

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM EALAÍONA, OIDHREACHT, GNÓTHAÍ RÉIGIÚNACHA, TUAITHE AGUS GAELTACHTA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON ARTS, HERITAGE, REGIONAL, RURAL AND GAEL- TACHT AFFAIRS

Dé Céadaoin, 12 Aibreán 2017

Wednesday, 12 April 2017

The Joint Committee met at 2.15 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae,	Senator Fintan Warfield.
Deputy Martin Heydon,	
Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív,	
Deputy Niamh Smyth,	

DEPUTY MICHAEL COLLINS IN THE CHAIR.

Business of Joint Committee

Vice Chairman: As we have the required quorum of four members, including one Deputy and one Senator, we will commence the meeting in public session. I advise members to turn off their mobile phones as they interfere with the sound system and the broadcasting of the meeting. Apologies have been received from Teachta Peadar Tóibín.

I propose that we go into private session to deal with a number of items. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee went into private session at 2.25 p.m. and resumed in public session at 2.50 p.m.

Sustaining Viable Rural Communities: Discussion (Resumed)

Vice Chairman: We will now consider what it takes to sustain a viable rural community. I welcome the witnesses, Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue, Mr. Michael O'Mahony, Ms Samantha O'Shea and Ms Anne Fitzgerald representing Social Action Group Rathmore. I also welcome Ms Peigi Uí Chéidigh, Ms Máire Denvir and Ms Breda Ní Choisdealbha representing Tearmann Éanna from Connemara. I call on the clerk to the committee to read the legal reminder given to witnesses before they address the committee.

Clerk to the Committee: Ba mhaith liom na finnétithe a chur ar a n-aird go bhfuil, de bhua alt 17(2)(l) den Acht um Chlúmhilleadh 2009, finnétithe faoi chosaint ag lán-phribhléid maidir leis an bhfianaise a thugann siad don choiste seo. Má ordaíonn an coiste do na finnétithe ámh éirí as fianaise a thabhairt i leith ní áirithe agus má leanann siad dá thabhairt, níl siad i dteideal tar éis sin ach pribhléid cháilithe i leith na fianaise acu. Ordaítear dóibh nach dtabharfar ach fianaise a bhaineann le hábhar na n-imeachtaí seo agus fiafraítear dóibh cleachtadh parlaiminte a urraimiú nach chóir, más féidir, daoine ná eintiteas a cháineadh ná líomhaintí a dhéanamh ina n-aghaidh, ina ainm, ina hainm nó ina n-ainmneacha ar shlí ar bhféadfaí iad a aithint. Ba mhaith liom na finnétithe a chur ar an eolas go ndéanfar na ráiteas tionscnaimh a chuireann siad faoi bhráid an choiste a fhoilsiú ar shuíomh ghréasáin an choiste tar éis an chruinnithe seo. Meabhraítear do chomhaltaí an cleachtadh parlaiminte atá ann le fada nár chóir dóibh tuairimí a thabhairt maidir le duine atá taobh amuigh de na Tithe, nó leis na hoifigigh, ina ainm nó ina hainm nó ar shlí ina bhféadfaí é nó í a aithint.

I draw the witnesses' attention to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to this committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence regarding a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. I also advise them that the opening statement and any other documents they have submitted to the committee may be published on the committee's website after this meeting.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an of-

ficial either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue: I thank the Deputies and Senators for the honour of addressing them today. We come from the Sliabh Luachra area of County Kerry. Sliabh Luachra is a well-known area which is renowned for music and things like that. Some people say it is not a geographical area at all, but a state of mind and a way of looking at things. It is a place of creativity.

One way or another, in the 1970s there were two very creative events. One was that two brothers came together in the backyard of their house and decided to set up a joinery. That joinery has become one of the biggest in Europe. It presently employs 1,300 people, five miles away from our own area. It has been a massive success. The owners have a number of hotels as well.

At the same time, in 1975, a group of third-level students and I came together and decided it was time to launch a social group to look after people. We created what has become known as the Social Action Group Rathmore CLG. The purpose was to give young people a chance to become involved in community development, to make a difference in the community and to brighten up the lives of as many people as they could. We were inspired by the old meitheal tradition. Pat Spillane has talked about that a lot over the last number of weeks and has said that we should go back to the time of the meitheal tradition, when neighbours gathered to help neighbours. We have been doing it successfully since 1975, but in our case it is based largely on young people - students in the secondary school - and a few adult leaders.

In the first few years we did little things like setting up a vegetable garden and selling the produce or cutting and selling turf, but one of the most important things we did was to go into the psychiatric hospital in Killarney, St. Finian's. The whole idea was to break down barriers and remove stigmas. We, with other groups, did that very successfully. Before long, people were coming out to parties in Rathmore for the first time and we were going in to the hospital faithfully once a month. It made a massive difference.

In 1981, we felt we needed our own headquarters. We did not have any money at the time, so we approached An Chomhairle Oiliúna, AnCO, the predecessor of FÁS. One of our tactics has been to approach State agencies. They agreed to supply the manpower for our little building, our headquarters, our community centre, if I can put it that way. Then we had to supply the money. Our groups went north, south, east and west in cars collecting money. They eventually made the £57,000 required. AnCo provided the labour and the building opened as our headquarters in 1983. As part of our headquarters there was a disco room. From the very start we felt we should create a kind of a cash cow, something that would generate a traded income. We made hundreds and hundreds of pounds with discos that were attended by students from the local secondary school.

Around the same time, we were approached by a priest, Fr. Clifford, who was based in Killarney. He had done a survey of the conditions of old people in the Kerry diocese. He painted a dreadful picture of the conditions of many people who lived alone and he asked us to become involved. It was a pretty big challenge for just a group of youngsters, myself, and maybe one or two more people, but we decided we would tackle it. We hit on the idea of offering a service. Immediately we decided to offer a laundry. We contacted the Southern Health Board again. It provided the transport and paid a person to bring the laundry to and from the homes of older people. The youngsters did the laundry in conjunction with a local nun, Sr. Genevieve. It worked out great. The very first couple of weeks were tough enough because, as members of the committee can imagine, some of the clothes that came in to us could not withstand the

rigours of the modern machines. They were left in a bad state and St. Genevieve occasionally had to go to Killarney to supply new clothes. Some old person said the nuns had great power after all because of what happened to the clothes and the, almost overnight, transformation.

That was very important because it began a hectic campaign. The home help paid by the Southern Health Board asked us to clean and paint houses. Eventually we went into dozens of houses and got essential repairs carried out, electricity supplied and water and toilets installed. It was a massive campaign over a decade and made a massive difference.

In 1990, we decided that we needed to do more. Some people were too isolated. They were living in bad accommodation that nothing could be done with. We decided to tackle the social housing. We contacted Kerry County Council and got on to the Department of the Environment. We became a registered company, got chartered status and were accepted to provide social housing. We got a site and built our first seven houses. We thought in the beginning that there was no way they would be filled in a rural area like ours, but when we went out looking for names we ended up with about 20. Our job then was to decide who would be the first seven to get a house.

We then said we would keep going and we looked for another site. Eventually in 1998 a site came up. The man asked us for £85,000. We had no money. We approached Clann Credo and it gave us the £85,000. We bought the site and again contacted the county council and the then Department of the Environment and Local Government. We built our 20 houses and a very modern, large day-care centre for the elderly. People are brought to the centre on a fleet of buses and a car and it has been a magnificent success. Not only that, but it has generated many jobs. Currently, we have 15 jobs of our own.

We still could not finish our waiting list. People were wondering what the nuns would do with the local convent. We approached them and they agreed to sell it. About three years ago we purchased the convent from the nuns. It is a beautiful listed building. We developed it at a cost of €1.1 million. All of the money was generated by our own fundraising, with the help of the Ring of Kerry charity cycle, from which we got €250,000. Is that sustaining the rural community? Obviously, it is. We have already generated 15 jobs locally. The man who won the contract for the convent was on the verge of collapse due to the recession. Since December 2015 there has been on average nine people working on the project every day. We feel that is one of the ways forward. We work with the State agencies and they generate money for us. We have a bit of experience now and we can make a massive difference.

As well as that, while I finish, we also decided to keep working for the young people. We have developed Teach Íosagáin - our headquarters since 1983 - a number of times since. We have added extensions. It is now one of the most modern youth cafés in the country and offers all kinds of services for young people. Again, one of the most important services is probably the disco hall. We do not believe in giving out money to DJs. We create our own DJs, one teaching the other.

That is basically our story since 1975, or part of it.

Vice Chairman: I thank Mr. O'Donoghue very much for his opening statement. I suppose the members of the committee will have questions, but Tearmann Éanna might give its opening statement now too and we will have questions from members afterwards.

Ms Peigí Uí Chéidigh: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghlacadh leis an Leas-Chathaoirleach

agus leis an gcoiste as an gcuireadh labhairt leo ag ócáid an lae inniu. Tá an t-ábhar atá faoi chaibidil ag an gcoiste, caomhnú pobail tuaithe inmharthana, agus an gá atá le tithíocht shóisialta do dhaoine atá ag dul in aois, fite fuaite le chéile. Teastaíonn pobail tuaithe atá bríomhar agus inmharthana agus taobh istigh de na pobail sin tá sé rithábhachtach go ndéanfaí cúram dóibh siúd atá ag dul in aois i dtimpeallacht a chleacht siad agus is mó a bhfuil siad ar a gcompord leis. Is é seo croílár na hoibre atá ar siúl ag Tearmann Éanna agus mar sin tá sé oiriúnach go bhfuil an deis seo curtha ar fáil dúinn. I gcur i láthair an lae inniu ba mhaith liom léargas a thabhairt don choiste ar an obair atá ar siúl ag Tearmann Éanna, an dul chun cinn atá déanta againn thar na blianta, na dúshláin a mbíonn orainn déileáil leo agus na forbairtí ba mhaith linn a fheiceáil ar chúram na n-aosach i gceantar tuaithe Gaeltachta. Is eagraíocht dheonach pobalbhunaithe í Tearmann Éanna. Táimid ar an bhfód anois le os cionn 20 bliain. Thosaigh Tearmann Éanna amach ag cur tithe ar fáil do dhaoine atá ag dul in aois i gceantar Ghaeltachta dheisceart Chonamara. Thar na blianta tháinig fás agus forbairt ar an eagraíocht agus de réir a chéile cuireadh leis an réimse seirbhísí riachtanacha a chuirtear ar fáil do phobal an cheantair.

Tá soláthar tithe sóisialta fós mar chuid lárnach de chlár oibre na heagraíochta agus le dhá bhliain anuas tá cistí caipitil ar fiú os cionn €3 mhilliún ceadaithe ag an Stát do Thearmann Éanna chun cur ar ár gcumas líon na dtithe a mhéadú ó 32 go dtí 57 sna blianta beaga seo amach romhainn. Mar eagraíocht, tá muid buíoch as an tacaíocht leanúnach atá á fáil againn ón Aire Stáit le freagracht as an nGaeltacht, ó Chomhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe agus ón Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála, Pobail agus Rialtais Aitiúil i gcur chun cinn na bhfiontar seo atá dírithe ar an bpobal áitiúil. Nuair a bheas an obair thógála ar fad tugtha chun críche - obair a bhfuil tús curtha léi cheana féin - beidh tithe sóisialta de chuid na heagraíochta lonnaithe i gcúig láthair éagsúla ó cheantar an Chnoic i gCois Fharraige go dtí Eanach Mheáin i mBéal an Daingin.

A lárnaí is atá sé dúinn tithe a chur ar fáil do phobal aosta an cheantair, níl anseo ach cuid den chuntas ar an obair a dhéanann Tearmann Éanna. Tá ionad lae den chéad scoth againn a bhíonn oscailte chúig lá na seachtaine. Bíonn réimse leathan gníomhaíochtaí agus imeachtaí eagraithe san ionad mar aon le réimse leathan seirbhísí á gcur ar fáil d'os cionn 300 duine. Cuirtear seirbhís taistil ar fáil do dhaoine chun freastal ar an ionad lae agus tá nasc láidir agus tacaíocht á gcur ar fáil againn do phobail eile i gceantar dheisceart Chonamara chun cur ar a gcumas seirbhísí ionaid lae a reáchtáil. Le roinnt blianta anuas tá seirbhís béile ar rothaí á cur ar fáil againn agus ionad curadóireachta forbartha a chruthaíonn nasc idir rannpháirtithe Thearmann Éanna agus na bunscoileanna agus na hiar-bhunscoileanna áitiúla.

Tá an tseirbhís cúraim bhaile ar cheann de na forbairtí is mó, is dúshlánaí agus, go deimhin, is tábhachtaí a bhfuil Tearmann Éanna tar éis tabhairt faoi le roinnt blianta anuas. Tugann an tseirbhís seo, atá á cur ar fáil i gcomhar le Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte, deis do dhaoine maireachtáil ina mbaile féin seachas a bheith i dtithe altranais nó in ospidéal. I láthair na huaire, tá Tearmann Éanna aitheanta ag Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte le 700 uair a chloig cúraim sa tseachtain a sholáthar.

Mar is eol dúinn agus don choiste, freastalaíonn seirbhís den chineál seo go minic ar na daoine is leochailí sa bpobal. Tuigeann Tearmann Éanna é seo agus tuigeann muid freisin a thábhachtaí is atá sé go bhfreastalófaí ar dhaoine ina dteanga dhúchais féin. Uaireanta ní thugann an Státhóras, ná go deimhin comhlachtaí príobháideacha a bhíonn i mbun na hoibre seo, aird mar is ceart ar an gcuid sin den chúram agus ní thuigtear a thábhachtaí is atá sé go bhfreastalófaí trí Ghaeilge ar dhaoine atá i suíomh leochaileach. Is í an Ghaeilge a dteanga dúchais agus an teanga is mó a bhfuil siad féin ar a gcompord léi. Mar eagraíocht phobalbhunaithe, agus arb í an Ghaeilge ár dteanga oibre agus cumarsáide, is cuid lárnach dár gcultúr agus dár bhfealsúnacht

í an Ghaeilge. Cuidíonn an cur chuige nádúrtha teanga atá in úsáid ag Tearmann Éanna le ceangal, comhthuiscint agus muinín a chruthú idir muid féin agus na daoine a mbíonn muid ag freastal orthu. Tá luach faoi leith air seo nár cheart beag is fiú a dhéanamh dó.

Tá dúshlán ann chomh maith céanna. Mar a luaigh mé níos túisce, is eagraíocht phobalbhunaithe í Tearmann Éanna ar a bhfuil stiúrthóirí a thugann a n-am go deonach ina bhun. Níl aon amhras ach go bhfuil an leibhéal freagrachta a bhaineann leis an gcineál seo oibre thar a bheith tromchúiseach ach tá an t-ádh linn go bhfuil stiúrthóirí againn le taithí agus saineolas i réimsí áirithe a fheiceann luach na hoibre agus atá sásta a gcuid ama a thabhairt go flaithiúil. Creideann Tearmann Éanna gur mó de bhuntáiste leas a bhaint as struchtúir áitiúla chun seirbhísí riachtanacha pobail a chur ar fáil nuair is féidir sin a dhéanamh. Caithfear, mar sin, tacaíochtaí praiticiúla a thabhairt do bhoird stiúrtha a ghlacann na cúramaí seo orthu féin agus iad a chumasú chun an obair seo a thabhairt chun críche. Mar eagraíocht neamhbhrabúis, déantar infheistiú ar aon fharasbarr a bhíonn ag an eagraíocht ar ais i seirbhísí na heagraíochta.

A fheabhas agus a bhíonn aon bhord stiúrtha, táthar ag brath cuid mhaith ar struchtúr bainistíochta agus foirne chun obair na heagraíochta a chur i bhfeidhm go laethúil. An taithí atá faighte ag Tearmann Éanna thar na blianta ná go mbíonn an Státchóras go maith ag soláthar maoiniú caipitil chun struchtúir agus tograí a bhunú ach go minic ní amhlaidh an cas áfach ó thaobh cistí reatha de. Tarlaíonn sé go rialta nach gcuirtear ar fáil ach an t-íosmhéid acmhainní a theastaíonn chun seirbhísí a reachtáil. Fágann sin go mbíonn ar Thearmann Éanna dul i muinín foinsí eile chun tacú le hobair na foirne. Cruthaíonn an múnla seo oibre neamhchinnteacht nach gá a bheith ann dá gcuirfí na hacmhainní cuí ar fáil faoi réir conradh seirbhíse. Is ábhar é seo gur chóir aghaidh a thabhairt air, go háirithe i gcomhthéacs ina bhfuil béim ar ardchaighdeán seirbhíse agus ar dhea-chleachtais oibre agus riaracháin, ábhair a n-aontaíonn Tearmann Éanna leo.

Tá cuid mhaith tráchtairachta á dhéanamh na laethanta seo ar na deacrachtaí ollmhóra atá roimh phobail tuaithe, le bánú daonra agus an tarraingt i dtreo na mbailte móra agus na gcathracha. Tá ceantar Chois Fharraige ar leic an dorais do chathair na Gaillimhe agus cruthaíonn sé sin buntáistí agus míbhuntáistí dá chuid féin. Cé nach bhfuil an bánú tuaithe le brath chomh mór sna ceantair sin is giorra don chathair, ní mar sin atá an staid sna ceantair atá níos faide siar an cósta. Tá sé le tabhairt faoi deara go bhfuil tarraingt an aosa óig i dtreo na gcathracha ag méadú go príomha de bharr cúrsaí fostaíochta, cúrsaí pleanála agus infhaighteacht seirbhísí agus freisin de bharr na n-áiseanna a bhíonn lonnaithe iontu. Tá pobail tuaithe ag fulaingt agus an dearcadh ann go bhfuiltear a bhfágáil taobh thiar den fhás agus den fhorbairt atá le brath sna ceantair uirbeacha. Tá cuid mhaith den fhírinne leis an dearcadh sin agus tá sé tábhachtach nach bhfágfaí daoine atá ag dul in aois ar an ngannchuid gan cóiríocht agus seirbhísí a chuireann lena saol agus a dhéanann an saol i bhfad níos éasca dóibh.

Creideann Tearmann Éanna nach bhfuil dóthain infheistíochta á déanamh le ceantair inmharthana tuaithe a fhorbairt agus caithfear a bheith cúramach nach bhfágtar comhdhéanamh na bpobal tuaithe claonta go láidir i dtreo na n-aoisghrúpaí is sine. Tá fíis uailmhianach ag Tearmann Éanna seirbhísí den chéad scoth a chur ar fáil do dhaoine atá ag dul in aois i nGael-tacht Chonamara theas. Mar atá tugtha le fios inár ráiteas misin, teastaíonn uainn timpeallacht na dea-chomharsanachta a chruthú ina mbeidh sonas, sláinte agus fad saoil ag ár muintir, faoi shó agus faoi chompord, i gciall agus i réasún. Tá an ráiteas misin sin lárnach sna spriocanna ata daingnithe inár bplean straitéiseach deich mbliana agus céimeanna móra glactha i gcomhlíonadh an phlean sin go dáta.

Ní féidir le heagraíochtaí ar nós Thearmann Éanna feidhmiú gan tacaíocht an Stáit. Cre-

ideann muid go bhfuil an Stát ag fáil luach thar na bearta ar an infheistíocht a chuireann sé ar fáil do Thearmann Éanna agus d'eagraíochtaí eile cosúil linn. Feidhmíonn muid i spiorad na páirtnéireachta le forais éagsúla an Stáit chun ár gcuid seirbhísí a sholáthar agus a fhorbairt agus tá sé chun ár leasa ar fad go mbeadh eagraíochtaí áitiúla ag déanamh cúraim do riachtanais a bpobail féin. Chuige sin caithfear an infheistíocht cheart a dhéanamh agus níl sé sin ag tarlú faoi láthair. Faoi mar a iarrtar ar eagraíochtaí pobalbhunaithe níos mó seirbhísí a chur ar fáil, caithfear na hacmhainní a chur ar fáil dá réir.

Inár gcás féin feidhmíonn muid i bpobail ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge fós in uachtar iontu mar theanga labhartha laethúil agus níos láidre fós i measc an aoisghrúpa a ndéanann muid freastal orthu. Níl aon cheist ach go bhfuil úsáid na Gaeilge faoi bhrú fiú sna pobail Ghaeltachta is láidre agus tá sé fíorthábhachtach nach dtabharfadh an Stát faoi aon chéimeanna, gníomhaíochtaí ná beartais, go díreach nó go hindíreach, a d'fhéadfadh dochar a dhéanamh do stádas nó d'úsáid na Gaeilge. Creideann muid gur de bharr easpa tuisceana a tharlaíonn an méid sin go minic. Is fearr an tuiscint a bhíonn ag eagraíochtaí pobail, ar nós Thearmann Éanna, ar an suíomh teangeolaíochta ina bhfuiltear ag feidhmiú ná mar a bhíonn ag eagraíochtaí Stáit agus eagraíochtaí seachtracha go minic. Is fearr agus is feiliúnaí go mbeadh na heagraíochtaí sin atá in ann seirbhísí a chur ar fáil ar ardchaighdeán agus i dteanga an phobail i mbun soláthar seirbhísí don phobal Gaeltachta nuair is féidir sin a dhéanamh.

Tugann Tearmann Éanna aghaidh ar an todhchaí le dóchas. Tá sé beartaithe againn páirtnéireacht níos láidre a chruthú le heagraíochtaí deonacha eile a fheidhmíonn go háitiúil ionas go ndéanfar freastal iomlán ar gach aoisghrúpa sa bpobal. Ar an mbealach seo, tá súil againn go nglacfaidh na pobail féin níos mó seilbhe ar na forbairtí agus ar na seirbhísí atá de dhíth ar an bpobal. Sna blianta amach romhainn, tá sé i gceist againn na seirbhísí reatha a neartú agus seirbhísí nua a fhorbairt. Ach na hacmhainní a bheith ar fáil dúinn, tá de chuspóir againn cúram níos fearr a dhéanamh de dhaoine atá ag fulaingt le néaltrú, galar atá ag fáil i bhfad níos coitianta agus a mbíonn tionchar mór aige ar shaol clainne.

Tá súil agam gur thug an cur i láthair seo léargas níos fearr don choiste ar an obair atá ar siúl ag Tearmann Éanna agus ag a mhacasamhail d'eagraíochtaí ar fud na tíre. Tá dlite orainn an aire agus an chóir is fearr is féidir linn a chur ar fáil do dhaoine atá ag dul in aois. Tá Tearmann Éanna ag déanamh a chuid féin, obair dhúshlánach ach obair fhiúntach atá thar a bheith tairbheach.

Vice Chairman: Gabhaim buíochas le Tearmann Éanna for the opening statement. I will now take questions from the members. I call Deputy Healy-Rae.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am absolutely delighted to see the Rathmore Social Action Group before this committee today represented by Mr. Michael J. O'Mahony, Ms Samantha O'Shea and Ms Anne Fitzgerald. I wish to recognise all of the other members in Sliabh Luachra, especially Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue's wife, Eileen May, and his family, which has been very involved with him in the social action group. I recognise all the other members and volunteers that are involved in Rathmore Social Action Group and in the entire Sliabh Luachra area, which encompasses the Cork side of the Blackwater River and up into Knocknagree, as far as Scartaglin on the western side and Gneevullia. In that entire area, the amount of voluntary assistance that has been given to the social action group and the amount of work that has been put in cannot ever have a proper value put on it because the work that is being done in the present time and that has been done in the past going back to the mid-1970s is massive.

It has made such a difference to the lives of elderly people from that area especially, which

is very rural. Like Mr. O'Donoghue said, many people's houses were not up to scratch. People were living in conditions in which they did not have running water, bathrooms and a lot of things. They finished up in very lonely places. It was great that Mr. O'Donoghue and his group took them out of that scenario. I am sure that the people who came into his houses at the start have passed on, but there are many like them still there at the present time. It is great to see the way they are seen after with meals. There could be brothers and sisters or an elderly man and his wife and it is great that they are looked after with meals and medical care. I could give an example of one lady in her 50s. She was in a very rural part of Kerry living on her own. Her brother passed on and she was not well. She did not have the wherewithal to look after herself properly. Gladly, she was taken into one of the social action houses. She was a bit unsure of herself for a while and maybe wanted to go back home, but now she is very happy and well looked after. She is a different person totally due to all of the support she gets where she is now living.

That is one part of the work that the social action group workers carry out: providing houses for the elderly and rural people. They also have buses going around collecting more elderly people and bringing them to the day care centre where they pass a few hours and get a meal. The value of that is so great and means so much to the person to get out of the monotonous home life. They meet more people like themselves. They pass a few hours, sing a few songs and talk. It breaks up the time for them and is very necessary. It is to be applauded.

The workers do meals on wheels. They take meals out to people. They cater for the young as well with Teach Íosagáin. They run discos. There is a hall in which all of the community groups can have their meetings. I am very proud when I go to other parts of the county and indeed other parts of the country, because we have more in Rathmore than I believe a lot of other rural places have. I am very proud of that. I am very proud of the way in which Mr. O'Donoghue goes about his business. We listen to the Government talking about building houses. Mr. O'Donoghue has more built with less commotion than all of the fanfare that is going on around the Government's building. If we take our county as a whole, and the State was involved as well, there were three rural cottages built by the local authority of Kerry County Council since 2011. That is three rural cottages in six years, compared with what we have heard this man and his group have built. With very little fanfare or commotion, this work has been carried out in Rathmore.

They also fund-raise. The Ring of Kerry cycle race, thankfully, has given them funding over a number of years. They run a pantomime there. Everyone gets involved. There is a lot to be learnt from what they have done and from their ambitions for the future. How can we help them as a committee? In their strategic plan, it states that the social action group will construct a new 140-seater theatre as an extension to Teach Íosagáin. That is a very laudable project. How can we support the action group to help build that? It is important to retain our culture, which we are very proud of. When we can display it, we need a theatre like that.

They have plans for a drop-in centre for active older people to tap into their creativity. Sadly, I feel that is something that we are losing, have lost and will continue to lose. People in rural areas used to meet in the pub before but that is not longer possible with rules and regulations or whatever. We are losing all of the characters and all of the voices that they were able to give to us that were handed down to them. We need places like the drop-in centre that Mr. O'Donoghue and his group are talking about. We need to create places like this to ensure that we do not lose the culture of the people up in the hills and the glens of Shrone, Knocknagree and Gneevgullia, the elderly people who are 70 or 80 years of age now. The ideas their grandfathers

had about rural areas were handed down to them. We need a continuation of that. If we do not find out how we got here, we certainly will not have a clue of where we are going. I may have gone on too far.

The Government is talking about the possibility of purchasing unoccupied houses. I do not know what will become of it. Mr. O'Donoghue spoke about it and I know it is something we will be coming with. There is a plan for the construction of four houses on the convent grounds. Can we ask the Minister for the environment if he can help in some way to purchase the land or do something to help us? Is there a feasibility for developing rural tourism? We have a very rich heritage in that part of Kerry and that part of the country. Sliabh Luachra is renowned for its music, song, set dancing and step dancing. We need to help and develop what this group has in mind.

I do not want to exclude Tearmann Éanna. It is doing much the same work and its representatives are very welcome to the committee. We are delighted to hear from them and appreciate the work they have done and will continue to do to help the people in Galway. If we had more of the likes of the seven witnesses before us today, the country would be a much better place.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an dá dhream anseo tráthnóna. I welcome the two groups to the committee this afternoon. It seems to me that what the Rathmore group is trying to do is create intergenerational services for young and older people in one setting. How dispersed throughout the community are the activities? What is the geographic area the group covers? I have a good idea of where Sliabh Luachra is, but is the area of activity about 20 miles by 20 miles across?

Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue: We work within a 15-mile radius with a population of about 6,000 people.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: How many people does the group have employed on an ongoing basis, including people in schemes and so on?

Ms Anne Fitzgerald: We have a community employment scheme that has places for 16 people. There are four and a manager on a community services programme. There is a contract with the HSE for the day centre. There are about eight people employed directly by the Rathmore Social Action Group in care assistant roles and one nursing role funded on specific programme contracts from each of those agencies. Our struggle is something that Tearmann Éanna referred to. There is a lot of programme money available for us to do various programmes. We can fund-raise very well. We can build things and organise. Where we are struggling as an organisation is at the level of infrastructure within the organisation. The problem is in having the core resources and funding to help us be open for business and do business, such as compliance, governance and being able to look after health and safety. It is this core funding that we are lacking.

We can raise money to build houses and have gardens. What nobody will give us money for is to have a business that is a social enterprise that is open for business. That is our significant and absolute gap going forward. There is goodwill, community spirit and a huge level of volunteering. There is great will, but we must be able to sustain our organisation going forward with a level of core funding and be able to access that money. No programme allows us to do that. We are not allowed to have management fees on a HSE contract or take out some of the money to contribute towards compliance and all of the costs of doing business. We are determined to bring our standards up and be fully compliant with the governance code for voluntary organisa-

tions. That is not without cost. At the moment, all compliance issues are done by the voluntary board of directors. We have no staff to do any of that stuff.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Has the action group any management staff?

Ms Anne Fitzgerald: No. The staff are all funded through programmes on specific things. The community service has a young manager who is there to manage the centre for young people. The day centre has a nurse manager who is funded to manage the health care needs of the people, so-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: But there are no general managers.

Ms Anne Fitzgerald: We have no funding to do all of that. It is all done on a voluntary basis. It is done by Mr. O'Donoghue for the main part and members of the board over the years. That is where we are struggling. We know that we are an effective local and social enterprise. However, we are now at a level where we question how much more we can deliver without being stretched. All of our funders have very strict criteria and we are happy to be transparent, be compliant and do everything that is required. Where apportionment kicks in, not every programme allows us funding to do these things. We do not have any infrastructure for our computer systems. The things we are lacking are housekeeping stuff. We can do the big stuff.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: We will come back to that in a minute. The action group is dealing with older people in the community. I understand it has some houses, but it is also dealing with people in their own homes. Proportionately, how many people of the older cohort whom it serves are in their own homes compared with those in specific housing that was built for them?

Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue: Maybe two thirds and one third.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: So two thirds are living in their own home.

Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue: Yes.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Does the witness find that a lot of people want to stay in their own home and another cohort who want to move into sheltered housing or into a scheme for various reasons?

Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue: The first choice would be to stay in one's own home. However, a lot of people make the right decision that it is no longer feasible to stay in their own home because of transport, if they cannot driver any longer, and, most important of all, because they are too far away from the services. We are very lucky because our houses are close to the church, the bus stop, the shop and the day centre. It is a perfect situation for people. They do find it very attractive and that is why we have a long waiting list. People make up their mind that they will hold on one year but that the following year they will have to relocate to one of the houses.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Casfaidh mé go Tearmann Éanna. Tá struchtúr bainistíochta ag Tearmann Éanna. Tá daoine fostaithe go lán-aimseartha.

Ms Peigí Uí Chéidigh: Tá. Tá muide fostaithe. Tá an t-ádh linne sa chaoi sin go bhfuil maoiniú againn tríd an gclár seirbhís pobail. Is éard atá ansin ná go bhfuil muide ag fáil maoiniú do bhainisteoir agus ceithre phost lán-aimseartha. I ndáiríre, mar a fheiceann muid ón bhfás agus ón bhforbairt atá déanta againn ó ceadaiódh an maoiniú sin dúinn in 2008, níl a ndóthain ansin ag an nóiméad seo. Tá na seirbhísí á fhorbairt amach. Tá éileamh níos mó tagtha orthu agus dá bhrí sin teastaíonn níos mó acmhainní uainn le go mbeimid in ann an cúram is fearr

agus is féidir a chur ar fáil do na daoine agus é sin a chur ar fáil dóibh sa mbaile. Aontaíom go hiomlán leis an gcainteoir le mo thaobh anseo nach bhfuil dabht ach go bhfuil sé tábhachtach go dtosaíonn an Státchóras ag smaoineamh ar airgead a infheistiú i gcúram agus seirbhísí a chur ar fáil sa bpobal, mar ní féidir brath ar an struchtúr atá ann faoi láthair. Tá an struchtúr atá ann thar a bheith lag don méid éilimh atá air.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ceann de na ceisteanna eile a chuir mé ar an dream as an Ráth Mór ná cé mhéad daoine a bhfuil siad ag tabhairt seirbhís dóibh atá sna tithe agus cé mhéad atá i measc an phobail, is é sin, a dtagann isteach don chúram lae agus mar sin de.

Ms Peigí Uí Chéidigh: Táimid ag caint arís ar an tríú chuid. Is céatadán an-bheag atá i gceist sna tithe sóisialta. Táimid ag caint ar cheantar thar a bheith mór. Caithfimid breathnú ar an bpictiúir mór. Táimid ag iarraidh i ndáiríre breathnú ar dhaoine atá ag dul in aois. Tuigimid ar fad go bhfuil líon na ndaoine ag dul in aois ag méadú. Beidh méadú mór ar sin idir seo agus 2024. Dá bhrí sin, tá sé tábhachtach dúinne go mbeidh muid in ann pleanáil leis an Státchóras agus go bhfeiceann muid amach romhainn. Mar a luaimid sa ráiteas oscailte, is rud é an néaltrú atá éirithe an-choitianta le tamall. I gConamara faoi láthair, níl aon tseirbhís lae ann do dhaoine a bhfuil néaltrú acu. Is trua é sin mar ní hamháin go bhfuil an duine atá an néaltrú aige nó aici i gcruachás, ach tá an teaghlach ar fad i gcruachás. Caitear go minic cosc a chur ar chuile shórt chun aire agus cúram a dhéanamh don duine a bhfuil néaltrú air nó uirthi mar is cúram 24 uair an chloig atá i gceist. Dá bhrí sin, is rud mór é dúinne faoi láthair go bhfuilimid ag breathnú chun cinn, ag neartú na seirbhísí agus ag breathnú ar an éileamh agus an líon daoine atá ag dul in aois, ionas go mbeimid in ann freastal orthu anois agus níos deireanaí.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Mar fhocal scoir, I have to admit that in my working background, I went to Connemara many years ago to work for a co-op. Very wisely at the time, the Department of the Gaeltacht was giving management grants, as they called it, to these start-up co-ops. They still exist and are still getting this core funding that the witnesses are talking about. It certainly had a massive effect in the Gaeltacht areas. Let us limit today's agenda to two issues and focus on them. One issue is the need for core funding for the development of local services. Rather than bringing all of the services in from the local big town, they could be provided from within the communities on a comprehensive basis. They need core funding to sustain and build those services and a scheme of core funding to be provided that is not scheme specific but is for that type of general service in rural areas. Would that be a major plus?

Mention was made of the community services programme. I do not know if the witnesses' organisations have a community services programme. I cannot remember if they have one or not. It is the only programme, apart from the rural social scheme, that allows the people to stay with the organisation. With community employment schemes, Tús schemes and so on, no sooner has an organisation got the employees than they are told they have to keep moving on, even though they are dying to stay with the organisation. In other places in the country, people who do the kind of work that schemes do out in the countryside are actually paid. They are paid full wages and given permanent jobs. Therefore, these are necessary services and are not ancillary. How important would it be for scheme jobs, Tús jobs and so on that the person would be allowed to stay on the scheme as long as they did not get full-time employment elsewhere? Therefore, the organisation would get to hold on to the staff it has trained and built up a rapport with rather than have a constant churn of the short-term schemes. If those two issues came out of today's meeting, would the witnesses feel it was worthwhile coming all the way up to Dublin?

Mr. Michael O'Mahony: In the case of Rathmore Social Action Group, as the committee

has heard, the instigator of it was Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue. We are hugely dependent on him. He is a retired teacher and principal from the Rathmore secondary school. He lives close by and is the man on the ground. We are talking here today about sustainability. Without Mr. O'Donoghue, it is not sustainable. In the absence of the kind of model that the Deputy was talking about in which there is core funding for a manager role, a chief executive or whatever the title is - somebody who can manage the day-to-day activities - it is quite likely that it will fall apart, irrespective of the best attempts of a voluntary board of directors who have full-time jobs themselves. They are in a governance role and a visionary role but they cannot do the day-to-day management that is required.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is getting worse every day.

Mr. Michael O'Mahony: Therefore, I completely agree with the Deputy on his first point. His second point has already been addressed by Ms Fitzgerald on the notion of multi-annual funding. An organisation needs to know where it is going. It cannot manage these things on very short timeframes when it is not sure if it is going to get the funding for the following year. It cannot have a vision and develop into the future on that basis. It needs multi-annual funding and the ability for people to stay on. We have also mentioned governance, health and safety requirements and all the rest. No sooner are people trained and put through all those procedures than they are gone from the organisation. There is huge cost to that and it is a very inefficient churn.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: B'fhéidir go bhfreagródh Tearmann Éanna na ceisteanna céanna.

Ms Máire Denvir: Tagaimse go hiomlán leis an méid a dúirt Mr. O'Mahony. Tá fíor-ghá le go mbeadh airgead seasta, core funding, bunairgead nó cibé ainm is mian linn a thabhairt air i nGaeilge ann. Ní féidir forbairt a dhéanamh gan fios a bheith ag duine. Tá sé thar a bheith tábhachtach go bhfuil bunrud ag eagraíocht le leanacht ar aghaidh le. Chomh maith le sin, luaigh an Teachta dhá rud faoi na scéimeanna Tús agus eile. Baineann muide an-chuid úsáid as na scéimeanna difriúla sin. Mar sin féin, tá sé thar a bheith tábhachtach go bhfuil leanúnachas ann agus go leanfadh na hoibrithe ar aghaidh ó am go ham agus ó bhliain go bliain.

Ceann de na fadhbanna a fheiceann muid agus atá pléite againn ná go bhfuil géar-ghá le hoiliúint a chur ar dhaoine. Ceann de na rudaí atá Tearmann Éanna ag déanamh le bliain anuas nó mar sin de ná cúram baile. Téann muid isteach sna bailte agus cuirtear duine isteach sa mbaile chun cúram a dhéanamh don seandhuine. Muna bhfuil oiliúint ag an duine i go leor rudaí, ach go háirid san aire, tá sé an-deacair é a dhéanamh. Táimid á dhéanamh ar bhealaí liopastacha nach bhfuilimid féin sásta leis. Ceapaimse gur chóir do na daoine seo oiliúint cheart agus cúrsa ceart a bheith déanta acu agus taithí oibre a bheith acu sula dtéann siad ag plé leis an seandhuine, an duine ag dul amach in aois nó an duine a bhfuil éalann air nó uirthi a theastaíonn cabhair uaidh nó uaithe.

Tá an-chuid páipéarachais ag baint leis an rud seo sa lá atá inniu ann, mar atá a fhios againn ar fad. Tógann sé sin suas an-chuid ama. Má tá ar eagraíocht duine a athrú chuile sé mhí nó bliain de bharr na cúrsaí seo, níl an eagraíocht ag dul áit ar bith mar tá sé ag caitheamh níos mó ama ag múineadh an duine atá ag teacht. An chéad rud eile, tá an duine sin bailithe áit éigin eile. Tá an leanúnachas seo ag teastáil ionas go mbeidh postanna ag leanúint ar aghaidh, bídís i bhfoirm Tús, FÁS nó cibé ainm a bheidh air an bhliain seo chugainn nó an bhliain ina dhiaidh. Tuigeann an coiste céard atá i gceist agam. Tá sé thar a bheith tábhachtach go mbeadh an leanúnachas sin ann.

Fad is a bhíonn freastal le déanamh ar an duine a bhfuil an freastal uaidh nó uaithi, ba chóir go mbeidh an oiliúnt faighte ag an duine atá ag déanamh an fhreastail agus go mbeadh aithne ar agus muinín sa duine sin. Go minic, le daoine atá ag dul amach in aois nó amach sna blianta nó le daoine atá faoi mhí-bhuntaiste nó faoi chiorrú coirp nó intinne, an rud is mó atá ag teastáil ná go mbeadh muinín acu sa duine ag tabhairt chúraim. Má tá eagraíocht ag athrú pearsan chuile sheachtain nó chuile mhí i gcaitheamh daoine, ní féidir muinín a bheith ag an duine sa té ag tabhairt chúraim. Is é sin an rud is mó le saothar a thabhairt.

Tagaim go hiomlán leis an méid a dúirt an Teachta Ó Cuív. Dá bhféadfaí fiú an dá rud sin a chur i bhfeidhm, chabhródh sé le déanamh cinnte de go bhfaigheann siad oiliúint cheart le déileáil lena gceird. Oiltear daoine i ngach rud, ach do cheann do na rudaí is tábhachtaí, níl aon oiliúint cheart againn sa Stát seo le tabhairt do na daoine seo.

Is é sin ceann de na fáthanna gur tháinig an oiread fadhbanna suas le cúpla bliain, mar nach raibh na daoine oile i gceart ón tús. Tógadh duine isteach anseo agus ansiúd. Nuair a bhí an taithí acu, chuadar áit éigin eile. Is ceird í seo atá tábhachtach agus a bheidh ag teastáil go mór sa todhchaí. Mar atá a fhios againn, chaill na pobail tuaithe go leor den aoisghrúpa a bheadh ag baile ag tabhairt aire do na daoine ag dul amach in aois. Deirfinn gur tharla sé i gCiarraí chomh maith is a tharla i gConamara, mar a tharla sé ar fud na hÉireann. Chaill muid beagnach glúin iomlán go dtí an imirce. Caithfear an córas atá ann a athrú anois le freastal ar dhaoine. Go minic, go háirid i bpobal tuaithe, níl an freastal ann. Tá bánú aisteach tarlaithe de bharr an lag trá eacnamaíochta a bhí againn. Is seanphort é anois nach bhfuil na daoine in Éirinn. Tá siad san Astráil, i Meiriceá, i gCeanada agus ar fud an domhain. Níl siad thiar i gConamara san áit a mbeidís ag teastáil. Mar sin, caithfimid córas eile a oibriú.

Senator Fintan Warfield: Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh gach duine chuig an cruinniú seo. As part of my work with Sinn Féin, I have had the pleasure of meeting similar groups, be they in urban or rural environments, across the Six Counties. Something I always think about is the entrepreneurial spirit among some of the young people and their ability to channel that for the social good into community groups. That is something I have not experienced as much in the South. Therefore, it is great to hear it at first hand here in the committee. We know that creativity does not need to be fostered. Everyone is creative. We need to facilitate it and acknowledge it, not only in terms of allowing young people to channel that creativity, whether it is entrepreneurial or social, but in terms of supporting the livelihoods of those young people such as in Kerry and allowing the fusion of relationships, as alluded to by Deputy Ó Cuív, on an intergenerational basis. I believe that is quite unique. It should be known, as Deputy Ó Cuív also mentioned, that this committee is listening to those concerns around core funding. I hope the witnesses appreciate that they will be channelled into our report.

I have a couple of quick questions about the current project at the convent. I wish it well. How many apartments is it hoped to facilitate? The convent is to be fully occupied immediately after being opened on 2 May. Is that this May?

Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue: Yes. There will be four apartments for older people and a residential area for the remaining sisters. As they, I suppose, pass on, we will be taking over more. We own the whole place now. It is a listed building which could have fallen into decay, but we took it over as we saw it as important. The State and the Government are benefiting enormously from the project as up to €200,000 in VAT will be taken in as well as PRSI on wages etc. We will be hoping to recoup some €200,000 in some shape or form over the next few years.

Senator Fintan Warfield: What is the current situation relating to financing from the

Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government for the construction of those four houses? It was stated that the construction of four houses will start as soon as possible, provided-----

Ms Anne Fitzgerald: They are being built through fund-raised income. The social action group is very good at raising money for specific projects. We want to get that across. People will contribute. If we tell the community we want to do something for the people of our community, as they are our neighbours and relatives, people are willing to give to specific projects where they can see a building and a result. It is far more difficult to raise money for the non-glamorous work that is essential to build these buildings such as that of quantity surveyors. No one is interested in that aspect but that is where our core needs remain.

We wish to stress that we are very good at fund-raising and we can build. We would love to get more and we will take what we can from whoever is willing to grant aid us. However, our essential needs are about strengthening our organisation to deliver locally on behalf of local citizens. We see ourselves as an equal partner and want to be recognised as a partner with the State in providing services within the local community. If a cost-benefit analysis was carried out, it would show that the State is benefiting hugely from the existence of organisations such as the social action group and that of our colleagues here. This is a net gain to the State as it does not have to provide these in core hospitals and services at a much higher cost. Despite this, we are not grant-aided to exist. We exist through spirit and will and not through the core recognition of the State. It does not say that there is a social capital and social gain here for all of us as citizens and as a society if these organisations are funded at a core level to do this work with us, on our behalf and in partnership with us.

Senator Fintan Warfield: Therefore, is phase 2 subject to finance from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government?

Ms Anne Fitzgerald: Yes.

Mr. Michael O'Mahony: It is a possibility, I suppose. On a related matter, as part of the convent project which, as has been stated, is completely funded through our own resources, we approached IRD Duhallow which is the local Leader organisation. We did not qualify due to state aid and *de minimis* rules. To my mind, this is ridiculous. As we were a successful organisation and already drawing down some state aid in terms of our community services and Pobal, we were beyond the €200,000 over three years maximum level of funding that can be achieved. Effectively, those who have an effective track record in managing projects that are of benefit to the local community are being penalised. It is a ridiculous situation that should be addressed. Some of it may be due to the interpretation of the particular rules in an Irish context rather than a European context.

Senator Fintan Warfield: I commend the plan to construct a regional theatre. Would it be the only one in the area? Where is the nearest regional theatre to access arts and theatre?

Ms Anne Fitzgerald: It would probably be Siamsa Tíre in Tralee.

Senator Fintan Warfield: One of the last quotes on the impact states:

I love when the young people come to entertain us in the day centre and accompany us on outings. I have great memories of our trips to Croke Park and Fota. Rathmore is a great place to live and a great place to grow old in.

That quote commends the organisation in a wonderful way.

Tá ceist agam ar Pheigí Uí Chéidigh agus ar Mháire Denvir. I do not want to throw a curve ball but do they have a response to the recent census figures on Gaeltacht areas? If they could make one demand of the Ministers with responsibility for the Gaeltacht and the Irish language, what would it be?

Ms Máire Denvir: Ar ais ar cheist na Gaeilge arís. Bhí muid ar fad ag ceapadh go dtiocfadh an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge ar aghaidh i bhfad níos sciobtha, níos dearfaí agus níos cinnte ná mar a chuaigh. Maidir leis an gceist go bhfuil laghdú tagtha ar líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge, tá laghdú tagtha ar líon an phobail i go leor de na ceantair Ghaeltachta freisin. Tá fadhb mhór sa gceantar ina gcónaíonn mé féin agus sin fadhb planála. Tá muid ag caint ar cheantar Thearmann Éanna agus tá muid ag dul ó na Forbarcha siar an chósta chomh fada le Leitir Mealláin, Carna, Ros Muc agus mar sin de. Má thógann muid an ceantar áirithe sin, abair, idir na Forbacha agus Ros an Mhíl nó siar an bhóthar ansin, tá sé beagnach do-dhéanta ag fear óg ar bith nó ag bean óg ar bith cur isteach ar theach a thógáil sa gceantar mar gheall ar go bhfuil seacht nó ocht de bhóithrín - níl a fhios agam cé mhéad línte atá ar mhapaí agus iadsan línte in intinn duine éigin istigh in oifig éigin - atá ann le blianta agus is cosúil go bhfuil siad ag dul ar aghaidh is ar aghaidh agus níl ann ach caint. Tá eolas agam ar leads óga a tháinig ar ais go dtí an Ghaeltacht agus atá ag obair sa Ghaeltacht ach atá ag cónaí i gCnoc na Cathrach nó i gcathair na Gaillimhe. Tá eolas agam ar fir óga agus mná óga a chur isteach ar cead planála ach diúltaíodh iad arís agus arís eile. Ag an bpointe sin, cheannaigh siad teach i gcathair na Gaillimhe.

Déanadh go leor plé ar na meáin ar an scéal seo i gcaitheamh na seachtaine. Domsa, atá ag cónaí san áit, ceapaim gurb é ceann de na géarchéimeanna móra atá ann ná easpa bóithre cearta chomh maith leis an easpa cead planála de bharr nach bhfuil an bóthar á thógáil ach go bhfuil an bóthar ag dul á thógáil. An dtógfar é? Sin ceist eile. Tá sé thar am réiteach a fháil ar an bhfadhb sin agus tá sé thar am réiteach a fháil go bhfaighidh daoine cead planála níos éasca. Mar atá a fhios ag an gcoiste, de réir cosúlachta tá an Stát, an Eoraip agus an córas in aghaidh tithe aonair a thógáil. Sin an áit a bhfuil an fhadhb.

Tá píos talún ag muintir na ndaoine seo agus sin iad pobal na Gaeltachta. Is féidir linn an méid agus is féidir linn de planáil teanga a dhéanamh. Bhí mé féin ar choiste planáil teanga i gCois Fharraige. Chuir muid plan isteach san údarás. Ag deireadh an lae, nuair atá sé sin ar fad ráite, mura bhfuil muid in ann an fear óg agus an mbean óg a chur ag cónaí san áit le clann a bheith acu agus iad a chur ar an scoil agus a thógáil trí Gaeilge, ní bheidh forbairt ar an nGaeltacht. An príomhrud ná an pobal a choinneáil. Caithfear tithe a thógáil agus caithfidh muid na daoine óga seo, mar a dúirt mé, a chur ag cónaí ann. Tá an-chuid acu imithe as an gceantar dá bharr seo. Tá an-chuid daoine atá ag dul amach in aois sa gceantar ina bhfuil muide agus tá an-chuid de na daoine fiú atá ag obair sa gceantar anois i gcathair na Gaillimhe.

Cé nár thit sé, le bheith fírinneach, an oiread sin sa gceantar ina bhfuil muid ann, b'fhéidir gur miniú áirid é sin ar cén fáth ar thit sé. Níl an oiread sin eolais agam faoi láthair ar cheantar Dhún na nGall agus ar cheantar Chiarraí. Caithfidh siad sin a labhart dóibh féin. Domsa, go pearsanta, i gConamara, caithfear athrú a dhéanamh ar na rialacha planála, bóithre a thógáil agus córas ceart Idirlíne a chur isteach san áit. Má théann duine amach go Dúiche Sheoigheach, ní bheadh sé nó sí in ann glaoch gutháin a fháil. Chaithfeadh sé nó sí dul amach go Maigh Cuilinn nó i dtreo na Gaillimhe le gur féidir glaoch gutháin a fháil. Ní féidir fiú gloach gutháin a fháil. Níl mobile ann agus níl Wi-Fi ann. Níl na rudaí sin ar fad ann. Tá sé ag teacht go pointe áirithe agus go ceantair áirithe, ach ba mhaith linn go bhfaighimid an ceangal sin ar fud na Gaeltachta ar fad. Is í aois na teicneolaíochta. Ní féidir dul i bhfolach ar an teicneolaíocht. We all

have to accept that this is a technological age. We must go forward. When we get broadband and all that is ag teastáil in éineacht leis, ní bheidh an pobal Gaeltachta ag titim.

Senator Fintan Warfield: I assure Ms Denvir that her comments regarding planning are extremely timely. We had a conversation during private session-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Before the witnesses came in.

Senator Fintan Warfield: -----where Deputies Healy-Rae and Ó Cuív ensured that it will be on the agenda. I thank Ms Denvir for her contribution.

Vice Chairman: Deputy Healy-Rae raised a question that could apply to the Rathmore group and the Tearmann Éanna group, which was how we as a State could help. That was Deputy Healy-Rae's question. Am I correct?

Mr. Michael O'Mahony: I will reply to that first. We are talking about sustainability. We and Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue have discussed this issue with young people as well. Broadband is of fundamental importance to the life of rural Ireland. Without it, we will not have employment or young people wishing to live there or return. It might be a bit controversial to say it but, despite the talk, post offices are of the 19th century. We need broadband because that is what will maintain jobs in rural Ireland.

My second point might be slightly off topic. The South Kerry Development Partnership is involved in a European programme on community-based sustainable energy. If we look at the resources of rural Ireland, there is agriculture and tourism. Energy is another possible resource that could be huge. We must enable communities to have ownership of energy resources so that they are not all privately owned and often offshore owned by multinationals. A specific request is that community-based organisations which are able to come up with a reasonable and feasible proposal in the area of renewable energy would be prioritised for grid connection. It is a very practical thing.

I already mentioned the *de minimis* rules, which basically discriminate against effective organisations at community level. We have already discussed the need for core funding to provide for continuity and the expertise that is necessary in these days of governance requirements to manage effectively an organisation which is providing significant employment and huge net benefit to the State.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: We have benefited a lot from the witnesses' attendance here today. As Ms Anne Fitzgerald mentioned, the request for multi-annual community support and funding is vital. The witnesses explained that it is no bother to get projects going or to get the building up but the issue is sustaining the service. We have learned from this meeting today and we will have to fight for funding to ensure that all the work that has been brought to this stage will be kept going.

Mr Jerh O'Donoghue and his family have given of their time, as have Mr. Michael O'Mahony, Ms Samantha O'Shea and Ms Anne Fitzgerald. However, a day will come when they will be too busy or doing something else but the service will still be needed. We need to impress on the Ministers and the Taoiseach of the day that funding will have to be provided. Whatever about their ideas about what they are going to do, we must retain what we have. We need to ensure we hold what the witnesses have obtained for us with all their sweat and blood going back over the years. We need to ensure it is preserved and that we keep providing the service. As long as children are being born and tomorrow comes again, the service will need to be continued. I

have got the message from all the witnesses here today. We will have to fight tooth and nail to ensure their services are protected into the future and funding will have to be provided.

I am glad Ms Denvir raised the issue of planning. While the witnesses were waiting outside, I raised the matter of planning. This issue is close to my heart. My father before me and I, since I was elected to Kerry County Council, fought tooth and nail to ensure that a young fellow or a young girl got planning permission. It is only a small thing when one considers all the racket, all the talk about social housing and all that is going on because hardly any houses are being built anywhere. It is hard to believe that we cannot give permission to someone in their own place to build a house to put a roof over their heads. We have two situations obtaining now in County Kerry that are preventing youngsters from getting planning. They have the money to build the houses themselves. A mother of one of them was on to me again today asking what is happening. We are stuck in a kind of limbo because they say that the national strategy and planning guidelines do not allow Kerry County Council to grant permission. If I am worth my salt up here, I must at least fight to have those policies changed to allow the young fellow or the young girl to build in his or her own place.

I know too many valleys where the lights have gone out and the elderly people have passed on. There is a lot of talk about keeping the scenery but, if there is not a light in the window or a house in the glen, we have nothing because we are gone dead then. It is left to the briars, bushes and badgers and all the different species. I always say people before anything else. If we look back at those who came before us, they protected the area they lived in, minded it and handed it down to us. The powers that be should depend on the locals, whether it is the farmer or another who owns the land, to look after the land and hand it down to theirs. That is what we did ever and we make no apologies for doing it.

We have learned a lesson from the witnesses today. We are very glad of all the work they have done. To ensure their work continues, we must fight for multi-annual funding for such groups. I thank them very much for coming here. They are very busy people but we have learned quite a lot from them. I know the other members appreciate, as do I, what they have told us.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: On the *de minimis* point, I cannot agree that the problem is not in Brussels. When I was the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, I went over to Brussels several times when the 2007-14 Leader programme - not the present one - was coming in. I had a modest demand, which was that the *de minimis* threshold would be increased to €400,000. It is ridiculous to think that giving €400,000 to a group in Connemara, Rathmore or wherever would interfere with international competition. It is absolutely bizarre but, to be honest, I got a deaf hear. DG Competition did not want to know although DG Agriculture was reasonably sympathetic at the time because the Commissioner was sympathetic to rural development as opposed to purely agriculture. It is a major problem.

This leads me to another problem that I have found in my experience in dealing with rural development. I do not know if the witnesses have come against it. There seems to be a belief that when we seek to develop something in the cities hundreds of millions are needed, but that we will solve the problems of rural Ireland for €10,000, €50,000 and €100,000 here and there and that we do not need millions. It is in that mindset that *de minimis* rules are nested.

I will put one more side to it. When I eventually got beaten by Brussels - I could not change it as it would have to have been changed across the European Union - I introduced in a previous Leader programme that it would be a non-profitable thing. I got around the *de minimis* rules by

saying we would give a grant of up to €500,000 to a not-for-profit, non-commercial operation under Leader as opposed to €200,000 if it was commercial. I could not do anything about the European law.

Am I right in thinking and would the witnesses agree that if we are really going to develop parishes or areas such as Sliabh Luachra or deisceart Chonamara - is féidir dul siar go Carna agus suas na cnoic - go bhfuil muid ag caint ar na milliúin is na milliúin agus ní ar na céadta míle? Nach bhfuil sé ach ag cur daoine amú a bheith ag caint ar na céadta míle seachas na milliúin?

Mr. Michael O'Mahony: If I may respond, in terms of the €500,000 even, I believe IRD Duhallow is prohibited from funding the community centre in Rathmore simply because it might return a surplus at the end of the year. We need surpluses. They are not bad things because they allow us to reinvest and put in the managerial expertise about which we are talking. In terms of the *de minimis* rules, it is patently absurd that we are in some way distorting intra-European trade. I respect that Deputy Ó Cuív has done his best to change it, but that is where the flaw is.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The flaw is in Europe.

Mr. Michael O'Mahony: To say that it should be €500,000 or so is probably a short-term solution because any of the energy projects that I was referring to are multi-million euro projects. Communities have to be involved. While on the topic, the Leader funding has been decimated - it is down by 70% - and the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, is on at the moment. This needs to be addressed. We feel we are providing huge value to the State and the people of Ireland by doing things at the lowest possible level. Leader is in that idea. There is a funding agency that is close to the communities and knows the communities that it is funding rather than anonymous county councils or agencies at central government level. Leader is an effective mode of funding. Its funding should be increased at the next possible opportunity.

Ms Peigí Uí Chéidigh: Aontaím go hiomlán leis an gcainteoir anseo. Tá sé thar a bheith tábhachtach go mbeadh agus go bhfuil na milliúin le fáil. Go deimhin, má tá muid i ndáiríre ag iarraidh go mbeidh na daoine atá ag dul in aois ag fáil cúram sa mbaile, chomh fada agus a theastaíonn uathu, tá airgead ag teastáil. Tá maoiniú mór ag teastáil. Chomh maith agus go bhfuil muid ag iarraidh na milliúin, breathnaíonn sé mór ach ní tada é i gcomparáid leis an airgead agus leis na milliúin atá á chaitheamh le daoine a bheith istigh i dtithe altranais nó in ospidéal gan aon fáth. Dá mbeadh an roinnt milliún seo - ní mórán milliún a bheadh i gceist - á thabhairt amach agus á dháileadh amach d'eagraíochtaí cosúil linn féin, bheadh muid breá ábalta. Tá tacaíocht chomh fada leis seo againn, tá áiseanna tógtha anois agus tá seirbhísí ar fáil. Tá ardéileamh orthu agus níos mó éilimh ag teacht orthu. Tá deireadh tagtha leis na mílte beaga a bhí ag teacht. Níl muid agus níl an pobal ag dul ag maireachtáil leis na céadta nó na mílte beaga seo. Ní mhairfimid. Ní mhairfimid mar phobal.

Dá bhrí sin, tá sé tábhachtach dúinn go mbeadh an coiste ag taobhú le heagraíochtaí cosúil linn féin. Mar a dúirt mé, tá muid thar a bheith ábalta in ann cúnamh a dhéanamh don pobal atá ag dul in aois ionas go mbeadh siad compórdach chomh fada is a bheidh siad ar an saol seo. Tá rud mór eile atá muid ag iarraidh a dhéanamh chomh maith leis na seirbhísí seo. Tá muid ag iarraidh go mbeadh ionad barr feabhais tógtha againn thiar i gConamara - ceantar atá thar a bheith mór agus leathan - le go mbeidh muid in ann an cúram is fearr agus is féidir a thabhairt agus go mbeadh teacht ag daoine ó Charna go Bearna ar sheirbhís againn. Mar a dúirt mé níos

luaithé, creidim go bhfuil néaltrú ag teacht thar a bheith coitianta mórthimpeall na hÉireann agus ní hamháin sin ach go hidirnáisiúnta. Caithfimid a bheith ag pleanáil. Caithfimid cuimhneamh arís go bhfuil infheistíocht ag teastáil san earnáil sin.

Mr. Jerh O'Donoghue: We did a survey of the local secondary school about a week ago. Of the 68 leaving certificate students that were interviewed, 52 said they wanted to live in the rural community in preference to a city or town. Sixteen said they wanted to go to a city or town for different reasons. One of those 16 said he would come back when he was getting old. That was the breakdown.

I thank Deputy Healy-Rae for arranging this for us today, for the work he is doing and the interest he is taking in our organisation locally. We appreciate it. I think it was Deputy Ó Cuív who brought in the Pobal scheme although I am not sure. We credit him with it in our area. I think it is a wonderful scheme and one of the best. Unlike the community employment scheme, people are involved for a long duration. They can be trained and they last. It is far superior. Today four people were taken out of our day centre to train for the new carer's course. They have been taken out of a centre where at least 12 people suffer from advanced Alzheimer's disease. We have to put in people to take their place. It is crazy. If there were a Pobal scheme like it, where they would be with us every day, it would be far superior. It is a good model. Perhaps tweaking is required but it is a fantastic model for rural areas.

Vice Chairman: I thank the Rathmore social action group and-----

Ms Peigí Uí Chéidigh: Ba mhaith liom arís buíochas a ghabháil leis an Leas-Chathaoirleach agus leis an gcoiste ar fad as ucht an cuireadh anseo inniu, leis an Teachta Éamon Ó Cuív, fear ó bhaile s'againne féin agus, go deimhin, leis an Teachta Healy-Rae. Tá sé cosúil linn féin. Ceapann muid go bhfuil muid san mbád mar a chéile agus go bhfuil muid ag treabhadh. Le cúnamh Dé, tá súil againn arís go mbeidh an coiste agus muid i bpáirtnéireacht le chéile le go mbeidh muid in ann na seirbhísí is fearr agus is féidir a chur ar fáil do na daoine atá muid ag freastal orthu. Gabhaim míle buíochas leis an gcoiste arís as ucht éisteacht linn.

Vice Chairman: That concludes our consideration of this topic. I thank the witnesses for assisting us in our deliberations.

The joint committee adjourned at 4.05 p.m. until 2.15 p.m. on Wednesday, 26 April 2017.