised funding process. The local authorities and, in particular, councillors do not have the decision-making abilities they should have with regard to the local property tax. I am well aware they will be able to vote on whether the local property tax goes up or stays at the same rate but a clear system is needed to allow councillors to see where Dublin City Council is spending the local property tax increase and to decide where this increase in tax revenue will be put in their local areas. If councillors are going to be held responsible by the public for the lack of local services in their areas, then they need to have power over local budgets. It is not the case, from my experience, that councillors have enough power in their local areas. The local authority and the relevant civil servants decide where the money goes. The councillors can give their opinions and sign off on it, but they do not have enough power.

I want to see councillors being able to decide there is a need for public toilets, a disability centre or more funding for the local GAA club. This is something I would really like to see, and not with ten layers of approval from Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council or any of the local authorities. It matters for the people living in an area and paying this tax to know where the money is going and that the people they are voting for will have the ability to divert these tax revenues. This is what the tax is supposed to do. It is not just about raising revenue, but about reinvesting in the communities paying these taxes and paying for amenities in places where people can gather, learn and play. This is what a fair and functional local property tax system should deliver.

We should not underestimate the pressure that councillors are under. I was one and people think the councillor is the person making this decision. Who are they not to blame? If we are going to empower local government to make real change, let us start by giving councillors more autonomy over the direct funds raised when they are the ones deciding and going to be under the hammer. If we believe in community and participation, then let us hand this decision back and give more power to the councillors.

**Deputy Carol Nolan:** I welcome this debate and many of the provisions of this Bill. I am aware that my local authority, Offaly County Council, generated approximately €4.9 million in local property tax revenues in 2024, but also that our baseline was €11.2 million. This means we received about €6.2 million in that 2025 distribution of equalisation funding. While that is welcome within the confines of the local property tax system, the heart of the matter remains the fundamental unfairness of LPT as a tax in and of itself. People work, save for years, pay their taxes and buy homes, and then they must continue to pay increasing rates of tax on those homes, which they may own outright, until the day they die. I note, however, that this legislation allows for tiered rates for higher valued properties to ensure they contribute proportionally more, aligning with principles of fairness in taxation. We all know, though, that house prices are radically out of step with actual value. There is scope for significant inequity to flow into

the LPT system.

I welcome proposals to expand the LPT exemption for defective concrete blocks in some counties. I hope that if more counties are found to be impacted by this issue, they too will be shown similar latitude. What we should be doing, however, is finding every way possible to tax not the ordinary homeowner and ordinary worker but the massive vulture funds and investment funds that are swooping in and wiping out any possibility of Irish couples and families bidding on and owning their own homes. While we are here today discussing local property tax, we have to accept that we desperately need an urgent debate on how our taxation and property purchasing systems are facilitating the expansion of the housing collapse for ordinary people. I accept, as the LPT is apparently here to stay, that there is at least an attempt in this Bill to introduce a fairer LPT calculation method that supports homeowners affected by defective concrete blocks and to provide local authorities with greater flexibility and the ability to adjust deferral thresholds to account for inflation.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** I will speak again on behalf of the hard-pressed homeowners of this country, especially those in rural Ireland and in my constituency of Tipperary, from Tipperary town down to Cahir, Clonmel, Cashel and Carrick-on-Suir as well as the villages and rural houses. These people continue to be squeezed by this unjust and unnecessary local property tax. The Bill proposes to increase charges on the vast majority of households despite the cost-of-living crisis. We have also been told there will be no more cost-of-living supports despite food prices, food inflation and everything else rising continuously - we do not see any respite from that - and despite the rising mortgage rates and countless families already struggling to keep their lights on.

I welcome some aspects of the legislation but I do not welcome that we can give our local councillors the latitude to increase the rate of local property tax by 25% instead of 15%. What will happen? Management will push for an increase of 25%, and more if they can get it, because councils have been cash-starved by central government for quite a while. I used to go around boasting that in the 1977 general election, as a young buachaill óg and member of Fianna Fáil, I campaigned for rates to be taken away. Since then, the county councils have been starved. In hindsight, it was a bad decision, but you learn from your mistakes and when you are in a party, you must do what you are told to do. I ask the Minister to re-examine this because it is not fair.

There are charges, despite rising mortgage costs and everything else. There are some areas where payment can be delayed and in some cases, it can be postponed. I have a few of those cases on my hands now. The parents are deceased and the bills had accrued on the properties before they passed on. The local property tax punishes people simply for working hard and putting a roof over their heads. It is blind to the realities in places like Tipperary town, Cahir, Cashel, Carrick-on-Suir and all the other towns where housing values have increased continuously and very few services are being provided in return. In fact, no services are being provided. We saw this last January when the snow fell. Not even an egg cup of salt was to be got for households. What do they get for the local property tax? All the local authorities now have a skeleton staff. I praise the staff who are there but there are not enough of them. There is no shortage of people ag obair inside in the offices, but there is only a skeleton staff on the ground. There was a time when people got these services and were looked after to the best abilities of the local authorities. People are not getting anything in return now. I know that in this debate people in Dublin will say they are being punished, but they have every service you could ever think of, from street lights and street sweeping to public transport, you name it. In the country, people are on their own in the sticks.

I have long opposed the LPT in principle. I said it in 2013 and I say again today that a family home is not a taxable asset but a necessity. We know how many people do not have homes and we should support them in any way we can to get them. This tax hits the elderly, those on low incomes and those who worked hard all their lives to buy a modest home. Now, with inflation still biting, the Government is quietly ratcheting up the burden again.

As I said, the councils will be told by the management that there are local services involved and carrots will be dangled. I agree that some of the money goes into vital services in rural areas and villages, such as in different enhancement schemes and everything else, and that local councillors have some discretion.

*7 o'clock*

It is the basis of the thinking behind this tax. Anyone who works hard to put a roof over their head should be supported. We will have a debate tonight and tomorrow about landlords, tenants and everything else. There are good and bad tenants. There are other issues. People put their hands in their pockets to put a roof over their heads or to try to maintain their houses. There is upkeep and maintenance to do. In view of the harder winters and everything else, it takes a lot of work to keep houses intact.

I was at a meeting recently with the management of Tipperary County Council. I was shocked to hear that the council must find €15 million before 2030 to refurbish and bring its buildings up to the new standards relating to the so-called carbon tax. Some of them are modern buildings, mind. The council must then spend €10 million or €11 million on a fleet. I questioned the necessity of a fleet. Management said that one diesel lorry must be replaced with double the number to take account of after-hours work, longer working days and everything else. That is nonsense. When I asked where this money was going to come from, there was silence. When I asked again, I was told that because there is no Government funding for this, the council is going to raise the money from two areas, namely rates and property tax. All this money is going to be invested in fanciful projects.

We have fine buildings in Nenagh and Clonmel. We constructed a building in Cashel and then closed it. It has been abandoned. Tipperary town has all new offices as well. We will now have to spend scarce money on bringing those up to standard. Any time I was inside those buildings, I had to take my jacket off because of the heat. While they say they are trying to bring these buildings up to standard in the context of future-proofing and whatever else, we are going to penalise ordinary citizens who cannot get SEAI grants and who have no money to put up. There is a two-year waiting list, or maybe it is longer than that. I call on the Minister and the Government to do something in that regard, because I will not be supporting this Bill. I cannot support it. I spoke against this measure in 2013. It would be hypocritical of me to support it now. Despite that, I welcome the fact that mica issues will be given some kind of consideration, although mica is an issue that is growing exponentially. We will have more areas with mica. It is ill-judged and ill-timed to try to force people to pay this tax, especially as we are entering such an uncertain period and when the cost of living is so high.

All the people we are talking about have their own houses. They pay everything and never shirk their responsibilities. They pay their mortgages. They pay repair men and maintenance men and for their houses to be painted. They pay for everything, you name it. They do not get any supports. This is an unjust and unfair tax. It should be shelved.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I am glad to get the opportunity to talk about this Bill. It relates to an important topic. People talk a good deal about local property tax, especially those who cannot ill-afford to pay it and who are often in trouble. It gives those people who are living hand to mouth and who barely have enough to cover the cost of everything, from putting food on the table to keeping their heat or whatever going, great trouble. This measure will facilitate the crowd with the expensive houses worth more than €1 million. The value of houses has gone up everywhere. To buy a house is an impossibility with the costs and the rates that apply now. This is a tax on the family home. While we get services out of it, I often wonder whether the money is divided out fairly and whether there is real accountability for it within the local authorities. It gives some local authority members a lot of anguish. I see that chief executive officers of the local authorities will be given the facility to increase it by 25%. I do not see any facility to bring it down if there were a need to do so.

There are certain things that arise in this regard. Many people do not get much for the property tax. We had incidents in Kerry this spring where the streetlights were not working in many towns and villages such as Kilgarvan, Castleisland and Scartaglin. There was so much trouble. It took months to get them repaired. I do not know what was wrong, but people were continuously giving it to us in the neck that they did not even have the streetlights any more for safety when it came to walking to the shops and so forth.

We used to have a facility in Kerry County Council where two roads could be nominated for repair if they were in a bad state. A total of six councillors were in that area at the time. This used to happen in July. Roads which are not on the three-year roads programme fall into disrepair. It happens due to the impact of lorries, bad weather, frost and even heat, which can lift the tar and leave roads in a desperate state. That scheme was abolished in 2012 because the country was in a desperate state financially. It has not been restored since. The scheme gave the councils a bit of power and made them feel wanted and needed. Councils felt they could respond to the requests of the people. That is sadly missing, and I am asking that it be brought back.

As already stated, many people are living in poverty. Many are poor and struggling to put food on the table. It gives them a lot of trouble, and I feel for those people. There should be some way of assessing people's ability to pay this tax. More often than not, the people I refer to live in local authority houses. Although the councils are the landlords in this situation, if these people request little repairs to their houses, the councils do not seem to have the money to do many of them at all.

We see money being wasted. In Kilgarvan, which is the village I left today at 6 a.m., there are two council houses that are voids. They were lived in until November last. The roofs and chimneys have been taken off them and air-to-water heat systems are being installed. That is a waste of money when these houses had open fires. I spoke to a lady in another village who was upset because the council told her that it is going to revamp her house and that a similar system is going to be installed. She explained that all she wants is her little fire, which is very cosy and gives her satisfaction when she puts it down and keeps it going all night. All she wants is to be left the fire. This is a waste of funds when we could be turning houses around much quicker. Some people just want homes. They do not want to be roasted inside them. While there may be more heat out of a heat pump, the electricity bill might be more across the year because the electricity has to be left on longer.

We are wasting money in certain instances that we could better spend elsewhere. A house in Marian Terrace in Killarney was vacant for five years. It costs way more to put in heat pumps



and do all the work relating to them rather than to just do the necessary things to ensure people are comfortable and that their houses are painted and can be lived in. Doing this extreme re-vamping of heat systems was the Green Party's idea. However, that party is no longer in power. I am asking the Government to take over and ensure that money is not wasted in this regard.

Money is being wasted in Fossa in terms of work to narrow the road there. On the N72, starting out on the Ring of Kerry from Killorglin, two vehicles now cannot meet. The footpath and the cycleway are wider than the road. Work is ongoing there. When you are held up there; you would often look and size it up. You could drive down the inside of the road up on the footpath and on the cycleway with any kind of car or vehicle. It is way safer, and there is more room than there is on the carriageway. Things like that are happening and are causing problems for many people.

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I thank everyone who contributed to this debate. I took careful note of the points the 24 speakers have made. I will begin by thanking Members from the Government benches and elsewhere who voiced support for the Bill and who recognised the important role the local property tax plays in supporting public services and funding local authorities. I appreciate their support. As that support is a given I will spend much of my time dealing with the different critiques that have been made of this legislation and the local property tax.

There were six main areas of criticism: first, that the charges are unaffordable; second, that not enough power resides with the local authorities; third, that local authorities do not have enough money; fourth, that the Bill is not progressive; fifth, people criticised how local authorities are funded, particularly in the context of the equalisation fund; and, sixth, the role played by investment funds and private capital was criticised.

I will begin with the third point, namely that local authorities do not have enough funding. As I do so, I am very conscious that there is a protest taking place outside the Dáil. Members of the Opposition parties are going out to address those taking part and calling for more to be done on funding. On one hand, we are saying that local authorities need more money and that more money needs to be spent on housing, but then the same speakers who make that charge argue the local property tax should be abolished. I put it to the House that it is difficult to do both. One cannot argue that local authorities should get more money and at the same time argue that the local property tax that helps fund them should be abolished. The argument will then be made that we are collecting taxes in other areas, but those taxes are being spent. They are being spent on public services as matters stand, so you cannot double count it. People cannot say that they want to get rid of local property tax and that things can be funded from other taxes we are collecting when those other taxes are already being used to fund public services and when the Opposition often states that there need to be more public services paid for out of those taxes. I put it to the House that there is a real case of wanting more of something – and we all want more houses and services to be coming out of our local authorities – and then people wanting to abolish a tax that helps pay for what they are seeking. I do not think that is credible. The country has already seen through it. When we face so many challenges in our society and when we need to fund public services better, the argument put forward does not stand up to scrutiny.

Second is the idea that the local property tax is unaffordable for many and that is an unfair charge. Let me acknowledge, as I have done on many occasions, the impact that inflation is having and that cost-of-living difficulties in recent years have had and continue to have on so many. However, at each point at which the re-evaluation of the local property tax has taken

place, real efforts have been made to ensure that as we ask people to pay more - and pay more with regard to their homes, which is always a sensitive point - we have made great efforts to try to ensure that the additional charge is affordable and is below the rate at which the value of homes has increased. This Bill continues that approach. We have widened the bands and cut the core rate of LPT to ensure that the vast majority of homeowners will still be within the same local property tax band that they were in the past. While this does mean that even if the band they are in remains unchanged they will be asked to pay a higher local property tax charge, by widening the band and reducing the rate the Government has made great efforts to try to help ensure that the additional local property tax charge that will result from this Bill will be affordable for as many people as possible.

Third, we have heard the criticism that there is not enough power residing with local authorities. I accept that we have to make more decisions and look at how we can make local authorities even more autonomous and powerful. My colleague the Minister for housing and local government, Deputy Browne, is looking at issues relating to this and is conducting a review. However, there are few things that will contribute more to the underdevelopment of local authorities in the time ahead than abolishing the tax that local councillors have a say in spending part of. One of the reasons we had to make a decision to ask the Oireachtas to consider this Bill more quickly is in order that we can fit in with the needs of local authorities, from a public consultation perspective, so that their views can be considered on how the local property tax can be spent. On the one hand, I have heard calls from many saying that local authorities need more power but, on the other, when it comes to the tax that gives them more power than many other taxes that this House considers and legislates for, those same people are against it. I look forward to debating that inconsistency on the later Stages of this Bill.

Fourth, there is an idea that the local property tax is not progressive. In particular, the point is made that even if it takes account of the value of a home, it does not take account of the income associated with that home. I accept that this is an important point. It is the reason we have waivers in place and why this Bill increases the income thresholds by which some can access waivers. The latter is because we appreciate that for those on low incomes, this can be a very difficult tax to pay. However, the value of a home when this tax is revalued is a very credible effort on the Government's part to examine how we can ensure the amount of the local property tax charged relates to the income somebody may have. We know that can break down at times because, as some Deputies stated, the value of a property does not correlate to income. That is the reason why we have waivers in place.

Fifth, I heard criticism of the operation of the tax and, in particular, the operation and maintenance of the equalisation fund. I want to make the point again that every euro that is collected in this tax goes back to the payment of public services at either local or national level. While I have heard criticism about the operation of the equalisation fund and the fact that local authorities should be able to keep more of the money that is collected at local level for local use - I heard that point being made by many - it is still important to emphasise that all of the local property tax that is collected is used to fund public services either at local or national level.

Sixth, I heard the criticism again of investment funds - the so-called vulture funds. Those who make that charge - and this is a debate in which I have participated over many years - appear to suggest that there should be no role for private capital in the funding of new homes in our country. When we talk about private capital, all we are talking about is the savings that are held in other parts of the world playing a role in delivering more homes here.

Those are some of the key points that emerged from the 24 contributions on the Bill we heard in the past couple of hours. No tax is perfect. There are always drawbacks and criticisms of any tax, but this tax, overall, plays an important role in the funding of local government in our country and the delivery of important services and infrastructure. The Government continues to be very conscious of the challenges of the cost of living and affordability. With the changes we are making, we aim to recognise the challenges that many are facing.

Question put and agreed to.

### **Emergency Action on Housing and Homelessness: Motion [Private Members]**

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- the housing and homelessness crisis is getting worse;
- house prices, rents, council waiting lists and homelessness are all rising;
- the Government continue to miss their social and affordable housing target, targets that are too low to begin with;
- tens of thousands of homes are lying vacant and derelict in every city and county;
- the lack of affordable homes, particularly for essential workers and low paid workers, close to their workplaces, is impacting on the delivery of public services and undermining economic competitiveness;
- an entire generation of young people are locked out of affordable homes with the highest levels of emigration since 2015;
- growing numbers of people approaching pension age are living in expensive and insecure rental accommodation fearful of their future;
- the student housing crisis continues to deepen;
- the housing needs of Travellers, people with disabilities, older people and other marginalised communities continue to be ignored; and
- tens of thousands of homeowners and tenants continue to live in unsafe homes impacted by defective concrete block and Celtic Tiger era building defects;

further notes that:

- housing is a human right;
- the cost-of-living crisis is putting ever greater pressure on workers and families while access to key public services including healthcare, childcare, disability and special needs services places even greater financial burdens on communities;

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- after 4 months in office it is clear that this do-nothing Government has abandoned communities;

- the Government's failure to invest in critical infrastructure such as water, electricity and under resourcing of the planning system is delaying the delivery of much needed homes;

- the chronic underfunding of our local authority housing and planning departments which must be reversed for councils to play their key role in meeting public housing needs; and

- instead of adopting a radical change of housing policy as recommended by the Housing Commission, they are threatening to remove protection for renters, proposing even more tax breaks to vulture funds, and further delaying the delivery of much needed social and affordable homes; and

calls on Government to agree that:

- emergency action must be taken to address the deepening housing and homeless crisis including;

- a dramatic increase of investment in and delivery of public housing to meet social and affordable housing need;

- stronger taxes on vacancy and dereliction and greater use of Compulsory Purchase Orders to bring empty homes back into use;

- real action to protect private renters through freezing and cutting rents and no changes to Rent Pressure Zones that would increase rents;

- an emergency response to rising homelessness, including reintroducing the ban on no fault evictions; and

- fully restore and increase funding for vital homeless prevention schemes including Tenant In Situ and Housing First.

As we speak, there are several thousand people outside, comprising trade unionists, workers for homeless charities, housing rights activists, students, political parties, renters, aspiring home buyers and people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. I left them moments ago. They are gathered together as part of the Raise the Roof campaign to declare very clearly and loudly that like its predecessor, this Government's housing policy is failing, enough is enough and it is now time for emergency action. That is why Sinn Féin, joined by the Social Democrats, the Labour Party, People Before Profit-Solidarity and other Independents have come here today with a joint motion. The joint motion is very clear and straightforward. It calls on the Government to take a number of emergency actions now to reverse the damage the Minister and his colleagues have been doing and continue to do to people's housing situation.

In advance of the finalisation of the Government's plan, it needs to increase investment in and the target for the delivery of social and affordable homes. It is not just about money; it is also about reform in how those homes are delivered, a problem the Government continues to conceal from the House but everybody knows exists. The Government needs to take more direct action to support local authorities, in particular, to be able to bring vacant and derelict

council and private homes back into use. Stronger taxes on vacancy, more efficient use of compulsory purchase orders and better funding for local authorities for bringing homes back into use are required.

Instead of doing what it has done last week and will do in the autumn, namely jacking up rents in the private rental sector even more, the Government should protect renters from rent increases and reduce the cost of rents while increasing supply of genuinely affordable social and cost rental homes. Instead of cutting funding for vital homeless prevention schemes, one of the Minister's first acts, he should instead restore and increase funding for the tenant in situ scheme, the housing first scheme and others. The Minister also needs to reintroduce a temporary and emergency ban on no fault evictions now, because the number of people entering emergency accommodation is too great and too few are able to exit.

That is the core of the motion before us today. That is the motion that the thousands of people, supported by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, ICTU, the entire trade union movement, civil society and others are supporting as we speak.

The Minister has been in office for five months and we can already start to see the damage he and the people around him are doing to our housing system. I have already mentioned that he has cut funding for vital homeless prevention schemes. For the life of me, I cannot understand how that could be his first act. He has completely ignored the Housing Commission's call for a housing delivery oversight executive with emergency powers, underpinned by legislation. The Minister is giving us a toothless tiger in the form of a housing activation office, and he could not even put the head of that body in place.

In what is probably one of the most bizarre spectacles I have experienced in my time as a TD tracking Simon Coveney, Eoghan Murphy and the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, the Government has introduced the most haphazard change to the rent pressure zones, an imperfect protection in the first place. The Government has changed its story day after day and the fact the Minister is shaking his head means that I wonder whether he fully understands the implications for tens of thousands of renters of what he intends to do. Some rents will increase immediately and others over time at an even greater rate than has been the case.

All the while, house prices, rents and homelessness are rising and the Government continues to fail and slow down the delivery of social and affordable homes. People have had enough. They are taking to the streets in Dublin today, and at the National Monument in Cork at 2 p.m. Saturday. The Community Action Tenants Union, CATU, will hold a protest in Dublin on 5 July. There will be more and more until the Government changes the policy or, ultimately, people change the Government. It is one of the other, and people have come outside the House today to say they want to change and the Government either listens or it goes.

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** I want to encourage everyone from Munster and nationally to come to the National Monument on Grand Parade in Cork this Saturday at 2 p.m. for Raise the Roof for Munster and raise the roof for people who are crying out for housing. I will provide the Minister with an example of what he has done. I am not being personal, but the Minister needs to understand the consequences of his actions as the Minister for housing. I know a 68-year-old lady, Maria, whose family has lived in a house for 90 years, a house that was supposed to be purchased under the tenant in situ scheme. She will be evicted, at 68 years of age, because the Government gutted the fund and pulled the money. She has an adult daughter and cried when she has contacted me. Imagine the stress she is going through. What is the Govern-



ment doing? She has worked all of her life and has done everything right.

Another 50-year-old lady cannot get on the social housing list because she is just over the limit and cannot afford to rent. She is caught in the middle. She asked me, “What must I do? I have done everything right. I went to college. I worked hard all my life. I am 50 years old and they are putting me into homeless accommodation”. That is on the Minister. He is the Minister for housing. The buck stops with him. What will I or the Minister tell those ladies?

Does the Minister have any idea how bad things are out there for ordinary families and workers? People are praying to God that they will not be evicted and can stay with their parents. I will ask the Minister a question I asked the previous Minister for housing. How many children must become homeless in this country before he finally admits that his policies are wrong? It takes a man to stand up and say he made a mistake. This Government has made mistakes over ten years. As the new Minister for housing, will the Minister stand up and accept that we need a radical change in housing policy? Will he start it or will he do the same again?

**Deputy Pearse Doherty:** I commend the motion. This is the type of radical reset we need in terms of housing. I do not need to repeat the words said by my colleagues. This Government is failing badly in terms of housing.

I was at the Raise the Roof protest earlier and was struck by a woman who recalled the alleyways that James Connolly crawled through in the Easter 1916 Rising. She said an Irish man now sleeps in those same alleyways at a time when there are over 100,000 derelict and empty houses across the State and the Government is backslapping itself about how well we are doing.

Some €8 billion this year has been put into the rainy day fund. Next year, €6.5 billion will be put into it. The Government has not recognised from its ivory tower that it is not just raining but it is lashing on ordinary people the length and breadth of the country. The Government does not get what people are going through, whether it is the individuals Deputy Gould spoke about or people in my constituency who face eviction.

The tenant in situ scheme has been completely and utterly gutted. The hope and dream of a social house has been completely destroyed because the Government has gutted the ability of local authorities to build at the scale we need. Rents continue to creep up over and over again. The Minister’s master plan and big first initiative in his role is to do what? When rents are sky high and out of reach for so many people, his big brainwave is to put rents up further. He is only speaking to one audience, and that is the vulture funds and the institutional investors. It is absolutely shameful.

I stand in the Chamber and I am proud to be in the Chamber. I stand and I look at the heroes of 1916 around us. The conversation and comment outside really struck me. It is not just the homeless person who is in the alleyway that James Connolly crawled through; there are thousands and thousands of people in the country who are homeless. Thousands of children are homeless at this point in time, and tens of thousands of people in this country have lost hope because Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have destroyed housing. They have commodified housing and looked at it as an asset as opposed to what it should be, which is a right. The motion is a manifesto for change and I commend it.

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** Throughout the State, families are crying out for housing. If they are not crying out for housing, they are in our clinics crying to us because they are facing eviction or watching their children raise their families crammed into their childhood bedrooms,

sometimes multiple families in the one home. They are the hidden homeless who are never counted in the figures and never make it into the headlines but they are homeless nonetheless. Others are only a paycheque or an eviction notice away from becoming homeless. People are in fear. The trauma in this country because of the decisions of this Government and successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments is very real and will be felt for generations.

In my constituency of Waterford, the message going out is on the slow pace of housing delivery and the fact that a sod has still not been turned on applications made six or seven years ago. This will be the legacy of the Government and of the Minister unless he changes and, as Deputy Gould said, unless he admits the policies are not working. I suspect that they are working for some. They are working for those who are speculating, hoarding and profiteering from the housing crisis. That is who they are working for and it is time that people understood this. Out on the streets tonight, including the streets of Cork and Dublin, people are waking up to Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael lining the pockets of speculators, investment funds and institutional landlords at the expense of Irish people, the future of Irish families and Irish children who are in homelessness or only a minute away from it.

I dtaobh cúrsaí Gaeltachta, tá ár gceantair Ghaeltachta ag fáil bháis mar gheall ar an easpa tithíocht inacmhainne agus shóisialta, agus níl an Rialtas seo ag déanamh faic mar gheall air. Níl sé maith go leor. The Government has turned its back on rural Ireland. The national planning framework is a disgrace of a document. It wants to end rural housing. Let us be honest about this, in that the planning framework the Government has instituted and presided over is doing nothing to address the depopulation crisis in our rural communities

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** I will begin by reiterating that, for the common good, I want every Government housing and homelessness policy to work. For every person on a housing list, for every one of the hidden homeless, for every family in a homeless hub and for all of those in emergency accommodation, I want the Government's policies to work. However, I do not know what way it needs to be communicated to the Minister for him to accept there is a housing and homelessness crisis and to the Government for it to understand that the housing and homelessness crisis will not go away and for it to acknowledge the housing and homelessness crisis will not resolve itself. It needs a change in direction from the Government.

The Government's failed housing policies have caused a big homelessness problem in the wee county. Louth, which is the 12th most populous of the 26 counties in the State, has the sixth highest level of homelessness, according to the latest figures available on the Department's website. I spoke previously to the Minister about the 35% increase in those needing emergency accommodation in just a year in my home county of Louth. It gives me no pleasure to state these facts.

Solutions are being put forward to the Minister if he would just hear them and accept them. According to the 2022 census, there are 163,000 vacant dwellings in Ireland. The housing list would be cleared and homelessness could be ended if the Government accepted our proposals and introduced stronger taxes on vacancy and dereliction and greater use of compulsory purchase orders to bring empty homes back into use. Rents would stabilise due to greater housing supply being available and our towns and cities suffering from dereliction would benefit. It is simple and effective and it would take great pressure off local authorities, such as Louth County Council, which have to chase rogue developers who sit on properties and allow them to go derelict until they see the opportunity for perfect profit regardless of housing needs, homelessness and the urban eyesores they have created. A wee change could do so much good, and for Louth,

the wee county I represent, I implore the Minister to take emergency action.

**Deputy Louis O'Hara:** Week in and week out, I have people in my clinics who are distraught because they cannot afford the cost of rent. A woman had to leave her home due to domestic violence and found herself and five kids moving in with elderly parents. A couple have to leave their home in two weeks' time and do not know where they will leave their personal belongings or their pets or whether they will be able to access emergency accommodation. There are countless families with children growing up in hotel rooms.

The average rent in County Galway is almost €1,700. It is more than €2,300 in the city. The Minister thinks this is not enough. He wants to hollow out rent pressure zones and allow rents for new tenancies to be set at extraordinary levels. Where is this going to end? Will it be when rents reach €3,000 per month? Will it be when almost all of our young people have left the country? What will it take for the Government to abandon its failed policies?

How are people supposed to afford these rents? How is it sustainable to continue to push them up even further? This is why people are protesting outside the building tonight; it is because the Government is denying them a future. It has normalised homelessness and it wants to squeeze every last cent it can out of hard-pressed renters. Not one affordable home has been delivered in my constituency. According to the Minister, the houses there are already affordable. We have had pitiful investment in housing infrastructure. The Government has gutted the tenant in situ scheme. There are dozens of empty homes in every town and village throughout east Galway that have been lying idle for years. These are all hallmarks of the Government's approach to housing. The solutions are staring it in the face but it chooses to ignore them. It is time for the Minister to wake up, stop making this crisis worse, stop increasing rents and start investing in infrastructure and affordable housing.

**Deputy Mairéad Farrell:** I heard the Taoiseach's remarks yesterday at the national economic dialogue, and I have to say never in my life have I heard such reality-defying words. He told us that fundamental reform was being delivered that was creating a sustainable housing system into the future. We have a Raise the Roof rally outside the Dáil today. If we did a survey of all the people there, and of all the people who were renting, they would disagree terribly with these words, which are so completely out of touch.

The Minister has heard an awful lot of real-life stories from these benches today and I want to add some of my own to show how the policies are impacting on people. I will make one point before I do so. We need to deal with the housing crisis and it needs to get sorted for the ordinary people who are being shoved left, right and centre. There is no emergency accommodation in Galway city or county. People are told to try to self-finance alternative accommodation because there is no emergency accommodation. I want the policies the Minister is bringing forward to work for people because I cannot continue to have people crying every single Monday in my clinic in Bohermore. People are crying because they are facing homelessness and they do not know what to do, especially when they are being told there is no emergency accommodation.

Nothing was more frustrating than when I saw the proposals last weekend. The Minister must know himself that the reality of his new proposals is that they will increase rent prices. He has to know that the impact of the cut to the tenant in situ scheme means it will shove more people into homelessness. The reality is there has been a real cut for the councils. There are two councils in my constituency, but if the Minister spoke to any of the councils throughout the country, he would definitely know this. He is aware of it and there is no way he does not

know it.

I ask the Minister to reconsider these measures. Will he reconsider the cut to the tenant in situ scheme funding? Will he reconsider the proposal he has, which will simply jack up rents? The measures are not working for people. It is not fair to people and people are really struggling.

**Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire:** One of the things that people cannot get their heads around regarding the housing crisis is how an issue can be top of the political agenda for so long but everything is still going in the wrong direction. How can it be the case that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have been in government for so long and the crisis has escalated and escalated? We are here discussing a set of emergency measures that are needed. “Emergency” is a word and words matter. They represent a situation. What is fundamental is that neither this Government nor the previous Government have treated the housing crisis as an emergency. They have treated other policy areas as emergencies. We know the capacity exists to respond to issues in an emergency manner but the housing crisis has never been treated as an emergency. In fact, the vast majority of measures the Government took that we welcomed were ones it had to be coaxed, cajoled and dragged into, and then it ended up resiling from them in any event. Look at the tenant in situ scheme. I know the Minister will respond that the tenant in situ scheme is not closed off and so on. We hear Government Ministers saying they are only targets but this is a classic example of where councils meet targets and are left hanging. This Chamber could have been filled with people from Cork city alone who were prevented from becoming homeless by the tenant in situ scheme, but because the Government is not funding it properly, people have ended up homeless. I know and have met people in my clinic whose homes were sale agreed with the Cork City Council until the Government pulled the rug from under it. More importantly, the Government pulled the rug from under those people who could now be in a council tenancy. Instead, they are in emergency accommodation. That is the reality of it; the Government’s policy is doubling down on the bits that do not work and is casting aside protections. The Government has thrown fuel on the fire and now it is ripping out the fireguard. That is the reality of the situation - record rents, record homelessness and record house prices. It is all going in the wrong direction.

**Deputy Conor D. McGuinness:** Hear, hear.

**Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy James Browne):** I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“recognises that:

— Housing for All, sets out an ambitious multi-annual programme that seeks to deliver more than 300,000 new homes by 2030;

— record levels of investment are being provided for the delivery of housing in 2025, with overall capital funding now available of almost €6.8 billion;

— this provision includes €450 million to support the delivery of 3,000 additional social, affordable and cost rental homes in the period 2025 – 2027; and €265 million to allow for a significant programme of acquisitions in 2025 for priority categories of need;

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— the capital provision for 2025 is supplemented by a further €1.65 billion in current funding to address housing needs;

— over 36,700 social homes have been delivered under Housing for All to Quarter 4 2024; in 2023, nearly 12,000 social homes were delivered, including 8,110 new-build social homes, the highest level of delivery of new-build social housing since 1975, and in 2024, 10,595 social homes were delivered including 7,871 new builds, 1,501 acquisitions and 1,223 leasing units;

— nearly 13,000 affordable housing supports have been delivered since the launch of Housing for All to December 2024 by Approved Housing Bodies (AHB), local authorities and the Land Development Agency (LDA), alongside schemes such as the First Home Scheme (FHS) and the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant;

— over 7,100 affordable housing supports were delivered in 2024, the highest yearly delivery to date, exceeding the year's target of 6,400;

— over €1.3 billion has been approved under the Cost Rental Equity Loan (CREL) since launch, to assist in the delivery of over 6,000 Cost Rental homes across 17 local authority areas, with over 2,000 homes delivered under CREL to end 2024; and

— on 13th May, Government approved an additional €30 million commitment to the FHS, bringing the total State commitment for the FHS to €370 million, more than 6,700 buyers have been approved to date under the FHS and more than 3,300 homes have been bought using the FHS to the end of Quarter 1 2025;

further recognises that:

— while housing supply has increased significantly in recent years, much more needs to be achieved;

— the measures introduced under Housing for All have helped establish a solid platform to 'scale-up' delivery of housing in the short-term and secure a sustainable level of supply that will help us meet demand;

— the measures committed to in the Programme for Government, including a new housing plan building on the successes of Housing for All, will help us meet the enormous challenge of delivering more than 300,000 new homes by 2030;

— the Government's new national housing plan will incorporate pragmatic actions to boost housing activity in the short-term coupled with strategic deliverables to drive comprehensive systemic change and subsequent increase in supply into the long-term;

— there has been record levels of investment in infrastructure under the current National Development Plan (NDP) for the period 2021 to 2030;

— new capital investments in infrastructure, particularly to support housing targets, are being considered in the context of the ongoing review of the NDP; and

— on 30th April, 2025, Dáil Éireann approved the Revised National Planning Framework (RNPF), which provides the basis for the review and updating of Re-



gional Spatial and Economic Strategies and local authority development plans to reflect critical matters such as updated housing figures or projected jobs growth, including through the zoning of land for residential, employment and a range of other purposes;

acknowledges that:

— to see the revised NPF translated to a local basis as urgently as possible, local authorities have been advised to start the process of reviewing and updating their development plans to align with the revised NPF;

— the Planning and Development Act 2024, which is being commenced on a phased basis over the next 18 months, represents a radical reform of the planning system and will set, for example, new statutory timelines for decision-making and streamline judicial review processes, which will help to reduce the delays that may be constraining housing supply;

— the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2025, to be enacted before this summer recess, will ensure sufficient time is given to activate planning permissions for much needed housing;

— under the Planning and Development Act 2024, the new Urban Development Zones (UDZ) will enable further housing development and the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage has signed an order that will enable local authorities to identify suitable sites for UDZs, and for the LDA and Regional Assemblies to bring appropriate sites to the attention of local authorities and the Minister, with work to begin as soon as possible;

— a review of the Exempted Development provisions is underway that will provide further options for the provision of housing, with a public consultation commenced this month and updated regulations to come into force later this year;

— Part 17 of the Planning and Development Act 2024 will also be commenced shortly to enable the establishment of An Coimisiún Pleanála to replace An Bord Pleanála; and

— a series of reforms have been progressed to support a well-resourced planning system, including the implementation of the Ministerial Action Plan on Planning Resources, which will strengthen the planning system and support the timely delivery of critical infrastructure and housing;

further acknowledges that:

— Government continues to support local authorities in the delivery of housing programmes, with almost €4.8 billion provided to the authorities in 2024 and this will increase further in 2025;

— more than 250 additional capital posts in local authorities nationally are being funded by the Department to support social housing delivery; in addition, over 140 professional/technical and administrative posts dedicated to delivering affordable housing are being funded by the Department in local authorities to strengthen their capacity to initiate, design, plan, develop and manage housing projects;

— the Government is progressing a number of structured and coordinated initiatives to address vacancy and dereliction, including the review of the Derelict Sites Act 1990, the Town Centre First Policy Approach and the implementation of the Planning and Development Act 2024 and development of related secondary legislation, including the current review of exempted development provisions;

— the Planning and Development Regulations provide for an exemption from the need to obtain planning permission for the change of use of certain vacant commercial buildings, including vacant above ground floor premises, to residential use such as ‘above shop’ living for up to nine units, subject to conditions and limitations, the most recent figures show that since 2018, local authorities have received 1,457 notifications relating to the provision of 3,429 new homes nationwide through use of this specific exemption;

— a €150 million fund to end long-term vacancy and dereliction in towns and cities has been provided under the Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF);

— by the end of Quarter 1 2025, over 8,652 Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant approvals had issued already, and €112 million has been paid out to refurbish almost 2,100 homes;

— the Compulsory Purchase Order Activation Programme, launched in April 2023, requires a proactive and systematic approach by local authorities to bring vacant and derelict properties back into use, this includes the active use of compulsory purchase powers by local authorities, with URDF Call 3 and other funding supports available for such purchases; and

— the vacancy rate of 3.5 per cent as reported by the Quarter 4 2024 Geo-Directory report is the lowest recorded vacancy rate since 2013;

affirms Government efforts to:

— support the housing needs of specific groups through a range of measures and supports, including a targeted second-hand social housing acquisitions programme, which responds to the needs of the most vulnerable, and which is supported by increasing the 2025 budget for the programme from the €60 million available under Housing for All to €325 million;

— address the housing options available for older people, as committed to in the Programme for Government, including by mandating local authorities to find suitable sites for housing specifically designed for older adults, ensuring accessible options within local communities; supporting AHBs in developing and managing senior housing with on-site support services; and reviewing and standardising the older persons housing financial contribution scheme;

— support older people and those with disabilities to continue living independently - Budget 2025 provided an Exchequer capital provision of €99.5 million for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and Disabled People with every local authority receiving an increase in their capital allocation; on 9th June, €23 million funding was announced for local authorities to carry out adaptations, extensions and other improvements to their existing social housing stock;

— fund Traveller-specific accommodation which has been fully drawn-down by local authorities over the past five years from 2020 to 2024, resulting in investment of over €100 million capital investment in Traveller-specific accommodation;

— support Housing First which was expanded significantly under Housing for All; over 860 tenancies were created under the current plan up to the end of Quarter 1 2025 and 1,060 individuals were in a Housing First tenancy; and

— increase the availability of suitable, financially accessible student accommodation as a key policy priority in the new Student Accommodation Strategy, being developed by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, which places affordability and equity at its core;

further affirms Government efforts to:

— work with all stakeholders to continue accelerating housing supply across all tenures and to deliver social, affordable and cost rental homes at scale and improve the availability and affordability of homes;

— support individuals and families who may be struggling to purchase a home, through a range of schemes, including the Help to Buy, FHS, Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme and the Local Authority Home Loan;

— sustain tenant in-situ acquisitions into 2025 as a clear indication of Government's commitment to preventing homelessness for Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme tenants who have been served a 'no fault' Notice of Termination;

— support the rental sector through new policy measures approved by Government on 10th June that will modify rent controls with the aim of strengthening tenancy protections and security of tenure, while encouraging greater private investment in the rental market;

— provide stronger protections and greater certainty for the rental sector by extending rent controls nationally, to protect all tenants from high rent increases, rent increases will be linked to inflation, whilst retaining the cap on permissible rent inflation at two per cent with limited exceptions; and

— to provide greater security of tenure by introducing legislative changes to significantly restrict 'no fault evictions' for smaller landlords (three or fewer tenancies) and to prohibit them for larger landlords, these changes will further enhance the current provision of tenancies of unlimited duration with the introduction of rolling tenancies of a minimum duration of six years with smaller landlords; and

notes that:

— a Housing Activation Office in the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is being established to identify and seek to address barriers to the delivery of public infrastructure projects needed to enable housing development at local level, through the alignment of funding and coordination of infrastructure providers;

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— an Infrastructure Division has been established in the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation, that will lead a process of infrastructure reform; and

— the Government is investing record levels of capital funding in critical infrastructure, including in the areas of water and energy, and will continue to do so under the NDP for the period 2025 to 2035, to be finalised by end of July.”.

I am thankful for the opportunity to come before the House today to introduce the Government’s amendment to the Sinn Féin motion and to outline the progress that has been made to date by the Government and the Housing for All programme. I will set out a few things to begin with to address some of the points that have been made. The first thing I did when I became Minister was to increase the capital spend by €725 million. When I became Minister, the funding that was available for the tenant in situ scheme was €60 million. I increased it to €325 million. Sinn Féin’s own policy on the tenant in situ scheme is to slash it to 800 units per year over the coming years, a fact its Members conveniently keep leaving out. Listening to their speeches, all of them are very good at observing, criticising and personalising politics with lots of clichés, but we heard no solutions-----

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** We gave the Minister a solution last week and he counted it out.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy-----

**Deputy James Browne:** Why is that? Why have-----

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** We gave him one last week, Ceann Comhairle.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy, the Minister did not interrupt you.

**Deputy James Browne:** ----- we heard no solutions? Sinn Féin had a manifesto in the general election that was rejected by the people-----

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** It was the truth though.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy, please.

**Deputy James Browne:** ----- that is why I have not heard any more about it since then. Deputy Gould will not shout me down. I ask him to show a little bit of respect, please.

That is what we have heard. We have heard clichés, personalisation, observations and criticisms, but no solutions. That is what one has to come up with - solutions. The only solution is to increase supply, not freezing the housing situation as it is, but increasing supply. That is what all of our proposals are working towards doing.

We also heard about social housing. We are delivering the largest social housing build since the 1970s. That is a fact. We will deliver even more. We have increased the number of houses-----

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** How many?

**Deputy James Browne:** We have significantly increased the delivery of housing in this country, and will take the-----

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** How many?

**Deputy James Browne:** -----next step change to do it.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Deputy, please.

**Deputy James Browne:** I want to set out some of these achievements that have been to date, but very much recognise that we are in a housing crisis. I am treating it as an emergency. I am taking rapid decisions to address the housing crisis in this country in order that people can get the homes they need where they need them. We will make bold decisions because that is what we have to do to get out of the challenging crisis we are in.

Despite the upward trajectory in supply under Housing for All, the number of new homes build last year was disappointing. Overall, we delivered more ahead of our targets under Housing for All. We will achieve that step change. It is important to reflect on the progress we have made in recent years under Housing for All. After all, in 2012 and 2013, fewer than 5,000 new homes were built in this country each year. By 2022, an undeniable step change in delivery was achieved, with almost 30,000 homes, and more than 32,500 homes delivered in 2022 and 2023, respectively, exceeding the targets in Housing for All. More than 92,000 new homes were built from 2022 to 2024, an annual average of almost 31,000 new homes over the past three years. Nearly 48,000 social homes have been delivered since July 2020. There is also a very strong pipeline, with more than 24,000 social homes at all stages of design and build, which will be delivered over the coming years.

Housing for All also provided for the introduction for the first time of a number of new affordable housing supports, enabling the delivery of a significant number of affordable homes through both new builds and homes brought back into use. Nearly 13,000 affordable home supports have been delivered since the launch of Housing for All to December 2024 by AHBs, local authorities and the Land Development Agency alongside schemes such as the first home scheme and the vacant property refurbishment grant. More than 7,100 affordable supports were delivered in 2024, the highest yearly figure to date, exceeding the year's target of 6,400.

On 13 May, the Government approved an additional €30 million State commitment to the first home scheme, bringing the total State commitment to the scheme to €370 million. Under this scheme, more than 6,700 buyers have been approved to date. More than 3,300 homes have been bought using this scheme to the end of quarter 1 of 2025.

The Opposition motion calls for a dramatic increase of investment in and delivery of public housing to meet social and affordable housing need. The Government and the previous Government, under Housing for All, have rolled out the largest social and affordable housing programme in the history of the State. We will continue to do so. This is demonstrated by the record level of investment provided for the delivery of housing in 2025, with overall capital funding now available of almost €6.8 billion. The capital provision for 2025 is supplemented by a further €1.65 billion in current funding to address the housing need.

Despite the undoubted progress, we must acknowledge that housing still remains a crisis. The number of new homes coming on stream each year is far short of what we need. The State has invested unprecedented levels of public money in the delivery of housing in recent years, and we must continue to do so. We must consider every available lever at our disposal. In the programme for Government, the Government has committed to delivering 300,000 new homes between 2025 and 2030, targeting at least 60,000 homes annually by the end of that period.



New targets are ambitious, but they provide a credible pathway to delivering the scale of housing needed. Our immediate focus, however, must be on activating. Key to achieving targets will be the delivery of new apartment developments in our cities and urban cores, and much of the investment needed for such developments must come from the private sector, financed through appropriate sources of capital funding, much of which will come from international sources. Again, the Opposition will not say where this funding will come from. It is quick to criticise but has no solutions. The capital is critical to apartment delivery, particularly for the private rental sector. Many of the apartments delivered last year were State-led. While this has secured much needed social, cost-rental and affordable housing, it is not sustainable in the long term to get from 30,000 to 50,000 or 60,000 homes. The State delivered 50% of all homes in this country last year-----

**Deputy Eoin Ó Broin:** That is not true.

**Deputy James Browne:** We will deliver more social and affordable homes. To get the numbers up to 50,000 or 60,000, however, we have to get the private sector to deliver. The State simply does not have that level of funding.

The changes approved by Government last week regarding new policy measures to support the rental sector by strengthening tenancy protections and security of tenure will provide significantly stronger protection for tenants and are finely balanced between the interests of tenants and the need for further investment in the rental market. Ultimately, we aim to improve the situation for renters by increasing the supply of rental and private accommodation, social accommodation and affordable accommodation. The measures providing greater certainty of protection from no-fault evictions will also be a critical intervention in preventing homelessness.

Addressing homelessness is a top priority for this Government. Funding of €303 million will be available for the delivery of homeless services in 2025. This will ensure that local authorities can provide emergency accommodation, homeless prevention and tenancy sustainment services, including housing first and other services to households experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It will also ensure that these households in emergency accommodation are supported to exit homelessness as quickly as possible.

Expanded significantly under Housing for All, the housing first programme provides the most vulnerable of our homeless population with a home for life, as well as key wrap-around health services and social supports to help them. The housing first national implementation plan aims to create 1,319 tenancies by the end of 2026. The programme for Government increased this target to create a total of 2,000 tenancies by 2030. More than 860 tenancies were created under the current plan up to the end of quarter 1 of 2025. A total of 1,060 individuals were in a housing first tenancy.

Tenant in situ acquisitions are recognised as a key measure in the prevention of homelessness. As such, I reassert the Government's commitment to the continuation-----

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** That is not true.

**Deputy James Browne:** ----- of a more focused and targeted programme-----

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Excuse me, Deputy.

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** That is not true. He cannot come into this House and make state-

ments that are not true.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Equally, you cannot-----

**Deputy James Browne:** ----- to ensure it benefits those who need it the most.

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** He is a Minister. A Government Minister.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** There is a protocol here.

**Deputy James Browne:** The Government has supported, and will continue to support, a targeted second-hand social housing acquisition programme, which responds to the needs of the most vulnerable. The Government increased the 2025 budget for second-hand social housing acquisition programme from the €60 million available under Housing for All to €325 million. This has given local authorities the flexibility within their programmes to respond to needs locally.

The clear focus of Government is to increase the supply of new-build social and affordable homes. Increasing the overall housing supply is key to addressing the housing challenge, particularly in preventing and ultimately eliminating long-term homelessness.

The Government is also committed to supporting the needs of specific groups through a range of measures and supports to improve the delivery and standard of housing for Travellers, disabled people and older people in conjunction with key stakeholders, particularly local authorities and the affordable housing sector. Traveller-specific accommodation funding has been fully drawn down by local authorities in recent years, from 2020 to 2024, resulting in more than €100 million in capital investment in Traveller-specific accommodation. My Department also offers grants, such as the housing aid for older people and grants which help older people with necessary repairs and improvements. We are also addressing the critical infrastructure challenges being faced as a result of the massive and rapidly increasing population in this country.

These are just some of the measures introduced by this Government and the previous Government under Housing for All. We will continue to work hard to deliver the housing needed in this country.

**Deputy Réada Cronin:** For years, we have known about the state of the housing crisis and calling it an emergency. The President, Uachtarán na hÉireann, called it disastrous when he came to my constituency in north Kildare. Record level house prices, rising rents and missing its own building targets year after year is the Government's record on housing as well as misleading people in the last general election with made up figures.

In my constituency of north Kildare, a second-hand three-bedroom house is currently €500,000. How is any nurse, teacher, bus driver or retail worker expected to afford that? The Government is locking ordinary working people out of housing and it has been going that way for too long. Those who are locked out of housing face the desperate conditions of the homeless services. I know of many who will not go to the homeless services because the conditions are so horrendous in some of those shelters. There is no dignity there.

I had a retired teacher in my office a couple of weeks ago who was crying because she had just become homeless. She is sleeping in her car because she refuses to go to the hostels offered by Kildare County Council. There is no dignity for people and the Government does not seem to care about them. She feels she has no other option than to sleep in her car as it is a better

alternative to what the State provides to its most vulnerable.

This is not the only reason people are sleeping in their cars. A few months ago, people were sleeping in their cars to try to see a house, a new build in Leixlip. This has only gotten worse under the Government's watch. As far it is concerned, rents and house prices are not high enough. We need real action immediately to protect renters by freezing and cutting rent in the reintroduction of no-fault evictions. We need a united front like the one we had outside Leinster House today to stand up to this Government, fight back, demand the dignity our citizens deserve and demand change immediately.

**Deputy Denise Mitchell:** We did not just wake up in this housing crisis; it has been going on for decades. We have seen plan after plan. Does the Minister remember rebuilding Ireland? That failed. Now we have Housing for All. In the meantime, and while this plan is going on, we have longer housing lists, people waiting to be housed, more unaffordable housing and record homelessness. Like many people outside the gate tonight, I am sick and tired of listening to the Government blame everybody else; it is always everybody else's fault. The Government is in charge in this State and has continued to underfund local authority housing departments which then cannot deliver housing. The Government decided in recent months to delay funds and restrict access to the tenant in situ scheme, throwing renters under the bus. That is before we come to its new announcement on rents, which is all over the shop. We all know this will do one thing: make rents go up.

This is not about opposition for the sake of opposition. For our part, we publish policy after policy of what we believe would solve this crisis. The Government does not agree with us and that is fine. It will have to stand over the decisions it makes. The one thing I will say - and it pains me listening to it from the Government - is that nobody expects this crisis to be fixed overnight but this has been going on year after year and we must call it out. It is a direct result of the Minister's Government's poor policy, reliance on private developers and now its inability to react. People need to stand up and call a stop.

**Deputy Martin Kenny:** I listened intensely to the Minister's speech and one of the things that always strikes me is the Government seems to believe what it is doing is working. Do those in government not talk to their constituents and meet people, including the families who have elderly people living in their accommodation with them because they were put out of the places they were renting? Have they not spoken to people with youngsters who have come back to live with them who, having lived abroad for years, have come back here to try to get a house but can get nowhere? We all meet those people and know the situation is not working.

The Minister says it is crisis and the Government is treating it as such. If it was treating this like a crisis, the Government would be doing much more to resolve the issue. A big part of Irish society, which is totally left out of this, are the ordinary working people. They are the people who go to college, get a good job and think they are going to get on in life but discover they cannot afford, or do not have a hope of affording, a house or place to live. We all meet them every day of the week. They are the ones telling us the Government is failing. They are the ones this State is supposed to protect and look after. They get up every day, go to work and pay their taxes, yet they cannot find a house. If they do find one, they cannot afford it.

The Minister talked about needing big investors to come in and about all these apartments that will be built. Who will live in these apartments? It will be people who are earning €120,000 or €140,000 a year because that is the only sector they will cater for. They will cater for people

who are on very high salaries. People who are ordinary workers and earn decent money but will still not meet that will be left behind. They will not be on the social housing list and will have nowhere else to go. The only thing they can do is to look to Australia, Canada or somewhere to emigrate to. That is unfortunately what I see.

I have youngsters in my own house who are in their 20s and that is what all their friends talk about doing. They talk about going somewhere else for the very reason that they do not see the prospect of being able to get a job in this country that will put them in a position where they can buy a house in the future. They talk about going away somewhere else, hoping to make enough money to come back with a deposit and to be able to buy a place. That is the way things are going; I have seen it. I recently spoke to an auctioneer who told me about new houses coming on the market in my area and that were going to be up to €400,000. There is not a hope for ordinary people to buy them and the Government just wants to leave them behind. The Government is a total and absolute failure as far as this policy on housing is concerned.

**Deputy Seán Crowe:** House prices, rents, council waiting lists and homelessness are all rising. Any options for ordinary workers and their families are vanishing. Figures from the start of this month show there were almost 16,000 people in emergency accommodation. This Government cannot even be said to be making a dent in the figures. At the start of this year, there were fewer than 14,000 relying on emergency accommodation. At the start of last year, it was fewer than 12,000 and the year before that it was 9,000. None of these figures include rough sleepers, women and children in domestic violence refuges, those who are couch surfing or crammed into their own box room with young children or those who are sleeping in cars.

Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil excel in one thing and that is smashing the homeless record month after month. They have normalised homelessness. The Government has absolutely no handle on the situation at all. It is a runaway carriage and will continue to be so until the Government finally accepts it is a housing policy, the entire ideology of which has failed. It cannot even provide the water or electricity infrastructure needed to allow housing to be built. Urgent and real action must be taken to address the ever-deepening housing and homelessness crisis.

The Government must introduce the ban on no-fault evictions. This policy saw the first reduction in homelessness numbers in over a decade when it was introduced during Covid. The Minister stands up here and tells us his plans are working and that he cannot build homes overnight. The previous Minister managed to wheel it out during the last election with a straight face. We have been hearing it from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil for more than a decade that it cannot be built overnight but when can they and when will they be built?

**Deputy Paul Donnelly:** I will read out two examples of emails that come into my constituency office:

It is with a heavy heart I am asking you to find yourself another house to rent. Unfortunately, you cannot wait any longer as this application has been going on since last autumn with a tenant in situ and the eviction notice on the property was up in April and the house prices are increasing every day. We are going to have to act on the eviction notice as we are still none the wiser as to when this is going to happen.

*8 o'clock*

This is from another constituent:

17 June 2025

I write to you in a desperate situation seeking your assistance in the following matter. We have three children. The landlord informs us he intends to sell the property to us or on the private market with us as tenants in situ. We are waiting on Fingal County Council as an application has been made. It has been inspected, evaluated, specific circumstances assessed, however, the process has stalled this year, through a lack of funding. The landlord informed us yesterday [by email] that we need to move out of the property.

That is two of the thousands of people who are facing eviction. The cornerstone of the Government programme and its plan is that rents are going to increase. Then, developers and vulture funds will move in and build apartments. The flaw in this thinking is, does the Government honestly expect them to build enough and continue to build to see rents fall? Does the Government honestly believe that the vulture funds and the capitalists that are building these apartments and who are going to get, because of the Government, €2,500, €3,000, €4,000 and if you live in Howth, €5,000 per month, they are going to continue to build and build and see those rents fall, because there will be a surplus in the market? No, they will stop because they will want to keep rents high. It is a disgraceful action being taken by the Government.

**Deputy Conor Sheehan:** The response of the Government to tonight's cross-party motion is extremely disappointing. The Labour Party has produced volumes of legislation on housing in the last couple of years, including, but not limited to the Housing (Homeless Families) Bill 2017, the renters' rights Bill and a Bill to give effect to the recommendations of the Kenny report to cap the cost of development land. Einstein's definition of madness is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. The fact of the matter is that with the changes to the tenant in situ scheme, the Government has effectively gutted the scheme. The changes being proposed regarding RPZs will not stop rents going up. Under Housing for All, the Government has never met its targets for social and affordable housing. The Government has come in here and effectively thrown renters under the bus by completely undermining housing options for young people, students, junior doctors and for transient and migrant workers. This will not stop with rents rising, because we all know that these people stay in their accommodation for a fixed amount of time and when they move on the rent will be reset and it will rise and rise again. Recently the Minister said that rents in Ireland are way too high. I agree with him. However, here he has introduced measures which will only cause rents to rise higher and higher and effectively bake in upward-only rent increases.

These RPZ changes will not guarantee any increase in supply in the private rental market, certainly not in my own city of Limerick. It may result in an increase in build-to-rent accommodation in Dublin and maybe in Cork, but it certainly will not be affordable. Rents in Limerick rose by 20% last year. The measures proposed in this motion are common sense, evidence based and implementable. They are emergency measures in response to a crisis which has led to 15,000 people becoming homeless. This is the equivalent of the population of a town the size of Tullamore. An entire generation of young people are locked out of any hope of owning a home of their own and are trapped in their parents' box bedroom, if they are lucky enough. I am one of that generation and it is my generation that is paying the price for this. This is the same generation that still disproportionately bears the scars of the financial crash. Ours is the first generation that will do worse than our parents. This is a crisis caused primarily by poor political and policy decisions, made at the behest of institutional investors and vulture funds which have essentially screwed young people.

For ten years the previous Government and this one have prioritised the needs of big business over ordinary people and this is the result. We only have to look at the group most af-



affected by the latest changes, students. Under these proposed changes, students, as I said, will leave their accommodation as they invariably do every year and they will see their rent rocket every time the tenancy changes. They have no protection under these measures. This begs the question for me as to what the Government has against young people. It feels like ideological warfare against the youth of Ireland. As a result of this Government's and previous ones' policies, young people are denied the traditional rites of passage that come with adulthood; leaving home, renting, buying a property, even starting a family. I have friends who want to have children but cannot because they are living at home with their parents and they cannot bring more people into an already overcrowded home.

The concept of living a normal, independent life has literally become a fairy tale for many people in their 20s and 30s. I feel that whenever I or anyone else calls this out here, we are met with pure and utter condescension. Home ownership is already out of reach for people of my age. Now, with these proposed changes, renting will be out of reach, yet again. We are losing thousands of young people every year to London, Sidney, Dubai, Perth and other places all over the world. Some of this is undoubtedly due to the normal rites of passage that come with adulthood, but the problem is that once people go, they are more than likely not going to come back, due to this housing crisis. It is always young people and it is always renters. If it is not young people and renters, it is Travellers and people from migrant backgrounds who are worst affected by this crisis. I want to be really clear that this housing crisis is not being caused by immigrants or immigration. It is a failure of policy and a failure of Government.

In the time remaining to me, I want to talk about a woman who emailed my office recently. She said she gave up her own secure HAP tenancy in order to return home to care for her late mother, during her terminal illness. She said that like anyone would do, she dropped everything to care for her mam and to become her full-time carer. She was fully transparent with the council throughout this time. It was her understanding that the process to add her to the rent account was under way. However, her mother subsequently died. Despite the woman grieving the loss of her mother, the council refused her right to succeed the tenancy under the two-year rule. She has now been threatened with legal notices, demanding she leave the home and threatening court action if she does not surrender the keys. This is despite the fact that this is the home she grew up in for many years. She is the mother of three young children, including twin boys, who are only one year old. She has continued to pay the rent and look after the property since her mother died. While she is actively trying to secure alternative accommodation, it has become impossible. The only option given to her by the local authority is to present herself as homeless to get emergency accommodation. She says she is on the housing list but a suitable property is nowhere in sight.

From what has transpired during the past week, it is very clear the Government is at sixes and sevens. At this stage we have had four contradictory and confusing announcements. The Government does not know what it is doing and by any objective measure, it is failing to prevent people entering homelessness and failing to build an adequate supply of social and affordable housing. The Housing Commission has recommended that this should amount to 20% of all housing stock. Currently, it amounts to 10% and this is failing young people of my age, in particular.

In this motion, we have presented a number of practical solutions. If the Government engaged meaningfully and took on board some of them, they would make a practical difference. I urge the Government to withdraw its amendment to the motion and to engage constructively with all of us. We have put our political differences aside to come together and we ask the Gov-

ernment to join us in taking collective action.

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** The motion is a very important one. It is putting forward solutions. We have heard criticism directly from the Taoiseach regarding the lack of solutions, but they are there, we have put them forward and we are putting them forward again tonight. The Opposition parties are bringing this motion to highlight that this housing crisis is no longer just a crisis. In fact, it has not been a crisis for many years, it is and has been an emergency. It is, in fact, beyond an emergency, it is a social catastrophe. When we look at what has happened in terms of the housing crisis and this record - we can talk about a new Government, but this is a continuation of the previous Government, which has within it Members who have been in power since 2011 - we see that it is now causing a social catastrophe in particular in the area of mental health. We look at the despair and anxiety among half a million adults stuck in their childhood bedrooms, who are unable to start an independent life, get a home of their own, start a family or see a point at which they can actually begin their lives. I have spoken to many of them and they talk about how difficult it is to see hope. Many of them have emigrated or are emigrating. They are the nurses, doctors and tradespeople that we need in this country.

If we go to renters, a million renters in this country are now facing even higher rents in the coming years, rents that will be increased across the board to market rents that are absolutely unaffordable. Then we can look at those who are in homelessness or in hidden homelessness - the people who are not counted - the couch surfers, those sleeping in cars and those in domestic violence refuges who are not counted in our homeless figures. All of them are experiencing some level of anxiety and ongoing stress. That is why this housing crisis should not be called just a crisis: as I said, it is a social catastrophe.

We need to be clear that having a home of your own that is safe, secure and affordable is the most basic of human needs. It is, in fact, a human right. Although this Government does not view it that way and has yet to legislate in policy or in law to make housing a human right, housing is a human right, one of the most basic rights that people have. Everyone in this country has a right to a safe, secure and affordable home.

The housing catastrophe is no accident of policy, it results from decades of policies. We could go back 40 years to see the roots of the housing crisis. It goes back to the years of the Celtic tiger when local authorities were effectively decommissioned from delivering social housing. We heard from a former county manager at the housing committee last week who spoke about this. He was the manager of Fingal County Council and he talked about when councils had the capacity, when they were delivering thousands of homes directly every year. What happened was Fianna Fáil-led governments said local authorities were no longer needed and they turned to Part V and the developers to deliver social housing. They decommissioned local authorities and then Fine Gael, during the years from 2011 onwards, effectively gutted local authorities of their ability and capacity to deliver housing. We talk about an emergency and the Government talks about the housing crisis, but it created it. There is no acknowledgment of the fact that this crisis was created by decades of policy failures and bad policy decisions that effectively decommissioned the role of local authorities in delivering housing. We must recover that and get back to the point at which local authorities can deliver thousands of homes each year.

The other key policy that has brought us here is the treatment of housing as a financial asset, as a real estate asset class that is about investor funds and corporate landlords profiting from housing. That is why the Minister is removing the rent cap between new tenancies. His policy makes it very clear: he is allowing rents to rise in order to incentivise a supply of new housing.

He is going to remove the inter-tenancy cap and rents will be brought up to market rents. He is going to introduce a policy whereby new-build units will be tied to inflation. What that means is that if inflation rises to 4%, 5% or 20%, rents will rise on that basis. What we are going to see is incredible. The Minister admitted to it today: he cannot protect nurses, doctors, students, guards - anyone needing short-term leases - from rent increases. Is this not absolutely unacceptable? How is he justifying allowing rents to rise to market rents when we are in the middle of a housing emergency?

The Minister talks about barriers and blockages to housing. I have made the point publicly, and I will say it again: right now, the Minister for housing and this Government are one of the blockages, if not the major blockage and barrier to housing.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I thank the Deputy.

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** I have been extremely critical. The Minister has withdrawn funding from public-private partnership developments.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I call Deputy Rice.

**Deputy Rory Hearne:** We need funding for those schemes to deliver housing.

**Deputy Pádraig Rice:** I have just come in from the protest outside the gates of the House. There is a huge crowd of people outside protesting about the Government's failed policies. We have nurses, students, young people, renters and representatives from all the political parties. They have one really clear message: it is that the Government's housing policies are failing. Things are getting worse and not better, yet the Government is doubling down.

What we hear constantly from the Government is that we have turned a corner. Honestly, it has turned so many corners now, it is going round in circles. The Minister has fundamentally got the new rent rules wrong. Students, who are going to change tendencies every year, are going to have their rents reset to market levels. Every single year, students are going to face record high rents. There will be increases year after year. A student attending college for four years in Cork who moves their tenancy every year will get a huge jump in their rent. I do not think the Minister has thought this through. I do not think he has thought through that students, young people and people who move for work will get their rent reset every single year.

The Minister needs to rebrand his affordable housing schemes because they are not affordable. There are affordable houses in Cork city costing €400,000. Does the Minister genuinely believe that a home costing €400,000 is an affordable home? I would love an answer to the question of what he actually considers to be affordable for someone in this country, because in my view €400,000 is not an affordable home. It is an expensive home, not one that people can afford.

When it comes to social housing, we have not seen the increases we need. In 2023, there was an increase of only 180 social homes in Cork city. Meanwhile, over 3,500 wait on the waiting list. As a result, we have people waiting for more than ten years to access social housing in Cork city. It is not good enough and it needs to change.

At the same time, we have 350 vacant council houses - houses that are boarded up - where the council spent almost €1 million in five years boarding up vacant council houses, while we have hundreds of people in our city who are homeless.

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I do not think the Minister is considering the consequences of his policies and the decisions he is making that are driving up rents, house prices and homelessness. It is a social catastrophe. I ask the Minister to stop, to think, to reconsider and to change track. What we need is a new direction and a new approach in housing policy.

I urge people in Cork city and across Munster to come and gather with us in Cork city this Saturday at 2 p.m. for the Raise the Roof rally and to send a signal and a message to the Government that its housing policies have utterly failed and they need to change.

**Deputy Gary Gannon:** I thank those who brought forward this motion, which is incredibly timely and important. It is one that resonates across society in Ireland. It is especially timely coming on the same day as the Raise the Roof protest, which is taking place outside the building this evening. People are once again calling on the Government to finally treat the housing crisis with the urgency it demands. I had the pleasure of stepping outside and engaging with the crowd. The energy was contagious. It was incredible to see so many people there with such a common purpose.

While there are so many dimensions to this crisis that have been discussed by my party colleagues and others across the Chamber, I want to focus on the widespread dereliction we have allowed to take hold in our towns and cities. In the heart of my constituency of Dublin Central, thousands of properties lie empty or in ruin. It is a staggering waste of existing infrastructure in the midst of a housing emergency, which has already had catastrophic consequences for families, most notably for children growing up in emergency accommodation with all of the impacts on their lives that are documented at this point.

Every day I see boarded up shopfronts, crumbling upper floors braced with steel, properties in prime locations that have been left to rot for decades, not due to fire or natural disasters, but because our current system tolerates, even enables, this decay. When public bodies allow buildings to lie derelict for decades, we are witnessing urban abandonment. Dereliction is far from harmless; it corrodes community life and leaves Dublin and our towns the length and breadth of this country looking unloved, feeling unsafe after dark, and very clearly underutilised. This motion puts forward decisive actions. We are often asked for ideas from this side of the House and this motion contains any number of them, as have previous motions throughout the years. The motion contains: a dereliction tax and stronger levy enforcement to incentivise reuse and redevelopment, a bold use of compulsory purchase orders wielded swiftly to bring empty properties back into the housing market and a commitment to substantial public investment in social and affordable homes, not more excuses or half-measures.

Families are struggling, essential workers are being forced out and young people are being saddled with emigration. There is no merit in letting buildings crumble while homes are desperately needed. There has been a complete lack of political will or even indifference from successive governments when it comes to housing. A vacant property tax exists but it has no teeth. I understand when I say there is no political will, others might say that is not true. What else do we call it when the results are clearly in front of our eyes? Dereliction should not be tolerated in any community, especially when so many are suffering. To allow it is a dereliction of duty. We call on the Government to agree to a vigorous enforcement of vacancy and dereliction levies, swift deployment of compulsory purchase orders and meaningful State-led investment to convert derelict properties into secure affordable homes. This motion puts forward emergency actions in the hope that finally some form of action will be taken. That is all we ask; that action is taken. I do not care who solves this crisis, I just want it solved. It requires urgency, invest-

ment, innovation and a general desire to improve our towns, cities and villages for the people who live there.

**Deputy Brian Stanley:** This is a very important, timely motion. As a group of TDs on the left, we were party to it. The situation is a housing emergency; everybody accepts that now, with 15,500 plus in homeless accommodation and huge waiting lists for social housing. County Laois, which has a fairly good record for social housing, still has a housing waiting list of 1,600 households. Low Government targets and projections are missed by a country mile. There is a huge need for investment in infrastructure and water in which we are falling way behind. Those who are above the income limit for social housing cannot get or buy an affordable house or get a cost-rental. This is really important. This is a group that is being left behind, a group of low-paid workers who are being caught and have no options. They are trapped forever in private rented accommodation with no control over the rent they are charged. What is being provided is drip-feed affordable housing and even fewer cost-rentals. Ministers, that needs to change. Workers and families are paying more than half their income in some cases to rack-renting landlords and we need to change that. What do we get? What did this Government do last week? It will force measures through this House that will drive already skyrocketing prices into the air. The Government shows no regard for struggling renters, or else it seems to miss the point.

New apartments will not be covered by the 2% rent cap that is supposed to bring prices down. Is the Government kidding? A landlord with three or fewer homes can continue to charge what they like and continue with no-fault evictions. When a tenancy ends voluntarily due to a tenant buying a house, moving into a social house or going to another rented home, the landlord can charge what is called “market rent.” This means they can follow the already galloping rents that are there.

What are students to do? They seem to have been forgotten. They are going to return in September. What are they facing come September and the September after that? The prices they are being charged are astronomical. We need to do something for students.

While it is welcome that 55 municipal districts not covered by RPZs are to be brought into the loop, though the Minister forgot about that last week until he was reminded, even with existing RPZs, landlords have found ways around them. We can take any town in the county, for example, Port Laoise or Mountmellick and places like that. In Port Laoise, rents have shot up way beyond 2%, to multiples of that. The proof is in the actual rents being charged. We must bring in proper rent limits and increase the supply of cost-rental and affordable housing. We must also step up the tenant in situ scheme and invest in critical infrastructure such as water supply and electricity to ensure new homes can be brought onstream.

**Deputy Catherine Connolly:** In my three minutes I am going to repeat what I have said since the day I came in here. This crisis has been caused by Government policy. We have just come in from the Raise the Roof protest. There is no doubt each policy from each Government has intensified the crisis as it has failed to recognise - deliberately so - that housing is a basic human right. Each Government has dealt with it like an asset and allowed the market to provide. When it did not provide, governments brought in every possible scheme to support the market, the HAP scheme being absolutely the worst, which became the only game in town. It is really important.

Today I heard an interview with a Mr. O’Driscoll on the new infrastructure taskforce and I was singularly unimpressed with his narrative. I state that publicly. I agree with him we have



failed to provide investment in infrastructure but no questions were asked as to how that happened. How did it happen that a city like Galway has no provision for a wastewater treatment plant on its east side, meaning no development can take place? How has it happened there is no wastewater treatment plant to the west, in Conamara? There were no questions asked. We look at planning and we put all the problems down to objectors, which is a dangerous and disingenuous narrative. It is absolutely appalling that arguments by somebody in that position reduces it to “objectors” when the real problem is at any given time there are 500 planning vacancies. I put my hands up and say “tell me if I am wrong.” However, how one runs a system like that with so many vacancies is pertinent. We blame the courts for judicial reviews when the only avenue left to many people is to go that route. The Minister knows that very well and the misquoting and misusing of figures.

We also absolutely made local authorities non-existent in relation to the provision of housing. We stopped building housing in Galway in 2009. We never built a single other house until about 2020. An integral part of the solution is public housing on public land. That is one part of the solution. The Government set up various entities and agencies, including the Land Development Agency and we are now going to extend its power. Its remit should be totally public housing on public land which it is not doing. It is doing a deal in Galway on the docks on public land for premium housing. At the risk of boring the Minister, we have a jigsaw of pieces - I am not sure how many pieces, though it might be an exaggeration to say 500 - with no overall vision except to bow down to the market and that the market will provide and when it does not, to add a new piece and a new piece to make sure we keep the prices up. It is an obscenity to talk about affordable housing at the price it is.

**Deputy Charles Ward:** On behalf of the 100% Redress Party I voice my strong support for the Raise the Roof campaign. We need to call the housing and homelessness crisis what it is; a national emergency. This is a national emergency and requires a national emergency response. This crisis has been going on for over a decade. Over ten years there has been a lack of housing, rising rents, crumbling homes and increased homelessness. House prices have risen by more than 130% in this time and rents have risen by more than 80%. We have seen record-breaking homelessness month after month. What kind of country do we live in when tens of thousands of people living here do not have a place to sleep at night or call their home? It is an absolute disgrace.

More than 4,500 children are living in emergency accommodation right now as we speak. Thousands of children across the country are growing up and spending their early and most formative years in hotel rooms and crowded living areas. Many of these children do not have access to a proper nutritional diet or a proper space to play. How can they be expected to grow and develop in these conditions? How do we hope to give them a fulfilling childhood when they are stuck in hotel rooms from age five to age 13? According to the 2022 census, the largest age group amongst the homeless population was infants to four-year-olds. That is 11.4% of the total homeless population. This is devastating and contradicts what many of us think homelessness looks like and who it impacts. Homelessness has been shown to have a negative effect on children’s development, their participation in education and their run in life as they grow older. The number of children impacted is rising every year, along with the number of people experiencing homelessness. Many families have been impacted due to the defective concrete crisis. It is clear from these figures the Government is failing. The only time in the past decade we saw a drop in the monthly homelessness figures was during the Covid lockdown measures. The Government needs to change tack and take action. We need an emergency Covid-level

response and intervention in this crisis and we need it now.

**Deputy Ruth Coppinger:** I welcome this opportunity, particularly as it is the first time I have taken part in a housing debate in the new Dáil with the Minister present. It is important that we get our points across to him. I was also outside at the protest. I am looking forward to a huge turnout on 5 July for the Community Action Tenants Union protest, particularly because young people are in despair. They are either sleeping in cars in order to stay in college because they cannot get accommodation or they are dropping out of college. Afterwards, they are not able to live independent lives. Student teachers and nurses are heading straight to Australia. The knock-on impact of this throughout society is incredible. One place where it is having such an impact is on the waiting lists relating to children's disability network teams. One in three vacancies for these teams cannot be filled. One thing I will never forgive the Government for is the oxygen it is giving to the far right by refusing to tackle the housing crisis. In the diverse communities I represent, many people are living in fear because of the hate and division being stoked up in places where minorities are being targeted.

I want to focus on solutions because the Government says we do not have them. Making the private rental sector more attractive to investment funds is not the solution. Taking away indefinite tenancies, opening up the prospect of instability after six years, allowing rents relating to new-build apartments to be put up beyond 2% and at the rate of inflation and voluntary exit potentially leading to rent hikes will be a disaster, especially for students. The Minister mentioned solutions. I dug out a report from nine years ago that I wrote after spending a hell of a lot of hours on a special housing committee set up by the Dáil. It was an all-party committee. Hundreds of hours were spent on that committee, and none of the recommendations it put forward was adopted.

Without being boastful, I would say that I have been responsible more houses to be built than the Minister. For example, Church Fields in Mulhuddart, which is being cited by the Minister and everyone as being the greatest thing since sliced bread, was put forward by me and Solidarity councillors in 2017. We got an architect to write a plan. We used a drone to make a video. We brought it to Fingal County Council and said there was a landbank it could develop. We told the council it had the money and outlined how it could work financially, with 50% social housing and 50% affordable housing. That scheme is now Church Fields. Development is under way. Hundreds of people will get homes as a result. It is not exactly the model I wanted, but it is much better than leaving the site vacant as had been the case. We have the same prospect now with another landbank and I want the Minister to take this on board. Fingal County Council has a huge strategic landbank at Scribblestown in Dunsink at which it has reported 7,000 homes could be built. It has asked for €200 million from the Government to help to get started. That must not be a long-term project. It should be a short-term project. There should be houses starting on that in five years. It is near a rail line. It has major potential. It has natural wildlife parklands that could be developed and it could provide homes for thousands of workers and young people.

The Minister asks where the money is. The Government has a budget surplus of €10 billion. It has the Apple money of €14 billion. I urge the Minister to please not use money as an excuse. There is ample money to build public housing, which is the only way to provide it cheaply and in the supply that is needed.

**Deputy Richard O'Donoghue:** We will be sharing time. We will each have three and a half minutes.

There is a housing crisis. We need to deliver houses. I am offering my services to the Minister, as I have offered them to other Ministers, to help to deliver houses. I do so in light of the experience I have and the knowledge I have that Irish Water is not providing value for money. It will not deliver the infrastructure needed to deliver houses. That is a fact. With all the millions and billions it is quoting the Government to deliver infrastructure, it has now been proved that Irish Water has not come in on budget on any of the contracts I have seen.

I will give a small synopsis of what has happened since the local authorities stepped away from water services and Irish Water stepped in. Ballingarry lost water for three days because an alarm went off and no one came back to check it. Pumps ran dry. We lost the water supply because someone did not go back to an alarm system that was being looked after by the local authority, and 1,000 houses were without water. We then had to pay for a new pump and run up the services again. The Croom water supply involved the use of five tankers a day for two and half months, which cost hundreds of thousands of euro because when the project started, no one checked where it would connect to. As a result, it went a few hundred thousand euro over budget and there was a need to use tankers to deliver water to a population of 2,500.

Irish Water is not offering value for money, so why not look at a developer-led approach? Let the developers put in the infrastructure and let Irish Water take it over when it has been built on time and on budget. That will help the Minister. All the budgets that come to the Minister are not factual. I want to help the Minister in any way I can by showing Irish Water up and showing that it is not offering value for money in order to allow him deliver more houses. I do not care if he gets the praise for it. Once the houses are built, I do not care who gets the praise. I want to help. I do not want to help with money being squandered when we could deliver infrastructure.

I also want to see the infrastructure for the water supplies we have been talking about. I spoke here two weeks ago. If we take storm water out of the sewerage system, a lot of the plants that are under pressure will survive until the Minister can get funding to them. It is a simple fix to remove water where we can. All new developments can be separated at no extra cost. If we can deliver that now, we can use existing systems and allow more houses to be built by removing the storm water and letting it run into the waterways by means of an inverted system. That is all we have to do. It is a simple fix. It would help the Government deliver more houses until it gets the chance to upgrade the plants.

During the winter months, we treat 70% water and 30% sewerage. When we have a dry summer, we deal 100% with sewerage and the plants are fine. Again, I am trying to help the Government to deliver. I will throw the ball in and the Minister can pull on it. He can deliver the houses. It is a win-win situation for everyone. The Minister will get value for money because I have no problem with being a watchdog and letting him deliver. This is what I am asking the Minister to do: let me help him by showing him he is not getting value for money. This will allow him to deliver more houses through his Department. That is what I am asking, and I will help him. At any meeting he is attending or any place he is going, let me in for a day to listen to what he is being told. Let me take the projects apart and show him they do not offer value for money. Development-led projects are needed so the Minister can deliver more houses. I am here to help. I will criticise him if I have to for not taking me up on my suggestion. If he wants help, I will give him the help he wants. That is what I am offering.

**Deputy Michael Collins:** During the election, Independent Ireland said a housing emergency needed to be declared and everyone ran away. Now it seems as though we are rushing

through legislation in the Dáil this week in a frantic bid to try to overturn the emergency that is there. There are 15,000 people without homes, which is a huge emergency for those in that dire situation. I am inundated every weekend when I hold clinics with people who do not have comes coming to me one after another. The local authority is coming to the point where if people have a roof over their heads, meaning the car roof, then it is okay and they are sorted. It is not okay.

I am not blaming the Minister. In recent years, the Government collectively has been asleep at the wheel. It needs to take responsibility and look at where we could have made changes. Some €148 million was announced today to take over a hotel in Dublin for an international protection accommodation services, IPAS, centre. There is a concentration on resolving that issue, even though the local community is up in arms over it, and rightly so. The problem we have is that modular homes, prefabricated homes and log cabins are needed for the 15,000 ordinary Irish people who do not have homes. Why are we afraid to look at that type of model? When we were growing up long ago, people who did not have a home stayed in a mobile home or whatever for a number of years until they got their feet under them. While legislation is coming and all this sort of talk is going on, action is not happening on the ground. While the Government is rushing through stuff, it is letting loads of other problems remain. Declaring a housing emergency would have dealt with that. Unfortunately, that latter has not happened.

The Government talks about infrastructure and funding. We have not got the funding; it does not seem to be getting to the areas that need it. I will pick out five areas that I have often mentioned here in the Dáil, namely Dunmanway, Shannonvale, Rosscarbery, Ballydehob and Goleen. Some of them have been waiting for 25 years for a wastewater treatment plant. One town I always pick above the rest - maybe I should not - is Dunmanway. There is a super opportunity to deliver housing for the people there. Not one house can be delivered, however. The delivery of houses may have to wait until 2032 or 2034, which is astonishing. The Minister needs to come down there and have a look at what is going on. We know the scandal of raw sewage pumping into the local waterways, and it was mentioned last year. The bottom line is that we are no further on.

The same is true of Shannonvale, with raw sewage pouring into a local play park and seeping down into the local river. Apparently, that is no problem. If a local farmer up the road was responsible, however, he would be put out of business pretty quickly. It is the same with Rosscarbery and Ballydehob. In 1999, I was on the local community council in Goleen. I still am. We paid to bring in the property owners in order that we could negotiate a deal to establish a treatment plant there, but it never happened.

The whole country is blocked solid when it comes to movement. We are free to call a housing emergency, which is what this is. If we do not deal with it, we will be in the same situation 12 months, two years or five years from now. As I have stated more than once when speaking about housing, if we had put down two or three blocks in those days, we would have built thousands of houses. It has never stopped.

The left groups in opposition have joined together. Let them join away. I do not think they have the solutions either. They are dreaming. We are here as Independent Ireland, a stand-alone party that has put forward solutions. They are not magical solutions, but at least they can move this country forward. People are leaving our country. Young people left, right and centre are going out of the country left because they cannot buy houses and they cannot see themselves being in homes in the future. That is something we need to overturn.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** I welcome the Minister to this debate on housing. He says he wants to deliver more private homes across the country. I agree that we need those houses, but there is another way. He has completely sacrificed renters in order to unlock this, but there is another way. I know people of my age across Mayo - people I play football with - who have planning permission and who were given prices by their builders, but they are not building. This is because of the cost of building. What has the Minister done for those people? He has done nothing since he came to office. His predecessor did nothing for those people either. We need to address the cost of building. We can do that by removing the VAT on construction. The North of Ireland does this. I ask the Minister to engage with this proposal. It would make a dramatic impact in reducing the cost of building. Last year, the State took in €3 billion in the middle of housing crisis. I ask the Minister to give some of this back to unlock the potential that exists.

Development levies, Irish Water connections, ESB connections and bonds to local authorities are precluding developers from taking the risk of building houses. The other aspect relates to planning. It can cost in the region of €100,000 to get planning permission over the line. These are practical suggestions that the Minister could implement in the morning if he wanted to unlock private housing delivery across the country.

There is an elephant in the room when it comes to housing. Everyone in opposition and in government is entirely focused on discussions on the supply side of this equation, and the Minister has failed in that regard. We must also address the demand issue and the immigration issue. For example, in 2014-15, the State was issuing in the region of 10,000 work permits a year. However, we are now issuing in excess of 40,000 employment visas in the State. The number of residency permits has also ballooned. I appreciate that the labour market is hot and that these immigrants are providing value in the market, but this is putting immense pressure on services and, in particular, housing. I have not heard the Minister discuss that yet, even though this is a way to address and alleviate the difficulties and provide part of the solution at least. In the absence of supply and as we are so far short of our targets, this is something we should consider.

I am aware of international students who have come to the country seeking an education and got a visa. They had to return home because there was no place to live. It is about time for the Minister to engage with his colleagues in government to manage this process. We need to provide visas where there is a critical need, for example, in the construction industry, in healthcare and in other sectors of the economy. However, it is shocking that this is a part of the equation that is not even being discussed by the Government.

**Deputy Mattie McGrath:** Tá triúr cainteoirí againn agus tá ceithre nóiméad ag gach Teachta.

As far as I can see, everything is an emergency. The housing situation has been handled so badly for so long that it is now a crazy situation. The Members from Independent Ireland - so called Saor Éire, the freedom fighters - talked a few weeks ago about 100% mortgages. Who can take them seriously? They got detached tonight from their leader, Mary Lou McDonald. For the past few months since the election, they have been clucking around after her and under her umbrella as if she were a hatching hen. However, there must have been a split in the camp. They have gone back to where they were.

There are many issues, and Irish Water has been mentioned. The infrastructure is not there. This morning, the ESRI made a statement. The situation is chronic. Many villages and small towns do not have the capacity to build water treatment plants. In many cases where there are



developer-built plants, there are issues with councils taking them in charge. I know they can and will provide the infrastructure, and will do so fast. Deputy O'Donoghue mentioned something, and I support him on it. We should separate the foul water from the sewer water. We have immense pressure on our septic tanks and sewerage systems. We cannot have the rainwater going into that and putting huge pressure on it. That is a no-brainer. What is needed is simple to do, especially with new developments, but it could also be done with many old developments.

The Minister floated an idea some time ago which gave great hope to people who live in cabins and behind houses in different areas. Something meaningful needs to be done about this. He knows and I know that there are hundreds of these cabins in his constituency and in mine. There are thousands throughout the country. They are one of the prongs to sort out the crisis that exists. They are very suitable as starter homes or whatever, and they are fine.

As Deputy Lawless mentioned, immigration has a massive impact on housing. I know we need nurses and doctors, and many of them do a great job in our hospitals. However, we must face the elephant in the room. I refer to the fact that the huge immigration is adding major pressure, but we are not going to talk about it. We are the great saviours of Europe. We can bring everybody in and find homes for them. Roderic O'Gorman told them all they would have their own front doors in 12 weeks if they came. He sent out a tweet in 13 or 14 languages. In the name of God, when are we going to get real and look after our own. We have a Taoiseach who travels the world and talks about the world's problems, but he is forgetting about the problems here. Looking after our people here first is his fundamental duty under Bunreacht na hÉireann.

Dundrum House hotel in Tipperary has been made into an IPAS centre despite the local people there protesting about this for more than 12 months. We were called to a meeting last night by the county manager to say the council, had erred in granting a section 5 exemption to a greedy, shabby, shoddy developer with a company brought in from Spain with declared capital of €120. We now we find it has all fallen on a heap of brus. A local group rightly took a judicial review, and now the council has had to cave in and say it erred in granting a section 5 exemption. What is going to happen? Will that contract be declared null and void? It should be declared null and void. It is null and void because it was granted under false pretences.

We have people before the courts, including Seán Meehan who is facing jail because of his situation with a log cabin. There are rogue developers who have no interest in humanitarian issues. They are interested in filling their pockets, making them fatter and destroying a village like Dundrum in County Tipperary which has a population of 200 by giving approval for an IPAS centre for 277 people, an illegal development that the council was told it was illegal. The fire officer had the cheek to tell us yesterday that he never visited the site once in the previous 12 months. That is the type of blackguarding you are going on with here. You need to get real.

**Deputy Carol Nolan:** Tá áthas orm an deis a fháil inniu chun labhairt ar an mBille seo. Baineann an Bille seo leis an éigeandáil tithíochta atá ar siúl faoi láthair. I welcome this Bill. In particular, I welcome the call to fully restore and increase funding for vital homeless prevention schemes, especially the tenant in situ scheme and housing first. This issue has arisen at my constituency clinics. People are coming to me after experiencing the desperate disappointment of being told that the council or their landlord could not or would not enter into the tenant in situ scheme.

I will use the brief time available to highlight once again that we have a serious number of approved housing bodies, AHBs. This needs to be tackled. Is this value for money? There are

437 AHBs on the official register. I doubt that is value for money in that. In many cases, I doubt these entities are contributing a vital and important service, such as offering shelter. They offer shelter to victims of domestic violence. However, I feel they should be contributing more and that there should be value for money.

In regard to the 437 AHBs in a country this size, it begs the question about massive levels of duplication and the appropriateness of funding. I absolutely agree that we have to use all levers at our disposal to try to put solutions in place to solve our housing crisis. However, there is a sense emerging that what we have here is almost akin to a homelessness industry.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh):** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Teachta.

**Deputy Carol Nolan:** Tá ceithre nóiméad agam.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh):** Tá trí nóiméad aici. Ghlac an Teachta Mattie McGrath ceithre nóiméad.

**Deputy Carol Nolan:** Nach bhfuil níos mó ama ná sin agam?

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh):** Bhí trí nóiméad ag an Teachta Nolan ach ghlac an Teachta Mattie McGrath ceithre cinn leis an méid a dúirt sé.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I am glad to get the opportunity to talk about housing again. This is a crisis. Everyone recognises that it is a crisis. I am not one bit happy that landlords or homeowners are being blamed for what is happening in the rental sector. Every site seems to be pointing at people who own houses and are trying to rent them out. I point out that I do have no house only my own. There are many vacant houses. I have asked the Government before to halve the tax or do something with it, such as 50% tax for someone who gets €1,000 in rent for a house. So many houses are idle, and there is no incentive to rent them out. Then people are afraid that they will not get their houses back.

In regard to planning permission for those who wish to build their own houses, people in County Kerry have been left behind on this. We have been hard hit by the urban regeneration pressure clause that deprives many young fellows who are four or five miles outside the town. They cannot get permission to build their own houses. Killarney has been in a pressure zone for more than seven years. Houses there are terribly scarce and terribly expensive. I do not see how what is proposed is going to help the housing sector. We must build more houses. We need to give local authorities more autonomy to build more houses. Long ago, when people were homeless, a county council would bring in demountable homes. That facility is no longer there. If you had a site, you get a place in a couple of days.

Another thing which has to be remembered is that the figures are going up, but we are housing more immigrants and housing more than our own. I fear no provision has been made for that. Reduce the tax and incentivise people to let their vacant houses out. That is necessary to tackle the problem of those empty houses. A vacant house provides no tax for the Government. We should take less tax in respect of such houses and do the same around the country for the other landlords. People would be far more interested in letting out their houses as a result.

**Deputy Michael Cahill:** We need to zone land and open up planning permission for people, especially for one-off houses. We need to provide affordable houses and social houses. We

need to provide private housing, low-cost sites and good-quality modular homes. We need to give choices to our people. I am convinced that good-quality modular homes are part of the solution here. Four or five modular homes can be provided for the price of one affordable house. They are better insulated and much warmer. They can be erected at speed.

I am focusing on modular homes because I meet young couples in every town and village in Kerry. I meet people in Killarney, Dingle, Killorglin, Cahirsiveen, Kenmare and Castleisland. I meet their parents. They would be very happy with modular homes because they are desperate. That is the bottom line. Plenty of land is available in Kerry from the HSE. It has not been used in years, and there are plenty of buildings also that could be quite easily turned into one- and two-bedroom homes. Negotiations between the Kerry County Council and the HSE have been going on for as long as I can remember.

We need to put the skids under Uisce Éireann regarding the provision of wastewater treatment facilities. We have up to 40 villages in Kerry where there is no sewerage treatment. I am a big believer in constructed wetlands. They are much cheaper, they are a success and they can be provided in a much shorter period. We must start providing cluster-type developments and, as others mentioned earlier, we must allow developers to provide the treatment facilities. Uisce Éireann is not going to do it.

Above all else, we must give our people choices. That is why I have put forward four or five different options. Otherwise, we will not reach our targets. I also look forward to the €100,000 over-the-shop grant being introduced. It will be a budgetary measure that will help with the provision of more accommodation.

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy John Cummins):** I thank the Deputies very much. I echo many of the comments made by the Minister, Deputy Browne, and take this opportunity to reassert the Government's commitment and determination to tackling the challenges we all know exist in the housing sector.

The Minister and I are very much aware of the difficulties being experienced by some people in accessing secure and affordable accommodation. I say respectfully that I listened to many of the contributions, some of them genuine. Some Members put forward solutions. The contributions of many others just involved grandstanding, false outrage and attempts at creating clips for social media. The Members in those cases offered absolutely no solutions.

The Minister, this Government and I are as aware as anyone else of the difficulties people face. There is no such thing as a monopoly on compassion when it comes to matters to do with the housing sector. For this reason, we are working day in and day out to make substantial changes to increase the supply of social, affordable and private homes throughout our country. While there is still much to do, the Opposition motion this evening does not fairly represent the efforts and progress made to date.

As a Government, we are committed to delivering 300,000 new homes between this year and 2030. We are targeting an average of 50,000 homes annually over the period.

*9 o'clock*

These new targets are ambitious but they provide a pathway to delivering the scale of housing needed. As a reference, these new targets are more than double the output of the last five

years. There are no doubt challenges and barriers to addressing these numbers, but I want to reiterate our strong commitment and determination to tackle these. As Minister of State with responsibility for planning and local government, I know the important role of the planning system as a critical piece of the solution to the housing challenges we face. I will outline some of the progress we have made in recent months in that regard shortly.

The Minister, Deputy Browne, has outlined the progress made under Housing for All and referred to the new successor plan, which will incorporate pragmatic actions to boost housing activity in the short term as well as longer-term actions that will implement systemic change and help achieve the sustainable levels of supply needed in the long term. However, we are not waiting for this plan. We are consistently bringing forward a series of policy decisions because we recognise that no single policy approach, decision or silver bullet will solve the housing challenges we face.

The Opposition motion states that there is chronic underfunding of our local authority housing and planning departments, which must be reversed for councils to play a key role in meeting public housing needs. That is simply not the case. On the contrary, the Government continues to support local authorities in the delivery of its housing programmes, with almost €4.8 billion provided to local authorities in 2024. This will increase further in 2025. Local authorities derive income from a variety of sources but my Department has provided funding for more than 250 additional capital posts in local authorities to support social housing delivery. In addition, more than 140 professional, technical and administrative posts dedicated to delivering affordable housing have been funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, to strengthen our local authorities' capacity to initiate, design, plan, develop and manage housing projects in their areas.

The Government has also progressed a series of reforms to support a streamlined and well resourced planning system. This includes the consolidation and streamlining of planning legislation under the Planning and Development Act 2024. This Act represents the most comprehensive review of planning since 2000 and will reform and streamline the planning process, reducing delays in housing and strategic infrastructure projects. Furthermore, the ministerial action plan on planning resources will strengthen the planning system and ensure there are timely decisions for critical infrastructure and housing. The national planning framework has been referenced by a number of Deputies. This provides the basis for the review and updating of regional, spatial and economic strategies and local authority development plans. Given the urgent need to ensure that updated housing requirements can be incorporated into the planning system as quickly as possible to address housing need and demand, local authorities will be required to vary their county development plans. This is a key priority of Government. We want to ensure that what has been agreed under the NPF is translated to a local basis as urgently as possible. In that regard, the Minister, Deputy Browne, has written to local authorities. We will update local housing growth requirement figures shortly to the local authorities.

As part of the implementation of the Planning and Development Act 2024, new urban development zones are a new part of the planning system and have the ability to be transformational. The ability for local authorities to start work on that immediately has been commenced and will dovetail with the variation process. Further, the planning and development (amendment) Bill 2025 was approved by Cabinet for priority drafting on 27 May, which will ensure sufficient time is given to activate planning permissions for much-needed housing across our country. It is intended to have that Bill passed before the summer recess.

A number of Deputies referred to exempted development. In this regard, an exempted development regulation review has been undertaken by the Department. It is intended that a four-week public consultation will commence, hopefully by the end of next week. That includes reference to modular homes to the rear of the dwelling, which a number of Deputies have raised and which I know will be helpful for many families in providing housing options. Of course, it will not be suitable in every circumstance but it is about providing options for people. Reference was also made to infrastructure and the ability of the private sector to deliver in terms of developer-provided infrastructure. My view is clear, and on the record, that we need to facilitate this, particularly in smaller settlements, to ensure housing delivery can be unlocked, particularly to a set standard and design that can be taken in charge. Work is ongoing within Government in that respect.

An Coimisiún Pleanála will be formally established tomorrow. This is also a significant reform which will ensure that we have greater certainty on when a decision can be expected within our planning system. Nobody expects a positive decision but they expect certainty on timelines. That is what we are seeking to achieve with the establishment of An Coimisiún Pleanála. Progress has been made. Cases are down from approximately 3,600 two years ago to 1,300 cases on hand. We have statutory timelines in place which we expect the new commission to ensure are adhered to.

The issue of vacancy and dereliction is also a significant focus of Government and a significant focus of mine in my engagement with local authorities around the country. Some local authorities are doing excellent work in respect of compulsory purchase orders. Others like my own in Waterford have done tremendous work using the likes of the repair and lease scheme. However, it is true to say that there is not a standard approach across the country from local authorities, which does have to change. We have put significant money behind this. We have provided a €150 million under call 3 of URDF to provide local authorities with the firepower to be able to use CPOs to their advantage to tackle vacancy and dereliction. We also have the vacant property refurbishment grant, which was mentioned. It provides up to €70,000 if a property is derelict. More than 8,652 grant approvals have been issued already to the end of Q1 of 2025 and €112 million has been paid out to refurbish almost 2,100 homes. We have also extended the local authority home loan to help finance the purchase and renovation of derelict and non-habitable properties. Of course, this will continue to be a focus of Government. If there are proactive measures that the Opposition wishes to bring forward specifically in this area, I am more than willing to take them on board.

In conclusion, social, affordable and private delivery of homes across the country is the number one priority for Government and will remain so. We will not be distracted from doing our job by efforts at sound bites for social media. We will continue to focus on our job, day in, day out.

**Deputy Máire Devine:** You are doing a very poor job.

**Deputy Matt Carthy:** We should just rename this debate the “black is white” debate. The Government is essentially trying to convince us that black is white. To have the audacity, as Ministers have done this evening, to come into this House and claim that their housing plan is working is akin to trying to convince people that the Earth is flat. The thousands of people who were outside this House this evening, demanding that we raise the roof, demanding of their elected representatives that we raise the roof on their behalf, know the reality of the record of the parties in government. House prices and rent costs through the roof, homelessness figures



beyond anything anybody could have imagined. On every single metric the situation is getting worse, every day, week and year that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are in government supported by Independents. Unless the policies that have been put forward time and again by Opposition parties, civic society groups and experts across the field, including in tonight's motion, unless and until those policies are enacted, the situation is going to get much worse. In reality, this means the young people who have just finished their leaving certificate examinations do not see a future for themselves in this country. They are well qualified and many of them will go and get the best university education in the world. They will be highly qualified, highly motivated and very talented and they will be in a position to get a job, but they will not be in a position to take that job because they will not be in a position to find somewhere to live.

It is time for change. It was correct and right that people travelled to Dublin to the Raise the Roof protest. I hope this is a sign of hope that people are going to stand up and demand change because absolutely no hope is coming from this Government.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** What those crowds outside the gates during the Minister of State's ten-minute speech heard was waffle and spin. They live the reality of this Government's failed housing policies. Their families, friends and co-workers live this reality. They know as well as we in opposition do that the Government at this stage might as well be a meme for fiddling while Rome burns when it comes to housing, because that is what it is doing. Instead of putting on its big boy socks and admitting its policies are wrong, it comes along with hare-brained notions to strip away protections from renters, propose more tax reliefs for vulture funds, further delay social and affordable homes and throw students to the wolves, all in one fell swoop.

In my constituency of Longford-Westmeath, we do not need statistics because we live this housing crisis every day. Families are sleeping in overcrowded box rooms and sofa surfing and young adults are forced to leave for far-off countries because there is no realistic pathway for them under this Government to ever own a house or rent an affordable one. Entire generations are being exiled from communities because of sky high rents.

While homes lie empty, what is the Government doing? It is dithering. Derelict homes rot while people struggle to put a roof over their heads. This is not a crisis but an absolute disgrace. Older residents are contacting me who have worked all their lives and are now facing eviction into homelessness because they rent privately with no security and no plan for their later years. Students are commuting hours every day because there are no affordable houses, and this is before the Government's measure comes in. Public sector workers - our teachers and guards - are priced out of their own communities. Does the Minister of State not see this as the reality of the situation? We do not need any more gobbledygook press releases. We need emergency actions. We need real rent controls, taxes on vacancies and public houses built at scale on public land.

**Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan:** Has the Minister of State ever stepped back and reviewed the performance of Fianna Fáil in running the Department of housing over the past few years? I refer to a performance review, so to speak, because from the outside looking in, the performance of Fianna Fáil in the Department of housing is looking disastrous and in need of a complete overhaul.

Across Kilkenny, we have dozens of council-owned homes left boarded up simply because the Minister of State's Department only allows an insulting €11,000 to do each home up. As a result, we see many of these homes being left empty for years. In my home county of Kilkenny, there has been a staggering 86% reduction in building commencements compared with the

same period in 2024. In the first quarter of 2024, approximately 500 buildings were commenced across the county. This year, it has plummeted to 61. We have watched as rents steadily increased by over 10% this year, and it is showing no let up. The cost of renting is now nearly 60% higher than before the pandemic.

I was delighted to see the KCLR roadshow programme covering the work of the local homeless charity today. We are very fortunate in Carlow-Kilkenny to have the Good Shepherd Centre Kilkenny and Tar Isteach Housing, because without them, God knows what would have happened to the hundreds of families left facing homelessness that these charities are now housing. The Government certainly was not stepping to the fore. Little to no concern is shown for the struggles of renters by this Government. We cannot lose sight that behind all these numbers and statistics are people, families, children and elderly people, left feeling lost and with a sense of hopelessness because of this housing crisis. This is, sadly, the most painful review of the Government's performance in the Department of housing.

**Deputy Sorca Clarke:** Hear, hear.

**Deputy Donna McGettigan:** Students are among the most mobile of all renters and will be disproportionately and negatively impacted by this new measure. I questioned the Minister for further and higher education in a committee meeting to ask what measures would be put in place to protect students against the impact of these changes. It was clear that students had not even been taken into account when the changes to rent pressure zones were considered. It was not reassuring that this point had to be raised at the committee and I felt students were never thought of in the first place. Students are also dealing with the accommodation crisis and they have to compete in the private rental market. Some end up in insecure and unregulated digs. While some digs and similar accommodation are great and help with the accommodation issue, some shocking and disturbing reports are coming from students of having no choice but to avail of these digs.

The Minister for further and higher education said yesterday that students should not be inadvertently disadvantaged and he wants exemptions to the new rules to be considered for students. Then this morning, the Minister for housing conceded it would not be possible for students or other short-term tenants to have special exemptions. This half-baked, makey-uppy type of measure, therefore, is just not good enough.

Children in hotel rooms need stability in their lives, not a Government that will leave them high and dry to grow up in hotel or hostel rooms. Three generations of families squashed under one roof need homes of their own. Children who grow up in emergency accommodation can be deeply impacted. Their sense of security and of belonging can be deeply affected. Parents are made to feel like failures because they cannot get a home for their children, when in actual fact it is the Government that has failed them. It said it has put billions of euro into housing and yet our homeless figures continue to climb each month, now reaching over 15,000. The Government did not meet its targets last year and reports are now saying it will not meet them this year. Will the Government tell those young people who have had to leave our shores it is doing a great job and they should come back and pat it on the back?

One question needs to be answered. Will the Minister of State tell the House what cohort of people is guaranteed under these changes to rent pressure zones not to have its rents raised in the next couple of years?

17 June 2025

**Deputy Dessie Ellis:** I thank all those who took part in the cross-party Raise the Roof motion on the housing crisis. I also thank all those who took part in the Raise the Roof protest at the Dáil tonight. There will also be a Raise the Roof rally in Cork city on 21 June at 2 p.m. and CATU will have a national housing demonstration on 5 July in Dublin. We urge people to come out and support them.

Having listened to the speeches during the debate tonight, especially from the Government and those who sit on the Government benches, we get the impression things are okay and there is no emergency crisis in housing. The Government is living in a parallel universe quite different from the reality I have experienced in my office and in the community. Never have I seen such desperation and despair, with people and families regularly being made homeless, uprooted and spread across Dublin and elsewhere.

Did the Government never ask itself why this was happening? Did it never ask why the housing and homeless figures were continually rising, why people were not able to find a rental property, now costing over €2,000 and €3,000 a month in Dublin, why people were struggling to buy their own homes and why landlords were looking to get their properties back? The reality is this Government has failed to deliver enough social and affordable housing, even missing the low targets set out in its own programme for Government. Its overreliance on the private sector and support for vulture funds has added to the cost of housing. The average price of housing in Dublin is over €450,000, while the average nationally is €360,000 and rising. People are leaving this country mainly because of the cost of housing, whether for purchase or rental. The local authorities should be the main drivers of delivering social and affordable housing and should be financed accordingly. It is time the Government listened to the people and not bury its head in the sand with its failed policies.

Amendment put.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh):** Beidh an vóta seo tógtha ag an am céanna leis na vótaí eile istoíche amárach. The division is deferred until the weekly division time tomorrow evening.

## **Ceisteanna ar Sonraíodh Uain Dóibh - Priority Questions**

### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

71. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality the steps she is taking to retain early years educators in the sector, and therefore retain capacity; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32746/25]

**Deputy Claire Kerrane:** I wish to ask the Minister about our early years educators. Staff turnover rates are high, particularly for private providers. We also have issues with capacity and retaining our early years educators. Of course, pay is a key issue. What areas is the Minister looking at to ensure we retain our early years educators in order to build on the capacity that is very much needed?

**Minister for Children, Disability and Equality (Deputy Norma Foley):** I acknowledge that many early learning and childcare services report recruitment and retention challenges. In general, these challenges are not caused by insufficient supply of staff, but by high levels of turnover. Data from the sector profile survey shows a turnover rate of 24.5% in 2023, with almost one third of the turnover rate due to staff moving from one provider to another. I note that new data on the number of educators or practitioners working in the sector increased by 10% between 2023 and 2024.

Turnover is linked to pay and working conditions. However, while the Government is the primary funder of the sector, the State is not an employer of staff. Neither I nor my Department set pay or working conditions. The joint labour committee process is the mechanism by which employer and employee representatives can negotiate minimum pay rates, which are set down in law through employment regulation orders. Outcomes from the joint labour committee process are supported by the Government through core funding, which has seen its allocation increase from €259 million in year 1 to €350 million for the coming year 2025 to 2026. An additional €45 million has been ring-fenced to support employers in meeting the costs of further increases to the minimum rates of pay. This allocation is conditional on updated employment regulation orders.

I recently met joint labour committee representatives - in fact, I met them again today - to acknowledge their important role and to emphasise the Government's expectation that any newly negotiated orders fully utilise the ring-fenced the funding available. My officials also continue to discuss issues of recruitment and retention with stakeholders through a subgroup of the early learning and childcare stakeholder forum. While the general consensus of the group is that pay is the single biggest issue, the group continues to identify other actions, including: a student fast-track process; the assessment of unfinished qualifications; and an agreement to promote careers in the sector.

**Deputy Claire Kerrane:** I thank the Minister. We have known for quite some time that pay is the single biggest issue. It has become and continues to be the main issue. While the work of the joint labour committee continues, we are now well into June and it unfortunately appears there is a wide gap between one side of the table and the other on the joint labour committee. SIPTU is seeking that providers must pay a minimum of €15 per hour to our early years educators. As this process continues, I am concerned that we do not appear to be getting anywhere.

A total of €45 million is on the table. In fairness to the Minister, while she has, of course, said she is independent of the process, which I respect, she has been direct in saying that the money needs to be spent to build and ensure the highest increase possible. I welcome the Minister's meeting today. Does she see any further progress on the issue of pay?

**Deputy Norma Foley:** There is agreement across the House that money ring-fenced for staff should go to staff. I acknowledge that has been Deputy Kerrane's personal view from the beginning. I met joint labour committee representatives today and I have met them previously. While they are entirely independent of me, it is important I take every opportunity, as the Deputy has, to articulate that money on the table is specifically ring-fenced for staff. It should go directly to them.

While I referenced it briefly earlier, I wish to mention that although pay is a key component, other important issues were identified by the group as well. For example, the student fast-track process was an important issue for the group where students who have reached a particular

level, such as level 5, could be acknowledged for that and work as they moved to levels 7 and 8.

**Deputy Claire Kerrane:** I would like to see the figures from previous JLCs on the amount of money brought forward by the Government in previous budgets and the amount of money that was actually spent on whatever the increase was. We will find quite a gap there, particularly when we look at the last increase and the length of time it took to achieve that. It was little or nothing in real terms.

Regarding the JLC itself, we all recognise that pay is a major issue. Once this JLC has concluded its work, which I hope will be sooner rather than later, and ahead of September, would the Minister be willing to look at the process again and perhaps conduct a review of how pay is determined? While I appreciate entirely that the Government and the State do not pay the wages, it is providing significant funds from taxpayer money. A total of €45 million is being provided in the latest round, as just one example. Based on the process and the Minister's meetings and engagements on this issue, on which she has been forceful, does she think it would be worthwhile after this next increase to look at the process in place?

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I will absolutely know a lot when this process concludes. I have always been clear that there are two elements to this, namely, the providers and the employees. One cannot work without the other. They must work together in the best interests of the children we serve. The mechanism we have currently, as the Deputy has outlined, is the joint labour committee. We have all made our views clear as to how we would like to see that process work, while respecting the independence of the committee.

I will be in a better position to judge everything once all of this process is concluded. I want the best possible outcome. I have been clear in that regard. I hope that will be delivered. Our core aim is to ensure that we have viable costs for parents and a sufficiency of places and that staff who work in the sector are suitably recompensed.

## Disability Services

72. **Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality to provide an update on the current unfilled positions in CDNTs across the State; to outline her plans to deliver on assessments and therapies for children with autism; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32285/25]

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** Will the Minister of State provide an update on the current unfilled positions within CDNTs across the State and outline the plans to deliver on assessments and therapies for children with autism? We are all shocked with the assessment of need situation. Some 15,000 children at this point are being failed when it comes to the delivery of those assessments. Basically, the Government is in breach of the law. This figure could rise to 25,000. I will repeat what Cara and Mark Darmody said. Not only are they utterly dissatisfied with these figures, but they also do not believe the Government has explored the capacity in the private sector in this regard.

**Minister of State at the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (Deputy Hildegarde Naughton):** I thank Deputy Ó Murchú for his question. This Government is committed to enhancing the delivery of supports and services for all children in Ireland with additional needs, including autistic children. It is important to emphasise that an autism assessment or an



assessment of need is not required for a child to access primary care, CDNTs or CAMHS. The Government accepts that waiting lists for assessments of need are too long. We are working to ensure that all children's disability network teams are fully staffed with the appropriate expertise and that the waiting list is reduced.

I am advised by the Health Service Executive that the most recent CDNT data available show that there are 2,009 posts filled in CDNTs across the country and 445.4 posts vacant. A workforce survey conducted in April this year shows that staffing levels in CDNTs across the country rose by 8% when compared with a previous review in October last year. By way of comparison, some 29% of posts in CDNTs were unfilled in October 2023. In April this year, the percentage of unfilled posts fell to 18%. This represents an overall growth in the workforce of 414.5 whole time equivalents in CDNTs between October 2023 and April 2025. These posts have been delivered through the concerted efforts of the HSE, my Department and other partners, including the Department of higher education. I recognise the work done to address this issue but I also know the CDNT vacancy rate remains too high and intensive work will continue in this year to bolster CDNT services through ensuring sufficient team members are available across the country.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** There are 414.5 whole-time equivalents. I thank the Minister of State. As she said, while this is a welcome increase, a huge number of posts still need to be filled. I fear we are still talking about another four or five years, based on that growth, to deal with the number of unfilled positions. As I have asked this before, does the Minister of State believe that if all these positions, given how long will that take, will we have a fit-for-purpose service? There are issues in the delivery of the assessment of need. While I have no issue with having conversations with stakeholders, particularly SLTs, OTs and whoever else about the best way to deliver both assessments and therapies, I am very afraid of a move that is just about changing the law so the Government is not in breach of the law on assessments of need.

**Deputy Hildegarde Naughton:** A number of things are happening here. There is an increased demand for assessments of need. We are all very aware of the reasons for that. For many, it is about getting access to services as well as wanting to know about a disability and getting a diagnosis. All these form part of the demands on the system. The Deputy will know we are doing work through a Cabinet committee on disability. We have been meeting very frequently to examine the assessment of need process. We are rolling out regional assessment hubs across all the regional health areas across the country to get through these waiting lists but this not just about reducing waiting lists. This is about ensuring that children and adults are getting access to the therapies they require. That is very much at the forefront of my mind. If that requires legislative change, that is something we will look at but we are also doing domestic and international recruitment, incentives for retention, recruitment drives within the CDNTs and going into secondary schools and promoting the value of working within CDNTs and in these positions across the country.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** Recruitment and workforce planning are absolutely necessary. We all know the plan needs to be about delivering therapies to those who require them. There are still issues regarding schools and others where, no matter what answer I get from the Government benches, parents are still being told they require an assessment of need.

What is the plan in relation to the assessment of need? I get where the general plan is but can I have a timeline for when the Minister of State believes all these positions will be filled? I fear that pay and numbers might have contributed to the suppressed positions. Does she believe

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that if all these positions were filled, and I accept she may be looking at changes to assessments and therapies, the service could then be provided to the children and families who are being failed now?

**Deputy Hildegarde Naughton:** To answer the last question first, ensuring that children have access to the therapies they need is absolutely my priority and our priority as a Government. It is for that reason that my colleague the Minister, Deputy McEntee is continuing the work that myself and the Minister, Deputy Foley did when we were in the Department of Education on special education with in-school speech and language therapists and occupational therapists going in to our special schools. That will also alleviate the demand for these therapies across the country. We are also looking at increasing the clinical placements in CDNTs and developing that pipeline of initiatives to ensure we retain and attract more therapists.

In our third level institutions 150 extra speech and language and occupational therapist places were provided from last September. We want to increase that number every year. The Minister for higher education, Deputy Lawless, is working very hard on that. This is a real concerted effort by the Government to ensure that children and adults have access to the therapies they need.

I cannot give the Deputy a definitive timeline but I assure him we are working really hard to try to ensure children get access to these therapies.

### **Disabilities Assessments**

73. **Deputy Claire Kerrane** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality the actions she has taken to date to reduce the assessment of need waiting list; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32747/25]

**Deputy Claire Kerrane:** My question follows on from the previous one. What actions is the Minister of State taking to reduce the ever growing waiting lists for assessment of need? We know from the HSE that it expects the waiting list will exceed 24,000 and will be closer to 25,000 by the end of this year.

**Deputy Hildegarde Naughton:** As I have said, the Government absolutely recognises that waiting times for assessment of need is far too long and we are committed to reforming the assessment of need process.

Both this Department and the HSE have been working intensively to progress measures to address these waiting times. I want to emphasise again to parents that while children have a right to apply for the assessment of need, they do not need one to access health services, including those provided by primary care, CDNTs or mental health services.

Demand for assessments of need, as we all acknowledge, has increased significantly in recent years, which is a reflection of both the increase in population and an increase in the number of families exploring all options to ensure their children receive appropriate services.

The HSE advises that in 2024 it received more than 10,000 assessment of need applications, which is more than double the 4,700 applications received in 2020. The most recent data from the HSE show that at the end of March over 15,000 assessment of needs were overdue for completion. To address this, the HSE is working to increase its capacity to deliver assessment

of need. Over the past year, there has been an improvement in the number of assessments of need completed, with an increase of 30% in 2024 compared to 2023. Recent HSE data show that this trend is continuing this year with a 65% increase in completed assessments of need in the first three months of the year compared to the same period last year.

This has been achieved by a number of measures, including the assessment of need waiting list initiative agreed by the Government, which targets those families waiting longest for an assessment of need with funding provided for the procurement of assessments from approved private providers.

As I said earlier in reply to the Deputy's colleague, regional assessment hubs are being rolled out by the HSE. They are aligned with the six new HSE regions. We are also reviewing potential legislative changes in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General to support the effectiveness and efficiency of the assessment of need process.

**Deputy Claire Kerrane:** I thank the Minister of State for her reply. She may not have them with her but is it possible to get figures? She gave percentage increases of 30% and 65% in the first few months of this year. If she has the figures for what that means in the numbers of assessments of need, that would be really helpful.

While the Government continues to build public capacity which is very important, the Minister of State previously said that funding will not be an issue in accessing private capacity. Has the HSE examined how much more private capacity can be reached to see how many more people can be taken off the waiting list?

Can the Minister of State update us on staffing and the set up and establishment of the regional assessment hubs? Where are they at in terms of their establishment and set up? What will they mean for people in those areas on the waiting lists?

**Deputy Hildegard Naughton:** I do not have a breakdown of the numbers of children who have gone through the process but there has been a 65% increase in assessments in the first three months compared with the same period last year. Even with that said, we know we have a lot more work to do to get through that. I might not have said it earlier, but we absolutely acknowledge people's statutory right to have access to an assessment of need process. What we want to do here is make sure we have the pipeline of therapists coming through. We are relying on the private sector too and we allocated in budget 2025. Those private assessments are being carried out this year. I can get the exact figure. It is approximately 2,800 this year but I will come back to the Deputy to confirm that. We are examining what we can do in regard to therapy assistants to try to assist therapists in getting clinical placements within CDNTs. The Minister for education is ramping up in-school therapies in our special schools. My door is open. If there are other suggestions from the Deputy, I would welcome them.

**Deputy Claire Kerrane:** I thank the Minister of State. I presume and expect that, as we come to budget 2026, she will consider further capacity to reduce waiting lists further, in particular as the HSE is expected to exceed a waiting list of 24,000 by the end of the year, an incredible figure. We need to consider how much we can get from private capacity.

In her final response, the Minister of State might speak about regional assessment hubs. When will they be established? What will they mean for people on waiting lists? Do we know how many children and people on waiting lists will be seen? How will the system work and play a role in reducing and tackling long waiting lists?

**Deputy Hildegarde Naughton:** Regional assessment hubs are being rolled out. We had a meeting with the CEO of the HSE, Bernard Gloster, on that. I can get updated information for the Deputy on that. My understanding is that they are starting to be rolled out. That will help to reduce waiting lists.

We have also worked with the HSE to seek to introduce specific recruitment and retention initiatives for therapists to work in CDNTs, along with a CDNT sponsorship programme with bursaries for fourth year and postgraduate students, linked to the acceptance of a traditional job offers.

There have been recruitment fairs, including one in May where one of the focus areas was on therapies and therapists. We are going into secondary schools around the country to encourage people to work in social care and talking about the value of working in these areas. There is a huge drive to encourage more people to get into this area. We also need to examine other Departments which are drawing on the assessment of need process where they do not need to and it is not required.

### Childcare Services

74. **Deputy Barry Ward** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality regarding the gradual reduction of childcare costs as committed to in the programme for Government; the steps she has taken to progress this policy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32763/25]

**Deputy Barry Ward:** I am sure the Minister campaigned, as I did, on the issue of childcare during the election campaign. It has remained a live issue since. We are committed to reducing that cost gradually. It is a commitment in the programme for Government. Will the Minister update us on the progress on that policy?

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I thank the Deputy. Earlier this month, I announced the introduction of maximum fee caps for all partner services in core funding from September 2025. The fee freeze will remain in place for all partner services with fees below these caps. This is an important step towards the reduction of childcare fees to €200 per month over the lifetime of this Government.

Maximum fee caps were introduced for new services last year, and this September they will be extended to existing services. Under the new fee caps, the highest possible fees will be no more than €295 per week for a full day of 40 to 50 hours per week. Once the national childcare scheme subsidy is taken into account, the maximum fee for a parent in this situation will be less than €200 per week. This latest measure builds on a range of supports already in place.

The early childhood care and education, ECCE, programme provides two years of preschool without charge and has participation rates of 96%. The national childcare scheme complements ECCE, giving universal and targeted subsidies to reduce costs to parents. Recent improvements include the extension of the universal subsidy to children under 15 and two increases to the minimum hourly subsidy, now worth €96.30 per week for 45 hours. Almost 220,000 children benefited from a subsidy in 2024. Since last September, children in childminding settings can also benefit from national childcare scheme subsidies.

In addition, the fee management system introduced through core funding has made sure the investment in affordability is not absorbed by unnecessary fee increases. Core funding has enjoyed high participation rates to date, with 92% of services taking part. Preparations for the first Estimates process for this Government are under way and I am committed to bringing forward proposals to make further progress in this area. Work is also under way to develop an action plan to build an affordable, high-quality and accessible early learning and childcare system, informed by stakeholder consultation. This will set out future steps to reduce the cost of childcare further to €200 per month.

**Deputy Barry Ward:** I thank the Minister for the update. I appreciate the progress that is being made on the fee caps. Is there a timeline for when we can achieve that? I know the commitment is within the lifetime of the Government, but the sooner we can do this the better.

As I am sure is the case for the Minister, parents contact me constantly to tell me they are being forced into making unpalatable financial decisions about work and what they do with their children. Many families cannot go to work because it is simply not financially viable for them to do so. We need to ensure that is never the case. These are important life decisions that people should be able to make freely. I know the Minister will agree with this.

If this is not done by the end of next year, for example, will we be in a position to report serious progress at that stage? Rather than waiting for the lifetime of the Government, can we do something more quickly to deliver for parents? Parents are crying out for our commitment to be delivered and we all know how important it is.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I want to be clear. This is a commitment over the lifetime of the Government. The more quickly we take steps the better, and the more quickly we will be able to deliver.

In the fewer than five months during which the Government has been in office, we have taken the first very significant step regarding fee caps. We should not underestimate the significance of fee caps. Families who, prior to this, were paying €325 saw a reduction to €295, and with the subsidy they are now paying less than €200 per week. That is an example of the trajectory we wish to follow.

I also acknowledge that, while we were doing that for the significant number of people paying very high fees, the fee freeze remains in place for the others. There are a number of different streams. The objective is to ensure the costs for parents are affordable, there are sufficient places and staff in the sector are being remunerated appropriately.

**Deputy Barry Ward:** I acknowledge the progress that has been made and I do not want to belittle that progress. Fees of less than €200 per week are a significant step forward. I appreciate the budgetary commitment I hope we will see later this year in that regard to ensure we continue on that trajectory. I also acknowledge that it is a commitment over the lifetime of this Government, but I know the Minister will appreciate that, the sooner we can do it, the better for everybody involved.

The Minister mentioned sufficient places. That has to be the dual threat that comes with this. Can we put in place a policy to ensure childcare facilities are not closing down? A service in the Presbyterian church on York Road in Dún Laoghaire closed without explanation recently, which has caused massive upset for the parents involved.



I live in Honeypark in Dún Laoghaire, an area with a lot of young families. I note a site earmarked for a childcare facility has now been advertised for sale in the commercial property pages of *The Irish Times*. Are we ensuring there will be sufficient places, continued delivery of childcare facilities and places for the children who need them?

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I have always been very clear that this is like a triangle. There is no point in reducing fees if there are no places for children to attend, and there is no point in having children available and reduced fees if we do not have staff who will work in the sector. There are three elements to this.

On having sufficient places, I want to be clear. Sufficient funding has been provided by Government in terms of core funding. There has been an unprecedented level of investment by Government. There has been a net increase of 226 providers moving into this area. Notwithstanding that, we have to continue working the area.

The Government recently announced the building blocks scheme, which will provide an additional 1,500 places. Equally, there is a commitment from Government, through the forward planning unit, that where there is a lack of capacity being delivered in certain areas, we will move forward with a public model where that might be necessary.

**Deputy Barry Ward:** I note the 226 net increase, which is a significant figure and certainly to be praised. In the context of places like where I live in Dún Laoghaire, where the cost of property and rent is much higher, is the Department doing anything to specifically safeguard urban childcare environments where the living costs for people working in those centres might be higher? We know teachers are leaving the education sector because they cannot live in Dublin and are going elsewhere. The same is true of childcare facilities. Is the Minister aware of childcare facilities that are closing? Is her Department doing any analysis of why that might be? Are steps being taken to safeguard the facilities against this happening? Appreciating the work that has been done, the unprecedented investment the Minister mentioned, the progress we have made and the progress we have yet to make, will the Minister assure parents in Dún Laoghaire, in Dublin and in Ireland that if their children are in childcare, those facilities will, to the greatest extent possible, continue to provide services? The Minister appreciates the need for sufficiency of service and the need to support these childcare providers.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** Obviously it is a core objective of the Government that we would maximise the number of providers in place. To do this we are lending support to private providers through schemes such as building blocks. We have also said we will step in where there is an absence of providers in an area. We are doing work on how this public model would look and what it would look like. Issues have been raised about the commitment in the planning guidelines to have places available for populations of 75 houses. Childcare facilities have been built which are not being used as childcare facilities. I am working with the Minister for housing to ensure there will be updated guidelines for planning in this respect. If a facility is built it needs to be used for the purpose for which it was built, in this instance for the provision of childcare. Significant work has been done to support smaller providers. Previously the lower base of funding they had was a guaranteed €8,500. The base income that is guaranteed has increased to €14,400. Quite a body of work is under way.

**Ceisteanna Eile - Other Questions**

*Question No. 75 taken with Written Answers.*

**Disability Services**

**76. Deputy Paul Lawless** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality the steps she is taking to ensure that children with disabilities receive early intervention and treatment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32482/25]

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** Early intervention is critical. I want to ask about CDNT vacancies. What is the number of vacancies? What is the percentage of vacant posts throughout the CDNT network? What are the long-term and short-term strategies to address recruitment issues?

**Deputy Hildegarde Naughton:** The Government recognises the importance of early intervention for children with disabilities and ensuring they receive the right services at the right time. Under the programme for Government, we are committed to ensuring children and their families who need early intervention and therapy input can access it in a timely way.

The key vehicle for change and improvement is the roadmap for service improvement for disability services for children and young people. The implementation of this roadmap is well under way and will continue until 2026. The roadmap contains an important set of actions that, collectively, will enhance children's disability services in Ireland. They include significant measures to integrate and improve access to services, expand the workforce and advance better communication and engagement with families. A key part of this work has been the improvement of access to services through the children's disability network teams, CDNTs. They are providing supports and services to more than 43,000 children.

I fully acknowledge that there is still a lot more to do. Recruitment and retention of health and social care professionals is the most significant challenge and work is ongoing to increase staffing levels. The HSE has advised that the most recent CDNT workforce survey available was conducted in April. This survey demonstrates an overall national increase of an additional 8% in staffing in CDNTs, compared with the workforce at the review in October 2024. This brings the total number of whole-time equivalents to 2,009. The Department is working with the HSE to introduce specific recruitment and retention incentives for therapists to work in CDNTs, including a sponsorship initiative and facilitating direct access for funded agencies to existing professional panels.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** How many vacancies do we have in the CDNTs? What is the number? What is the percentage? What are the strategies on this? The Minister of State alluded earlier to the strategy being recruitment in secondary schools. Am I right in saying this? Are we to believe the crisis will not be solved for a number of years? What are we doing to entice the wonderful graduates in this field who are now in Australia, Canada and the UAE? What strategy does the Minister of State have in place to bring these people home? This is the quickest way to unlock the crisis.

**Deputy Hildegarde Naughton:** We are doing a number of things in recruitment and retention. We have bursaries in place. We are opening up HSE panels. We have HSE advertising streams. We also have a number of fairs, including one in May where one of the top priorities

was to recruit people and to introduce people to social care therapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists. We have 150 extra therapists going through our third level institutions and there will be more again this year. We are looking at therapy assistants. We have therapists going into our special schools. We also have incentives for therapists to work in our CDNTs. We have more than €10 million in funding. Additional funding has been made available by the Government for children's services. This funding focuses on recruiting various positions in CDNTs, including 20 senior therapists, 20 staff grade posts, 20 health and social care assistant posts and 15 clinical training posts. Measures are also being taken to assist with sustainably addressing the backlog in the assessment of needs.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** I have to say if I were a parent listening to this I would be incredibly frustrated. The Minister of State has, perhaps, a mid- to long-term plan but very little to alleviate the crisis today. There is a window of opportunity. These children will miss their targets. They will be significantly disadvantaged. For some it will mean the difference between being able to live independently or not. We have many wonderful professionals abroad. They are living abroad for many reasons. The Minister of State has not answered the question so I assume she has no plan to bring them home.

I will give an example. I spoke to a number of psychologists who had to leave this country to get training because there were not enough assistant psychologists posts available. These people are highly educated. They completed their doctorates in places such as Britain. The HSE does not have a clear pathway to bring these people home. One psychologist has been trying to work in the HSE for more than a year and has been met with bureaucracy and red tape.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh):** Go raibh maith agat.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** This is the type of proactive solution and policy I want the Minister of State to address. These are wonderful Irish graduates-----

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh):** Go raibh maith agat a Theachta.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** -----some of whom graduated with their basic degree in Ireland. They went away for doctoral training.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh):** Go raibh maith agat a Theachta.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** The HSE is not welcoming them home. Meanwhile we have a crisis today.

**Deputy Hildegard Naughton:** I assure Deputy Lawless that absolutely everything is being done. What is happening now is what I have just listed out. We also have domestic and international recruitment drives happening all the time, as we speak. We also have an expedited CORU registration process from this year. This is specifically for people who may have trained abroad and want to come here to work. We want to expedite this process. It has already been expedited. We are looking at absolutely everything. If there are particular cases, and Deputy Lawless is aware of particular people who are having issues with coming home or registering, my door is open. I absolutely assure him from a Government point of view there is a Cabinet committee that meets very regularly on recruitment drives and higher education. In-school therapists will be in place in September. The programme has been up and running since the

Minister and I were in the Department of Education. We want to roll this out. It is all about making sure that children and adults have access to therapists. We know there is big demand. We are lucky to have full employment in the country. With that comes these issues. Absolutely everything is being thrown at this. If Deputy Lawless has suggestions on what we can do, my door is open.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** Will the Minister engage with me on this?

**Deputy Hildegarde Naughton:** Deputy Lawless can come back to me afterwards.

### **Disability Services**

77. **Deputy Catherine Callaghan** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality the extent to which parents of adult children with a disability are consulted with regard to a future plan for their child; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32193/25]

**Deputy John Clendennen:** I would like an update on the extent to which parents or next-of-kin of adult children with a disability are consulted on future care and the provision they receive.

*10 o'clock*

**Deputy Hildegarde Naughton:** I thank the Deputy. On 26 April 2023, the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015, along with most of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Act 2022, were commenced, replacing the wards of court system. That Act places individuals at the centre of decisions that affect them and provides for the necessary supports to enable persons with capacity difficulties to retain control over their own affairs and the decisions that affect them. One of the principles of the Act is that a person is presumed to have capacity to make a decision unless it is shown otherwise. A third party, such as a parent or other family member, does not have an automatic entitlement to be involved. Where a person's capacity to make a particular decision is in question, or may shortly be in question, their capacity is assessed specifically regarding that decision. This is known as a functional capacity assessment, whereby capacity is assessed on an issue- and time-specific basis. A person may lack capacity to make one decision but have capacity to make another decision. All practicable steps must be taken to help the relevant person whose capacity is being called into question to make their own decisions, and the relevant person's capacity to make a specific decision must only be assessed if they are still unable to make the decision after such supports have been provided. Service providers must work to enable a person to make their decision through the use of supports appropriate to their capacity to make that decision. Where persons lack decision-making capacity and require decision-making supports to meet their ongoing needs, they can seek to put in place a decision support arrangement under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015. The HSE has prepared a suite of person-centred plan resources for people with a disability, their families and service providers across adult disability services. I am not sure if that is what the Deputy specifically referred to, but that is the recent Act.

**Deputy John Clendennen:** I thank the Minister of State. The future and provision of care as to how a parent's or guardian's loved ones will be looked after, particularly after they have passed, is something that keeps people up at night. The appointment of decision-making capacity and assistance with it is important, but there needs to be an element of understanding that the

next of kin, where there is one, is given the opportunity to assist in that regard. What we do in the present will give a sense of confidence as to what will happen in the future. One issue that has been raised with me frequently in recent times is the wait times for assessment and delays in applications for people who are already in a healthcare setting, particularly where someone is in a residential care setting for the elderly, but may be of a younger age and may not need a facility to that extent, and are not stimulated or motivated by it. We need to ensure that we are giving confidence to loved ones within families in that regard to ensure their more vulnerable family members are being adequately looked after.

**Deputy Hildegarde Naughton:** As the Deputy was speaking, I was reminded of people in a similar situation who have come into my constituency office. Often they are parents who have a grown-up adult child. Their question is what will happen to their child when the parents pass away. We cannot always answer those questions, but they will be looked after. It is all about this forward planning and having the data.

As the Deputy knows, we are working on a national disability strategy, which will be published over the coming weeks. These are the questions I want us to be able to answer during the term of this Government and to set out a vision regarding these services, to make sure that families and people with disabilities know where they are going and have that person-centred plan in place. On 29 May 2024, the HSE launched a suite of person-centred plan resources for people with disabilities, their families and service providers. That was a good learning module. It is something we want to do, but we need the data to forward plan and to know. We need a mapping exercise across the country regarding the facilities within the Deputy's county and my county in order that people know where they can go for day or residential care. We have to look toward independent living.

**Deputy John Clendennen:** I acknowledge the efforts the Minister of State has made in this area. I recently met with the Muiríosa Foundation. The work it does in this space is commendable and is very welcome in terms of the initiatives it is bringing forward, particularly to encourage individuals with a disability into the workplace, into education and into different services. There is an element of needing to ensure there is an adequate service there to meet that level of dependency. Local employers are providing a couple of hours of work a day to get people out of the house and give them a sense of routine. It is rewarding for more than just the individual who is receiving that opportunity to get into the workplace. We need to see more initiatives such as that. Everything we do in this space today will reassure those family members of the days in the future when they may not necessarily be around to look after them. I acknowledge the work the Minister of State has done, but the timeframe for assessment, such as psychiatric reports from doctors or otherwise, needs to be done in a timely manner. We need to continue to work on the services that we are providing.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** It is a huge issue for families who want to plan for their child with a disability. As we know, many of them are dealing with children who have huge challenges. I agree with the Deputy that we have all dealt with issues where it relates to the bureaucracy. There is an issue in ensuring that assessments are made within a decent time. We know that a number of people, agencies and whoever else have had issues where cases have had to be resolved by court, and we are talking about log-jammed court system. What is being done with regard to reviewing this process to streamline it and make it work for everybody? We want to be able to support the person with a disability, but we also need to make sure that we have a system that is fit for purpose and that we engage with all necessary stakeholders, particularly when we are talking about families who provide huge support, alongside those who work within the



services as well. We do not need what we intend to be a solution to become a problem.

**Deputy Hildegard Naughton:** Both Deputies have raised important points. For example, when somebody is leaving the school setting, there needs to be a transition. We are doing work in that regard. The person-centred plan has been developed with each person, his or her family and his or her support person, looking at ensuring that this person with a disability is making informed choices about what he or she wants to do, be it a job, training or a day service. A few weeks ago, the Ministers, Deputies Foley and Calleary, and I launched the wage subsidy scheme, which incentivises employers to employ people with disabilities. Sometimes that is the obstacle. At other times, the obstacle is the transport for the person to get to the job and the job is not the issue. That is why this national disability strategy that we are working on will include areas such as this regarding transitions from school into the workplace and day centres and how we can support people to be able to live independently in their own homes, to get a job and to make their own personal choices. I take on board the issues the Deputies raised regarding timely assessments. I will be following up on that.

### **Childcare Services**

78. **Deputy Joe Cooney** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality the number of new childcare providers who have entered the sector in each of the past five years; the number of childcare providers who have left the sector in each of the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32214/25]

**Deputy Joe Cooney:** One issue that always arises during my weekly clinics in County Clare is the lack of childcare places. This is such an enormous stress for almost all working parents. An adequate level of such facilities is important from an educational perspective, but also as critical enablers for parents to join the workforce. Will the Minister provide a breakdown of the number of childcare providers that have entered and left the sector over the last five years?

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I thank the Deputy. Every year it is normal for some services to open and for some services to close. The year 2024 saw a five-year high in the number of childcare services opening and a five-year low in the number of early learning and childcare services closing. A total of 357 services opened, while 131 services closed, which resulted in a net increase of 226 childcare services opening in 2024. There have been year-on-year increases in the number of childcare services opening since registration of school-age childcare began in 2019. The register and related data are updated monthly by Tusla and reported to my Department the following month. The data I have available from Tusla from the end of 2024 indicates a total of 5,106 childcare services were registered with Tusla at that time. Last year, as I mentioned, there was a net increase of 226 childcare services and previous years also saw net increases in the number of childcare services. The net increase and total number of childcare services was 46, 51, 30 and 129 in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, respectively. Year on year, we are seeing a net increase and that is testament to the significant amount of State funding going into this sector to support providers, while also ensuring we have additional places and staff who are appropriately remunerated.

**Deputy Joe Cooney:** Having spoken to several childcare providers, the main concern for the viability of sector is staff retention. I am not surprised, given the information I have received. I understand an SNA can be applied to a primary school having completed a 12-week certificate course, while a childcare educator must have a minimum FETAC level 5 qualifica-

tion, which is a one to two year process.

A childcare educator is paid an average of €4 per hour with less work, more hours and lower holiday entitlements. It is no wonder the staff in this sector feel undervalued and are walking away in significant numbers. Childcare facilities are the foundation stone for the growth, development and education journey of all children. I ask the Minister to give serious consideration to a root-and-branch review of how these facilities and staff are valued and funded and to bring their level of bureaucracy in line with other education services such as our primary schools, for example.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I thank the Deputy. To be clear, I am under no illusions regarding the importance of retaining staff in this sector. I have been clear on that from the outset. We can make all the progress we want in having additional places and more accommodations available but if we do not have staff working in the sector, we achieve nothing at all.

Suffice to say, the Government has put €45 million on the table for this year that is ring-fenced, solely for the purpose of ensuring there will be an increase in wages for staff working in the sector. The decision on that, however, is a matter for the joint labour committee which is independent of the Government. I have met committee members on a couple of occasions and have been clear on my personal view on all that funding being used for staff but it will be an independent decision. Nevertheless, I am very clear about the importance of paying staff appropriately.

**Deputy Joe Cooney:** I thank the Minister for her positive reply. I wish to raise one final point with the Minister regarding extra capacity that may be within the system without any extra facilities, highlighted by this direct quote from the manager of one facility. The manager stated that allocation of a blanket of 35 hours childcare per week to a family without full consideration of their circumstances is completely clogging up the system. Moreover, the manager regularly sees 45 hours allocated to families with one or both parents at home for whatever reason. The manager noted that while every child should have an allocation of hours for socialisation, the allocation of 45 hours per week while a parent or parents are home should be discouraged and concluded by stating that this facility could potentially take another 30 children off the waiting list if the process around how hours are allocated were re-examined.

I suggest the Minister examine this process to see if an amendment would deliver taking extra childcare spaces in the short term.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** While the pay and conditions of staff are incredibly important, the physical buildings in which they operate are also important. While I particularly welcome the building blocks programme which was an important initiative, the Minister and I know the limitations of that. We could do with a few more bob from the Department of public expenditure - if it was giving it to the Minister - but also for the cap on it. Unfortunately, in Dublin, the €750,000 cap prevents some of the really good, experienced, community-led childcare programmes from expanding. I ask the Minister to continue to do all she can in this area in providing more capital funding, as well the pay and conditions for staff.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I thank Deputies Cooney and McAuliffe. I will go to the last question first. The building blocks scheme has been positively welcomed and will deliver an additional 1,500 places, which is hugely important. The budget available for that was €25 million and I appreciate this brings its own constraints but it is delivering 1,500 additional places. As I

previously outlined, we are also working on payment for staff with the money being ring-fenced and put on the table being the €45 million.

Specifically on Deputy Cooney's question, it is very difficult to determine families who have different needs at different times and therefore may require longer or lesser hours in a childcare facility. It is a matter for parents in this respect because we do not know their individual circumstances but I hear the point he raises.

### **Childcare Services**

**79. Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality the measures being taken to address the shortage of after-school childcare places in the mid-Cork region; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32414/25]

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Parents in different parts of mid-Cork have raised with me the difficulty they have in getting available after-school childcare. They are possibly travelling long distances or waiting a long time to get a place, if they are lucky enough to do so. Could the Minister outline what steps are being taken to make available additional places across mid-Cork?

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I acknowledge the Deputy's question which specifically asks about after-school and general childcare places.

Early learning and childcare capacity is increasing, which is an important point to make at the outset. The estimated number of enrolments increased by approximately 19% between 2022 and 2024. Enrolments in Cork county and city each increased by almost 29% in the same period. Core funding application data shows between years one and three of the scheme, annual place hours increased by more than 15%. The growth in school age childcare plans has been particularly strong. Data from Tusla shows there was an increase of 34 services on the school-age register in Cork alone in 2024.

We continue to support sustainability and expansion of the sector through ongoing development and resourcing of core funding, which has given rise to a significant expansion of places since the scheme was first introduced. Core funding supports providers with operating costs based on the number of places available.

A forward planning and delivery unit within the Department has been expanded, with the allocation of additional staff in its pursuit of an ambitious programme of work. For the first time, the programme for Government commits to providing capital investment to build or purchase State-owned early learning and childcare facilities to create additional capacity in areas where unmet need exists. The programme for Government also sets out the ambition to work with schools to host before- and after-school childcare in school buildings, as well as planning the development of State-led early learning and childcare facilities in tandem with the school building programme.

Last year, the Department of education published procedures on the use of school property and sports facilities outside of school hours - I was keen to publish this and did so last year. This guideline provides encouragement and guidance to schools to make available facilities for early learning and childcare and other community purposes when the space is not required by

the school. Officials have met several times with officials from the Department of education planning and building unit to share expertise and information on this.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Last August in Cloghduff, the only provider in that area withdrew from the core funding and left local parents in a very difficult position. This is an area that has seen considerable building of houses in recent years with more homes currently under construction and strong demand for childcare nearby. Another mum was in contact with me who said she had signed up with nine different facilities, chasing after school services around Ballincollig, Cross Barry and the Farran area. She was told it would be 2026 before she could expect a place to be available. She wants to work full-time which is a real challenge for her due to the lack of after-school childcare. There is a similar situation for a mum in Millstreet working in the Cork area.

Are there recognised black spots and particular measures which could be there to support parents in these areas?

**Deputy Norma Foley:** We absolutely recognise that there are areas across the country where it is extremely challenging for the needs of parents to be met. For this reason, the Department is taking a number of initiatives, such as the building blocks extension scheme to provide assistance for an existing provider to put on an extension and to provide for more places. Where that is not a possibility and where no provider is in place, there is a commitment in the programme for Government to introduce State-led facilities. There would be a public model for the purchasing or building of a facility to provide for the needs in an area. To support this work, there is now a forward planning unit in the Department, specifically looking at areas of the country where there is an absence of facilities. Where that is found to be the case, the Department will step in to provide the public model.

**Deputy Aindrias Moynihan:** Tá dúshlán breise ag pobal na Gaeltachta toisc go dteastaíonn uainn ár dteanga a thabhairt slán don chéad ghlúin eile. Is baolach gurb amhlaidh go bhfuil níos lú roghanna againn dá bharr sin. Ní féidir taisteal chomh fada agus níl an rogha céanna ann. Tá muintir Ré na nDoirí ag lorg ionad cúram leanaí a chur ar fáil chun freastal ar dhaoine tar éis scoile. Tá muintir Bhéal Átha an Ghaorthaidh tar éis a bheith ag streachailt le heaspa foirgnimh ar feadh i bhfad, Tá gá le hionad cúram leanaí i mBaile Bhuirne chomh maith. An féidir a chinntiú go mbeidh tacaíocht chuí ar fáil do thuismitheoirí sna pobail seo?

Gaeltacht communities have a particular and added difficulty in ensuring facilities are available through Irish. Can the appropriate support be provided to parents in Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh, where they have struggled with a building recently? Families in Ré na nDoirí have plans to develop an after-school facility, which is needed in Baile Bhuirne as well.

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** Like the previous speaker, people have been contacting me from Ballincollig and surrounding areas to outline how they cannot get after-school placements or crèche facilities for their children. They are searching in mid-Cork and coming in to the city. I spoke to a lady recently who said that she had secured a childminder for the summer but that if she does not have a crèche and after-school facilities to mind her child in September, she will have to give up work. This lady and her husband must decide which of them will give up work because they cannot find care for their child in a crèche or somewhere after school, because they have other children as well. These are people who want to work and are doing everything right. The situation they find themselves in is unbelievable. One of them will have to give up work come September or the end of August, when the kids go back to school. What a situation

they are going to be in.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I will begin by addressing Deputy Gould's points. The express purpose last year of introducing the guidelines to schools was to ensure that they would have a freedom, at the end of the school day, to introduce things like after-school provision. As part of the guidelines, schools were informed that any funding they received through that would not impact on any grants they received from the Department of Education. It would a matter entirely for themselves to hold so that boards of management would feel that they had a freedom if it was their wish to provide after-school activities by having a provider step in, or whatever. I am just pointing out that this is a reality. Also, the public model I referred to earlier is looking at instances where no capacity is available in a particular area.

Tuigim go bhfuil gá le háiseanna a chur ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge freisin. I completely understand that there is a need for facilities that work through the medium of Irish to be provided for. This is not just in terms of childcare but also includes a range of facilities that fall within the remit of the Department. That is a hugely important initiative.

### **Childcare Services**

80. **Deputy Joe Cooney** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality regarding Tusla services in County Clare, the number of social workers employed; the number of vacancies for social workers; the length of time those positions have been vacant, the number of children with no allocated social worker; the number of children in need of either foster or residential care who are not currently placed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32215/25]

**Deputy Joe Cooney:** Recently, I had discussions with a number of people who have engaged with Tusla's alternative services in Clare. What I heard about the type and level of care being provided for some of the most vulnerable children in our society caused me great concern. I am here to get some answers as to the number of social workers, the number of vacancies, the turnover rate for social workers in Clare and the number of children who have no allocated social worker and who are currently placed in foster or residential care.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** The Department funds the provision of a range of Tusla services in County Clare, including family resource centres in Shannon, Kilrush, Ennistymon and Killaloe. These services do great work with children and families throughout Clare, and I am delighted to be able to support that work. According to information provided by Tusla on the number of social workers in Clare, I have been informed that 20 social workers are currently employed in the county. Three vacancies exist, and I understand that Tusla has undertaken a number of initiatives to address these vacancies, which are expected to be filled over the summer months. These vacancies originate from October 2023, May 2024 and June of this year.

While I acknowledge the efforts Tusla has made to resolve these specific vacancies, I am aware of the difficulties the agency has faced in recruiting and retaining social workers across the country, while child protection referral rates continue to increase year on year. In that context, Tusla has informed me that there are currently 77 children with no allocated social worker in County Clare. However, I understand that all of these children have been allocated a social care worker, and I am informed that all urgent cases receive a social work service. However, I acknowledge the critical importance of children in care, or in need of child welfare and protec-



tion services, being allocated a social worker.

The Department has actively engaged with Tusla and other stakeholders with regard to addressing issues relating to the supply, recruitment and retention of social workers. A significant range of initiatives have been undertaken in this regard, and Tusla achieved a national increase of almost 5% in social work employment levels between March 2024 and March 2025, with 79 whole-time equivalents.

In respect of the Deputy's query regarding the availability of care placements, Tusla has indicated that there are currently 11 children awaiting residential or foster care in County Clare. I am informed that Tusla has placed all these children in residential respite, short-term fostering or supported lodgings. It is a shared aim of the Department and Tusla to provide a significant and sufficient number of high-quality placements to children in care, and specific actions are being undertaken in this regard.

**Deputy Joe Cooney:** I have heard about a very low number of social workers and extremely high rates of staff burnout and staff turnover in Clare. This has resulted in severely traumatised children being handed from one social worker to another, with little or no continuity of care. I have heard of children with a foster family or residential placement being put into special emergency arrangements, through the out-of-hours service. This only operates from 6 p.m., as the Minister is aware, and children can be placed anywhere around the country. Social worker staff have to transport these very vulnerable children from Clare to wherever a place is available, perhaps in Donegal, Cork or wherever else.

Concerns have been raised with me that some of these providers may be unregulated and that the care being provided may not be the most appropriate for the needs of these children. I have heard from foster families who have to deal with increasingly complex care needs of vulnerable children who have been left without appropriate levels of support. I ask the Minister for an update.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I confirm that the Department allocated additional funding to Tusla in 2023 and 2024 and there was record investment in 2025. This included increased capital investment.

Regarding foster care, 87.2% of all children in State care are cared for in the foster care setting. I cannot overstate the importance of this. It is a great opportunity for children to be placed in the foster care setting, which is excellent. In recognition of that, even though it is at 82.7%, which is high, we want it to be higher. The Department has overseen significant investment in foster care supports, including the foster care allowance. This has been increased to €400 per week for children under 12 and €425 per week for children over 12. Today, there was an announcement in relation to the back-to-school clothing and footwear allowance. In addition, budget 2025 provided further investment and support directed towards children in foster care. This included an initial payment at the start of each foster care placement.

**Deputy Joe Cooney:** I thank the Minister, but everything I have heard on the ground tells me that the system is broken. A review of the issues I have highlighted is needed to make a start on improving things. Good people across the county are holding on by their fingertips and will leave unless a real attempt is made to address their concerns. These children need consistency in social worker staff in order to make progress. That is not happening because staff are walking away on a continual basis due to the pressure of a complex workload, limited

resources and a crumbling system. They are firefighting and it is impossible to sustain. The children need secure long-term accommodation. Foster families do wonderful work providing it. They provide complex care to some of the most vulnerable children in the country. They are not being supported properly and they are walking away. The lack of continuity of care is having a profound impact on the welfare of the children involved. It is the responsibility of the State to deliver and it is failing.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** As I said at the outset, there are 20 social workers in County Clare. All of the three current vacancies are due to be filled this summer, depending on whether they relate to a career break, maternity leave or whatever else, so they will be at their full capacity of 23 social workers.

I recognise the invaluable work of social workers. Across the country, there is a lack of social workers available to us. It is for that reason that social work, *per se*, is on the critical skills list of the Department of enterprise. It is also for that reason that new routes to social work training are in place. In UCC there is an apprenticeship model of earn-as-you-learn. That is very important because the wider we can cast the net for people to become involved in this field of work, the better. Some 320 additional places are being provided in further and higher education this year alone, and a significant number of them are in the area of social work.

### **Childcare Services**

81. **Deputy Grace Boland** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality the steps taken to reduce the cost of childcare to €200 per month, to date in 2025; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32101/25]

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Ireland's best asset is our hard-working men and women. It is crucial that we fund childcare as an essential infrastructure. I know this is something we have talked about many times before. The Minister might give us an update on what she has done to reduce the cost of childcare to €200 per month and what she plans to do to make sure we achieve it over the lifetime of the Government.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I appreciate the Deputy's ongoing engagement with me on this matter. She will be aware that earlier this month I announced the introduction of maximum fee caps for all partner services in core funding from September 2025. The fee freeze will remain in place for all partner services with fees below these caps. This is an important step towards the reduction of childcare fees to €200 per month over the lifetime of this Government.

Maximum fee caps were introduced for new services last year, and this September they will be extended to existing services also. Under the new fee caps, the highest possible fees will be no more than €295 per week for a full-day place of 40 to 50 hours per week. Once the national childcare scheme subsidy is taken into account, the maximum fee for a parent in this situation will be less than €200 per week.

This latest measure builds on a range of supports already in place. The early childhood care and education, ECCE, programme provides two years of preschool without charge and has participation rates of 96%. More than 70% of families say that if it was not a free service they would never have been able to access it.

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The national childcare scheme, NCS, complements ECCE, giving universal and targeted subsidies to reduce costs to parents. Recent improvements include the extension of the universal subsidy to children under 15 and two increases to the minimum hourly subsidy, now worth €96.30 per week for 45 hours. Almost 220,000 children benefited from a subsidy in 2024. Since last September, children in childminding settings can also benefit from national childcare scheme subsidies.

In addition, the fee management system introduced through core funding has made sure the investment in affordability is not absorbed by unnecessary fee increases. Core funding has enjoyed high participation rates to date, with 92% of services taking part.

Preparations for the first Estimates process for this Government are under way and I am committed to bringing forward proposals to make further progress in this area. Work is also under way to develop an action plan to build an affordable, high-quality, accessible early learning and childcare system, informed by stakeholder consultation. This will set out future steps to reduce the cost of childcare further to €200 per month.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** I very much welcome the work that has been done to date. As I stated, I hope we deliver the reduction in childcare of the lifetime of this Government, as it is essential.

I also highlighted with the Minister that it is not just the cost that is an issue for many parents who are trying to access childcare; it is also the access to childcare. As she is aware, I live in the youngest area in the country. Many parents like myself in Balbriggan, Skerries, Rush and Lusk simply do not have access to the childcare they need. Demand far outstrips supply, which is why I very much welcome the establishment of the forward planning and delivery unit. The Minister might please give us an update on the progress of this unit and on when we will see high-pressure areas like my constituency of Dublin Fingal West start to see the benefits of the work of this unit, particularly in the delivery of more childcare places.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I thank the Deputy very much. I acknowledge that she has consistently raised the very specific challenges in her area. She is correct that the cost of childcare is one thing; the remuneration of staff is another element of it; and there is also the availability of places or access to places. In that respect, there are a number of different initiatives. We already discussed that two weeks ago when we announced the Building Blocks scheme, which was of benefit to some, although not all, and will deliver an additional 1,500 places. The forward planning unit is an important unit within the Department. Work is currently under way to specifically identify an absence of provision. Other Deputies have identified places in their constituencies where there is an absence of provision; in other words, where there is greater demand than the provision that is available. That work is under way. Its purpose is to identify the areas and then to provide a stream of funding for a public model, whereby the State will step in to buy or build new childcare facilities.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** The Building Blocks scheme was welcome, but the eligibility criteria are limited and many private providers could not apply for it. The Minister might consider reopening the scheme and widening the eligibility criteria to enable private providers to apply. There are very few public childcare providers in Dublin Fingal West. I would love to see that being prioritised for delivery in the roll-out of the scheme. The Minister should please let me know if there is anything I can do to support it. I very much hope she gets the funding she needs in budget 2026.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** I very much welcome the childcare supports and subsidies. It is critically important that we reduce the cost.

I also want to raise with the Minister a poll by Amárach Research in 2024, which found that 69% of mothers with children under the age of 18 would prefer to stay at home if they could afford it. In addition, 76% of mothers felt that their work in the home is undervalued compared to work in society. We know that women who stay at home to look after their children provide a very valuable service to their families, the community and the economy. Many mothers have children with disabilities and it is a necessity for them to provide additional care, particularly in light of the lack of services that are available from the State. What amount of the additional funding presided over by the Minister in recent years is going into supports for mothers and families on this aspect of childcare?

**Deputy Thomas Gould:** They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Sinn Féin policy was to deliver childcare for €10 a day or €200 a month and then, lo and behold, just before the general election, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael said this was going to be their new policy as well and they would deliver it if re-elected. It has not been delivered. What is the timeline for the Government to deliver childcare for €10 a day or €200 a month? Will it be in this year's budget? Will it be in next year's budget? The Minister said she would phase it in. I am not sure whether she said it would be done over the lifetime of this Government or over a period of time. I am looking for clarity on that because, at the end of the day, commitments were given and they must be honoured.

**Deputy Norma Foley:** I thank the Deputies for their questions. On the last point, I have been very clear and the programme for Government is very clear: this will be delivered over the lifetime of this Government. It will be done in an incremental manner. One of the first key steps was taken just last week when we announced a fee cap would be put in place. We will build on that as we go forward.

Deputy Boland has engaged with me before about Building Blocks. It is a scheme with existing criteria, which is absolutely delivering for some. I hear what the Deputy is saying on the flexibility going forward. There has to be a clawback as well for the State. If funding is being provided by State, there must be commitments given for the length of time that they will continue to work in the area of childcare. It is a fine line that we walk there.

On the points that have been raised on mothers working at home and in particular mothers, which is very pertinent to both the Minister of State, Deputy Naughton, and myself, in the area of disability, there are specific funds relating to disability such as domiciliary care allowances. Fundings of that nature are made available. The key point is that even in childcare services there is a choice for people to avail of the service and that all are included in the service, including children with disabilities, whom the Deputy referenced. It is open to all.

**Deputy Paul Lawless:** What about the broader point of childcare? Are there any additional supports for those mothers?

**Deputy Norma Foley:** Specifically, that is a matter for the Department of Social Protection. I am speaking to our remit, which is childcare provision and care for disability.

## Disability Services

82. **Deputy Tony McCormack** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality for an update on her Department's work on the implementation of the UNCRPD. [32481/25]

**Deputy Hildegard Naughton:** Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCRPD, in 2018. Since ratification, Ireland's approach has been to ensure cumulative advancements over time. The programme for Government commits to delivering a new national disability strategy that will provide an overarching framework for advancing the State's obligations under the UNCRPD. In advance of the strategy, work continues unabated across government to advance implementation, with achievements including: increases in funding for disability services, including €3.2 billion in budget 2025 for HSE disability services; the ratification of the optional protocol to the UNCRPD; the publication of the Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026; publication of the autism innovation strategy; the commencement in 2023 of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015, as amended, which establishes a modern legal framework to support decision-making by adults who may have difficulty making decisions without help; the introduction of key programmes like the work and access scheme to support disabled people in accessing employment; and the publication of the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027.

The publication of the next national disability strategy will be the next milestone in Ireland's UNCRPD journey. That provides a whole-of-government framework for the advancement of rights. It will be ambitious. It will take action across a range of thematic pillars taken collectively that will capture the issues that most affect disabled people in their day-to-day lives, including education, employment, independent living, health and transport. It is codesigned with disabled people and their representative organisations. The strategy will provide a framework for sustaining and building on this progress and ensuring that disabled people are empowered to live full lives of their own choosing

**Deputy Tony McCormack:** I welcome the Department's leadership in advancing the national disability strategy. The shift towards to a whole-of-government approach embedding the UNCRPD into policy across Departments is critical to making rights real for people with disabilities. The move of disability policy from the Department of Health to the Minister of State's Department was a significant step towards a right-based model and the upcoming strategy is a real opportunity to build on that momentum. However, the key to this success will not just be policy alignment but real implementation and measurable outcomes. Many individuals and disability organisations are anxious to see concrete timelines. Thankfully, the Minister of State was able to provide me with those. The implementation of the UNCRPD is to be monitored by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, IHREC, and the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Can the Minister of State assure me that this is going to happen?

**Deputy Hildegard Naughton:** I will answer the Deputy's last question first. Housing and disability are absolute priority for the Government y. We all know knocking on the doors in the general election campaign the importance of disability right across the sector. Last week, I attended the United Nations disability conference in New York. The Irish delegation travelled with leading disability groups from Ireland who have directly fed into this national disability strategy. Once this strategy is published - and the timeline for that will be before the summer recess - this will be a living document. That is not the end of it. We will constantly be adapting



and making sure that we are getting our policy right by listening to those with the lived experience. It is not just about publishing a strategy, as the Deputy said; it is about implementing it. There needs to be an action plan. A cross-government implementation team will be put in place. This will not just included myself and the Minister in the Department of disability. Every single Department and every Cabinet Minister will play their role, while making sure that we achieve that step change to ensure people with disabilities live independent lives.

**Deputy Tony McCormack:** I appreciate the update on the Department's engagement with the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The UNCRPD is not just about legal commitments; it is also about meaningful lived change for people with disabilities throughout the country. The first report in 2021 was an important step but real transparency and accountability come from continuous engagement with the committee and stakeholders here at home. Organisations like the IHREC and the disabled persons' organisations, DPOs, have a critical role in this. Can the Minister of State clarify whether the Department has received feedback on recommendations from the UN committee following the 2021 submission? When is the next periodic report due to be submitted? It would be helpful to know about what consultations will take place to ensure that people with disabilities are meaningfully involved in shaping that report.

**Deputy Hildegard Naughton:** There has been, and there will continue to be, robust consultation with all the key stakeholders, disability groups and DPOs. To give the Deputy an example of our track record on that, for this disability strategy we had extensive public consultation, which concluded last year. That included 34 focus groups and almost 500 responses to a national questionnaire. We had town hall events in Dublin, Cork, Galway and online feeding into this disability strategy. The consultation has continued on an alternative basis with key stakeholder groups, including DPOs and disability service providers, as well as across government. This engagement has supported the development of an ambitious strategy that will advance the implementation of the UNCRPD and ensure that disabled people are supported to live full lives of their own choosing. It is all about that lived experience. If we are going to get this right, it is about listening to them. I will come back to the Deputy on the timelines that he asked about.

## **Health Services**

83. **Deputy Paul McAuliffe** asked the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality for plans and an indicative timeline of implementation for a community neuro-rehabilitation team for the treatment of neurological patients in north Dublin, as committed to in the programme for Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [32453/25]

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I recently met with the Neurological Alliance of Ireland who raised a number of questions with me. They were specifically interested in the programme for Government commitment, which seeks to put in place community neuro-rehabilitation teams. I was particularly concerned when they alerted me to the fact that north Dublin, the area that covers my constituency, does not currently have a community neuro-rehabilitation team. Will the Minister update the House on the matter?

**Deputy Hildegard Naughton:** I thank the Deputy for raising this important issue. The overarching aim of the neuro-rehabilitation strategy is the development of neuro-rehabilitation services to improve patient outcomes by providing safe, high-quality, person-centred neuro-

rehabilitation at the lowest appropriate level of complexity. It straddles acute hospitals and primary care as well as specialist community-based disability services.

The past few years have seen consistent funding being provided to advance the roll-out of the neuro-rehabilitation strategy. The Department of Children, Disability and Equality as well as the Department of Health, aim to continue this important work to ensure there is a fully integrated service available to those people who need it. As part of the strategy, the HSE is in the process of expanding the number of community neuro-rehabilitation teams across the country. The current position is that four new teams have been recruited and will be operational this year. A further two partial teams are in place that predate the strategy. There is currently no community neuro-rehabilitation team, CNRT, operational in HSE Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary South, Waterford-Wexford, HSE Midlands or HSE Dublin and North East. Moving forward with the neuro-rehabilitation strategy, the aim is to enhance the existing CNRTs, fund those areas that do not have a CNRT and create a large population-based CNRT within each regional health area following the implementation of the new regional health areas under Sláintecare. Additional funding will be a matter for the annual budgetary process.

As outlined in the 2025 national service plan, the HSE is committed to developing community neuro-rehabilitation teams in line with the implementation framework and enhancing capacity for its implementation nationally. A care pathway has to be integrated to make sure people are getting these services as close to home as possible. That is at the basis of the Deputy's question today.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I agree with the Minister of State that these services are incredibly important. The multidisciplinary nature of the teams provides intensive neuro-rehabilitation at critical times and they assist with acute hospital discharges. Studies have shown that, on average, they save up to three days per patient, but they are also a critical intervention. Any multidisciplinary approach to patients can improve patient outcomes.

I was pleased to see the additional four areas, particularly in south and west Dublin, being allocated. This is a need across the country. While I am a TD for my constituency, I recognise that this is a new area of care and one the Government wants to implement and it is being done on a phased basis. I would not be happy if, in the coming 12 months, after this year, no provision had been made for Dublin north and east. It is crucial we put that in place. I ask the Minister of State to do all in her power as part of the budgetary process to attract funding for it.

**Deputy Hildegarde Naughton:** This is a new structure being rolled out. It has taken the team a little time to set up the structures. The funding was in place and they are now rolling out those teams across the country. We will complete the national roll-out of the HSE community neuro-rehabilitation teams. We will develop more regional inpatient rehabilitation beds as well, implement community-based, multidisciplinary rehabilitation services in every regional health area, and increase the number of neurology nurse specialists and consultant neurologists. I look forward to working with the Deputy and keeping him up to date on the roll-out.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I encourage the Minister of State to engage with the Neurological Alliance of Ireland. It is a strong organisation. I know the Minister of State has met its representatives. Tomorrow she will visit my constituency and a member organisation of the Neurological Alliance of Ireland, An Síol, which deals with longer term treatments. It is keen to get a permanent home. It has identified a site with Dublin City Council. In the HSE capital plan, money has been put in place to do the feasibility study for that. The director is a fantastic

man. He is originally from Germany and he does not understand Irish bureaucracy. He wants it to happen now because of the patients. I look forward to engaging with the Minister of State on that issue too, which is part of the broader spectrum of support for people with acquired brain injuries, strokes, Parkinson's disease and so on.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** Many of us have met the Neurological Alliance of Ireland, as the Minister of State has. When its representatives met me, it was with a constituent who I had met many times previously about the fact there has not been any community neuro-rehabilitation team in what we term the north east. We have not had it in CHO 8 and in what will be the regional health authority of Dublin north-east. We need to make sure we put this in. It is an absolute necessity. At the moment, people are ending up in accident and emergency departments. They are going in to get imperfect services and so forth. On the timeline for delivery, it needs to happen as soon as possible.

I want to put something on the record. It was brought to my attention that there seems to be an issue for the likes of St. John of God and its approved housing body, which was previously able to purchase houses under the capital assistance scheme. Will the Minister of State bring it up with the Minister? I have already mentioned it myself. It was a means of getting disability housing that seems not to be in play at the moment. There seems to be an issue with the Department of public expenditure.

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh):** Time, Deputy.

**Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú:** This was the likes of St. John of God operating alongside county councils such as in Meath and Louth and people could be severely impacted.

**Deputy Hildegard Naughton:** I thank both Deputies. I am looking forward to my visit to An Síol tomorrow morning and to seeing the Deputy there. I know they are doing fantastic work there on the ground. I am visiting these services throughout the country. When I am in these services, I meet people who have acquired brain injuries. I see the results of road traffic accidents and the importance of these facilities on the ground within communities. It is great to be in this position. I am honoured to be and to be able to fund such services that do fantastic work. I will take on board comments from Deputies.

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*Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.*

### **Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters**

**An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú):** I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 39 and the name of the Member in each case:

Deputy Louis O'Hara - To discuss the ongoing closure of Dunguaire Castle, Kinvara, County Galway.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne - To discuss the planned extension of Coláiste Bhríde secondary school, Carnew, County Wicklow.

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Deputy Jen Cummins - To discuss staff recruitment and retention at community training centres.

Deputy Claire Kerrane - To discuss the Government response to recent wildfires in Gortaganny, County Roscommon.

Deputy Barry Ward - To discuss the EU response to sustained attacks by the Hungarian Government on LGBTQ+ citizens.

Deputy Erin McGreehan - To discuss use of Louth County Hospital as a surgical hub for the north-east.

Deputy Donna McGettigan - To discuss the need to roll out Jigsaw in more locations in County Clare.

Deputy David Cullinane - To discuss the funding requirements of community specialist neuro-rehabilitation services in the south-east.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly - To discuss the need to expand services for people with disabilities in Lusk.

Deputy John Brady - To discuss the future of 106 social homes in Blessington, County Wicklow.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly - To discuss the provision of safer school routes and road safety arrangements on the regional roads network in north Kildare.

Deputy Colm Burke - To discuss the need to increase the number of training places for students who wish to study dentistry.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty - To discuss concerns regarding the suitability of the Citywest Hotel complex reported to be being purchased by the Government.

Deputy Mattie McGrath - To discuss funding for the Cluain training and enterprise centre in Clonmel, County Tipperary.

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan - To discuss safeguarding procedures of the Football Association of Ireland to ensure player safety.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú - To discuss changes to the CAS and CALF schemes and how this impacts on disability housing provision.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke - To discuss the need to improve consumer protections of home buyers arising from a case in County Meath.

Deputy Albert Dolan - To discuss a change to the enrolment criteria for specific speech and language disorder special classes.

Deputy Séamus McGrath - To discuss how we can reduce mortgage interest to be in line with EU average rates.

Deputy Conor D McGuinness - To discuss departmental funding for fisheries ports and harbours in County Waterford.

Deputy Thomas Gould - To discuss the closure of the tenant in situ scheme in Cork city.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - To discuss school secretary and caretaker pension entitlements.

The matters raised by Deputies Pádraig O'Sullivan, Barry Ward, Paul Nicholas Gogarty, Jen Cummins, Malcolm Byrne have been selected for discussion

## **Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate**

### **Child Protection**

**Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan:** I appreciate the Minister coming in this evening to take this Topical Issue matter. He will be aware that earlier during the Order of Business, I raised this issue with the Taoiseach, but such is my concern about this matter that I believe it needs further deliberation.

On 8 June, the *Sunday Independent's* Mark Tighe wrote an article entitled "FAI 'too slow' to act over allegations of former national team manager's behaviour towards female footballers". As I mentioned earlier, the article alleged a number of things, but mainly that the FAI agreed a financial settlement with its former director of public relations to keep details of his complaints from becoming public. Second, and crucially, despite the FAI stating publicly that it only learned of these allegations in early 2024, the FAI's former director of public relations attempted to make a protected disclosure alleging the FAI had knowledge of these issues back in May 2023.

I know this because I have access to the same information as the journalist who wrote the article on 8 June. Despite the FAI claim that it had no knowledge of these concerns prior to early 2024, I can see that the former chief executive initiated a conversation internally on 4 May 2023. It is there in black and white for all to see. With the back and forth he engaged in on that day, I can see other senior officials acknowledging that they were "aware of stuff behind the scenes" in relation to this individual. Another remarked that it was an issue "to discuss privately perhaps", but that there were "potential historical complaints of his time in management". I understand from the FAI's formal correspondence with me that it internally decided not to proceed with an investigation in 2023 as it determined that suspicions, rumours and concerns that were reflected regarding the individual in question did not come in the format of a formal complaint or allegation at that time.

I am not attempting to stray into the specifics of any allegations. That is a matter for the authorities concerned. However, for an organisation such as the FAI not to act on this matter, even in the absence of an official complaint or allegation, is extremely worrying and, if I am being brutally honest, it directly contradicts its child welfare and safeguarding policy, which I have a copy of with me this evening.

*11 o'clock*

That document explicitly states that in relation to any case of abuse, if a mandated person knows, believes or has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child has been, is being or is at risk



of being abused, the mandated person must report this issue to Tusla under the Children First Act 2015. The same policy that I have here has provision for the standing-down of staff in circumstances where concerns are raised with the FAI outside a statutory authority investigation. This did not happen until nearly a year after the individuals first came to attention.

In addition, the FAI's safeguarding policy also states that individuals should always inform Tusla when they have reasonable grounds for concern that a child may have been, is being or is at risk of being abused or neglected. In addition, it is not necessary for the individual to prove that abuse has occurred. All that is required is that the individual have reasonable grounds for concern. Reasonable grounds include "any concern about any potential sexual abuse". Did this happen in this case? Was the child protection officer informed? Was the safeguarding officer within the FAI consulted?

Having seen the evidence, I think it is fair to ask the FAI if it reached the threshold required by its own policies. If individuals within the FAI in May 2023 conceded that they were aware of stuff behind the scenes, wanting to discuss privately offline the potential historical complaints of these individuals in management and the former chief executive conceding that they had to assume more of this could be out there, surely that is concerning. Nobody and no script from any Department will tell me that those conversations by their very nature do not point to the fact that people in the FAI had concerns covered by their own safeguarding documents. My only concern is to ensure that safeguarding in a large organisation like the FAI, to which we entrust our children and young people, is followed.

**Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (Deputy Charlie McConalogue):** I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. As he is aware, the matter in question is the subject of an ongoing Garda investigation and we must remain mindful of that fact during our discussions this evening.

It is the view of my Department and that of Sport Ireland that the FAI has engaged appropriately with these allegations. From the newspaper article which the Deputy mentioned, it seems that no complaint was made to nor any evidence of inappropriate behaviour received by the FAI in 2023. Once it received a formal complaint in January 2024, the FAI acted swiftly and contacted An Garda Síochána and Tusla in accordance with mandatory reporting requirements and its own safeguarding and child welfare regulations

The allegations made by women involved in football in the 1990s were truly shocking and I commend the bravery of those who came forward to tell their stories. It is vital that allegations of this nature are taken seriously and dealt with in the appropriate manner. Last year's reporting of this story, both in print and on television, played an important role in bringing those stories to light.

Once it received a formal complaint, the Football Association of Ireland contacted An Garda Síochána about these cases, in accordance with mandatory reporting requirements and its own safeguarding and child welfare regulations. It has fully engaged and co-operated with the ongoing Garda investigation.

Following the revelations, the FAI introduced an anonymous reporting mechanism to allow players and others to flag concerns and report inappropriate behaviour to Raisea concern, an independent complaint-handling firm. I would urge anyone who experienced harm or abuse from Irish football or who wishes to report issues related to abuse or inappropriate or unlaw-

ful behaviours to contact this independent service to make a statement. In addition, the FAI's safeguarding awareness campaign, Play It Right, was rolled out to clubs across the country, promoting good behaviour and a confidential independent helpline and website for anyone who wants to report a serious concern anonymously.

Cases such as these serve as a reminder of the need to be ever-vigilant and of the importance of safeguarding policies and procedures in our efforts to create, protect and promote a culture that allows people to speak out about anything that makes them uncomfortable, in all sports. It is vital that allegations of this nature are taken seriously by any national governing body of sport and that an athlete-centred approach is taken in response.

In August 2023, Sport Ireland launched a new national code of conduct template for sporting organisations, which sets out a set of guidelines and principles that promotes the behaviour and conduct expected from our athletes, coaches, supporters, officials, club members and parents or guardians. All national governing bodies were asked to use the national template code of conduct as an opportunity to review their existing policies and procedures for handling code breaches to ensure that we have a safe and respectful environment for all involved in Irish sport. The creation of a culture of safety that promotes the welfare of children and young people engaged in sporting activities must be at the core of all national governing bodies' operations. Sport Ireland's safeguarding guidance for children and young people in sport is a core document in this regard.

Sport Ireland has an extensive suite of guidelines and codes of practice for the protection of children in sport, consistent with child protection guidance and legislation. Last year, Sport Ireland wrote to all national governing bodies to remind them of their responsibilities and that their policies and procedures regarding player welfare must be up to date and fit for purpose.

We have made significant strides in promoting increased female participation in sport in recent years. The Irish sports monitor report for 2024 shows that female participation in sport increased to its highest level to date, at 47%. Last week, we announced the investment of €4 million under the women in sport programme for 2025.

The aforementioned measures, while positive, must of course be supported by a robust safeguarding framework for all who participate in sport. It is imperative that we demonstrate that there is simply no place for abuse of any kind against women in sport and there should be zero tolerance for any actions that endanger their welfare.

**Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan:** I start by thanking the Minister of State for coming in to address this matter himself. It was remiss of me not to preface my comments by saying that if anybody has been affected by these issues, they should follow the formal complaints procedure that the FAI has encouraged people to come forward with, details of which the Minister of State has outlined. I do not raise this matter lightly. Many of us here have children. I quoted extensively from a series of correspondence that I obtained through an individual. The correspondence clearly demonstrates that this was known nine months prior to the "RTÉ Investigates" programme. That in itself is damning. I have written to the sports committee about this and it will be discussed in private session tomorrow. I will seek that representatives of the FAI come in to address the concerns I have raised this evening. I hope to have the support of some of the committee members present here tonight.

My overarching concern is that given that we entrust our children to large organisations like

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this, it is paramount that their safety is ensured. I will not stray into the realm of individual accusations because I do not have any information pertaining to any individual allegations. I am exclusively concentrating on the FAI's own safeguarding policy which the Minister of State has said his Department is satisfied with. I ask him to ask his officials go back and read it because I quoted it extensively from it. It states specifically that no specific allegation is required in the case of any sexual allegations. It is there in black and white.

I ask the Minister of State to ask the departmental officials if they have the information that I have in my possession. If they do, I think they will have a very different view of what we are discussing here this evening. The Minister of State mentioned Sport Ireland in his response. I would also ask that in any investigation or examination Sport Ireland has done here, the same information that I have in my possession is also brought to its attention because that will also inform its future outlook on this.

I can only ask the Minister of State to reflect on what I have outlined here this evening. I do not do it lightly. I will bring it to the committee tomorrow in private session and I hope representatives from the FAI will come in to address the concerns.

**Deputy Charlie McConalogue:** This is an issue that my Department and Sport Ireland were aware of and had looked at. It is my Department's view, and that of Sport Ireland, that the FAI engaged appropriately with these allegations. The Deputy mentioned a particular newspaper article which has been discussed this evening. It outlines that no complaint was made to, nor any evidence of inappropriate behaviour received by, the FAI in 2023. Once it received a formal complaint in January 2024, the FAI acted and contacted the Garda and Tusla, in accordance with mandatory reporting requirements and its safeguarding and child welfare regulations.

Sport Ireland has strong criteria for safeguarding compliance. It is a compulsory requirement for all national governing bodies and is a critical element for funding to national governing bodies. These criteria are reviewed twice annually by Sport Ireland, which works with NGBs to ensure that appropriate policies are put in place to take a proactive approach to safeguarding by identifying and mitigating risks to player welfare. It also works with national governing bodies, NGBs, on an ongoing basis to ensure they have mechanisms in place to react appropriately and handle complaints or issues when they arise.

I reaffirm to Deputy O'Sullivan that from the point of view of my Department and of Sport Ireland in regard to any information received on this, they are of the view that the FAI engaged appropriately. It is certainly open to the Deputy or anyone else to provide any and all information they have to Sport Ireland and to the Department. Certainly, in regard to anything they have looked at so far, both my Department and Sport Ireland are of the very clear view that the FAI engaged appropriately with these allegations.

## European Union

**Deputy Barry Ward:** As the Minister of State will know, on 23 June 2021 the Hungarian Parliament passed a law significantly curbing the rights of members of the LGBTQI+ community in Hungary. As it came into effect on 1 July 2021, next week that law will have been passed for four years. It is hugely problematic from the point of view of Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. It clearly curbs fundamental rights that are set out there, not least freedom of expression, equality, non-discrimination, pluralism and tolerance. As a result the European

Commission took a legal action against the Hungarian Government in July 2021, that is, four years ago. It is hard to discern what exactly has happened in that regard since then. While I am aware that the Commission has massively curtailed payments to Hungary, amounting to billions of euro during that time, the law has gone pretty much unabated since then. As a result, ordinary people who are members of the LGBTQI+ community in Hungary are massively curtailed, not just in their activities, their freedom of expression and their right to play a full part in society in Hungary but they are also in genuine fear of falling foul of this law and finding themselves at the end of a criminal conviction or a criminal prosecution in any event.

The European Commission stated in a tweet in 2021 announcing that it was taking the legal action against Hungary, that Europe will never allow parts of our society to be stigmatised. That is a laudable aim and I support that. Ireland also supports that goal but it does appear to have allowed them to be stigmatised during the past four years because those actions have not been taken.

It has been condemned by 17 member states, including Ireland, within the European Union. I want to put on record my support for the work that the Irish Embassy in Budapest to support the rights of LGBTQI+ people and the rights of the Pride parade in Budapest, which I understand will take place next week but which is technically against the law now in Hungary. Those efforts essentially are being ignored by Fidesz, by Viktor Orbán and the Hungarian Government. If we are seriously to respect the rights that are set down in the Treaty on European Union and if we embody them in Ireland, we need first to assure ourselves we are doing everything we can to make it clear that we oppose this and make that clear on the international stage and at European level, at European Council meetings and in all our dealings with the Hungarian Government; and second, we actually need to take concrete action.

The Minister of State should tell me what Ireland is doing and what the Commission is doing in real terms to tackle what flies in the face of fundamental principles that we associate with being part of the European Union.

We know that in Ireland we have huge support for membership of the European Union. Well over 80% people in this country recognise the value it has had for us. I would say that the same value with membership of the European Union could be ascribed to Hungary and yet, whatever it is, 157 out of 158 MPs in 2021 voted for this law. What is it that they do not see? How can we make them see it? How can we share with them the benefits of being part of a pluralist society that respects diversity, difference of opinions and difference in perspectives on things like sexuality? If we stand back and allow it to happen, then what is the point of being part of a European Union that lays down those fundamental rights for all European citizens, not just those whose governments choose to give them to them, but all European citizens, irrespective of what country they live in or under which government they live? Let us be clear in our voice on this and tell us what we can do to make this different.

**Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Healy-Rae):** I thank Deputy Ward for raising this important issue. I apologise on behalf of the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Harris. Ireland is a strong supporter of the rights of LGBTQI+ persons in Hungary. Respect for human rights and the rule of law are fundamental EU values as enshrined by Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. The Tánaiste is very concerned by recent measures taken by the Hungarian Government to restrict the rights of LGBTQI+ persons, including the passing of legislation that allows for a ban on Pride celebrations this year. June 28 will mark the 30th anniversary of Budapest Pride, the

same date as Dublin Pride and the anniversary of Stonewall.

The legal and constitutional amendments fast-tracked by the Hungarian Government in recent weeks now provide a basis to ban it under the false pretext of child protection. As a staunch advocate for the rule of law and fundamental EU values, the Tánaiste condemns this fresh attempt to target this community in Hungary by restricting their rights to freedom of expression and assembly as set out in Articles 11 and 12 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. This move is a disturbing escalation by the Hungarian Government in ongoing attempts to curb LGBTQI+ rights. It is the latest development in a series of measures targeting civil society, independent media and minority rights, further weakening the rule of law in the country.

It is imperative that the EU uses all the tools at its disposal to address the rule of law backsliding in Hungary. The European Commission has taken legal action in the form of infringement proceedings against Hungary for its failure to abide by its obligations as an EU member state in upholding the rule of law. Ireland has supported these efforts, including by joining the Commission's case against Hungary in relation to its so-called Child Protection Act. The opinion of the Advocate General of the Court of Justice of the European Union on this case was released on 5 June 2025, in which it considers that the child protection law infringes EU law. It suggests a free-standing breach of Article 2 should be found. I look forward to the final judgment in this case, which is expected in the autumn of this year.

Ireland also decided in February this year to intervene in the European Commission's case against Hungary's sovereignty protection law, which seriously threatens civil society space and independent media in Hungary. Separately, the Article 7 procedure, an EU treaty instrument, has been triggered against Hungary since 2018 due to serious breaches of the rule of law. In addition, the EU is using a range of tools to withhold a total of €18 billion in funding, including through the conditionality mechanism; rule-of-law-related so-called super-milestones in Hungary's recovery and resilience plan; and the horizontal enabling condition of the common provision regulation that relates to compliance with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Additionally, Hungary is denied access to Horizon funding and the Erasmus programme. It is regrettable that Hungary's access to these programmes is limited but it is essential until remediation measures are put in place to address its consistent contravention of EU law.

Ireland is a strong supporter of the EU rule of law toolbox and views it as essential that the EU has the necessary tools at its disposal to respond effectively to rule of law challenges where they arise.

**Deputy Barry Ward:** I thank the Minister of State. I recognise the truth of much of what he said, particularly in terms of Ireland's support for the rule of law toolbox. That brings us to the root of this issue. I have raised the matter with the Tánaiste. I am aware of his strong stance on this and I respect that hugely. I am also aware that Ireland has a chequered history with dealing with the freedom of individuals, particularly members of the LGBTQI+ community. There is an extent to which we are people in glasshouses casting stones. However, I also recognise the fact that we have made huge progress within my lifetime on this issue, particularly in the past ten years since the referendum in 2015.

I refer to the cynical manner in which the Hungarian Government seeks to equate child protection with what it calls its anti-paedophilia law, with people who simply want to live life in



the way they want to live it. That cynical conflagration of two totally unrelated issues is a major problem. It is disturbingly cynical in the message it sends out. As Chair of the European affairs committee, this is an issue we want to look at. We are hoping to do so next week.

Here is the real question. We have joined the case and stated our case. We talk about the rule of law toolbox. We know funding is being restricted from Hungary and that clear messages are being sent from the Commission and many European Union states. It has not changed the facts. No matter what the judge advocate says in the Court of Justice of the European Union, and no matter the finding of the court in the autumn, what do we do if Hungary still thumbs its nose? What do we do if we withdraw the funding, criticise them and decry what we all know to be wrong, and they still do nothing about it? Where is the rule of law toolbox if we cannot use it to actually effect change and enforce the law we have all signed up to as part of the *équipe communautaire* and as part of the various treaties of fundamental rights and of functioning of the European Union? What do we do if they still say and do nothing?

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** I thank the Deputy. His genuine sincerity, concern and emotion are very heartfelt and that is evident in his statements this evening. Ireland has consistently and strongly advocated for the promotion and protection of the rights of LGBT+ persons, including in our relations with Hungary. We have regularly raised our concerns about the serious rule-of-law backsliding and the targeting of civil society and minority rights in Hungary, including in direct contacts with our Hungarian interlocutors. Through our embassy in Budapest, Ireland had 21 diplomatic missions on 27 March this year in calling on Hungarian authorities to repeal the recent legislation passed that allows for a ban on Pride celebrations, including Budapest Pride. At the recent General Affairs Council on 27 May, Ireland, along with a large majority of EU member states, joined a declaration outlining our deep concern and calling on Hungary to reverse these measures.

Through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's enlargement and fundamental values fund, we support Hungarian civil society organisations that work to protect the rule of law, civil society space and minorities, including LGBTQ+ rights, in Hungary. We will continue to work closely to monitor developments and raise our concerns as well as continuing to support civil society organisations working to defend our fundamental EU values in Hungary. Again I wish to relay the Tánaiste's apologies, who wanted to be here this evening to answer the Deputy directly. Like the Deputy, the Tánaiste is very sincere in his concerns about what is happening out there. There is right and wrong in the world and what is happening at present is obviously fundamentally wrong. It is good of the Deputy to raise it here this evening. I apologise on behalf of the Tánaiste in his absence.

### **International Protection**

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** The residents of Saggart, Citywest, Rathcoole and adjacent areas today got a huge slap in the face. In very arrogant, dismissive behaviour by the Government, it issued a press statement and then the Minister, Deputy Jim O'Callaghan, and the Minister of State, Deputy Brophy went out onto the plinth and said the State was purchasing the Citywest Hotel. This came with no notice to any of the local elected representatives, not least Deputies Shane Moynihan and Emer Higgins on the Government side. On 22 May last, it first came out in the media that the Government was considering this. Since then, I have put down five parliamentary questions. I asked the Minister what the plans were, whether he could

outline them and whether there would be consultation. I even used the term “enhanced consultation” because consultation has not always been such. It is more about telling people what the Government has already done rather than giving people any kind of input. There were calls for the Minister to sit down with residents’ groups and representative bodies from the Saggart and Citywest area to talk about the plans.

Citywest is not just another location for a permanent IPAS centre. It was the largest hotel and conference centre in Europe. It was the home for many years of the Fianna Fáil Ard-Fheiseanna. Because of ramshackle rezoning over the years, it was one of the few community facilities in the wider Rathcoole and Saggart area. When I was a councillor, going back to the start of the development plan in 2016, when the owners were looking at getting the land rezoned for large-scale residential, the residents spoke very eloquently and in large numbers about the need to protect the site. Going back to 2015, around its National Asset Management Agency, NAMA, period, the hotel and conference centre was operating as a profitable concern. It then turned into a Covid centre, then became a temporary location for Ukrainian refugees and then moved on to hosting International Protection Accommodation Services, IPAS.

The community has been quite balanced in pointing out the pluses and minuses. There have been instances of antisocial behaviour because if you put 2,000 people anywhere, that will be the case. It also has been the case that some of the residents have helped in Tidy Towns and other community events. The reality, however, is that this is not a built-for-purpose centre. It is a hotel and conference centre. There is a gym and leisure centre in operation. I note that the Minister said that some things would be allowed to continue. Why could he not have met the residents and gone through all of the issues in advance? That was a fair question and it was not listened to. This was presented as a *fait accompli*, a big slap in the face.

Saggart is one of the fastest growing and youngest areas in the country. Approximately a third of all residents of Saggart are under the age of 15. Another third of Saggart residents were not born in Saggart, which points out that Saggart is a very welcoming and diverse community. However, it does not have the facilities. There are no public areas in the Saggart, Citywest and Rathcoole locations where they can put in a lot of council amenities. Adjacent lands have been rezoned under the strategic housing developments. There have been lots of new houses but no facilities. The chance the community had of this hotel being repurposed once again for community need now appears to be gone, unless there is proper engagement and consultation now that the Government is going ahead with this plan.

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** I thank the Deputy most sincerely for raising this matter. I wish to convey the apologies of my colleague the Minister for Justice, Deputy Jim O’Callaghan, who regrets he cannot be here for this matter due to another commitment. On behalf of the Minister, Deputy O’Callaghan, I thank Deputy Gogarty for raising this issue and for offering me the opportunity to respond.

An opportunity has arisen for the State to purchase the Citywest campus, a former hotel complex in the outer Dublin region. The purchase is part of a long-term strategy to develop a sustainable accommodation system. It will deliver significant long-term savings to the State as it moves from licensing to ownership, and will enable Ireland to meet our requirements under the new EU pact on migration and asylum.

The site, which is already being used for both international protection and Ukrainian accommodation, currently has capacity to accommodate approximately 2,300 people between

the hotel and the convention centre. When purchased, the campus will continue to be used to accommodate international protection applicants, meeting the State's intention to increase State-owned accommodation in this sector, which is a major step forward in delivering on the programme for Government. The Citywest campus will be the foundation stone for the new screening facility and border facility and will enable a one-stop shop for processing, accommodation and supports in one location, delivering the most pivotal parts of the new migration pact.

Since 2020, the State has been leasing parts of the Citywest campus, first to support the delivery of vaccinations during Covid-19, and since May 2022, as a transit hub and accommodation centre for both beneficiaries of temporary protection and international protection applicants. The State's current licence for the site expires at the beginning of September. The campus has become a very important multifunctional facility for the State. There is currently no alternative accommodation centre of similar scale and facilities to process and accommodate both international protection, and beneficiary of temporary protection, arrivals. The cross-government response has been working extremely well at the Citywest campus and this has been acknowledged by all the State parties and NGOs. There are no immediate plans to increase the capacity at this site. New spaces for international protection applicants will be achieved by using the existing capacity currently being used by Ukrainians and restructures to the current layout. This means the purchase will not lead to increased pressure on local services or the community. The leisure centre on the campus is in commercial use and it is proposed it will continue to function as it currently does to ensure the community can maintain its very important access.

The Department wants to support amenities, local services and integration in this area and our community engagement team is already working closely with local community leaders, community groups and stakeholders. A significant strength that applies to the engagement programme needed at this site is that the Citywest campus already enjoys good relationships and operational partnerships in the community with State services and community representatives, including elected representatives.

**Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty:** Regarding the State's requirement to have a number of large-scale IPAS centres, I see the logic of the State trying to buy somewhere rather than pay rent. I believe, however, that such centres need to be purpose-built rather than trying to call a former hotel a suitable campus. I mentioned this to the Taoiseach before. Obviously, we are a welcoming country and many people are fleeing persecution and need our support. Equally, as I pointed out, there are economic migrants abusing the asylum process and these people need to be processed very quickly. Unfortunately, it is taking far too long. If it was not taking so long, we would not need so many IPAS centres. It should take six months for people to be in and out of the process and for a decision to be made that they are welcome because they are fleeing persecution or - and they might be the nicest people in the world - told "sorry, we do not have the capacity". This is what we are requiring.

In terms of this specific location, I am a bit worried about some of the words used, such as there being "no immediate plans to increase the capacity of this site". Reading through that after today's announcement is like hearing it will be increased down the line. There are also issues concerning the "good relationships and operational partnerships in the community". Yes, there have been very good relationships, but there have also been issues of overcrowding in the past and reports of incidents of antisocial behaviour. Saggart does not have sufficient GP services or proper Garda services. In any type of consultation, the first things to be asked include what GP levels, education facilities, types of support and leisure activities are being planned

to be on site. All these things should be considered in the discussion before any purchase goes through. While there are no current plans to get rid of the leisure centre and the gym, equally, there is no opportunity for a long-term vision to repurpose this as a major hotel and conference centre again, something that was very valuable to south-west Dublin in the past and I believe should be once again.

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** Once again, Deputy Gogarty's sincerity and concern are very obvious. I thank him for that. He was also very balanced. The planned facility at the site will enable the fastest and most efficient processing of asylum applications in the history of the State. Applicants who will be part of the migration pact border procedures will be fully processed in less than three months from application to the final decision, which is very important.

In terms of application numbers, this Government has seen a reduction in those applying for international protection this year from an average of 1,500 per month in 2024 to an average of 1,000 per month so far in 2025. We are, however, still trending to have the third or fourth highest annual application level in the history of the State. Reform of the processing system and the migration pact will help to curtail the need for growth in the accommodation system, but there is still a need to ensure cost-effective solutions that deliver long-term sustainability for international protection accommodation. Community engagement will focus on providing direct public information, proactively engaging with people and local media and creating a space for safe and sound dialogue.

### **Further and Higher Education**

**Deputy Jen Cummins:** Community training centres, CTCs, provide an excellent education to young people in second chance education. There are 31 community training centres located around the country. Young people aged 16 to 21 who have left mainstream education before the leaving certificate can attend these centres, which provide a range of training and other supports to them, achieve QQI levels and progress to further education and employment.

I have the pleasure of being on the board of directors of one of these community training centres, Ballark community training centre in Santry. I have worked closely with this centre for several years. It started when I was the co-ordinator of Ballymun Anseo school completion programme, SCP, located very close to this centre. I have seen first-hand how these centres bring young people into a learning environment that is caring, practical and learner-centred. The staff are absolutely committed to the young people. When young people leave school early, their reintegration into education can be very complex and there needs to be patience, kindness, structure and acceptance. CTC staff are experts at this, but the CTCs are finding it challenging to recruit and keep staff as a result of the substandard salary scale they are on.

To put this into perspective, points 1 and 2 of the clerical scale available to staff in the CTCs are below the minimum wage. Managers of the community training centres earn approximately €10,000 less than the Youthreach and SCP co-ordinator salary scale, and yet they are supposed to be on the same scale. CTCs are funded by their local ETBs and have been since 2011. Prior to then, CTCs were funded by FÁS and the salary scales were linked to FÁS salary scales. When FÁS was dissolved, all the staff moved to the ETBs and were placed on public sector pay scales. They have, however, been left in limbo and - without consultation - this pay link was broken. In 2023, CTC staff were given a 5% increase, which was the first increase of its kind since 2006. It was accepted with the agreement that CTCs would be linked to the Youthreach

pay scale, but this has not happened. CTCs are under the Youthreach umbrella in terms of training and education but not in terms of pay and conditions. Without this link to the public sector pay agreements, CTCs will have to continually try to argue with governments for just the crumbs they will get.

The work of the CTCs has become increasingly difficult since Covid. There has been a huge increase in the number of students attending CTCs with more complex needs than ever seen before. The Government needs to recognise and value the work being done in these centres and pay staff accordingly. The community training centres were made promises but these promises have not been kept and the staff are feeling undervalued and despondent. It is just not good enough. When the staff working with really vulnerable young people are themselves vulnerable in their pay and conditions - I have said this not only concerning workers in this sector but those in several other sectors in the education system too - they are not able to support young people who are coming back into second-chance education and do not feel valued as learners. The staff working in the CTCs are incredibly skilled at instilling confidence back into these young people so they can learn and get back on track. The cost of living in this country is extremely high and, therefore, people on wages poorer than those found in other agencies doing similar work are not on a par. This means community training centres are not attracting the staff they need so much. I urge the Minister of State to please consider what can be done to support these staff members in community training centres.

**Minister of State at the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Deputy Marian Harkin):** I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. I think it might be useful at the outset for Members to understand the context of what is being raised here. Community training centres were established in 1977 as community training workshops to support young, unemployed people aged 16 to 25. Since 1988, they have been delivering the Youthreach programme. I agree with the Deputy that they do really valuable and important work. I am having the opportunity to see more of it as I travel around the country. There are 31 CTCs throughout the country contracted by the education and training boards, ETBs, to deliver the Youthreach programme. This means they are grant-aided organisations. Each CTC is a non-profit company and has its own independent board of directors which is responsible for the recruitment and retention of staff. With the Deputy's background and experience, she will know that CTCs are not public sector organisations nor are their staff designated as public servants. ETBs manage the CTCs within the parameters of the Department of public expenditure's Circular 13/2014. This circular provides comprehensive guidelines for the management, accountability and reporting of public funds allocated through these grants.

Regarding the importance of Youthreach, Department officials maintain a strong working relationship with CTCs through IACTO, which is their representative body. This is supported by the IACTO liaison committee, which includes representatives from IACTO itself, the ETBs, SOLAS and the ETBI. Officials have advised me that the last meeting of the committee took place on 27 May. However, at that meeting it was agreed that the original purpose of that committee is now redundant and that a review of the terms and conditions will be undertaken and discussed at the next meeting, which will take place in September.

These guidelines are being developed under Circular 13/2014. It is intended the revised guidelines will address issues raised by CTCs through this liaison committee. I have to stress that the issues related to recruitment, retention and terms and conditions cannot be resolved within this committee as they are the responsibility of the CTC boards. They are outside the remit of the Department and other committee members.



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Specifically in response to the Deputy's query, the Department has no role in the employment of CTC staff, including in the areas of recruitment, terms and conditions and pay. This also applies to the ETBs, which contract the service from the CTCs, and to SOLAS, which provides funding to the ETBs. I am sorry to anyone listening for all the mention of ETBs and CTCs. The Deputy and I know what I am speaking about, however. As the Deputy said, staff in the CTCs were awarded a 5% pay increase following a WRC hearing in June 2023. Staff were awarded the increase in two increments.

Staff recruitment and retention issues have not been raised recently at the committee meetings that I spoke of. It is important to say they cannot be resolved through the liaison committee as they fall under the authority of the CTC boards.

**Deputy Jen Cummins:** I thank the Minister of State. It is great to raise this issue. It is great that the Minister of State is visiting these centres because they are amazing. While I understand that boards are responsible for the pay and conditions of each staff member, the funding given centrally to the community training centres is not enough. Although the staff are supposed to be put on the same pay and conditions, or pay rates, as Youthreach co-ordinators, the funding is not there to pay them at that rate. If they are supposed to get paid whatever that rate, increment or point on the scale is, boards will not be able to pay it if the funding does not come centrally. The board can decide to pay a certain rate, ultimately. We have a situation where school completion co-ordinators, for example, have had the exact same problem for the last number of years. They were brought under the ETBI, put at Youthreach scales and are all being managed like this. If we are going to value staff members, we need to do everything we possibly can to bring them under the umbrella. While it is totally fine for there to be local arrangements and for the boards to manage them, there is no reason funding cannot be allocated to the centres which covers all things to do with pay, recruitment, retention and industrial relations. If the central budget does not reach that, they are going to lean into other things they are also struggling with. Every other organisation in the country is struggling with the need for multi-annual funding for all the increased insurance and all the things that go with a project. Someone needs to be championing for these staff members to ensure they are on the correct rate and are given the right amount of money. It is about ensuring community training centres are given the right amount of funding centrally to be able to do that and making sure those staff members are valued, appreciated and paid correctly.

**Deputy Marian Harkin:** In her original question, Deputy Cummins raised the fact that some CTCs have a clerical officer scale on which the first two points fall below the minimum wage. In May, SOLAS informed IACTO that the Department had no objection to points below the minimum wage being removed. I am happy to see that. In fact, I would be really disappointed if that had not happened.

To come back to the general point the Deputy is making, I understand what she is saying. I have to say again that these matters relating to recruitment and retention fall under the responsibility of the individual CTC boards and are outside the Department's operational remit. I hear what she is saying about the importance and value of the work and that funding must be appropriate for what is needed.

Due to the way this is all structured, and given the parameters, the ability of the Department is constrained in this regard. All I can say is that I encourage IACTO and CTCs to feed their concerns into the development of the revised operational guidelines. I know that SIPTU is seeking a pay increase to bring CTC staff pay in line with that of Youthreach staff and that

IACTO supports the claim. Again, the Department cannot respond to SIPTU's request because those decisions must be taken by the CTC boards. While there were links historically between CTC staff, certain FÁS grades and Youthreach staff, they ended in 2009 with the FEMPI legislation. As the Deputy said, in 2022, SIPTU lodged a claim for Building Momentum increases with full retrospection. Although that was rejected by the management side, after a WRC hearing in June 2023 CTC staff were awarded a 5% pay increase funded from the Department's Vote. I heard what the Deputy has said.

### **Schools Refurbishment**

**Deputy Malcolm Byrne:** I thank the Minister of State for staying to this late hour to take this question about Coláiste Bhríde in Carnew, Wicklow. This is a progressive secondary school of almost 1,000 pupils which serves a predominantly rural area in south Wicklow as well as parts of north Wexford and south Carlow. The local community rightly takes great pride in this school. The whole school evaluation reports regularly speak of the positive relationships between teachers and students and that it is an inclusive and caring community. In addition to having a reputation for academic excellence, it also supports extra-curricular activities, even to the point that students involved in the Young Social Innovators led a successful campaign recently to amend, change and ensure there was junior certificate grade reform. That reform was indeed announced by the Minister, Deputy Helen McEntee, and there will now be a broader range of grades for those at junior certificate level.

While the school is very successful in what it delivers for students and the communities, the school's buildings have not been fit for purpose for quite some time. There has been a long campaign to try to ensure that this community has adequate school facilities. In that regard, tribute must be paid to the principal of the school, Anna Gahan, the staff team, to John Naylor and the board of management and to the parents and students who have been waiting a long time. We finally saw a commitment that we would see a new school for Carnew as part of the Project Ireland bundle, which dealt with a number of schools in the region. This involves the refurbishment of the 1930s school building and the construction of a new two-to-four storey building with SEN units. It will be a state-of-the-art facility that will be critical for the community. Preliminary planning was granted by Wicklow County Council in December 2023. From replies to parliamentary questions I have asked, we have been told that this has been at stage 2b for a while. The Minister of State will be aware that is where the final designs progress before the tender documents are issued. It is critical we get to the stage where the tender documents are issued, a contractor is appointed and work can begin. My critical question is: when will stage 2b be completed? When will a tender for a contractor be awarded?

The school has also sought as part of the development that there would be groundworks for a multipurpose pitch and that this would be facilitated. That did not come in right at the beginning but the Minister of State will appreciate that with a school of almost 1,000 students, which is likely to grow because of the expanding population in north Wexford and south Wicklow, that we need to have sports and recreational facilities within a school. At the moment, any of the teams that want to play a game or train, whether soccer or anything else, has to hire a bus to get to the nearest pitch. That is not acceptable for a modern and inclusive school community.

I am conscious it is coming close to midnight. Carnew in south Wicklow has often felt as if it is the Cinderella in Wicklow. I am hoping that tonight on this last question the Minister of

State will be Carnew's Prince Charming and be able to announce some good news for us this evening and give us a potential timeframe for delivery.

**Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Healy-Rae):** The Deputy has a wonderful way with the English language. I commend him on his determination and having the patience of being here until this time tonight. I am glad to be here representing the Minister for Education and Youth, Deputy McEntee. I thank the Deputy on her behalf for raising this matter as it gives me the opportunity to provide an update to the House on the current position regarding the major school building project for Coláiste Bhríde, Carnew, County Wicklow.

Delivery of the project has been devolved to the National Development Finance Agency, NDFA, as part of the programme for school building projects. The brief for the project is to provide a new-build replacement school for a long-term projected enrolment of 1,000 pupils, including a four-classroom special educational needs base. The project is currently in the final stages of stage 2b, the post planning process, of the architectural process, which allows for detailed design and planning, obtaining the necessary statutory permissions and the preparation of tender documents. When this stage is finalised, the next stage is tendering for a contractor and then onwards to construction in due course.

The time a project takes to deliver depends on several factors, as the Deputy well knows, including scale and complexity, and is subject to the time it takes to progress through the various design stages and the statutory approval process.

While at this early stage it is not possible to provide a timeline for completion of the project, the NDFA will continue to engage directly with the school authorities to keep them fully informed of all progress.

I assure the Deputy that the Department of Education and Youth is committed to ensuring appropriate accommodation is available for the pupils in Coláiste Bhríde and will in the wider context outlined ensure that this project, as for all projects on the school building programme, is subject to the due diligence required under the public infrastructure guidelines.

Since 2020, the Department of education has invested more than €6 billion in our schools throughout the country under the national development plan, NDP, involving the completion of over 1,375 school building projects. Government support for this investment, including by way of supplementary capital funding, has delivered real benefits for school communities. A recent Government decision approved €210 million in supplementary capital funding for the Department of Education and Youth, which brings the total capital allocation for 2025 for the Department to €1.6 billion.

As part of the NDP review process, all Departments, including the Department of Education and Youth, are currently engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, NDP Delivery and Reform with respect to NDP allocations for the period 2026 to 2030. It is expected that there will be clarity on these allocations over the summer period and this will allow the Department of Education and Youth to plan its capital investment programme for the 2026 to 2030 period in line with prioritised needs and reflecting, as appropriate, wider Government priorities.

Maximising existing capacity in schools to meet needs is very important. The progression of prioritised individual projects to meet the most urgent needs in the 2026 to 2030 period that

cannot be met through existing capacity across schools in the local area will be considered on a rolling basis from autumn onwards after the NDP allocations are finalised.

**Deputy Malcolm Byrne:** I welcome that the Minister of State indicated the stage 2b process is in its final stages. However, he knows as well as I do that the critical next step is moving to a tender so that a contractor will be appointed. With the best will in the world, even if the Minister of State announced tonight that stage 2b was complete and it was moving to tender, we would still probably be looking at more than two years by the time the new school was completed.

The neighbouring town of Gorey, my home town, has three schools, the third of which was sanctioned by the previous Minister, Deputy Foley, will soon reach capacity because the population in north Wexford and south Wicklow is growing incredibly quickly so there will be pressure for additional places in the area. That is why it is critical that Carnew gets a modern schools as soon as possible.

The other big concern for the school community is that adequate sporting facilities be made available on the site. What the school wants to see, which makes economic sense, is that the groundworks are carried out to ensure those sporting facilities can be provided while the school is being built. It is about long-term planning in the area. This has to be a priority. I appreciate the Minister of State being here at this time. I have tabled quite a number of parliamentary questions on this. He can understand how when serving such a wide area, much of it including rural communities, that this school is at its heart and it is critical we get a timeframe as to its delivery.

**Deputy Michael Healy-Rae:** I am sure the Deputy's constant support for this project will be a great help to its progression. His determination in this regard on behalf of his constituents will be acknowledged by the Government and the Minister. I thank him again for the opportunity to outline the Department of Education and Youth's position relating to this very important project. As I have outlined, the NDFA has been engaging and will continue to engage with the school to progress this important project. I wish the Deputy every good luck in his endeavours. His determination is duly noted by the Government.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 11.59 p.m. go dtí 9 a.m., Dé Céadaoin, an 18 Meitheamh 2025.

The Dáil adjourned at 11.59 p.m. until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 18 June 2025.