



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

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

Business of Seanad	2
Commencement Matters	3
Seaweed Harvesting Licences	3
Building Regulations	7
Respite Care Services Availability	9
Health Strategies	11
Order of Business	14
Public Service Broadcasting: Statements	28
National Rehabilitation Hospital: Statements	45

SEANAD ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 23 Bealtaine 2017

Tuesday, 23 May 2017

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 2.30 p.m.

Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.

Business of Seanad

An Cathaoirleach: I have received notice from Senator Grace O’Sullivan that, on the motion for the Commencement of the House today, she proposes to raise the following matter:

The need for the Minister of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to outline the reason his Department approved the licence for 1,860 acres of kelp seaweed harvesting in Bantry Bay, County Cork; whether an adequate environmental impact assessment has been carried out on this project; whether the Minister is satisfied that the advertisement and public consultation on this application was in compliance with the letter and the spirit of the law; and whether he shares concerns over the mechanical harvesting of the kelp at low height on the stem.

I have also received notice from Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to publish the report and recommendations from the expert panel established by the Government to investigate the problems that have emerged in concrete blockwork in Donegal and Mayo; and the need for the Minister to consider establishing a redress scheme for the affected families.

I have also received notice from Senator Colm Burke of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Health to carry out a full national review of the availability of respite care facilities currently available to over 18,000 families who are caring for those who have physical or intellectual disabilities, in view of the fact that many centres previously available are no longer able to provide this care.

I have also received notice from Senator Gerald Nash of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Health and the HSE to develop a national strategy for Crohn’s disease and colitis.

23 May 2017

I have also received notice from Senator Gerard P. Craughwell of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to give details and a breakdown of the figure of €696,000 which his Department claims was paid to the rural resettlement initiative over the past five years; of the amount paid directly to the initiative for administration purposes; and the amount given for funding of the 21 voluntary houses.

I have also received notice from Senator Tim Lombard of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to develop a strategy for increased funding, recognition and participation for women's sport.

I have also received notice from Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to outline the reason Tir na nÓg respite services in County Carlow does not qualify to use Respond accommodation in Glen a Brú, Bagenalstown, County Carlow, given that the HSE, in conjunction with the Beams of Bagenalstown, were planning to offer the facilities to the Tir na nÓg respite services during the summer; and if he will outline the criteria required to avail of Respond services.

I have also received notice from Senator Paul Gavan of the following matter:

The need for Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline his views on the failure of Shannon Airport Authority, SAA, to achieve key goals in line with its current business plan with regard to passenger numbers and new jobs; his views on the subsequent decision by the SAA to downgrade the airport in order to cut costs; and the need for the SAA to heed the calls from a range of groups, including local unions and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, for a re-think on these short-sighted cost-cutting measures.

I regard the matters raised by the Senators O'Sullivan, Mac Lochlainn, Colm Burke, Nash, Craughwell and Lombard as suitable for discussion. I have selected the matters raised by Senators O'Sullivan, Mac Lochlainn, Burke and Nash and they will be taken now. I regret I have had to rule out of order the matters raised by Senators Murnane O'Connor and Gavan on the grounds that the Ministers have no official responsibility in these matters. Senators Craughwell and Lombard may give notice on another day of the matters they wish to raise.

Commencement Matters

Seaweed Harvesting Licences

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: As the Minister is aware, a licence has been issued for the mechanical harvesting of sea kelp in Bantry Bay in County Cork. The licence will cover 1,860 acres of native kelp forest. It was not advertised adequately within the local community and contains no requirement for an environmental impact assessment. I would like to state for the

record that I am not at all opposed in principle to the sustainable harvesting of seaweed - in fact, I previously applied for a licence for a small-scale operation. Seaweed is a fantastic natural and renewable resource with multiple uses in agriculture, food, medicine, energy and so on. Fostering the farming and harvesting of ocean resources in a sustainable way is instrumental to the new green economy that will be essential to Ireland as it moves into a post-carbon future.

This licence, however, is an example of how to stop that process dead in its tracks. There are a number of central issues with the agreement between BioAtlantis, the licensee, and the Department. The public consultation has been woefully inadequate. There has only been one public advertisement of the application in the *Southern Star* newspaper in December 2009, which did not mention the large size of the area under consideration, the mechanical nature of the harvesting or the indigenous nature of the kelp forest in question. Neither Cork County Council nor its western division, which covers the Bantry Bay area, was consulted on the plans. There seems to have been an almost deliberate exclusion of the Bantry Bay Coastal Zone Charter group, an EU-funded organisation designed to protect the bay from exactly such inappropriate developments.

The second issue is the scope of the operation planned. The 1,860 acres are quite massive, the equivalent of cutting down 38% of Killarney National Park. The Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Deputy Damien English, clarified in the Dáil that the extraction will work on the principle of rotation, but that still means a massive area of the bay will be facing mechanical harvesting in any single period. As a test case this level of harvesting can hardly be considered a conservative approach.

Third, the nature of the harvesting is a grave concern for two reasons. I have already mentioned the mechanical harvesting but I am almost more concerned to learn of the way in which the cutting is to be conducted, namely, the cutting of the stipes of the kelp so fast to the holdfast. Best practice recommendations from the Ryan Institute on environmental, marine and energy research for the harvesting of seaweed states that individual plants should be left with 20 cm of the blade above the stipe to ensure the fast re-growth of the plant and that fertile plants should be left alone as much as possible. This is not what is proposed in the authorised agreement.

Finally, there is grave concern about the potential impact this level of extraction and its methodology would have on the ecology and habitat of Bantry Bay. Bantry Bay is an iconic and complex ecosystem and the kelp plays an essential part in it. It is the home for juvenile lobster and shrimp, a part of the life cycle of sea bass and correspondingly a key resource for species high up in the food chain, birds such as the chough and fulmar and mammals such as the iconic harbour seal. These in turn support various industries, notably the fishing and tourism sectors which are so essential to an area that was badly hit by the recession and only now is getting back on its feet.

The community of Bantry Bay is not taking this lying down. A public petition has been shared extensively and has secured over 4,400 signatures to date. Cork County Council has asked for consultation with the licensee about aspects of the deal and public meetings are planned for later this week. In fact, last night there was another public meeting in the area organised by Coastwatch Ireland and others, which discussed the importance of the bay in terms of local tourism, ecology and fisheries. At the meeting local voices raised concern about the effect large scale kelp removal could have on wave patterns in the bay and the effects on tourism, including diving, kayaking and angling which are now making a return since the recession. Concerns were expressed about the potential future colonisation of invasive species such as

23 May 2017

Japanese seaweed, which has the potential to move into areas left vacant by over-harvesting. There was a shared anger at the way the licence has been granted and a frustration that local people are not being heeded and that the local democratic structures are being undermined.

There have been nice sounds this week from both of the Fine Gael leadership candidates in their manifestos about protecting and cherishing the environment. While we do not have enough data at present to make recommendations on sustainable levels of seaweed harvesting, it is alarming that the Government could consider an area of this magnitude as an appropriate test bed. This is the same approach we saw the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Heather Humphreys, take with the heritage Bill - cut now, worry later. This is National Biodiversity Week, yet once again Fine Gael is taking an approach to the environment that is dangerously cavalier.

I have already stated that neither I nor my party is opposed to sustainable seaweed harvesting, but the approach we are seeing with regard to the community and the licence is unacceptable. We ask the Minister to reconsider the licence and to take into account the concerns of the community of Bantry.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I am replying on behalf of the Minister, Deputy Coveney. I thank Senator Grace O'Sullivan for raising the matter. Earlier this month my colleague, the Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Deputy Damien English, outlined to the Dáil the background and context to the decision that was made in this case and I welcome the opportunity to provide similar details to the Seanad.

The history of the hand harvesting of seaweed and the uses or further processing that traditionally followed harvesting will be known to many. Over time and particularly in recent years more sophisticated uses have been found for the properties contained in seaweed. This has led to the development of cutting edge bio-pharma and similar businesses based on seaweed. These businesses face many challenges, one of which is the security of supply of seaweed, their most essential raw material. A number of applications were submitted over the years to mechanically harvest seaweed, but this licence is the first to be granted. The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government does not plan to grant any similar licence before the environmental monitoring data, the provision of which is a condition of the licence, is fully analysed. The indigenous Irish company that has been granted this licence had previously applied to harvest in Kenmare Bay. At that time, experts recommended that for an application to be approved it should focus on the areas outside of the special areas of conservation, SAC, and should include a commitment to conduct a detailed programme of monitoring. The application to harvest in Bantry Bay, which was originally received in June 2009, met this criteria and was processed in the normal way. Normal public consultation procedures were followed, after which the marine licence vetting committee, an *ad hoc* group of experts which has, for many years, advised successive Ministers on foreshore related matters, undertook a technical evaluation of the application and recommended that a licence should issue. Approval in principle was given by the former Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, John Gormley, in 2011. He agreed with the conclusion that, subject to compliance with the specific conditions attached to the licence, the proposal was not likely to have a significant negative impact on the marine environment. The final legal papers giving effect to the decision were completed by the then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Alan Kelly in 2014.

The licence is of a trial nature and was granted for a period of ten years, commencing in 2014. It allows for the mechanical harvest of certain kelp species within five specified zones but with only one zone to be harvested in any one year. The planned rotation is four years with the fifth zone being a standby zone to be used only if weather prevents access to a zone in any particular year. On average, less than 1% of the bay will be harvested annually and much of the kelp in the bay will not be subject to harvest at all. The inclusion of a standby zone, which under the lease only comes into play in place of one of the other zones if needed, reduces the overall area for harvest by almost 100 ha to a maximum of approximately 650 ha. The licence is of a trial nature and can provide significant environmental data through a programme of monitoring and control, which can inform further policy development in this area. The agreed monitoring programme is available to view on my Department's website. It includes measurements of the kelp as well other flora and fauna in both the control and harvest areas within the licensed area before commencement of the harvest. Over the lifetime of the licence, my Department will also receive an annual report on harvesting activities to include the area and quantities harvested and measured regeneration rates of the seaweed. In the event of an unacceptable impact on the environment being observed, the licence allows the Minister to modify or restrict harvest practices and schedules as necessary.

I understand that the Irish company which was granted this licence a number of years ago has, in good faith, made significant investment relating to the proposal. A harvest vessel has already been commissioned. Studies relating to the potential impact of the harvesting and a baseline assessment of flora and fauna in the harvesting site has been completed. Further expenditure will be incurred in regard to the agreed monitoring programme. It is envisaged that the data gathered through the monitoring programme will feed into further policy formulation and proposals in the general area of seaweed harvesting. I expect the information gathered in Bantry to be very useful in this regard.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Minister of State and wish to point out that we are already three minutes over time on this matter.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: My apologies.

An Cathaoirleach: It was not the fault of the Minister of State. Senator Grace O'Sullivan took an additional two minutes and because it was about Bantry Bay, I was a bit indulgent. I urge the Senator not to push me now and to be brief with her supplementary question. The Senator has made a very strong case.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: I thank the Minister of State for the reply. She said that this harvesting is to secure the supply of seaweed but we are arguing that an environmental impact assessment prior to the initiation of mechanical harvesting is required. That is what the people of Bantry Bay are asking for and that is why they are so outraged at the moment; they feel that their voices are not being heard. Enabling the company to go ahead as is would potentially destroy the resource. We are pushing very strongly for sustainable harvesting of seaweed rather than the annihilation of the kelp seabed in Bantry Bay.

An Cathaoirleach: The point is well made.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I have taken note of the issues raised by Senator O'Sullivan, in particular with regard to the public consultation process. The Senator said that the application was only advertised in one newspaper which meant that many local people missed it, despite

23 May 2017

the fact that it is so important. I will bring the issues, which the Senator has raised, back to the Minister, including those around environmental impact. I have taken a lot of notes. I will have the Minister come back to the Senator on a one-to-one basis.

Building Regulations

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: I raise this issue on my behalf and that of Senator Rose Conway-Walsh from Mayo because the families affected are in Donegal and Mayo. Some 18 months ago the Government of the day, which was led by the Minister of State's party, announced the establishment of an expert panel. This panel was to examine the crisis facing a large number of families in Donegal and Mayo in respect of the failure of the concrete blockwork in their homes as a result of the presence of mica, or pyrite as is the case in Mayo. It was to report by 31 May 2016. Here we are a full year after that deadline and that report has still not been published. The families who are crying out for help and assistance still have not received any.

Let me spell out the issues. Regularly, families come to me and other public representatives in County Donegal. They tell us about the dilemma of having a gable or other wall in their house that could fall in on top of their families. That is their reality. If they spend money now fixing and repairing it, they will not get money back through a redress scheme, so they are forced to delay and wait. Some of those families have spent money which they will never get back - money they did not have. Some have gotten a loan while some have used their family's education fund.

This is a failure of the State, of building control legislation and to ensure compression tests guaranteed that the blockwork, the core product in the family home in Ireland, was sound. It was an utter failure of State regulation right through. These families have been failed utterly. I plead with the Minister of State and her Government to publish this report and put in place a redress scheme so that these families have a solution to this devastating crisis. I have met people, grown men, in tears in their own kitchens. Can the Minister of State imagine the heartbreak? The biggest purchase of people's lives is their family home. They are devastated because of the failure of this State to protect their interests and to ensure that those blocks were sound and that the building controls standards were enforced properly. Now they are left with crumbling homes. I cannot urge the Minister of State enough that this needs to be sorted out urgently. People cannot wait any longer.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I am taking this matter on behalf of the Minister, Deputy Simon Coveney. I will reply to some of the issues the Senator has raised after I read this reply from the Minister.

At the outset, I acknowledge the very difficult and distressing situation that certain home owners in Donegal and Mayo are facing as a result of damage to the structural integrity of their homes. The Minister, Deputy Coveney, firmly believes that the parties responsible for the poor workmanship and-or the supply of defective materials should face up to their responsibilities and take appropriate action to provide remedies for the affected house owners. An expert panel on concrete blocks was established in the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in 2016 to investigate the problems that have emerged in the concrete blocks of certain dwellings in Donegal and Mayo. The membership of the panel on concrete blocks was formally announced on 6 April 2016 following the announcement of the chairperson, Mr.

Dennis McCarthy, on 1 February 2016.

The panel had the following terms of reference: to identify, in so far as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be affected by defects in the blockwork in the counties of Donegal and Mayo; to carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected home owners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings; to outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those technical options could be applied; and to submit a report within six months. The expert panel on concrete blocks has met on 12 occasions since it was first established. A similar number of meetings have taken place with key stakeholders, including affected home owners, elected members of Donegal County Council, local authority officials, industry bodies, academics, public representatives and other interested parties. A substantial volume of information has been provided by affected home owners in both counties, as well as by Donegal County Council. Additional information has also been provided through the consultation process. The panel has concluded its meetings and is in the process of finalising its report, which is undergoing legal proofing. I understand this will be completed shortly. I fully appreciate and understand the urgency of this matter for the affected home owners. The Minister will continue to monitor progress closely. It is equally important for the affected home owners that the final part of the process with regard to the report is completed thoroughly. In this regard, the Minister will await the outcome of the panel's report before considering what further actions may be required to assist the parties directly involved to reach a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The language used in the Minister of State's reply does not tally with the Government's actions. How can it take the best part of five months to legally proof a document? I understand this report was concluded at the beginning of this year. It is not acceptable that five months have been spent legally proofing it. A year has passed since this document was supposed to be published. Families have been faced with impossible choices during that time. This is a real crisis. Senators will recall that the Government rightly responded to the pyrite crisis faced by families in Dublin and north Leinster by putting a redress scheme in place. Such a scheme is urgently needed by families in counties Donegal and Mayo. It is shocking that it has taken so long to legally proof these documents. I ask the Minister of State to convey to the Minister, Deputy Coveney, that people in County Donegal are angry because the Government has failed to get this sorted out and done. I urge the Minister of State to get this report published as soon as possible so that a redress scheme can be put in place for these families.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: Like everyone else, I have seen the TV programmes depicting people's homes crumbling around them. Other people, including those who built the blocks, those who built the homes and the county councils that took part in the process of planning these homes, are responsible here. It is not only the Government that is responsible. I understand the Senator's frustration. As I have said in the Dáil Chamber, it is about time this report was given to the relevant people. The reasons these people should get some redress need to come out now. I will relay all the messages outlined by the Senator to the Minister. A great deal of consultation was done and there were many meetings as part of the in-depth process of identifying the needs of home owners and seeing what structural damage had been caused to their homes. All of this took some time. I agree with the Senator that it is time to get on with this process so that the report can be launched. I understand the Minister intends to have the report finished within

23 May 2017

a number of weeks. This could mean four weeks or it could mean six weeks. I will relay the Senator's message to the Minister and make sure he gets an answer.

Respite Care Services Availability

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath.

Senator Colm Burke: I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House. I have raised the issue of respite care with him previously, particularly in so far as it relates to Cork. Since the last time I did so, I have been contacted by a number of parents across the country who are having difficulties as a result of what has occurred in the past two or three years in premises where respite care is available and in respect of which HIQA has done inspections and set standards.

I have no difficulty with standards being set and making sure we achieve them, but in some cases facilities have been withdrawn. What I am looking for - it is a very reasonable request - is a national respite care strategy. We should identify, first, the number of people with disabilities being cared for by their parents, their brothers or sisters or their relatives in their own
3 o'clock homes, in other words, those not reliant on the State or a State facility for their care.

Second, we need to identify the demographics of people with disabilities, the age groups about which we are talking, the numbers between the ages of 18 and 30 years, 30 and 40, 40 and 50 and so on and their changing needs.

The third thing we need to identify is extremely important; it is an issue that arises every week at my constituency clinics. I refer to ageing parents who are looking after their children. For instance, one man whose case I have dealt with travels 15 miles a day to put his daughter into the care of a Cope Foundation day facility and collect her every evening. He is 79 years of age and has been doing this for the past 45 or 50 years. He will not be able to do it forevermore. There are a huge number of people looking after their children at home who have been doing it for many years and time is catching up with them. We need to find out their age profile.

Once we have this information, we can plan a detailed strategy, not just for one place but for the entire country. We specifically need to identify facilities which cater for people who require respite care. This is extremely important. As I said to the Minister of State previously, one lady I met recently told me that she slept for a full two days when her adult son was in respite care because of the work she had to do in order to look after him. These are the difficulties such carers face. I dealt with another case in which the parents of a child who is now in her early 20s had to lift her out of bed every morning, wash her, clean her and tube-feed her. They provide care for her 24/7. It is important that we give such parents the support they deserve by making sure there is an adequate respite care service available, not just in one place but across the country.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I thank the Senator for raising the very important issue of respite care services and giving me the opportunity to outline the position on their provision.

A Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the need for respite care services to be developed further. The Government is committed to the safeguarding of vulnerable persons in the care of the health service by providing services and supports for people with disabilities that will empower them to live independent lives in accessing the services they choose and en-

hance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives.

The provision of respite care services has come under additional pressure in the past few years. I accept the point the Senator made in that regard. Any available development funding has focused mostly on the provision of day places for pupils graduating from school or rehabilitative training programmes. We have prioritised this area because there were huge gaps in it, particularly when I took over my responsibilities as Minister of State. This has led to increased demand for respite care services for these young adults who would previously have accessed them as children. We accept that there is a problem and that we must do something about it.

More children and adults are seeking access to respite care services. The “changing needs” of people with a disability are also having an impact as they, with the rest of the population, live longer. Respite care is not always centre-based and can be provided in a number of ways, for example, as a holiday residential placement, an occasional respite care placement with a host family, overnight respite care in the home and in summer camps which allow people to continue living with their families and in their local communities. To support these alternative ways of providing respite, funding has been provided to the HSE to provide 185 new emergency residential placements. New home supports and in-home respite care for 210 additional people who require emergency supports has been allocated. This marks a significant change in the way respite services are delivered. The HSE social care operation plan for 2017 aims to provide 182,000 overnight stays in centre-based respite services, in addition to the 41,000 day respite sessions. The HSE acknowledges the difficulty experienced by families in respect of the lack of respite places available and is working with agencies to provide and explore various ways of responding to this need in line with the budget available.

In this regard, an ehealth resource for providers, such as online case management systems that facilitate the effective management and tracking of all residential home support and emergency respite services across the nine community health organisations, is being developed. This will provide a detailed inventory, bed register and map of current service capacity. Each of the CHOs will have in place residential care and executive management committees that will have the overarching responsibility of managing and co-ordinating residential places supports within their respective CHOs

I thank Senator Burke for raising this very important issue. I want to assure him and the House that I will continue to liaise with the HSE regarding the availability of respite care facilities.

Senator Colm Burke: I thank the Minister of State. In fairness, he has dealt with the issues I have raised but there are one or two fundamental issues that we need to identify, such as the demographic profile of parents who are caring for children. It might not be a bad idea to seriously consider asking an educational institution, such as a university, to conduct research in this area and collate all of the figures because that has not been done. We still do not know the total number of people who require respite care, their age profile and the age profile of the parents concerned. That is fundamental information that we need to have in place.

All of the information is in different organisations, but there is no national database. One of our educational institutions could take on such work as a research project. The ESRI could take on such work as a project. Long-term planning is of fundamental importance to this area.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I thank Senator Burke for raising these very important issues.

23 May 2017

I take on board the views he has raised. In regard to the HIQA issues, we all want to improve standards for all services for people with disabilities. We also need some flexibility.

I take on board the Senator's point on demographics and the age profile of parents. It is a fact of life that because young adults with intellectual and physical disabilities live longer than they did 25 years ago we have to plan for that. I will explore the idea of getting a third level institution or some other organisation, such as a group within the disability sector, to conduct research.

I have been in this job for 12 months. My plan was to try to ensure that we have services from the cradle to the grave for families. We have done a lot of work at first and second level, and now we have to put out the fires for the cohort aged 18 years and older. Senior citizens acting as carers is a major issue.

I have travelled around the country and have heard what the Senator has said. I was in Cavan yesterday. I met two families, one of whom had 18.5 hours of respite care a week, which I could not believe because it is the first time I have heard of such a high level of respite care. Another woman only receives six hours a month of respite care. There are inconsistencies, problems and a lack of co-ordination in the system.

We need to determine the facts in order to plan for services. I will bring all of the points discussed back to the HSE. I spoke to a representative as recently as last week about pushing the issue of respite. In terms of the social care disability plan for the next two or three years, we must have accurate information so that we can plan for the services.

Health Strategies

Senator Gerald Nash: Approximately 40,000 people in this country have Crohn's disease or colitis. I am one of them; I have had this condition since I was 14 years of age. I was diagnosed with it in 1990. As the Minister of State will be aware, the prevalence of this condition is growing and it is very much a condition found in the western world. Alarmingly, most people in Ireland who are diagnosed with the condition are diagnosed between the ages of 15 and 30. In that respect, at least from a diagnosis perspective, it is very much a young person's condition. It is also very striking that cases in Ireland among children have trebled since 2003.

We are not certain of the causes of this debilitating and often life-altering condition but we can be certain of some matters. We know from a research report entitled Gut Decisions, published two years ago, that inflammatory bowel disease, IBD, costs the health service as much as €185 million a year. In Ireland, 90% of patients with inflammatory bowel disease are hospitalised within five years of their diagnosis. The international average is about 85%. A staggering 49% of people who have inflammatory bowel disease have either lost or have had to give up their job as a result of their condition. That is quite a staggering statistic. Behind each and every one of those stories lies a personal story of difficulty, loss and financial consequences.

We also know from talking to medical professionals and from the research undertaken in this area that one of the greatest barriers to the delivery of better patient care is the absence of a sufficient number of specialist inflammatory bowel disease nurses. It is sad to say that, unfortunately, not a single one of the recommendations made in the Gut Decisions report published in 2015 appears to have been progressed or implemented. That is why it is critical that

the Government undertakes to explore the idea that we should have a coherent, cogent national strategy to deal with Crohn's disease and colitis. If, for example, we doubled the number of inflammatory bowel disease nurses - currently, there are on 12 wholetime equivalents but we need 24 to 28 - this would remove a great deal of pressure from emergency departments and from our acute hospital care settings.

Last Friday was World IBD day and I joined the Irish Society of Colitis and Crohn's Disease, Professor Colm O'Morain, and other experts in the field to call for the doubling up of specialist IBD nurses. These are, essentially, expert nurses, located unfortunately only in 48% of the hospitals across this country, who are at the end of a telephone and can assist people with their medication, dietary plans and with other very basic interventions, which would prevent a Crohn's disease or colitis patient from having to queue in a cramped emergency department, where there is often a difficulty in terms of accessing toilets, and can manage their conditions much better in what we might describe as a primary care setting or primary care intervention.

We need a coherent national strategy to deal with this condition that is growing in prevalence by the day. One of the first steps we could achieve in doing that is to commit to spending as little as €1 million annually to provide for the doubling up of inflammatory bowel disease nurses.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I thank the Senator for raising this very important issue with which I know he has a personal involvement. He has also raised it over many years. I accept his sincerity and integrity in regard to it. It is an important issue in terms of broader society and the broad planning of our health services. I am delighted that I have been given the opportunity to discuss Crohn's disease and colitis.

Officials from my Department recently met representatives of the Irish Society of Colitis and Crohn's Disease and the Health Service Executive, HSE, about patient care for these conditions. There are two principal forms of inflammatory bowel disease, IBD, namely, ulcerative colitis, UC, and Crohn's disease, CD. There is no current data on the incidence and prevalence of inflammatory bowel disease in Ireland. However, it is estimated that approximately 40,000 individuals suffer with IBD. Population-based studies from a range of European countries suggest a similar rise in the numbers of new cases in the adult population.

Crohn's disease is a very rare condition. It is estimated that for every 100,000 people, there will be seven new cases of the disease a year. Most cases of the disease first develop in people between the ages of 16 and 30 years, although the condition can affect people of all ages, including children. The disease affects slightly more women than men. The outlook for patients with the disease is highly variable. There can be long periods of remission that can last for weeks or months during which they have no or very mild symptoms, followed by periods during which their symptoms flare up and are particularly troublesome. There is no cure for the disease. However, medication is available that can be used to treat the symptoms and prevent them from returning. Approximately 80% of people with the disease will require surgery to relieve their symptoms, repair damage to their digestive systems and treat the complications of the condition.

Within the acute hospital system, the provision of care for individuals with inflammatory bowel disease is largely undertaken by the gastroenterologist, with individuals who require surgical intervention falling under the care of lower gastrointestinal disease consultants.

23 May 2017

While the HSE has no specific programme for inflammatory bowel disease or Crohn's disease, the work of other HSE programmes will impact positively on individuals with colitis and Crohn's disease. They include the BowelScreen and endoscopy programmes which contribute to early diagnosis. Given the increased incidence and use of medication, the HSE is working with gastroenterologists and recently established a group to look at developing a model of care for the use of biological agents for the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease. It is estimated that of the 40,000 patients in Ireland with the disease, approximately 8,000 are receiving or require treatment with these agents. This model of care will look at the following areas: the criteria for treatment of inflammatory bowel disease; appropriate prescribing of biosimilars; entrance and withdrawal criteria for the use of these treatments; and appropriate prescribers and centres for treatment. The HSE group developing the model of care has recently commenced meeting and it is anticipated that it will set out the clinical management of inflammatory bowel conditions such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. I await the completion of this model of care for the purposes of determining any further action that may be required.

Senator Gerald Nash: I thank the Minister of State for his reply. It is very interesting that the HSE and his Department are taking the approach that there should be a new model of care in assisting and treating inflammatory bowel disease patients across the country. I appeal to the Minister of State to give serious consideration to the initiative I outlined in my initial contribution, that is, the engagement of 28 inflammatory bowel disease nurses across the country. As I said, less than half of the hospitals across the country have inflammatory bowel disease nurses available to them who could make early interventions in dealing with conditions such as Crohn's disease and colitis to empower patients to manage their condition in a better way. It is the classic no-brainer in terms of spending approximately €1 million each year to prevent people from having to present at the local emergency department and minimise the risk of their having to undergo very invasive and complex surgery. In that context, we need a national strategy to address all of the implications of Crohn's disease and colitis, conditions that are becoming more prevalent. There are also financial consequences for families up and down the country, with job loss being a reality. I outlined the figures which are staggering. Any condition in respect of which 48% of sufferers have reported that they have either had to leave a job or lost a job needs our urgent attention. We need to look at the financial implications and how we can support such families.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I thank the Senator. I take on board his point that a national strategy is needed. With regard to other illnesses and disabilities concerning my portfolio, five or six years ago the Government did not opt for a strategy but now "strategy" is the buzzword. I will bring the Senator's message back to the Minister and HSE.

The bottom line is that the Senator made valid arguments, one being that 49% of those with Crohn's disease lose their job. These are serious issues that have to be dealt with. I will bring back to the Government the simple proposal the Senator put on the table today. We currently have 12 nurses and need 28. From an economic point of view, in addition to a medical point of view, there are practical benefits to taking the pressure off the accident and emergency units by having the 28 nurses in place. Less than 48% of hospitals are not able to cater for those affected and do not have the nurses.

The Senator's points and proposals were very constructive and I will bring them back to the Minister and use them in negotiations with the HSE.

Sitting suspended at 3.25 p.m. and resumed at 3.30 p.m.

Order of Business

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Order of Business is No. 1, statements on public service broadcasting, to be taken at 4.45 p.m. and to conclude not later than 6.30 p.m. with the contributions of group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes and all other Senators not to exceed five minutes, and the Minister to be called upon to reply not later than 6.25 p.m.; No. 2, statements on the national rehabilitation hospital, to be taken 6.30 p.m. and to conclude not later than 7.10 p.m. with the contribution of group spokespersons not to exceed five minutes, and the Minister to be called upon to reply not later than 7.05 p.m.

I propose we observe a minute's silence in memory of those tragically killed and injured in last night's atrocity in Manchester.

Members rose.

Senator Catherine Ardagh: I send my deepest sympathies, and those of the Fianna Fáil Party, to the families of those victims murdered and injured in yesterday's brutal attacks in Manchester. It is hard to fathom the extent of this depravity. Why anyone would attack innocent children at a concert is beyond the realms of belief. The people of Manchester, as we know, are resilient and will not stand for this type of evil attack on their city or children. I would like to send the message that we stand 100% behind them in their fight against terrorism in their city. I also hope this vicious attack by extreme Islamic fundamentalists does not isolate Muslim communities in Manchester, or in our own city, who vehemently condemn these barbaric attacks along with us.

The second issue I wish to raise is the imminent closure, from 1 June, of 11 of the 22 beds at the Linn Dara child and adolescent inpatient mental health service in Cherry Orchard in Ballyfermot. This decision will have a major impact on the already hard-hit mental health services in the greater Dublin area. I, therefore, implore the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Helen McEntee, to reconsider and stop the closure. The closure of the 11 beds is due to a shortage of nursing staff. Over 50% of the nursing posts at the centre are currently vacant. As we know, Ireland is one of the leading importers and exporters of medical professionals, something of which we should be ashamed. This is an extreme but real example of the shambolic recruitment policy followed by the Government in the past six years. Children who have been diagnosed as critically unwell and admitted to hospital and who are at serious risk of harm are being discharged back to their homes where they could be at risk of further harm due to the staff shortages. The solution is placing them in adult facilities which, ultimately, are not appropriate. The closure is completely unacceptable and shows the disrespect and almost contempt the Government has for children with mental health issues. If need be, they can be forced to attend adult psychiatry units which are most inappropriate. I call on the Minister of State to stop the closure.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: First and foremost, I am sure everybody in the House wants to offer his or her deepest sympathy following the events in Manchester. The truth is that there is terrorism all around us. In the modern world terrorists can move from country to country. They can operate in cells, lie in hiding and await being called and we saw what happened last night when, apparently, one slight gap in the security system at the Manchester Arena allowed a terrorist to blow himself and 22 other human beings to kingdom come. I have spoken

previously in this Chamber about the National Security Committee which consists of six persons, four of whom are secretaries general of Departments, one of whom is the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces, while the other is the Garda Commissioner. There is nobody overseeing the committee which does not report to the Oireachtas which needs to have oversight. We do not need to know the *minutiae* of what it does, but we do need to know that there is oversight and that there are plans in place. The co-operation about which the Taoiseach spoke this morning between the United Kingdom and Ireland is all very well, but the House of Commons and the House of Lords have oversight of the security organisations in the United Kingdom and receive regular reports which are made available on a website. We do not have that luxury in this country. These are the Houses of the Oireachtas in which the people are represented. When will the Government put a director of national security in place who would report to the Oireachtas and confirm to and reassure it and the people that all of the various State agencies are working in unison? This is a vitally important issue and on a day like today it pains me to bring it up again. One of these days RTE will be reporting on a tragedy. We have had terrorism on this island and those who terrorised it also terrorised the rest of the United Kingdom. Let us not forget the Manchester bombings in the 1980s and the Birmingham bombings. The only way we can be assured that the various State agencies are working to maximum capacity is by having a director of national security to report to the Houses of the Oireachtas. Will the Leader ask the incoming Taoiseach, whoever he may be, to consider the establishment of that post?

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: I express my sincere condolences and those of the Sinn Féin team in the Seanad to the families of those who lost their lives in the Manchester bombing. Our thoughts and prayers are with the bereaved families and those who have been injured and traumatised by the atrocity. Manchester is a city that has been home to generations of Irish citizens. It embraces diversity and multiculturalism which are reflected in the many county associations that keep Irish culture alive in the city, which diversity can be seen in the St. Patrick's Day parade. We stand in solidarity with the people of Manchester, against hatred, division and fear. We unite with Manchester in creating an inclusive and safe society where people live in peace and harmony, embracing each other's differences and celebrating each other's cultures. I commend the people of Manchester who opened their doors last night to people in need and in distress. I commend the emergency services and all those who came to the aid of the people who were caught up in this bombing. May the deceased rest in peace.

Senator John Dolan: We often use the term "Manchester United". Today it is united in grief, despair and loss. We hope it is not loss of hope. The Civil Engagement group very simply also wishes to give its condolences, understanding, thoughts and prayers to those affected and those around them.

To move to another issue, I will address the current public pay negotiations and people with disabilities with regard to their services and supports. Some provider organisations - section 38 organisations - are effectively in the negotiations through their unions. Any pay and conditions implications and costs will be provided for by the State via the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This is not so for other organisations in the same communities providing the same services - those are section 39 organisations. They took the same cuts and had to deal with them. They are now being told to use the State's industrial relations machinery. There is no automatic bailout for them. Both sets of organisations are in the same labour market, but one will automatically move with the rising tide of pay conditions and increases that are agreed in this. In effect, they will have a Department of Public Expenditure and Reform bailout.

The section 39 organisations are in the same labour market, with the same pressures and

similar staff, and still tied at the low water level of the cuts that they got. That is not sustainable or fair. It is not that it is not fair to the organisation, but it is not fair to the people the organisations are trying to serve. It is not sustainable and it will not result in quality services. This situation is now about to get worse through these negotiations. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is the State decision maker on this, and I ask the Leader to urgently request that the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform come to the Seanad to set out how he intends to quickly rebalance this so that the section 39 organisations have equal capacity to deliver quality and sustainable services, and to continue to work to be in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in the driving seat. It negotiates and determines the budget for the Department of Health or for the HSE, not the Minister for Health. I am very sincerely and strongly calling on the Leader to have the Minister responsible come to this House and show how he will address this matter.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: I certainly know that last night should have been a night of joy and happiness for many parents, when their children were in many cases going to a concert for the first time unaccompanied, or when younger children were accompanied by their parents. For such indiscriminate bombing of those children and that concert to happen is totally unforgivable. My group here within the Seanad sends its sympathy to the people of Manchester, and especially to the people who have lost young people. They will never get over that sense of fear of bad news. I remember very distinctly when Dublin was bombed. I was sent out by my mother to search for my uncle, because he normally came through the city centre at the same time as the bomb exploded. What must the parents have gone through last night when they were worried about their children? It must have been horrendous. The bombing of cities, of concerts, of people at any time is unforgivable and should never happen. We send our deepest sympathies.

I want to give the Leader notice that the Labour Party group intends to put a motion on the Order Paper regarding the sale of State assets and in particular the sale of AIB shares. That motion will be put down on the Order Paper tomorrow and we will seek cross-party support for the motion which we will circulate to all parties for their contributions when we have it.

Senator David Norris: Hear, hear.

Senator Ray Butler: Last night's bomb attack in Manchester was a cowardly and evil act that has taken the lives of many innocent and defenceless people who were simply going about their daily lives, enjoying a concert, and it must be condemned. Our thoughts and sympathies are first and foremost with the families and friends of those who have lost their lives in this atrocity. To see the pictures of children covered in blood, looking for their parents, and parents looking for their children was horrendous. I was watching Sky News and to see the photographs of first two children who had been killed was heartbreaking.

Islamic State has claimed responsibility for this attack. As it is losing its grip in other countries, is this now their cowardly way? I read recently in the press that we have between 75 and 80 of these Islamic State fighters or supporters in this country. I want to know what level of threat these people are to the State. We have concerts happening here soon and I want the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality to come in and inform us of the level of threat to the Irish public and what safety measures will be put in place now that this has happened across the water.

Senator Terry Leyden: I join with Senator Catherine Ardagh, leader of the Fianna Fáil

23 May 2017

group in offering our deepest sympathies to the families, friends and relations of the 22 people who were murdered in Manchester last night and the 59 people who were badly injured by this suicide bomber. It was at an Ariana Grande concert. She is an American pop idol who appeals primarily to young people. My granddaughter was supposed to go to the concert on Saturday evening in Dublin. She specifically appeals to a young group, it was not an old concert by one of the famous singers, it was geared mainly for young people and when one considers that Saffie Roussos, aged eight years, was murdered last night in Manchester it brings home what happened. Many young people have not yet been found and their parents have been making appeals on television to locate their loved ones. The people of Manchester should be commended for how they have risen to the occasion, there were many wonderful deeds and acts of kindness displayed by the wonderful people of Manchester. Many people in Manchester have Irish connections and I myself have family members there.

ISIS has claimed responsibility for this atrocity. On the question of responsibility it should be pointed out that this was the weak part of any concert, when people are leaving. Those responsible were not going to get in with a bomb on their back but the perpetrator came in when those attending the concert were all leaving and panic ensued. There is nothing more we can say except that we, as a Seanad, through the Leader and through the Cathaoirleach should send united condolences to the mayor and people of Manchester, the families, friends and relations.

We must move on. We cannot allow these atrocities and the ISIS organisation to stop freedom. We all have to be on alert. It is high alert across the world and no country is exempt from the activities of ISIS. This is a most tragic situation and it is only right that we as a Seanad give our deepest, genuine sympathies.

Senator David Norris: I unreservedly condemn the appalling massacre in Manchester but one must also ask where does this viciousness come from. It is not a natural part of human nature. One must, regrettably, remember the unspeakable massacre of civilians by the American bombing of men, women and children in Falluja.

I rise today to express my regret at the closing of GLEN. It originally emerged from the Hirschfeld Centre. It did a remarkable and very professional job of lobbying and campaigning. It published a series of very important reports on the situation, establishing for the first time a factual basis on which Government policy could be launched. It was originally funded by Chuck Feeney, and we need to pay tribute to his enormous impact and generosity. In the early days of the gay movement, we got no grants whatever. We had to earn all the money ourselves. I remember some weeks I did five discos a night - a week, not a night. Five discos a night would be a bit much even for me.

Senator Máire Devine: See you on the dancefloor, Senator Norris.

Senator David Norris: It is remarkable that I was the person who stopped both Elton John and Freddie Mercury - I did not know who they were - and asked them for their membership certificates. I pay tribute to Brian Sheehan in particular. He did a remarkable job. Kieran Rose also worked extremely hard, even though latterly he was a little foolish. He took me on in something he published in which he said I was unfit to be in politics and should not be allowed into the Seanad because I described the Government's initial civil partnership Bill as a dog licence, but I am absolutely unrepentant. It is the responsibility of independent campaigners to hold the Government to the gold standard and not to lean on it for any little crumb that falls from its table. I pay tribute to GLEN and I am very sorry it has closed down. I thank the

organisation as an ordinary gay person for the remarkable work it did and I hope there will be a successor organisation to carry on what it has done. Finally, I would like to say how very sorry I am that the three remaining employees will now find themselves on the dole queue.

Senator Maria Byrne: I join with all the other speakers in their comments on what happened in Manchester last night. I do not think anyone here could support what happened. There are 22 people dead and something like 16 people under the age of 16 in hospital. They are the youth and they are our future. I pass on my sympathies to all involved.

I wish to pay tribute to one other person, namely, the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan, who has served with great distinction over the past six years. He comes from my native Limerick. He announced his retirement as Minister recently, and I wish Michael and his family all the very best for the future. Given where the economy was, he did a fantastic job bringing the country back to where it is. He has not only been very good for Limerick but for the entire country. He is well respected in Europe. He is in Brussels at the moment. I saw on social media earlier that finance Ministers were paying their own tributes to him. He has served this country in a manner in which we can be very proud of him.

Senator Michael McDowell: I agree with Senator Norris: I am sorry to see the demise of GLEN. I am someone who took the first steps to manoeuvre Irish public opinion and my partners in government at the time towards, first of all, the idea of civil partnership.

Senator David Norris: I thank the Senator for that.

Senator Michael McDowell: They were a very responsible group of people and were very constructive at all times.

I wish to echo a second remark made by Senator Norris, namely, the idea that people could be filled with such hatred towards other people that they would take out their children and take out themselves in the same moment. In this context, everyone is revolted by what happened in Manchester yesterday, and everyone should be, but Ireland should also take a look at what is happening in the world this week. In particular, I am deeply disturbed by the conference in Saudi Arabia at which the proposition was put forward that the Sunnis are all right and that evil lies in Iran to be confronted. I do not remember Shia people bombing Coptic Christians in Egypt. I do not remember them blowing up wedding parties in Pakistan.

Senator David Norris: Or 9/11.

Senator Michael McDowell: I do not remember them carrying out 9/11. I do not remember them blowing up innocent people right across the world. I do not see Shia people destroying young girls' lives in Nigeria. In that context, I resent bitterly the suggestion by President Trump that somehow all the evil is to be located north of the Arabian Gulf and that all goodness is now to be found south of it. Saudi Arabia is the cradle of Salafism. Saudi Arabia is the place from which this poison has spread.

Senator David Norris: Hear, hear.

Senator Michael McDowell: I believe we need a debate in the Chamber about where Ireland as a member state of the European Union stands in this new world, where grotesque distortions of truth and what we might call alternative facts are elevated to international truth in rather alarming ceremonies held in conjunction with massive arms sales.

23 May 2017

It is, as Robert Fisk has pointed out on a number of occasions and as I have hinted myself in some articles I have written, that we are getting ready for a war on Iran. The weapons are being put in place and the rhetoric is being deployed. It is a huge injustice, especially to a people whose regime is by no means perfect at all but whose people voted for moderation in recent days. It is one of the few countries, God bless us, in that neck of the woods where there are elections which mean anything.

Senator David Norris: And we voted for Saudi Arabia to be on the human rights committee.

An Cathaoirleach: I call Senator Devine.

Senator Máire Devine: Is Senator Norris finished?

Senator David Norris: Not quite, darling.

Senator Máire Devine: I echo the words of condolence for Saffie Rose and Georgina, the eight and 18-year old young girl and woman, who were the first victims from the Manchester attack to be named today. We are heartbroken and we send our love and support to the people of Manchester.

Today I welcome the review published by the HSE into maternity care in this country. The clinical complaints covered four decades, with particular emphasis on the Midland Regional Hospital Portlaoise. It was initiated following an RTE programme “Fatal Failures” in 2004, another whistleblowing programme on which I commend RTE. It also did a programme on Grace. It has done much over the past two decades to point out the absurdities and failures in this country.

The findings of the report and review cover 203 complaints received relating to perinatal death, maternal death, communication and the management of labour among others. It has taken too long, from 2014 to 2017, to get this report published today. This has exacerbated the stress and grief of those who lost babies in difficult and unusual circumstances. It is necessary that we learn lessons and implement recommendations which will help underpin quality compassionate care that is science-led in our hospitals for our women and babies. I hope the proposed national maternity hospital will get rid of any church and religious influences and will go along with science and compassion.

Senator Frank Feighan: Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families. Targeting a concert attended by young people, many of them teenagers, is plumbing new depths of depravity and is truly a massacre of the innocents. Every Irish person stands in solidarity today with the city of Manchester, which has been devastated by a vile act of terrorism. We must remember that Manchester has a very proud Irish community, many of whom are from my region of the west of Ireland. It is estimated that approximately 35,000 Irish people live in the greater Manchester area. This senseless atrocity has left Manchester reeling. While this is a time of deep sadness it is also clear that its people will not cave in to terrorism. The Seanad stands united in absolutely deploring this outrageous crime against humanity.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: I join my colleagues in expressing my sincere sympathy to the people of Manchester on the terrible happening last evening.

Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

I wish to raise the issue of children's hospice care. This week is Children's Hospice Week so it is fitting that we should address the issues of funding and planning for children's hospice care in this country. I pay tribute to the hospice services throughout the country which do great work providing much-needed care for people who are very ill and much-needed support for their families. It is particularly sad to see children in need of hospice care. This week the LauraLynn children's hospice said there are an estimated 506 sick children in this country in need of hospice care who do not have access to it. That is a very sad statistic. It is estimated that at any given time in this country, 3,800 children with life-threatening conditions are in need of hospice care. Of that figure, an estimated 700 are in need of immediate hospice care.

There are two issues that must be addressed. The first is funding. Funding currently provided by the HSE only allows the LauraLynn facility to cater for 150 sick children. The facility can cater for approximately 200 children. There is also the issue of sick children in rural Ireland and how they are to get care. I ask the Leader to bring this matter to the attention of the Minister as a matter of urgency. The one luxury these sick children do not have is time.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: I had intended to raise a separate issue but most Members of the House would agree that everything is overshadowed by the events in Manchester. Like other Members I ask you, a Chathaoirligh, to express the Seanad's condolences with the people of Britain, the Prime Minister, Ms Theresa May, and the newly elected Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham. It is difficult to come to terms with what happened last night and to find an adequate response. Unfortunately, when something so hateful and evil occurs the response can often be one of hate. While there has been a massive outpouring of love and compassion among the ordinary, decent people of Manchester there were, unfortunately, sentiments of hate swirling around and trying to capitalise on this event to once again dehumanise and denigrate an entire faith and decent people living in Britain.

It was the Irish who once bombed Manchester and people in this country stood with the people of Manchester at that time, so it is important to do so now in the face of this appalling tragedy. Anybody in this House or in Ireland who knows a young person who has ever attended a concert can only weep at the thought of the scenes that were witnessed by the young people. Those who have survived will have flashes of imagery going through their minds for the rest of their lives. It will not leave them, so how do we fight back as has been suggested? What we must have in our armoury, as Senator McDowell so eloquently put it, is information and knowledge, as well as compassion, love and a belief that in unity and understanding we can create a society that can overcome these things.

Again, we stand in solidarity with the people of Manchester. We must not allow those of a certain political persuasion to use this event for their own narrow ends to denigrate an entire people or faith in the UK. There are also people in this jurisdiction who will use this for their own ends as well. We are better than that. We are a proud and decent people. It is only through compassion, love and understanding that this terrorism will be defeated.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: I join in the expressions of sympathy to the people of Manchester and, of course, to people throughout the UK, as many youngsters had travelled to Manchester for this concert. It is a real tragedy. It hits home for us in Mayo as so many Mayo people have gone to Manchester over the years. There is a Mayo Association in Manchester and we have the Mayo Manchester Tradfest every August in my home town of Ballina. Many

23 May 2017

young Irish dancers and musicians come over from Manchester on exchanges. What happened yesterday is horrific and I join my colleagues in sending my thoughts, prayers and solidarity in the face of this evil.

I ask the Leader to invite the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, to the House to discuss the mid-term capital review. We need to have a real debate about infrastructural deficits in this country. There are deficits all over the country but particularly in the west and the north west, which has no major inter-urban routes, no high-speed train service and only a limited deep water port in Killybegs, not to mention the broadband deficit. We must consider where we can invest in order to grow these areas. These are areas which are experiencing population decline, where teacher numbers are falling because school enrolments are dropping because families cannot live there because they cannot find work. In the big urban centres children cannot find school places and families cannot find places to live, while there are empty houses in the west and north west. Investment in infrastructure by the State will make these areas less peripheral, improve connectivity and make them more attractive to investors. This is particularly pertinent as we face into Brexit. Investment in infrastructure can sometimes be curtailed by EU state aid rules. We found this to be the case with regard to Knock Airport, which is limited in what it can get from the State because of these rules. There is a case to be made for a temporary framework, similar to what was done in the face of the banking crisis in 2009. We need to see investment in the western rail corridor, in roads, broadband and in Knock Airport.

Senator Fintan Warfield: I join with Senators Norris and McDowell in commending the work carried out by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, GLEN, since 1988. Its closure last week means that a colossus of the LGBTQI movement in Ireland has now been lost. Since its inception following the homophobic and brutal murder of Declan Flynn in Fairview Park, GLEN initiated Ireland's first Pride parade, was pivotal in decriminalisation and in the campaigns for civil partnership and civil marriage equality. Recently GLEN advocated support of Sinn Féin's Gender Recognition (Amendment) Bill, for which I thank the organisation. I commend all of GLEN's achievements in making Ireland a safer place in which to grow up LGBT. It is regrettable that the activism of GLEN would come to an end in controversy. It is hugely unfortunate that not only its advocacy work but also the various services it provided have come to an end. The HSE will not provide funding to any organisation under investigation but the services previously provided by GLEN will now be provided by other LGBT organisations, of which there are now many.

On Sunday many of us woke to a realisation that the LGBTQI struggle has a good distance still to go. The George bar in Dublin's city centre was vandalised with discriminatory and fascist emblems and slurs. In this context, we must urgently address the need for hate crime legislation. Last weekend marked the second anniversary of the passing of the civil marriage equality referendum and I want to commend friends and comrades, Mark McLoughlin and Neal Rush, for their mock wedding at Stormont. Same-sex couples in Northern Ireland continue to wait for legislation around civil marriage equality. It is time for all-Ireland civil marriage equality and for hate crime legislation.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I also want to pass on my sympathies to the people of Manchester in the wake of this devastating event. Our thoughts are with them.

HSE figures for 2017 show that 2,520 children and young people are waiting for an initial assessment by our mental health services. There has been an increase of 44 on last year. That

is unacceptable. Children are waiting more than a year or two years for these services. I see it in my own area, where the after-hours services have been cut. I have brought this up in the Seanad and with the Minister. It is a disgrace to see that nearly 2,520 children are waiting on these services. It is unacceptable.

The other issue I want to address today is the community-based CCTV system which the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality announced a few months back. I welcome that. It is a three-year programme. It will cost €1 million. I have great concerns about the scheme because in my own home town we applied, with the local authority, through the Garda Síochána programme for CCTV in our town park three years ago. We have been waiting for three years. Last week we were told again that we will not be receiving funding through this programme. This is a programme which An Garda Síochána has implemented. It is unacceptable. While I welcome this programme, why is the Minister introducing new programmes when for years we have not been getting the money we have been waiting for? I will be asking the Minister to come in to the House. It is unacceptable.

An Cathaoirleach: I see the Senator is ignoring the ruling which the Leas-Chathaoirleach made. The Senator only gets one bite of the cherry.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I am the only one who gets addressed for that.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator caught me off guard.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: That is a first.

(Interruptions).

Senator Victor Boyhan: I want to raise one issue. It relates to a report on direct provision supports for asylum seekers published by Mr. Justice Bryan McMahon in 2015. In that report he made 173 recommendations. I made contact with Nasc last week. For those who do not know what Nasc is, it is the Irish immigration support group based in Cork. Of course there are different stories depending on who one talks to but, according to Nasc, only 16 specific items of those 173 recommendations have been fully implemented. That is very disappointing. I learned today that Mr. Justice McMahon will speak at a special conference here in Dublin in the first week of June, at which he intends to deal with this subject matter specifically. It would be very appropriate for the Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality, Deputy Stanton, who I think is the direct line Minister for this area, to come to the House to explain what is happening in respect of these 173 recommendations. That would be fair because everyone one talks to has a different story to tell. The key term in this is verifiable evidence - verifiable evidence as to the delivery of the key recommendations of the now retired Mr. Justice Bryan McMahon.

I leave that request with the Leader. Will he consider arranging a debate or statements on this matter, perhaps in the next two weeks? It would be very helpful. I see on this afternoon's Order of Business that we will have the Minister for Health in the Chamber in respect of the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire. We have specific time set aside on the agenda and I thank the Leader for agreeing to that last week.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I echo the remarks of sympathy and solidarity with the

23 May 2017

people of Manchester following the horrific tragedy inflicted upon the city and its people last night. If I can, I wish to reaffirm the remarks from Senators Norris, McDowell and Ó Ríordáin. In the words of the great Martin Luther King, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that”.

I consider myself very proudly anti-fascist. I consider myself very active, where I can be, in that anti-fascism, whether fascism is manifested in the kind of awfulness we saw in the Manchester Arena last night or in some of the mistruths, horrible lies and distortions that are being spread, oftentimes deliberately. Even though we are somewhat distant from Manchester, we are connected by those bonds mentioned by Senator Conway-Walsh. As political leaders, we have a responsibility here in Ireland to be ever alert to that kind of hatred-spreading and to do our best, where we can, to face it down.

Last week I mentioned in the Seanad the Lá Dearg that was coming up in Belfast at the weekend. Much like Senator Warfield, I find it difficult to imagine we still await marriage equality legislation in the North despite a majority of MLAs being in its favour. We also wait for legislation that protects the rights of Irish language speakers and of those who want to live their lives through the medium of Irish. Similarly, the North is waiting for legislation to protect the rights of Irish-language speakers and those who want to live their lives through the medium of Irish. At the weekend, over 12,000 people, mostly families, students and young people from Gaelscoileanna, took over the streets of Belfast in a colourful, diverse and inclusive way. As I said last week, all the parties in these Houses and the Government have made it clear, as the UN and the EU council of experts have done, that rights-based legislation to protect the Irish language - an Irish-language Act - should be introduced in the North. I think all of us should redouble our efforts upon the conclusion of the upcoming Westminster election and the resumption of the talks to make sure outstanding issues, like marriage equality and Acht na Gaeilge, are resolved.

An Cathaoirleach: Before I ask the Leader to respond, as Cathaoirleach of the Seanad I would like to convey my sincere sympathy and condolences to all of those who died in the appalling tragedy in Manchester last night. As someone who lived in London during the era of the Birmingham bombings and many other situations, I know the impact such events can have on a community and a country. There have been terrorist attacks in Sweden, France, Germany and Belgium in recent times. If one follows the line, one wonders whether we are absolutely protected in these situations. Le cúnamh Dé, we are. I am not too sure. I hope it will never happen here to any of our children or any person. I hope this situation could not arise. It hits home acutely to me that this has happened in Manchester, which is nearly another Irish city when one looks at the history and the connections, etc., over many years. It is very sad and tragic. I think it is an awful day. I would like to add my voice to the voices of others. Most people here today have mentioned this appalling tragedy. In my view, it was an appalling act of lunacy.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I thank the 19 Senators who contributed to the Order of Business. I thank all the Senators who spoke eloquently, passionately and sincerely about the awful tragedy and atrocity that happened in Manchester last evening. We must all stand united in the fight against terrorism. I agree with the overarching remarks of Members of the House regarding the way in which the world has moved. I would be happy to arrange a debate on foreign affairs issues, specifically the way the world order is moving and changing. It is not about dividing and conquering or about pillorying. It is about standing united against terrorism, no matter who the perpetrators are.

Young people were killed last night after attending a concert. These men and women, boys and girls, and teenagers and young adults should be basking in the glory of that concert today. They should be talking about what they did, the songs they sung and the enjoyment they had. Today the world is united in grief and in the condemnation of terrorism. I agree with the Senators who spoke about the need to stand up to terrorism without sowing hatred or division or standing for intolerance. We must all work together in support of our right to stand up for who we are and what we represent. We must all stand for peace, love and unity. That requires political leadership. We all need to be tolerant and inclusive. We live in a world that is changing.

It is important that we stand in solidarity with the people of Manchester, as a second Irish city, and with its new mayor, Andy Burnham. We acknowledge the significant role played last night by the first responders, including emergency men and women. We thank them for their work and professionalism. We also thank the members of the community of Manchester who stood up, opened their doors and welcomed people in. Today we send our thoughts and prayers to the families of those who died, to those who are now in hospital and to those who are at home suffering the shock and the aftershock. The world must stand united today. This cowardly act of violence and terrorism has no place in our world. We must all ensure the lives of people are protected. We must stand up to terrorism, no matter who the perpetrators are.

Senator Craughwell asked about the national security committee. Today is not a day for division. The cross-departmental national security committee, the operations of which are confidential as one might expect, comprises officials from the Departments of the Taoiseach and Justice and Equality and members of An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces. It is chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of An Taoiseach. Its job is to ensure the Government is informed and the Taoiseach is advised on high-level security issues and the appropriate responses to the same threats. It also deals with national security and operational matters, which it monitors and on which informs the Government. I know where the Senator is coming from, but I certainly hope we could have that sense of confidentiality. There is accountability, to be fair.

Senator Ardagh raised the matter of beds being closed in Linn Dara in Cherry Orchard. I do not have information because I was not aware, but I am happy to have the Department liaise with the Senator on the matter. Any issue with regard to the closing of beds is a matter for the HSE at an operational level, as the Senator knows quite well. In saying this, the issue needs to be addressed because it is important we provide respite beds.

Senator Catherine Ardagh: Psychiatric beds.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Yes, as the Senator knows, the Government is committed to the issue of mental health, and I will come back with a response on this matter. It is important the information is provided. I do not have it because I was not aware of it, but I am happy to have the Department liaise with the Senator directly.

Senator Dolan raised the issue of the public sector pay talks, which commenced yesterday. I commend all participating in the talks and wish them well. Yesterday was the beginning and it is important the work is allowed to continue. The plenary session began with opening remarks by those parties involved. Presentations were made by Mr. John McCarthy, chief economist at the Department of Finance on the economic outlook, and by Ms Annette Connelly of the central expenditure management section in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the fiscal context. I heard the remarks of Senator Dolan on this matter. I will dove-tail the remarks

23 May 2017

of Senator Humphreys regarding the sale of State assets and the remarks of Senator Mulherin on the mid-term capital review plan. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Donohoe, will be in the House next week and we will have a debate on all of these issues. I ask the Senator to hold off on his motion-----

Senator Kevin Humphreys: I do not have a right of reply.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Let me finish before you say “No”. The Senator might get what he wants if he listens. If the Senator waits until the Minister comes in next week and hears what he has to say he can then table his motion rather than doing so tomorrow. I am asking the Senator to defer until he hears what the Minister says first. The Minister will be here next week and as part of that debate Senator Dolan will have an opportunity to make a contribution.

Senators Norris, Warfield, McDowell and Ó Donnghaile referenced the closure of GLEN. It is a tragedy that GLEN is closing. I commend former Senator Gillian van Turnhout for her excellent work on the report she was commissioned to carry out and I thank her for what she has done. Today is the second anniversary of the result of the marriage equality referendum being announced. It is with sadness we speak about the closure of GLEN. Those of us in the LGBT community and beyond, our supporters, friends and allies, recognise the huge work done by the late Chris Robson and people such as Arthur Leahy from Cork, Kieran Rose and others.

I share the views of the Senators that there is a need for an organisation similar to GLEN. If we look at the pathway to marriage equality and gender recognition, we will see it was the approach adopted by GLEN, that incremental approach as enunciated by people such as Brian Sheehan, Tiernan Brady and others, that got us to the day of a referendum, along with the political involvement of political parties and Independents. It is the legacy they have left which can never be airbrushed or changed. If we look at the approach GLEN has taken on the issues of mental health, diversity in the workplace, HIV and education we will see its footprint, and we commend its involvement with various Departments, organisations and agencies. I pay tribute to all those involved in GLEN, including volunteers on the board and those who worked with Departments and Ministers on the journey. It required people to advocate, lobby and work to bring about change. As Senator Michael McDowell said, there were willing partners such as the former Ministers of State, Senators Aodhán Ó Ríordáin and Kevin Humphreys. GLEN was required to bring about change, for which I commend. I hope a new type of GLEN can be established. I hope all of us will commit to undertaking that task. As Senator Fintan Warfield said, at the weekend graffiti of a derogatory nature was painted on the front of a gay bar. We must recognise that there is still work to be done and that the roof of the house has not yet been completed. It is a job which we all need to continue to complete. I share the views of the Senator in that regard.

Senator Maria Byrne praised the Minister for Finance, Deputy Michael Noonan. I wish him well on his impending retirement. I commend him for the work he has done during a very difficult economic time and thank him for his leadership.

Senator Máire Devine referred to the HSE’s report on the review of the maternity clinical complaints system which was published today. I very much welcome its publication, as a former Chairman of the Joint Committee on Health which examined issues which arose in Portlaoise. It is an important report which highlights inadequacies and the ways in which the health system needs to change. I regret that it has taken so long to do so. Some of the stark findings made in the report are a reminder that we must be increasingly vigilant, rather than complacent,

in the way women, newborn babies and families are treated. In some cases, the recommendations are being implemented in Portlaoise. There is a need for openness and a people-centred approach and to listen to and respond with empathy to women and others who speak about their treatment and the ways in which they need to be cared for and supported. The Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris, is very committed to implementing the recommendations made.

Senator Robbie Gallagher has mentioned that this is Children's Hospice Week. I commend the work being done by LauraLynn which I visited as a former Chairman of the joint committee on health. I commend the work of its staff and those who fundraise and volunteer. I commend the care and support they give to children with life-limiting conditions. There is a need for a joined-up approach by the Government and the HSE in the provision of hospice and specialist palliative care, therapies and other supports for young children. My heart goes out to the families affected. I endorse the remarks made by the Senator in that regard.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor referred to HSE's mental health services. Senator Ray Butler also made a very good comment. When Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor's party was in government, it was the land of milk and honey. It forgot about lots of services and people. The Government is now playing catch-up. I agree that the mental health service was the Cinderella of the health service for a long time. That is why there has been an increase in the HSE mental health budget from €86 million last year to €853 million this year and additional staff have been recruited. There is a plan to develop 24/7 mental health care service.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: There have been cuts across the board.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I am very much aware of the remarks made by the Senator. We have heard them. I want to put the matter in context. As I said, the Government is committed to increasing the mental health budget. The Vote for the Department of Health is passed to give money directly to the HSE for the provision of services. I recognise there is a need to improve our mental health services and provide more funding for them. I am not arguing that point. There has been a timelag in the taking up of different posts but the Senator and others need to recognise that the budget for our mental health services has been increased. The Minister of State, Deputy McEntee, is committed to implementing that and to seeing those services develop and evolve in the coming years.

Regarding the provision of a closed-circuit television, CCTV, system for Carlow, I would be happy to arrange for the Minister concerned to liaise with Senator Murnane O'Connor. Perhaps the Senator and Deputy Deering might come together in a joint collaborative approach with the county councillors.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: He is very busy at the moment.

(Interruptions).

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Without pre-empting the result of the Fine Gael leadership contest, the Senator and the Deputy might talk to the new Taoiseach or the Minister for Justice-----

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: Who is the new Minister for Justice?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: -----whoever they may be, or the existing Minister for Justice and Equality, to ensure that the necessary funding is available. In my city of Cork the provision of

CCTV facilities has increased. I might give Senator Murnane O'Connor some tips afterwards.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: Is the Senator confident that he will remain as Seanad Leader?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The point Senator Murnane O'Connor made is an important one.

Senator Boyhan raised an important point concerning the direct provision system. We had the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, in the House last week dealing with the issue of the implementation of the migrant strategy and some Members raised with him the direct provision system. All of us recognise the need for the implementation in full of the report that the former High Court judge, Mr. Justice McMahon, was commissioned to deliver. The Senator referred to Nasc, which does a great deal of important work, and I am familiar with its work in Cork. I would be happy to arrange for the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, to come back to the House to deal with that issue.

Senator Ó Donnghaile raised the issue of the Irish language Act. Tá suim mhór agam i gcúrsaí Gaeilge, go mórmhór sa Tuaisceart. Bronnaim mo thacaíocht personally ar an Teachta Ó Donnghaile as ucht na hoibre sin. It is important that we promote the right of all of us on this island to speak the Irish language, to be educated in it, and to have the right to have that conversation and to do business in Irish in our country. I have no issue with that. I hope the Senator will talk to his leader in the North and to his colleagues, the Members of the Legislative Assembly, MLAs, and that he will be very proactive regarding the provision of marriage equality in the north of our country. On this anniversary of the same-sex marriage referendum, it stands as a disappointment that all people do not have the right to marriage in all of our country. The Senator has a key role to play in that respect, given his strategic importance in the party to which he belongs, not only to come in here to advocate, but to give a not so gentle prod to his MLA colleagues and his leader in the North.

(Interruptions).

Senator Jerry Buttimer: It is important that he would use that. To be fair, he may be supportive but I do not believe his party in the North has been doing a huge amount.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: That is way out of order.

Senator Máire Devine: That is really unfair.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: In saying that, we might use that as part of the negotiations.

Senator Máire Devine: That is pure conjecture and a lie.

(Interruptions).

Senator Jerry Buttimer: If I said “black” the Senator would say “white”.

Senator Máire Devine: The Senator could not help himself. Shame on him.

An Cathaoirleach: Ciúnas, le do thoil.

Senator Máire Devine: Can I just go because I have had enough of the Leader?

An Cathaoirleach: I have a question to put but on a day that this House and many parliaments and democracies are tinged with sadness, it might be a small chink of light that one of our Seanad colleagues, Senator Lorraine Clifford Lee, gave birth to a little baby boy. That is a small bit of good news.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I did not realise that but I want to congratulate her as well.

An Cathaoirleach: You can have a debate tomorrow on the new baby.

Order of Business agreed to.

Sitting suspended at 4.35 p.m. and resumed at 4.50 p.m.

Public Service Broadcasting: Statements

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I thank the Seanad for the invitation to discuss the funding of public broadcasting. The opportunity to discuss our views on public broadcasting and its funding is both timely and welcome. Senators will be aware that I have asked the Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment to consider the future funding of our public service media and, indeed, how we might define that media. I also look forward to hearing Members' views on this important issue today.

Internationally, the broadcasting sector has seen enormous change due to the growth of digital and online technologies. Audiences now expect to be able to view or listen to whatever they want, whenever they want and usually at no extra cost. Traditional broadcasters, both public and commercial, face increasing competition from large international players and need to adapt quickly to maintain their relevance, audience and commercial revenues. The Irish market faces the same challenges as an ever-increasing number of non-Irish channels compete for audience share and advertising revenues. Competition from UK opt-out channels is having a serious impact on the viability of Irish services. Brexit also had a significant effect on commercial revenue in the latter half of 2016. The increasing importance of online platforms and the use of hand-held devices are impacting on Irish broadcasters' audiences and revenues. In the case of public service broadcasters, these issues are affecting licence fee revenues. Online advertising revenue is now greater than television advertising revenue in Ireland, as it is in Europe. The consensus is that commercial revenues are unlikely to return to where they were before the downturn. The increasing use of mobile data and improving broadband penetration will continue to drive greater choice for consumers.

Despite all this, our television and radio services have shown themselves to be resilient in the face of these challenges. Irish people still watch a great deal of live television, averaging over three hours a day. We also listen to a lot of radio, with eight out of ten adults listening on average to almost four hours per day. It is not all bad news. Even so, our broadcasters must adapt and remain agile enough to respond to the changing environment. As legislators, we need to consider carefully what we want our future media environment to look like and how it is to be funded.

Irish audiences need and value strong, independent public service media. In return for public funding, there are various standards that we expect, including high-quality broadcasting

23 May 2017

and editorial independence. As politicians, we expect a fair hearing on the issues which matter to us. More than ever, we need trusted sources of information, with balanced evidence-based comment and opinion. Despite the challenges they face, we expect our broadcasters to provide high-quality programming that reflects our common experience and provides an Irish perspective on events and current affairs.

RTE plays a central role in raising public awareness and in helping to provide our society with a sense of culture and identity. It is a major provider of jobs and training, and a source of skills and expertise for the wider sector and of programme commissions for the independent production sector. The success of the 2016 commemorative programme and, more recently, Cruinniú na Cásca over the Easter period show how successfully RTE can engage with the public beyond its traditional role.

Having celebrated its 20th birthday last year, TG4 continues to provide significant support for the development of the Irish language independent production sector, Irish sport and cultural bodies and the Gaeltacht-based local economy. It supports the 20-year strategy for the Irish language and the promotion and development of the Irish language with children and young people and provides a worldwide Irish language service through the TG4 player and online services.

Crucially, of course, this all requires funding. The serious challenges I have outlined, alongside significant falls in public funding, have caused RTE's revenue to drop by over €100 million since 2008. TG4 has also suffered cuts in its public funding levels in recent years and is facing a major challenge to maintain or increase its audience numbers and commercial revenue. Given the real and urgent pressures faced by our broadcasters, my priority has been to bring forward amendments to the existing regime. I want to be realistic and believe that amendments to the existing television licence regime provide the best chance of stabilising funding in the short term.

I believe that the licence fee remains for now the most appropriate way of funding these services. Obviously, there are issues with this model. Evasion is high, at 13.75%, and the existing licence does not take account of the new ways audiences are choosing to access public service media. There is also a lack of public support for any alternative funding model. I made a judgment at an early stage that the Oireachtas would not pass legislation introducing a household broadcasting charge in any form. I also thought a licence fee increase unlikely. Since then, I have secured an additional €6 million allocation for licence fee funding in the budget. This begins to reverse the cuts in public funding that the public service broadcasters were subject to over the past few years.

I recently submitted legislative proposals which would allow for the appointment of a television licence agent by public tender. Experience in the UK has shown that this can significantly reduce evasion. It is my intention that the post office network should remain central to the sale of television licences. An Post has made it clear to my Department that it finds the current television licence arrangements a burden and, in that context, would be keen to be able to tender for the new television licence agency role on a more commercial footing. These proposals will be considered further by the joint Oireachtas committee as part of its pre-legislative process.

Of course, commercial and community broadcasters are facing many of the same challenges. The independent radio sector and community radio stations have been raising important questions about how we define public service broadcasting and about how, in its widest sense, it might be supported in the longer term. As a rural Deputy, I have a good grasp of the important

public service contribution of both commercial and community radio stations around the country. They play a vital role in providing local news and in maintaining the fabric of rural society. However, the changing marketplace, alongside levy payments and the cost of news and current affairs obligations, places the longer-term viability of some of these services at risk. In recent years, the Sound and Vision scheme has provided a degree of support. To assist further, I am proposing that the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland may be allocated public funding from the television licence receipts towards meeting its operating expenses. The BAI would be given greater scope to grant exemptions, deferrals or reductions in the levy for individual broadcasters or classes of broadcaster. I have also proposed the creation of a new funding scheme that would allow the granting of bursaries to journalists in local or community radio stations. This would be administered by the BAI much like the current Sound and Vision scheme.

The financial situation for Irish media organisations is now extremely serious and we need to make choices. At a time when they need to transition and adapt to the new realities, our public service broadcasters are struggling to meet their objectives under the Broadcasting Act. The BAI's funding reviews make this clear. Failure to act and provide a secure and reliable funding stream will only bring a further decline in the relevance, audiences and viability of our broadcasters. We need to provide a meaningful commitment to our public broadcasters. They need adequate funding if they are to be able to compete, to commission Irish programming and to help build a successful independent production sector. For these reasons, I have decided to try to amend the existing TV licence regime to improve the level of funding available as quickly as possible. Longer term, it is doubtful that the current system will be able to provide adequate funding to sustain viable public service media. Therefore, through my engagement with the joint committee and in the Seanad today, I hope to prompt a discussion about where we want our public service media to be in five to ten years' time and how it will be funded.

Irish audiences need to be at the heart of our thinking. Some Members of this House will be familiar with the Creative Ireland programme which holds that culture and creativity are the greatest assets of any society. It is our duty to do everything we can to unleash the full creative potential of our people. The same programme notes the significant opportunity for Ireland to be an international leader in media production. We need to ensure that the resources are there to allow that to happen. I look forward to hearing Senator's views.

Senator Terry Leyden: I welcome the Minister and his officials to the House. The Minister's portfolio is very broad and broadcasting is only one aspect of it. The Minister must also deal with climate change and other significant issues. That said, broadcasting is a hot potato at the moment. RTE is selling land and hopes to realise €80 to €90 million, which should help. I note that issues have been raised with regard to directing that money elsewhere but in fairness, the money should be directed at broadcasting, if not solely at RTE. I note the Minister's support for local radio and I am sure he will agree that we are very well served with Shannonside Radio, Midwest Radio and Galway Bay FM in our area-----

Deputy Denis Naughten: Do not forget Midlands 103 FM.

Senator Terry Leyden: Yes, of course. They are providing a very good service but there is no recognition for their current affairs and news programmes, which are very expensive to produce. Those stations are surviving on things like the death notices, which are one of their biggest sources of revenue. They are competing with RTE for advertising revenue.

23 May 2017

I note that in 2015 RTE got €178 million from the television licence and €155 million from advertising, bringing its income to €333 million, which is a lot of money. There is a large number of staff in RTE. It has a public service obligation and it pays for several orchestras as well as for TG4 and several radio stations. RTE is an outstanding public broadcaster. Last Sunday I watched its latest drama which was home produced, in conjunction with the BBC. It is proving very popular and is attracting a large audience. “The Late Late Show” also attracts a fantastic audience because it is live, current and lively. RTE also has some tremendous broadcasters. I know that they are expensive and people complain regularly about the cost of paying certain broadcasters. The broadcasters in receipt of the highest salaries complain about the salaries of Senators and Deputies regularly, although their own salaries are more than generous. I note agreement has been reached on further cuts to the budget in RTE as the broadcaster is in pretty dire straits at the moment.

The Minister has rejected the idea of collecting money from people with mobile devices and I think he is right because it would be practically uncollectible. People can have mobile devices in their cars or elsewhere and tracing them would be very difficult. I would be concerned if the Minister were to transfer responsibility for the collection of the television licence fee from An Post. When I was in the then Department of Post and Telegraphs many years ago, we always fought for that. I do not see why An Post is so enthusiastic about tendering for this particular provision and I would ask the Minister to elaborate on that. Why is An Post so enthusiastic about a tendering system when it is now in charge of the collection? The percentage is going down every year. We have to come up with ways of counteracting this. I note that a campaign is running at the moment relating to the television licence, which references Terry’s hot tubs. While it is a rather funny advertisement, it is not very clear. I would urge the Minister to consider an amnesty for a number of months. People who do not currently have a licence could be given a certain amount of time to get one, regardless of how long they have had their television and be assured that they will not be pursued through the courts. I make that suggestion to the Minister, respectfully. There was a tax amnesty at one stage in the past which was very successful.

Senator David Norris: There were two tax amnesties.

Senator Terry Leyden: Senator Norris would not have been in favour of it at the time but I thought it was a very good idea. Was Senator Norris in favour of it?

Senator David Norris: No, I was not.

Senator Terry Leyden: Anyway, it proved not to be as successful as we thought because some of those who availed of the amnesty were still hiding away their money.

Everyone who has a television has electricity in his or her home and the Minister is also responsible for the electricity supply. The two run in parallel. The Minister might be told that he cannot, under data protection rules, provide the information. I know that the ESB does not have all the connections now because of privatisation and other issues. It would have its own lists but the combined list is there. If everybody could give that extra support for the licence it would ensure the continuation of high quality broadcasting, which is very expensive. The service provided by RTE 1 and RTE 2 is very good, although I would have no objection to RTE 2 being privatised. It is surplus to requirements. Apart from its sports coverage, it does not provide much. I would also appeal to Irish companies to advertise on Irish television and radio. I regularly see advertisements for supermarkets on Sky television but Sky is not generating any

income here, as far as I know. It had a team in Ireland at one point but I do not think that is the case anymore.

As far as current affairs are concerned, RTE has made some terrible mistakes. I am thinking in particular of the Fr. Reynolds case, which was a gigantic error. RTE must be very careful when it comes to current affairs broadcasting and must ensure it gets its facts right. I would not be impressed by the entrapment tactics used with regard to public representatives. A form of inducement was given to entrap people but that is not the job of RTE. If there is corruption in the system, then An Garda Síochána should deal with it. That is not the responsibility of RTE. That being said, I would like to commend RTE for its work on the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising, which was extremely good. Since RTE covered the visit of President John F. Kennedy to Ireland in 1963, its outside broadcasting production has been exemplary. Next year the Pope is coming to Ireland and RTE will have another opportunity to show how good it is at covering such events.

The Minister has responsibility for RTE. I know his heart is in the right place and that he is trying to work with the organisation to ensure its survival. I was one of the first people to publicly oppose section 31 of the Broadcasting Act many years ago. I got into political trouble over that at the time.

Senator David Norris: I voted against it.

Senator Terry Leyden: I could never understand how a system could disbar people, of whatever view, from being broadcast. They were getting more publicity by virtue of not being broadcast while not having to justify their actions at that time.

Acting Chairman (Senator John O'Mahony): As there is no Member present from the Independents group-----

Senator David Norris: That is because I left it.

Acting Chairman (Senator John O'Mahony): -----I call Senator Tim Lombard.

Senator Tim Lombard: I welcome the opportunity to comment on the important matter of the future of broadcasting and how we will fund it into the future. Senator Terry Leyden is correct that the Minister, Deputy Denis Naughten, has a very wide brief that includes communications which we are discussing, post offices and climate change. It includes everything, except water, but I believe that is on the way to being included.

How we are going to fund the national broadcaster and broadcasting into the future is an important issue and there are options we must consider. There is controversy about how to deal with the licence fee. Technology is changing by the day in many ways. Many of the houses I visit do not have a television. It is not because people are hippies of some type or do not believe in having a television but how they live their lives. Everything is done on an iPad or the phone. We must engage with it and how technology has changed rapidly. One of the key initiatives in which the Minister is involved is the roll-out of broadband. When that happens, the number of electronic tablets used in Ireland will increase dramatically. There will be a huge change in how our society communicates with the outside world in the area of entertainment. It is happening at a rapid rate.

A new level of funding or a new funding model is required to deal with these issues. We

might be changing how we will collect the television licence fee, but five or ten years hence will there be a need for such a collection service and will the television licence be a part of Irish society at all? Will we have moved on to electronic means of communication through the hand-held devices we use at present? That is probably what will happen and how we deal with it will be the most important issue. I have a six year old and a seven year old at home and it is iPads for everything. They do not even have to watch the television any more because it is all on their iPads. That is how the next generation is being reared. How we deal with this and how RTE can be funded will be key considerations.

As an entity, RTE has a very good public affairs element and is good in the regions. However, how to sustain it into the future will be a major problem. Unfortunately, the current funding model is broken. RTE is selling land to pay for programming and pay off some of its debt. When one must go to the level of selling property, the model is broken. The big challenge will be how we can fund it in the future. Other Senators may have mentioned pay rises and the salaries some of the major presenters receive. Ireland has a population of 4.5 million people. If they want competition, they can go to the United Kingdom, but there is no internal competition for that amount of money to be spent on presenters. There should be a dramatic cap on pay. Given the size of the population, the amount of money they are receiving is not logical. Major reform and change are required in dealing with that important issue. There is a sense that although this is not London, RTE is paying London prices. Why is that happening? That will be an important element of how RTE reforms itself in order that the general public and politicians can have confidence in what it will do into the future. We need it to be sustainable and an appropriate broadcaster, but we must also deal with its current inappropriate financial position.

Another issue the Minister mentioned was the future direction of local radio services. That is an important part of where the broadcasting industry is going. The important services and stations are the heart and soul of many communities. The Government and the Department must ensure they do what they can to support them. If we cannot keep them going, we will lose part of our culture. Previously, we had radio stations that were unregulated, but these small stations are regulated and provide local news that is closely followed. It is an important part of the service they provide. Local sports news is also an important part of it. Considering what both RTE and local broadcasters provide, the issue is about getting the balance right to ensure we keep all of them going. That will be a big challenge in the next few years.

Broadcasting has always been a changing dynamic but now more than ever. The change we have seen in the past few years will accelerate in the next few years and our policies must move with it. If we do not move with it, the services will become out of date, just as the technology has become out of date.

I wish the Minister well with his brief. He has a great understanding of it but urgent measures are required to ensure we can have a sustainable national broadcaster and local media outlets which are under great pressure and need the Government's help.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Tá céad fáilte roimh an Aire. Fáiltím go mór roimh an díospóireacht thar a bheith tábhachtach seo. Ba cheart dom a rá ag an tús go raibh ceangal agam le RTE agus le TG4 sna blianta a caitheadh agus mé ag obair dóibh i rólanna éagsúla. I should declare a former interest in respect of both RTE and TG4 as I worked for both organisations at times during the years. I was working in soap opera, but sometimes there is more soap opera on the Seanad stage-----

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: It is an open goal.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: -----than in TG4 or RTE.

Senator David Norris: Which one was it?

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: I will tell the Senator later.

Senator Terry Leyden: Was it Ros na Rún?

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: This is an important debate. It is important to discuss the role of public service broadcasters. Fáiltím roimh an méid atá ráite ag an Aire, go háirithe faoin ról atá ag na meáin Gaeilge ó thaobh na seirbhíse poiblí agus an méid atá á dhéanamh acu. Labhróidh mé fúthu ar dtús.

It is worrying to hear that there will be up to 250 redundancies in RTE because the crux for public service broadcasting is finding the talent and quality of the people required to deliver it. The discussion on public service broadcasting covers a range of areas. There are television and digital services, but there are also ancillary services such as choirs and orchestras, the diverse programming on Lyric FM and Raidió na Gaeltachta, children's programming, Longwave 252 and so forth. These different services are crucial and would not be provided by a commercial provider because it would not be economical to do so. However, that is not to say they are not extremely valuable to the country and who we are as a nation.

I welcome the rationality the Minister has brought to the debate on the communications fee that was mooted. He has re-thought the matter, which is important. We intend to make submissions to the committee in that regard. I note that concerns are being raised by the National Union of Journalists, NUJ, about the quality of journalism in a post-redundancies RTE if 250 jobs are lost and, depending on where people will be lost, how it will affect the staff who remain and the quality of the services they can provide.

Ba mhaith liom an deis seo a ghlacadh an chraoltóireacht trí mheán na Gaeilge a lua. B'fhéidir nach luaitear é go minic. Sílim go bhfuil moladh thar na bearta ag dul go dtí TG4, ach go háirithe, agus freisin go dtí na soláthraithe atá ag déanamh cláir san earnáil neamhspleách. Tá scoth na gcláracha á sholáthar. The recent Celtic Media Festival awards show, once again, how high the quality of programming is, not just in Irish programming in English but also in the Irish language media programmes that have been produced. A number of awards were given recently at the festival on the Isle of Man. "Is Éolaí Mé" produced by Meangadh Fíbin Teo won an award at the event, as did "Eoin Mac Néill: Fear Dearmadta 1916". That is not uncommon. The programmes regularly win awards. The broadcasters in Raidió na Gaeltachta also regularly compete with other public service broadcasters, as well as broadcasters across the islands and come out on top. Ba mhaith liom ceann de na ceisteanna móra maidir le TG4 a ardú. Tá gá ann airgeadú ilbhliantúil a chur faoin ggraolachán poiblí sin. Ní féidir le haon eagrais pleanáil stuama a dhéanamh gan chinnteacht faoin gcistíocht a bheidh ar fáil dóibh. Multi-annual funding for TG4 is certainly an issue. It is very difficult to plan with year on year funding, and we need to look at that.

Tá éacht laethúil á dhéanamh ag TG4 ar son na Gaeilge agus ar son an chraolacháin poiblí ach níl aon chinnteacht d'aon chineál aige maidir leis an maoiniú a gheobhaidh sé ón Aire ó bhliain go bliain. Tá go leor cainte déanta faoi seo ach teastaíonn gníomh go práinneach. I hope the Minister will act on that rather than just talk about it.

23 May 2017

Tuigim go bhfuil na craoltóirí poiblí ag dréachtú plean straitéiseach ilbhliantúil faoi láthair chomh maith. Is maith iad na pleananna agus is ceart iad a bhreithniú go cúramach nuair a chuirfear ar fáil iad. Ní fiú tada an saothar seo ar fad muna bhfuil an tAire agus an Rialtas sásta maoiniú dóthánach ilbhliantúil a sholáthar lena chur i bhfeidhm.

On the five year strategies the different broadcasters are preparing, those of us who speak the Irish language know all about 20 year strategies. However, issues arise to do with funding and the resources being provided. I welcome the fact that these strategies are being prepared, but we need to see the Government putting its money where its mouth is when it comes to resources being made available.

Tá gá freisin le straitéis Rialtais don chraolachán poiblí agus don earnáil chruthaitheach i gcoitinne. Beidh sé suimiúil a fheiceáil céard a fhásfaidh as an síol atá curtha le Creative Ireland, ach ní fiú tráithnín é muna gcuireann an Rialtas cistíocht ar fáil lena fhás ar bhealach comhordaithe. Tá cumas ar leith ag an earnáil craolacháin in Éirinn ról lárnach a imirt i bhforbairt eacnamaíoch na tíre, sna réigiúin agus sa Ghaeltacht ach go háirithe. Chonaic muid 25 bliain ó shin an ról lárnach ceannródaíoch a d'imir Údarás na Gaeltachta san obair ullmhúcháin agus oiliúna do bhunú Theilifis na Gaeilge. An measann an tAire go bhféadfaí sin a dhéanamh inniu? Ní dóigh liom é mar gheall ar an easpa airgid ó thaobh Údarás na Gaeltachta.

It was visionary that TG4 was set up-----

Senator David Norris: Hear, hear.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: -----in the Connemara Gaeltacht. Great credit goes to Máire Geoghegan-Quinn and Michael D. Higgins in that regard. However, Údarás na Gaeltachta had a crucial role to play because even before TG4 was set up, it set up training courses to make sure there were people available to work in the services when they came around; I attended one of those courses years ago. I do not know whether we could do that now because of the huge cutbacks in the likes of Údarás na Gaeltachta, but if we are to keep up with all the movements in the digital media, we will need to make sure people are trained in those areas.

Tá ardstiúrthóir nua ar TG4, Alan Esslemont, fear den scoth. Failtím roimh an gceapachán sin. Creidim nach fada go mbeidh ceannaire nua á cheapadh ar RTE Raidió na Gaeltachta. Guím chuile rath orthu agus tá súil agam go bhfaighfidh siad an tacaíocht is gá.

When does the Minister expect that a new head of Raidió na Gaeltachta will be appointed? Edel Ní Chuireáin did very good work over the years. I wish her well in her new role in Doirí Beaga, but we would like to make sure that a new appointee is put in place in Raidió na Gaeltachta as soon as possible.

Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an bpolasaí Gaeilge atá foilsithe ag RTE féin ó thaobh na meán Gaeilge freisin. Ar ndóigh, déanann sé normalú ar an nGaeilge sa tseirbhís ar fad.

Many people might have picked up on the fact that they are hearing more presenters and so on using a few words of Irish here and there throughout RTE's services. That has not happened by accident. It is part of a positive strategy as regards the Irish language in RTE, which I welcome.

Feicim chomh maith go bhfuil forbairtí déanta ó thaobh cúrsaí digiteacha - go bhfuil comhordaitheoir ceaptha ó thaobh cúrsaí digiteacha, go bhfuil níos mó á dhéanamh ó thaobh na

meán sóisialta agus go bhfuil go leor clár i nGaeilge le feiceáil ar RTE Jr., rud atá go maith.

It is important that in any new model RTE undertakes we would see a specific percentage of programmes being commissioned through the Irish language to ensure that we see programming as Gaeilge across all the different services.

Could the Minister tell us more about the other broadcasters that are broadcasting into Ireland from outside the State? Is there any way she can see that we might be able to levy them to pay something towards the cost of public service broadcasting in this State?

As our spokesperson for the diaspora, I have to mention Longwave 252, which is raised with me on a regular basis when I travel abroad, particularly to Britain. The continuation of that service for the older Irish, particularly those in England, Scotland and Wales, is hugely important. I must say also that RTE's digital services are a huge resource for our Irish diaspora across the globe, and they welcome those.

I have one question. Tá ról lárnach ag an Aire ó thaobh comhlíonadh an straitéis 20 bliain. The Minister mentioned the 20 year strategy for the Irish language. How many times has he and the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, met to discuss the 20 year strategy, and his Department's role in that? It is a crucial role and I would like to see it developed.

Senator John Dolan: I welcome the Minister, Deputy Naughten. Thousands of people are visually impaired, blind, deaf and hard of hearing, and they are part of the public to be served. The Minister stated that he believes Irish audiences need and value strong, independent public service media. I absolutely agree with him. However, taking into account the Government's intention to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the public duty, people with hearing or visual impairment are also members of the public to be equally served. It is not just the person who is blind or deaf. It is also their families. Sometimes I watch "Gogglebox" and the enjoyment families get from watching television together is fascinating.

The targets set by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland for both Irish sign language and audio description for the respective cohorts in the Irish television service are embarrassingly small. This year, RTE One and RTE 2 have a target of 2.25% for Irish sign language while RTEjr has a target of 1.25%. That will increase next year by 0.25%, but it is still extremely modest. Percentage wise, audio description targets for RTE One and RTE 2 are the same as those for Irish sign language, but RTEjr has a higher target of 4% this year, and it will be 5% next year. The same increases are projected for audio description broadcasts. There appears to be no requirement for TV3, be3 or 3e to provide either Irish sign language or audio description services for deaf and visually impaired communities.

I have three questions for the Minister. First, can he advise the House as to the reason the targets for Irish sign language and audio description broadcasts are so low? Second, can he advise as to whether the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland has any plans to require the TV3 suite of channels to commence audio description broadcasts? I understand that some of the soaps it broadcasts already have that facility when broadcast in the United Kingdom.

Third, I ask that the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland would direct television broadcasters to instruct continuity announcers and teams to advise people when a programme has an audio description facility built into it. It would take five or six seconds to do, but it would be a practical way to assist people.

23 May 2017

I look forward to the Minister's Department making substantial progress on these issues in the next year. I hope he would have an eye to the budget regarding that matter.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: The Minister is very welcome to the Chamber. I am a huge believer in and defender of public service broadcasting, and in general I am supportive of what RTE does in that regard. I would be critical of it in my remarks purely because I have such high expectations for the standard of broadcasting RTE gives to this country.

I agree with what Senator Dolan said about diversity because I want to speak to diversity in terms of RTE's programming. I believe RTE needs to take the gender equality issue more seriously. We must address the issue of all-male panels. It is sometimes very difficult to have a handle on how best to promote diversity among presenters of various shows, as the BBC has done. Panel presenters, who are the face of Ireland and RTE, are still predominantly white. This has to be addressed. While it may be challenging to address in terms of various ethnic backgrounds, it is not as challenging to address the gender issue. It is still really unacceptable that a number of panels, be it in political programming or sports programming, are so dominated by men. No matter what a programme is about, having six, seven or even more men discussing it just has to end. I have often been on panels and mentioned that it was an all-male discussion. The researchers often say they did their best. It is not good enough any more to say one did one's best. The practice of having all-male discussions has to be terminated.

The issues of gender equality and having role models in our national broadcaster must be addressed such that young Irish children from diverse backgrounds, be they Irish-Polish, Irish-Nigerian or Irish Traveller, can say, "That person reflects who I am." The national broadcaster should proactively seek presenters who are the face of this country and regularly give opportunities to express viewpoints.

A creeping issue concerning some of our political programming, particularly our flagship programming, is our giving of platforms to people whom I would describe as little more than cartoon racists. I do not understand why flagship political programmes in RTE feel the need, in order to have entertainment value and ignite a row, to give a platform to dangerous people with dangerous viewpoints and no political mandate at all. Sometimes they are shipped in from abroad. These are people whose nastiness and vitriol are likely to have a very damaging effect on Irish society, yet they are given a platform for the purpose of ratings. I do not expect much from other broadcasters but I do expect a lot more from RTE. If "Claire Byrne Live" or the "The Late Late Show" are to give a platform to a cartoon racist, a comic-book racist, we have to call it out. It is not good enough. It may be good for ratings but it is not good for society. The Minister needs to be very clear on that.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: I welcome the Minister to the House. He has a very wide-ranging and challenging brief. I wish him the very best in that.

I have no great problem with the sale of land at Montrose but we need a whole-of-government approach to housing and housing in the capital city. One major developer's proposal, Project Montrose, is to put 500 apartments on the site. In many ways, this is within the scope of the development plan. Again, I have no great problem with it but I suggest to the Minister that he take a quick look at Poolbeg west or the old Irish Glass Bottle site, where the receivers have agreed to a proportion of social and affordable housing, including for rental, of up to 25%. I ask the Minister for a whole-of-government approach to the shortage of housing in the city and to consider a condition of sale stipulating that up to 30% of housing in the sale be social

and affordable, including for rental. Everybody knows Donnybrook is one of the very wealthy areas but it also has Home Villas and Beech Hill, which were local authority housing. I very much urge the Minister to act on this.

I am a great admirer of RTE and that is why I try to hold it to account in this House. The director general got off to a very bad start when she was before the committee and failed to mention the closure of children's television. She did not even inform the group of unions within RTE, although it had been agreed with RTE. One can get over a bad start. One must hold RTE to account in this House without fear. Some Members raised the point with me today that they are a little fearful about holding RTE to account.

One must hold RTE to account in regard to its editorial coverage of the news. In early April, RTE covered semi-State companies and their bonuses. I ask the Minister to examine the freedom of information questions I put to RTE about its performance-related employment. In the vast majority of the questions I asked, there was a ruling against me. I have appealed. RTE has covered other semi-State companies on the same issue in a very derogatory way so I actually gave it a taste of its own medicine, to a degree. Unfortunately, I did not get the answers.

Let me address a recent occurrence concerning social media. RTE has a legal obligation regarding fairness. RTE issued social media guidelines in 2013. This probably followed on from what happened to Senator Norris during the presidential election campaign. The guidelines were reissued and updated in 2015. I find it extremely unacceptable and disappointing that the head of news would actually tweet on the future leader of Fine Gael. It is of no account to me or Senator Norris but it certainly relates to whoever will be the next Taoiseach. For the life of me, I cannot understand why the director general or chairman of the RTE board has not given some comfort in regard to the standards. I can understand that what occurred was a mistake and that the information was taken down quickly. We have to be confident, however, because RTE has a very important place in our society. It is the dominant news agency in this country. When the head of news tweets in such a manner – I admit it was taken down quickly – the Minister must put questions to the chairman of the RTE board and the director general. They must make it very clear that they will cover political discussion in society in a fair and impartial way, as RTE is legally obliged to do. I would be very interested in hearing the Minister's response on this issue, which has arisen only in recent days.

Senator David Norris: I welcome the Minister to the House. It is vital that we have a national broadcasting service. I want to speak today strongly in favour of RTE even though, as Senator Humphreys half indicated, I am partly responsible for the mess it is in. I have just received very substantial damages on foot of a libel action I took against RTE in the aftermath of the presidential election. It is extremely important that we have a national broadcaster. I am old enough to remember when RTE was Raidió Éireann and broadcasting from the GPO.

We have tremendous programmes, including RTE news, "Nationwide", "Prime Time" and "The Late Late Show". There are wonderful broadcasters, who have included Anne Doyle and Gay Byrne, Aengus Mac Grianna and Eileen Dunne. I send my best wishes to Gay Byrne on his recent health problems.

Let me refer to RTE's different stations. TG4 is the best station in this country. It has the most remarkable documentaries and the best films. It is really marvellous. Consider also the way RTE keeps the orchestra going. Lyric FM is a superb station.

23 May 2017

In political terms, there tends to be nowadays an arrogant, invasive series of hosts of political programmes who project themselves as the stars of those programmes. They trample all over Ministers and they do not give a damn about absolutely anybody.

It was a great mistake for RTE to outsource children's programming. I understand that has been reversed and I am very glad if it has.

The Minister said An Post made it clear it finds the current TV licence regime a burden. Do the post offices get a rake-off for selling TV licences?

Deputy Denis Naughten: Yes.

Senator David Norris: It could be increased. There should be a universal radio and television licence. Every citizen should pay. I do not give a damn if they listen to the radio or watch television through a filling in their tooth, as they are all listening or watching. It does not matter a damn to me how they do so. Somebody mentioned electronic radio. It is all electronic and has been since the introduction of the wireless in 1922.

I am very glad that RTE kept its Longwave 252 service. It is absolutely essential. I receive so many communications from elderly people living in England saying it is their connection with the homeland. It must, therefore, be kept. We also ought to keep the Angelus as it is still a Christian country. I would have liked the old Christian Angelus. As a member of the Church of Ireland, I strongly object to Protestants being used as an excuse for getting rid of it, as most of us like it. It is part of our Christian heritage.

Selling land is grand, but it is a once-off trick. It can only be done once and is not a solution to the problem. Nobody should get away with suggesting it is. I speak strongly in favour of RTE which deserves every penny it gets. Of course, I also support local radio which I point out was vital in saving Seanad Éireann. During the debate I went on every single provincial local radio station and received thousands of emails from people saying they thanked God that they had heard me, that they did not know what was going on and that they were going to vote against its abolition. They said they had heard me on Shannonside FM, Clare FM or Louth Meath FM and then understood the situation and that they were going to vote to save the Seanad.

Senator Terry Leyden: Well done.

Senator David Norris: The question of broadcasting is so important.

Let me make one final point. Standards of broadcasting are just extraordinary. Sometimes when I am twiddling the dial I hear language the likes of which one would not hear in a brothel. The views people feel free to come out with on the airwaves are shocking. I am not in favour of censorship, but I have to say I sometimes lie in bed and laugh at the things people say. It is, however, pretty disgusting. For that reason, I thank God for RTE. It keeps standards up and let us keep the Angelus. Why not Christianise it a little more? The bland secular thing from the Limerick School of Art and Design or the somebody else school of design is hogwash. It is and should remain Christian and I will strongly support it.

Senator Terry Leyden: Good man.

Senator John O'Mahony: In the last Dáil I was Chairman of the Joint Committee on Transport and Communications. Therefore, I have an interest in this subject. Public service broadcasting is hugely important and it is hugely important that it be balanced and fair. At times

there is a blurring of the line between what I would call entertainment and politics. For the most part, current affairs and news coverage is fair and balanced, but sometimes broadcasters on entertainment programmes steer into the area of politics. In the main current affairs programme interviewers know what they are talking about, but entertainment programme broadcasters who are usually the higher paid do not have a clue what they are talking about when it comes to politics. I know that complaints about “The Ray D’Arcy Show” have been upheld on numerous occasions. I very much enjoy Oliver Callan as a comedian and think politicians take to him as we do not mind being mimicked, although I would not be among the echelons subject to it.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: The Senator might be a Minister yet.

Senator John O’Mahony: In recent times I have seen the same comedian on programmes discussing serious political issues. I do not know whether he is a comedian, an analyst, a pundit or whatever else, but he cannot be all of them. I have seen this problem not just on RTE but also on other national stations and it is an important matter to raise.

It is welcome that the local radio broadcasting levy is being done away with, eased or whatever the case may be. It was a major issue in recent years because local radio stations were involved in public service broadcasting. The big issue is there has never been an exact definition of public service broadcasting. As other Senators said, RTE did a fantastic job in covering the 1916 Rising commemorations, in particular. It commemorated the centenary in a very dignified way into which people, no matter what side of the divide they were on, could buy. That was very laudable. As has been said here, local radio stations play a huge part in public service broadcasting, for which, in fact, they had to pay a broadcasting levy. I am glad that it has been alleviated or removed altogether in certain cases.

Of course, there are challenges with the licensing model. I am glad that the Minister has stated An Post should still be central to any new model because. It is another part of his brief, of which I know he is very conscious, and it was a concern of mine. As regards not having a broadcasting charge, I wonder if there are other ways by which it could be done. Obviously, another charge might not go down well, but at the end of the day if people are buying tablets or whatever else, there should be some way of charging them. I do not think they would object if it was done in the right way. There is no reason a charge could not be implemented because life is changing so much, when one considers the introduction of digital media and so on. The charge, whatever it is, needs to take this into account.

Senator Michael McDowell: I welcome the Minister and endorse what has been said about the value of public service broadcasting. I disagree with virtually nothing that has been said, although a few of the comments have been colourful. One of the major functions of public service broadcasting is to act as a counterbalance to the counter-factual news spread on social media. In keeping up standards of public education through the media, public service broadcasting has an invaluable role to play. In its description of the right to free speech the Constitution acknowledges that the media in Ireland have an invaluable role to play in educating public opinion. It is in that role that public service broadcasting cannot be allowed to be driven from the battlefield by its competitors. I am talking about Sky News and other bodies which are doing a tremendous job in attracting advertising revenue away from RTE. I do not know how many Members of this House have noticed that when one is listening to the radio, as I do at weekends in particular, a significant number of advertising slots are given to RTE to state what it has broadcast or proposes to broadcast or to State organisations to ask people to present for this or that medical check. By the look of things, the number of private sector advertisements

23 May 2017

on RTE has reduced substantially. The advertising slots are being padded with informational, charitable and cultural material to make it look as if there is still advertising being carried on stations.

I strongly believe that RTE should drop its obsession with social media. It does not matter whether Mary from Rathmines, Joe from Donnybrook or whoever else it may be thinks that the last item was brilliant or unbrilliant. All of that is hugely manipulated. There is a well known routine. If the Minister goes out to RTE and bares his soul to the nation, he has people ready to phone, text or tweet immediately and say he is fantastic and it was brilliant to have him on the programme. The amount of manipulation of RTE through social media is huge. Who really cares what one person thought of the last item on a programme? If RTE has confidence in its editorial standards, it should not be constantly looking over its shoulder at the social media commentary. We know in politics how utterly unrepresentative and valueless most social media commentary on politics is, how utterly perverse a great deal of it is and how shallow nearly all of it is. The notion that RTE should have all its presenters saying, "Please tell me how I am getting on in this programme, please give me feedback", is wrong. They should have a little more confidence in their own views. The same applies to the print media. If a newspaper prints an article by Senator Ó Clochartaigh on some issue, why is it right that some eejit like me can write in something offensive about him immediately under his article and the newspaper puts that up on its website?

The Minister is grappling with the issue of the licence fee. He has run a few little balloons on iPads and other devices, and people here are concerned about An Post. The way to fund RTE is by requiring every home in the country to pay a licence fee or a sum, and the way to collect it is through the local property tax. An amount of €70 or €80 could be taken from every dwelling in this country, regardless of whether there is a television, an iPad, a broadband connection or whatever. If every dwelling paid a flat proportion of its local property tax to RTE, the cost of collecting it would be minimal, the evasion would be zilch and the capacity of RTE to know from where its budget was coming, and the public service broadcasting system generally to know from where public money was coming, would be crystal clear. We would know what 10% of the residential property tax, RPT, or whatever it is, would be in any given year.

Let us be clear about it, it is futile hoping that the current licensing system will ever become comprehensive. It is foolish to spend hours and hours agonising over whether people will be honest, dishonest, evade or whatever. It is unfair, as I pointed out to the Minister on a number of occasions, that somebody who has a house in Coolock and a caravan in Gorey is expected to pay twice the licence fee of €160. To find that money out of post-tax income requires up to €600 for people who are paying tax at the 40% rate, which includes many average industrial earners at this stage. That is unfair. Therefore, let us have a different system. Let us simply provide that a portion of the local property tax goes to a public service broadcasting fund, full stop. Then there would be no problem with people needing to run around the country, having detectors and people knocking on people's doors. The issue would be simply dealt with. The system could be extended and applied differently to hotels, guesthouses and pubs. Places of public entertainment could be charged a differential rate or whatever the Minister would want to do there. If he would want to charge a mega pub in Dublin a licence rate, which is substantially different, he could simply do that through the taxation system. However, all of this is a waste of the Minister's time, effort and his goodwill with the public because the balloon he ran on tablets, iPads and on all the other devices was a bit of a lead balloon, but I wish him well is everything he is doing.

Reference was made to the need for impartiality in television broadcasting. The point was made that fascists and racists were put out there to provoke people. If that is what is really happening, it should not be happening. Public discussion must be interesting. We cannot have everybody having the same bland views on every issue and all of us saying more or less the same thing about all issues. I agree with Senator Norris in one respect, namely, that some presenters argue with their interviewees in politics, they do not interview them. They believe it is their duty to score points off them bang, bang, bang, as if it is a boxing bout and waiting to score maximum points before the bell rings.

One of the greatest beneficiaries of the political system and the charity of politicians, collectively, is Vincent Browne on his evening programme. I know of no man who has received such support from a great number of people-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: He has.

Senator Michael McDowell: -----who go out there and get mangled on his television programme so that his ratings can look good. It is a case of car crash dummies for politicians. I do not know why they do it but they do. It has always struck me that this is the only case where the politicians are extremely kind to the public service broadcast. If any of them had any sign of rationality, no politicians would appear on that programme-----

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: That is definitely the case.

Senator Michael McDowell: -----but for some reason we are decent to the man and we respect his record in journalism and keep his programme going for him.

Senator Fintan Warfield: RTE is a national asset and I would like to see an RTE that we could all be proud of. With some exceptions, I do not engage with it as much as I could or should. As it stands, I often believe that RTE is broadcasting a single vision of Ireland. I tend to engage with TG4's programming. Although with some exceptions, RTE's programmes, such as Raidió na Gaeltachta's "An Taobh Tuathail" with Cian Ó Cíobháin and Lyric FM's "The Blue of the Night" are extremely powerful.

Any cultural policy must recognise and value the growing diversity of the island and, as mentioned by Senator Ó Ríordáin, we must enable all of our citizens to see themselves on screen. Gender equality, which he mentioned, is a good example. When I watch sports coverage on RTE, is RTE telling me that there is not one woman in Ireland who could contend with any guest or speaker on the panel of a sports programme? I do not believe so. In that context and in terms of seeing our stories on screen, citizen-led media, formally supported by Sound and Vision, is of the utmost importance. Citizen-led media and storytelling works to empower our communities. RTE should have a role in that, as Dublin Community Television, DCTV, has done good work on that front. I would also like RTE to have a minimum spend on feature films and feature documentaries, with a dedicated production unit budgeted per annum.

The conversation we are now having in the House also highlights the need for a department of culture as well. RTE has a considerable budget which is much greater than any other arts organisation or agency. It seems extraordinary that the Minister with responsibility for the arts would have such a limited involvement in RTE, despite the Minister's passion for the issue. All moving-image stakeholders, RTE, TG4, UTV, the BBC, Bord Scannán na hÉireann, Northern Ireland Screen, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, community media, the IDA, and Enterprise Ireland, should be brought together to commit to a collective strategy or something similar

23 May 2017

in terms of collaboration for the benefit of the Irish audience and of having a strong moving-image sector.

Such an initiative could be led by the Department and could explore industry collaboration; the role of the public service broadcasters, as we are discussing today; the restoration of Irish Film Board funding and the IFB's transition to Screen Ireland; all-Ireland relationships; and citizen-led media.

Senator Ó Clochartaigh mentioned the 250 redundancies in RTE. Without painters and dancers, performers and musicians, writers and storytellers, there is no film industry, no TV, no radio, nothing on stage or the walls of our galleries and nothing in print. There is no culture without people. Ordinary staff in RTE have embraced considerable change in their terms and conditions, unlike many in the ranks of RTE who take home bloated wages.

Culture is also connected to space, or place. I read an interesting article arguing for the relocation of Channel 4 to the north of Britain, away from London. I am thinking out loud, but would the breaking down of the Dublin media not be something worth exploring and an initiative for our public broadcaster to lead?

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I thank the Senators for their contributions. I will try to deal with as many of the issues raised as possible.

I was smiling to myself when the father of the House, Senator Norris, was speaking earlier about broadcasting from the GPO. This comes back to a point Senator Warfield made about reconsidering the location of RTE, and I remember Deputy Eamon Ryan raised this issue with me in the Dáil just after I had been appointed Minister. We must remember that the original dial marker on radios for Irish broadcasting read "Athlone". The transmitter in Athlone is still intact, and we would be quite happy to have RTE relocated to Athlone.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: Is the Minister from the midlands?

Deputy Denis Naughten: Only I do not know what would happen to Ciarán Mullooly's job if RTE were relocated to Athlone. We need to be conscious of that.

Senator Norris also spoke about the universal licence, which Senator McDowell spoke about in the context of the property tax. I had to smile when Senator McDowell made that point. On the one hand, he wants TV broadcasting to be funded through a general property tax across every property across the country yet, on the other, he does not want the TV licence to be applied universally across the country on every property. The example given was a person who has a house in Coolock and a caravan in the country. I do not know what the position is if one has a house in Dublin and another on the banks of Kilglass Lough, but we can have that debate on another occasion.

I wish to touch on a few other things. Senator Norris raised the important issue of the use of Longwave 252 to keep in touch with people abroad. This comes back to the issue of local radio stations. On the weekend Clann na nGael played Kilmore, and when club games take place right across the country, we have listeners as far as Timbuktu now because of the Irish radio player and the use of new technology. It is not just that the Irish in the UK can access what RTE broadcasts in Ireland; now, right across the globe, people in Argentina can find out what

is happening in the intermediate club championship in Galway or any other part of the country. This is what technology allows us to do.

Senator John O'Mahony spoke earlier about not being mimicked by Oliver Callan. I know Senator O'Mahony is involved again with the Leitrim team. Perhaps if he were to pull off the coup he pulled off in 1994 he might get a little coverage from Oliver Callan.

A number of other issues were raised. Senator Terry Leyden and a few others spoke about the sale of the RTE lands. The funds coming out of the sale of the RTE lands are for capital investment in the organisation, upgrading the organisation to deal with the challenges of the digital era.

An amnesty on taking out a TV licence is effectively already in place. When people buy TV licences, they are not asked if they previously had one, and no record of that is kept, so I encourage people to purchase their TV licences. Why is An Post seeking that the collection of TV licence fees be put out to tender? It is doing so because the current regime does not suit the current An Post organisation and configuration. It is quite willing to tender for the licence fee collection. There have been, I think, seven or eight expressions of interest to date.

Senator Lombard is correct that there is a need for a new funding model to be put in place. I have accepted that. About one in eight homes has declared not to have a TV. The Senator is right in that we are rolling out broadband at a rate of one house every minute of every working day, and we will continue this for the next 84 weeks. I hope that momentum will be continued beyond that. The majority of those properties are getting 1,000 Mbps, which allows people to watch up to 200 high-definition Netflix channels at the one time without a reduction in the quality of service being provided. This does change the whole dynamic. There is the issue that people say they do not have a television but they use public service content, whether it be the RTE player or the TV3 player, and use technology that way. That is the challenge we have, and how we address it in the longer term is something we need to deal with.

Senator Ó Clochartaigh talked about TG4 and the number of awards it has won. It is an exceptional channel. Like Senator Warfield, of all the channels I watch, I watch more TG4 than any other channel purely because of the sport and the documentaries it shows as I have a personal interest in many of those. The kind of programming it provides is something an Irish audience appreciates. It would be lovely to be in the position of being able to approve multi-annual funding for the channel, but I must get the funding to allow that to happen.

The new head of Raidió na Gaeltachta is a matter for the board of RTE and does not come under my remit. Senator Ó Clochartaigh raised the point about transmission from abroad. This is one of the issues being examined by the committee. That dynamic is changing now particularly with Brexit because it is not just a matter of broadcasting from abroad; broadcasters will now potentially be broadcasting from outside of the European Union. This is part of a wider debate my colleagues are discussing at European level.

Senator Dolan raised the issue of the visually impaired and hearing-impaired. As an aside to that, one of the decisions I have made as Minister is to waive the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland levy for community radio stations. We have a unique system of community radio stations here. I do not think there is such a system anywhere else on the globe. In fact, we have a far greater radio listenership than anywhere else on the globe. This is a unique Irish trait. Quite a lot of these community radio stations engage with people from marginalised sectors, includ-

23 May 2017

ing the disability sector, and many people from these sectors get opportunities to broadcast that they would never get only for the community radio sector.

The issue of targets and so on is covered under section 43 of the Broadcasting Act, and there are statutory access rules set by the Broadcasting Authority Ireland which set down the obligations on broadcasters. Section 43(6) of the Broadcasting Act provides for a biannual review of these access rules. This is where the input needs to be. I actively encourage the groups that have an interest to make submissions in this regard. I know they have done so in the past. Senator Dolan raises a valid question in asking why, if the capacity is there regarding content coming in from abroad, it cannot be utilised. Virgin has made significant investment in the TV3 studios, and this capacity, which may not have been there in the past, may now be available to that company. The Senator makes a valid point about the announcement of visual description and we will relay that back to the BAI.

Senator Ó Ríordáin raised the issue of all-male panels discussing political issues and so on. Much of the time this is because the political parties do not put forward female spokespersons. They are usually asked to do so. I would be concerned about the comments made regarding racism. Senator Humphreys raised the issue of the 30% condition on the sale but that is a matter for the planning process. As the Senator knows with regard to the Poolbeg site, it was the planning process that determined-----

Senator Kevin Humphreys: I am sorry to interrupt, but it was not dealt with through the planning process. The 25% was agreed outside of the planning process. Given the fact that the Minister is the main shareholder, I believe that we could look at-----

Deputy Denis Naughten: That is a matter for the board and I am not going to interfere in that.

Senator McDowell raised the issue of a counterbalance to social media and he is correct in what he says. There is a big problem with regard to fake news across the globe, as well as here. In fact, before a certain global leader raised this issue during an election campaign last year, I raised it here in this city. How do we address this problem? The best way to address it is to ensure that we have responsible broadcasters and news outlets to whom people can turn when they see a story on social media and on whom they can rely to determine if the story is legitimate, correct and accurate. One of the ways I am trying to support that is through supporting the training of young journalists. That is why we are establishing the bursary for young journalists through the broadcasting sector. I would like to see that extended beyond the broadcasting sector but, unfortunately, that is the limit of my remit at the moment. That will help to ensure that the strong quality of journalism in this country over many years will be continued into the future and that good traditions will be passed on to the next generation of journalists.

I am trying to open up the debate, in the context of new technology, on how we fund public service broadcasting into the future. This debate commenced at the joint committee and I am looking forward to the output from that committee, which will then be considered by myself, my Department and the Government.

Sitting suspended at 6.15 p.m. and resumed at 6.30 p.m.

National Rehabilitation Hospital: Statements

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath to the House. The Minister of State will speak first. Spokespersons may speak for five minutes. The Minister of State must be called on to reply at 7.05 p.m. and he will have five minutes to conclude.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I welcome today's opportunity for statements on the bed closures at the National Rehabilitation Hospital. I thank Senator Victor Boyhan for raising this very important issue.

I have been informed by the Health Service Executive that the complexity of the medical conditions of patients referred to the National Rehabilitation Hospital for rehabilitation programmes has increased in recent years, resulting in greater challenges for the hospital. In response to this situation, management at the National Rehabilitation Hospital reduced its existing bed capacity by 12 beds to enable the hospital to provide a safe and appropriate level of care to patients from within existing resources. Some eight of these beds are in the brain injury programme and four are in the spinal cord injury programme.

I have been assured that the Health Service Executive is actively working with the National Rehabilitation Hospital to optimise capacity in the hospital by positively attempting to address concerns regarding funding, along with the provision of specialist supports via the Health Service Executive's clinical programmes division. I wish to inform the House that as an interim step to reinstating bed capacity at the National Rehabilitation Hospital the Health Service Executive is supporting the incremental reopening of four beds at the hospital, together with additional resourcing to support increased therapeutic inputs to all users of the hospital's services. This additional investment will support increased capacity at the hospital with effect from 1 June.

The bed capacity situation is made more difficult as a result of the challenges associated with discharging patients with complex needs. In this regard, the Health Service Executive supports the development of a dedicated post of liaison co-ordinator to further develop an integrated care pathway for spinal injuries patients. I am pleased to say that this position has been approved for 2017. This post will be key to supporting patients in their timely discharge to the next phase in their rehabilitation and will also contribute to optimising bed capacity at the hospital.

The Government recognises the excellent rehabilitation programme which the National Rehabilitation Hospital delivers and the hospital's excellent patient outcomes. In terms of capital developments, the priority at the current time is the redevelopment of the campus at the hospital. There has been good progress on this redevelopment project which will provide a purpose built 120 bed facility, with integrated therapy and support services on the campus. This will include support therapies for paediatrics and acquired brain injury wards, a hydrotherapy unit, a sports hall and a temporary entrance. Planning permission has been awarded and it is expected that the appointment of the successful contractors will be approved by the national rehabilitation board and the Health Service Executive in June, and that construction will commence thereafter.

The area of neuro-rehabilitation is a priority for the Government. A Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to publish a plan for advancing neuro-rehabilitation services in the community. The Health Service Executive's national service plan for 2017 has identified a number of priority actions in this area. They include finalising and progressing

23 May 2017

implementation of the framework for the neuro-rehabilitation strategy. Full implementation of the strategy will, of necessity, be a longer-term project. The Department has agreed with the HSE that the focus initially will be on the implementation of the strategy in the community, which is in keeping with A Programme for a Partnership Government.

The development of the framework will include the strategic direction of the National Rehabilitation Hospital, as well as Peamount Hospital and the Royal Hospital in Donnybrook. It is in the context of the development of the framework that the resource requirements of the National Rehabilitation Hospital will be established. These requirements will be further considered as part of the Estimates process. I thank the House for the opportunity to address these issues and I look forward to hearing the contribution of the Senators.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I warmly welcome the Minister of State and thank him for coming to the House to respond to the opportunity presented to him last week. He has come here willingly, as he always does, and I want to acknowledge that any time the House makes a request to the Minister of State, he responds positively and brings information with him. The more information he can bring us, the more we will invite him to come.

I acknowledge what the Minister of State said in terms of facilitating another four beds in the hospital. We need to go back a little bit. I have spoken with the authorities in the hospital at great length. In the past 12 months, I have raised the issue of the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire more than any other issue in the Seanad. I have been reliably informed that patients with spinal and brain injuries are waiting for life-changing treatments and many feel they are being left in limbo.

We have to get the context right. This week 209 patients are waiting to go into the National Rehabilitation Hospital. Those facts have been provided by the hospital. Its representatives are listening to today's debate. I spoke to someone an hour ago who was checking the time of the debate. That is very important.

We know these patients are holding up acute beds in general hospitals. Where does all that fit in with the hospital policy of the Minister of State and the Government? Are we for real? Since January, 12 beds in the hospital were cut on the watch of this Administration which told us it is absolutely committed to a national strategy for the rehabilitation of people with brain and spinal injuries. As the Minister of State correctly said, the 12 beds concerned relate to spinal and brain injuries. They are life threatening conditions and the hospital staff are frustrated and disappointed about what is happening.

I thank the Minister of State for making arrangements and facilitating the opening of four events in the next month. We have a real issue; we have waiting lists. The situation needs to be kept under constant review. It will come as a disappointment to the staff, management, directors, doctors and clinicians in the National Rehabilitation Hospital that this is the best that can be done, but it is a positive start. I want to acknowledge the intervention of the Minister of State in those matters.

The Minister of State referred to two other issues in his statement. I am delighted to hear the hospital project has gone to tender, that tenders will be announced and that it is to be hoped construction will start. The Minister of State will recall me asking him on numerous occasions in the House about the redress indemnity scheme and the sisters who own some of the lands. I am reliably informed that there are still issues around that. While I am not suggesting they are

holding up the first phase of the redevelopment, there are issues as to the ownership of the lands. The Government is committing vast sums of money in investment at the rehabilitation site in Dún Laoghaire, which I welcome, but we need to be clear because we have seen this with other hospitals and schools where the religious are involved. I have no axe to grind with the religious and acknowledge their great commitment to health and education and other spheres of society and life, but we have to get this one right.

The Minister, Deputy Harris, went out there for half an hour and ended up spending an hour and a half. Everyone was thrilled with him and he was thrilled with himself. However, we are no further on. What is the story? Who owns this land? What commitments are there and have the nuns fully discharged these lands in line with their commitment to the State? I am privy to the conditions signed up to on these lands and am more than happy to make them available to the Minister of State. It is important before one brick is turned on the site, which I want to happen quickly, for the Minister of State to reassure the House or revert with supplementary information as to absolute clarity on the ownership.

I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House and welcome the four beds, which is a start but not good enough. It comes as a great disappointment to the staff there. I welcome the fact that the new hospital will start in June. The only outstanding issues are the remaining beds, which we can hopefully get reopened in the next few months, and clarification as to the full ownership of the site so that it can go ahead. Let us be sure that not one parcel of that land is sold for other development. There are a number of neighbouring industrial units and people want to buy that. The whole site must be ring-fenced for further expansion of the rehabilitation hospital services.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, to the House and thank him for visiting County Cavan yesterday where he was very well received and took on board everything that was put to him by the groups he met. I know he will come back to them with, hopefully, positive news. I thank Senator Boyhan for raising this issue not only this evening but on a number of other occasions in the House. It is a very important issue. While I accept the Minister of State's commitment to reopen four of the 12 beds which were closed, it is not acceptable that patients with spinal and brain injuries who are waiting for life-changing treatments are being left in limbo because the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire is unable to operate at full capacity.

The National Rehabilitation Hospital is the only hospital of its type in the country. It provides specialist rehabilitation services, inpatient, outpatient and day-patient services to patients with complex needs who have acquired a physical or cognitive disability as a result of an accident, illness or injury and require specialist medical rehabilitation services. I understand the hospital delivers excellent rehabilitation programmes with excellent patient outcomes. However, 50 extra staff are required to reopen the entire 12 beds. As we speak, 226 people are on a waiting list for treatment at the hospital. That puts in context the difficulties we face here. It is estimated that Ireland should have 270 beds, not 56, based on its population. Given the current waiting list, those figures seem to add up. It is also worth pointing out, as Senator Boyhan alluded to, that there are no rehabilitation beds outside Dublin in spite of a number of reports dating back to 2000 recommending that facilities should be provided in the Munster region at a base in Cork. The latest such report was in 2010.

Reinhard Schaler, the CEO of the pressure group An Saol, whose own son, Pádraig, suffered a severe brain injury in 2013 has referred to the closure of these beds and the inability of

23 May 2017

patients to seek treatment when they require. He said it is a denial of basic and universal human rights and I agree fully with him. I appreciate the commitment the Minister of State made this evening to open four of the beds which have been closed, but that is a drop in the ocean given the reality of the situation, the waiting lists and the number of beds we ought to have based on our population. I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House and I look forward to his response.

Senator Colm Burke: I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House and I thank my colleagues, Senators Boyhan and Hopkins, for raising the matter on a number of occasions over the last number of months. I am extremely concerned that we have people occupying beds in other hospitals nationally who are waiting to get in for rehabilitation. Their families are putting us all under pressure, rightly, because they want to get the rehabilitation their loved ones require. My colleagues have outlined the fact that over 200 people are waiting to get in. As recently as today, I had to explain to a family that the earliest they would get into the hospital was September 2017. The issue must be prioritised.

It is sad that there is a lack of long-term planning, which is an issue I have raised consistently over the last number of years. While I welcome the fact that we are proceeding with the new development, the population is increasing and we need to do a great deal more long-term planning. When my colleague from Cork, Deputy Micheál Martin, was Minister for Health, there was talk of a new rehabilitation unit in the city. That is over 15 years ago, but very little progress has been made. We really need a centre of excellence outside Dublin, preferably in the Munster region, and we need to do long-term planning for that. I welcome the fact that progress has been made to open the additional four beds, but it is not enough or fast enough. We need to keep the pressure on to ensure that the maximum capacity is available.

Senator Maura Hopkins: I thank the Minister of State and Senator Boyhan, who has raised this issue consistently for quite some time, as have I. I first became aware of the fact that 12 beds were closed on 14 February last. From January until mid-May, we have had 10% reduced capacity at our National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire. As an occupational therapist who has worked in rehabilitation for the past eight years, I am deeply frustrated. The evidence very clearly supports the need for people to have access to timely and specialist rehabilitation. It is comparable to a life-saving drug. People who are currently in acute beds need access to timely and specialist rehabilitation in order to have the best possible outcomes and to help improve their quality of life.

It is very positive that the rehabilitation unit planned for Roscommon hospital is being progressed. It is important to have a satellite centre of the NRH to cater for the needs of those who need rehabilitation in the west of Ireland. I emphasise strongly, as I have in the Seanad over the past number of months, the need for proper treatment and rehabilitation for those who need it. I am deeply passionate about that and will continue to raise it. While we are receiving somewhat positive news on the reopening of the four beds, we need those eight beds open now. The Health Service Executive needs to respond to the work force planning document that was submitted by the National Rehabilitation Hospital and they need to act on it urgently.

Senator Frank Feighan: I thank the Minister of State for coming before us. I remind people there is very positive news and the last Government allocated €7.85 million for the design and build of a stand-alone €10 million medical rehabilitation unit on the grounds of Roscommon hospital. The unit will operate as a satellite under the NRH. Almost a quarter of the patients treated at the NRH normally reside in the west region but there are no dedicated re-

habilitation units there. Effectively, the design contract will go out to tender very shortly. This will certainly help in the coming few months and years in addressing the shortage of beds, notwithstanding the fact that there is a shortage. I welcome that four beds have been reopened and we must do more. This will be a major addition for Roscommon hospital and I invite anybody in the Seanad and Dáil to come to Roscommon and see all the good work that is ongoing. It is another allocation of €20 million from the last Government, and it is very good news.

Senator Máire Devine: I welcome the Minister of State and if his attendance in the Seanad were recorded, it would have a gold star. That also demonstrates the dire need for disability services in this country and the demands for them. I thank Senator Boyhan for raising the issue so we are allowed to discuss it today.

Patients with spinal and brain injuries are waiting for life-changing treatments and are being left in limbo because of the National Rehabilitation Hospital's not operating at full capacity. The Minister of State has cited the complex needs that have come about through new discoveries in medicine and rehabilitation therapy, which creates challenges for the hospital, leaving a reason to decrease the number of beds. There is also basically a lack of finance and resources being pumped into the hospital. The closure of 12 beds is horrendous for the individuals and families waiting for treatment. We know early intervention allows a person to be rehabilitated, meaning patients could achieve 80% of function, for example.

I refer to the group that has been set up because of the frustration and lack of resources and timely intervention. It is "We Need Our Heads Examined", and the Minister of State met its representatives. One of our councillors, Ms Natalie Treacy, acted on its behalf, and her mam had a brain injury after a fall. She was told if there was immediate treatment, 80% of her mam's function would return. She is a wife, a mam, a worker, a grandmother. She waited two years, from June 2015 to this week, to commence her treatment, which is completely unacceptable. The woman will now only get 20% of her function back, and that goes for so many of our needy patients throughout the country.

I am "Dubcentric" I suppose but the fact there are only 100 or so beds that are only available in Dublin is detrimental to the rest of the country. People have to access those beds from Donegal, Kerry and the far west and are at much more of a disadvantage than the Dubs, who find it difficult enough to access this. An additional four beds are welcome but again it is a piecemeal approach and pretty miserly, considering our need. We probably have the fewest interventions and smallest capacity in Europe but there was a promise in 2008 of building a state-of-the-art facility that would have been the largest and most effective in Europe for rehabilitation purposes. That has not come to fruition. We need to prioritise our health needs and get people back to full function as soon as possible, allowing them to continue within families and communities.

The emphasis will be on the community model and I applaud the Minister of State on that, as it is the way to go. Given what we have had in mental health services with A Vision for Change and the closure of hospitals, with nothing in place in the community, I am slightly cynical. I hope the Minister of State will not rob from hospitals to give to the communities but just give to the communities. The service in its entirety is required in both inpatient and community-based facilities for our people. I wish the Minister of State well and thank him for coming in. I thank Senator Boyhan for raising the issue; he will raise it again and again until either he is dead or we resolve it.

23 May 2017

An Cathaoirleach: I hope it is the latter.

Senator Colette Kelleher: I welcome the Minister of State to the House and the debate on the National Rehabilitation Hospital. This is an issue I have raised in this House, along with colleagues, a number of times and I am delighted to see time dedicated to this issue again. When I raised this issue back in October, the Minister of State, Deputy McGrath stated:

I accept that services are underdeveloped and hanging around for another two years would not be acceptable. I give that commitment but I will go back to the Minister, Deputy Harris. Both of us will work on the issue. I hope to see some serious movement before Christmas.

This is June and beds have been closed since then. Are we meant to be happy, grateful and encouraged with four beds being reopened? I cannot share the generosity of colleagues in saying this can be in any way good enough for people. The services at the National Rehabilitation Hospital are inadequate to meet the needs of the Irish people. We are letting people down, often at their most vulnerable point, and we should have 270 specialist beds, let alone talking about reopening beds that have closed. With regard to the proposed development and liaison officer, the proposed redevelopment has not even happened. It will only be 120 beds in any case. Thank goodness we have people of persistence and determination and the likes of the Neurological Alliance of Ireland and its excellent campaign, supported by 17 neurological charities, including We Need Our Heads Examined, to keep us focused on this. I had much more to say but there is a continuous pathway of services and supports needed for people on their neuro-rehabilitation journey. There is a vital window in which to provide neuro-rehabilitation following conditions such as stroke and acquired brain injury. As Senator Hopkins knows, people lose functionality with every minute they do not get that rehabilitation.

What plans does the Minister have in place to secure the 270 beds we need? Will they all be put in place after we get the 120 beds? Will we have any beds outside Dublin? If one is miles away from one's family, with a terrible condition, it is simply not good enough. There is also a need for community supports to be built. What plans does the Minister have to put the four regional inpatient specialist services in place? When will we get the fully staffed nine community neuro-rehabilitation teams? How much longer can the 25,000 people wait when they are suffering enough with their condition without access to a decent service? I cannot celebrate a paltry four beds tonight. It is better than going backwards but it is surely not good enough.

Senator John Dolan: I will be curt without being unpleasant to anybody. I thank the Minister of State for being here. The point has already been clearly made that with the people waiting to get in, it is not just that their life is on hold but their opportunities are going backwards at a rate of knots. It is a massive issue, as has already been said. I thank Senators Boyhan and Kelleher, who have pushed this, as well as the Neurological Alliance, for their work.

The complexity of medical conditions of patients referred to the NRH in recent years has increased. It could have been anticipated. There was a strategy to deal with people who have suffered strokes and other conditions going back 20 years. If fewer people were dying as a result of these conditions, there would be more people with legacy issues. I am not trying to be cynical.

Will somebody else be robbed in some other place in order to get the beds back incrementally? I sense that we take the fire engine to one place and take it from wherever it was.

The Minister of State referred to the neuro-rehabilitation strategy. There is no outcome action set out in it. There is an extra process, another process around the framework and a commitment involving the Department and the HSE that when this whole thing gets going, it will have a community focus. That, however, is selling us a pup at this stage.

7 o'clock There is actually nothing stating there will be an outcome action for people. There is an honest-enough reference to consideration in the Estimates process.

People are waiting to get in but whenever they get in and go through, if ever, they will be waiting to get out and go back to a home and community that can properly take care of them, including to a house that will be accessible, etc. There are major issues.

I ask the Minister of State to make sure, in respect of a Department in which he has an interest, the Department of Justice and Equality, the issue of traffic enforcement is addressed. Every single accident prevented helps, as does stronger enforcement of the traffic code.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I thank all the Senators for their contributions to this very important debate. It is clear from the exchanges in the House this evening that we agree that the work of the National Rehabilitation Hospital is critical to the care of people who require its services. I share the Senators' frustration. A detailed workforce planning document has been prepared by the hospital and is under consideration by the HSE.

Neurological illness or injury has significant implications for the individual and their family and impacts on their social, educational, vocational and recreational participation. The National Rehabilitation Hospital provides complex, specialist rehabilitation services to patients who, as a result of an accident, illness or injury, have acquired a physical or cognitive disability and require specialist medical rehabilitation. The HSE has given me a commitment and has undertaken to discuss the cases the Senators have raised tonight with colleagues throughout the organisation to ascertain the key challenges in discharging these patients. The hospital has a reputation for excellence - I accept the Senator's comments in this regard - and provides patients with every opportunity to meet their rehabilitation goals, through personalised treatment plans delivered by consultant-led teams whose members are expert in their fields.

The rehabilitation programmes at the National Rehabilitation Hospital are tailored to meet the individual needs of adult and paediatric patients in the following areas of speciality: brain injury; spinal cord system of care; prosthetic, orthotic and limb absence rehabilitation; and paediatric family-centred rehabilitation. I re-emphasise the Government's commitment to the area of neuro-rehabilitation. The development of the new 120-bed National Rehabilitation Hospital on the existing hospital campus is a priority. The design will be patient centred and based on the principles of empowerment, dignity, privacy, confidentiality and choice. It is expected that the National Rehabilitation Hospital board and the Health Service Executive will approve the appointment of the successful contractors in June. This will be a major enhancement of rehabilitation services in the country. It will have a direct and significant impact on patient recovery, by providing an optimal ward and therapeutic environment for patient treatment at the hospital.

I anticipate that the ongoing engagement by the Health Service Executive with the National Rehabilitation Hospital regarding the latter's resource requirements and the initiatives I outlined in my opening statement will be effective in supporting increased capacity at the hospital. As part of its work on the development of an implementation framework for the neuro-rehabilitation strategy, the Health Service Executive has committed to undertake a mapping and gap

23 May 2017

identification exercise for the country as a whole in order to establish a clear picture of where specialist rehabilitation services are currently being delivered and where the demands are for these services. The Health Service Executive's social care division and the National Clinical Programme for Rehabilitation Medicine will work together to form an action plan, under the HSE's clinical strategy and programme division. A national steering group made up of stakeholders representing all the interested parties will be responsible for the governance and implementation of the action plan. I believe that the Government's commitment in A Programme for a Partnership Government, along with the priority actions in the area of neuro-rehabilitation identified by the Health Service Executive in its national service plan for 2017 will have a positive impact on the development of these services into the future and on the lives of those people with neurological illness or injury.

On the matter of ownership, under the redress scheme, the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy proposes to transfer the ownership of the lands and buildings to the HSE. The congregation has initiated the process to secure the consent of the Minister to the transfer but the process within the Department is at a very early stage. The future management and operation of the hospital are also part of this very complex proposal, which, in order to ensure that the National Rehabilitation Hospital will continue to provide health care services on behalf of the State, includes a proposal that the transfer be followed by a partial lease-back. Under the redress scheme, the transfer to the HSE will take place.

The Senators have raised many issues in this debate and it is my duty, as Minister of State with an interest in disability, to raise their concerns and the issues raised with the line Minister and the rest of the Government. I thank the Senators for the opportunity to address these issues this evening and for their valuable contributions to this important debate.

The Seanad adjourned at 7.05 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 24 May 2017.