



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

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

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 15 Samhain 2017

Wednesday, 15 November 2017

Chuaigh an Leas-Chathaoirleach i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

*Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.*

Business of Seanad

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I have received notice from Senator Jerry Buttimer that, on the motion for the Commencement of the House today, he proposes to raise the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to address the funding shortfall at Togher family support centre in Cork and to outline the plans her Department is putting in place to rectify this matter.

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

The need for the Minister of State with special responsibility for defence to make a statement on the amount of money being spent on the purchase of new ships for the Irish Naval Service.

I have also received notice from Senator Aidan Davitt of the following matter:

The need for the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation to address the direct threats to Irish foreign direct investment and jobs growth due to domestic policy decisions, the housing crisis and the current planning process system that are making Ireland an uncompetitive jurisdiction for retaining our current foreign direct investment footprint and attracting new investment.

I have also received notice from Senator Maria Byrne of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to provide emergency funding for the repair of the Olympic swimming pool in the University of Limerick.

I have also received notice from Senator Victor Boyhan of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to confirm the number of fast-track applications submitted to An Bord Pleanála in 2017; the number of housing units involved; the number of applications granted under the scheme; and if An

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Bord Pleanála is ready to roll out an IT interface with the public in terms of online submissions.

I have also received notice from Senator Frank Feighan of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to outline the number of former miners who worked in Arigna and in other mines who have availed of disablement benefit due to work-related illness; and whether there are enough resources currently available to expedite existing applications from former miners seeking disablement benefit.

I regard the matters raised by the Senators as suitable for discussion. I have selected the matters raised by Senators Buttimer, Gavan and Davitt and they will be taken now. Senator Byrne has withdrawn her commencement matter which I had selected. The other Senators may give notice on another day of the matters that they wish to raise.

Commencement Matters

Family Support Services

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I welcome the Minister, Deputy Zappone, to the House. As Leader, I congratulate her on her GALAS success. Grove Cottage, the Togher family support service, is an important community facility that gives access to families who need its services. Some 77 children and families availed of the service last year. This group of people fall between private and public funding and cannot afford a service at the prices being asked but are accommodated by the Togher family support service. The centre is hugely important in the area of family law and child care and caters for estranged parents in a variety of different relationships.

I received an email from a mother who said:

I have been availing of their child contact service which allows me to see and build a relationship with my daughter, ... which I would otherwise not have been able to do without this service.

There are other private organisations that provide a child contact service in the Cork area, but as I am in receipt of social welfare I am unable to avail of their services due to the much higher cost per visit.

If this service closes as planned then I will have a real struggle maintaining a relationship with my 4 year old daughter.

I received another email from a person with whom I am well acquainted, who wrote:

Seeing my child is the hope that was given to me when I needed it. I am secure in the knowledge that they work directly with "Children First" in mind at all times.

It is tragic that the one and only place that can offer this support in Cork is being closed due to lack of funds. I have no doubt that I would have been at the very least feeling suicidal

by now had I still not seen my child. I dread to think of her growing up without her mother.

These are emotional emails. The Minister has met with representatives of the Togher family centre and I commend her on her proactivity in this regard. She has a child-centred brief and is very much in control of it and if she visited the centre she would see the quality of the people who work there. If she went into Grove Cottage she would see the environment - the toys, the furnishings, the care, the support and the safe, child-friendly environment, which are testimony to Jackie Costello and the people who work there. The centre ensures there is an environment where relationships can be rebuilt, advice and support are offered and professional supervision is provided for our most vulnerable at a critical time in their lives, whether they are recovering from addiction or coming out of domestic abuse or sexual violence.

The Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will be aware of issues with the courts referring people to this service in Togher, which is happening more and more and is further testimony to the work being done at the centre at Grove Cottage.

This is about children and families. I recognise that Tusla provides funding to Togher family centre in the area of access, but we must look at the people who fall through the cracks. I appeal to the Ministers in the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to come to an understanding that intervention in the form of provision of extra funding is needed, or perhaps new funding is needed, because this is a very important service.

I was the Chairman of the committee involved in the pre-legislative scrutiny of Children First and which recognised the importance of the children's referendum. I do not mean to be patronising but the Minister is bringing a certain and a different emphasis that was not, perhaps, in the role before. This is about children and their right to have a relationship with their families.

I hope that the work of Grove Cottage, which has developed and evolved beyond what was envisaged on day one, will continue. It provides quality affordable child contact, and I know from going there and meeting with parents and staff that this is an issue that is going to arise in other parts of the country, because more referrals are taking place. The request for funding to expand the service was unsuccessful in the past, but I hope that now, at a time when we have seen an increase in budgets, an accommodation can be found.

I commend the work that is being done, which the Minister knows about because she has met with the staff there, and I hope that we can find extra funding. I thank the Leas-Chathaoirleach for choosing this matter. He knows that as Leader I rarely put in Commencement matters, but this is one I feel very passionate about. Go raibh maith agat.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I accept that. Thank you, Senator. I call on the Minister.

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I love to hear the call of the Seanad each morning, and I am delighted to come here to address and respond to the issue raised by Senator Buttimer, a very special colleague whose legacy on marriage equality hit the shores of Australia last night, so I congratulate him.

To the matter at hand, the Togher family centre operates as an independent organisation and is governed by a board of management that is representative of the local community. As Senator Buttimer noted, I have had the opportunity to meet the staff. I acknowledge that it is

a voluntary, community-based service located in the heart of Deanrock Estate, Togher, Cork city, and it provides a range of services, including early years education; integrated support and early identification of need; family support services; family access services; adult education; and early intervention youth work.

It was not immediately clear from the question if the Senator had a particular service in mind, although it may be clear in light of his contribution this morning. The centre receives funding from my Department under the early childhood care and education, ECCE, scheme and the community childcare subvention, CCS, scheme. Funding to Togher family centre under both schemes to date in 2017 comes to a total of just over €295,000. In 2017, funding of more than €30,000 was also provided by my Department, through the Cork Education and Training Board, for the Togher youth resilience project, which is based in Togher family centre. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has advised that it provided funding of approximately €144,000 to the centre this year. An additional €26,000 was also provided by Tusla to the centre in recent months, bringing the total funding allocation to more than €170,000 in 2017. This is an increase of almost €33,000 over 2016. I understand the centre also receives funding from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection under the school meals programme, and from various other sources.

The Togher family centre provides a service in line with the principles of Tusla's prevention, partnership and family support programme. The main focus of services is on early intervention to promote and protect the health and well-being of children, young people and their families. The centre, as the Senator has referred to, has also developed an access centre which provides services to children in care and their families. This provides a safe, neutral and child-focused setting for children to visit with their non-custodial parent. All visits and exchanges take place under the supervision of trained staff. Togher family centre can arrange for supervised access through referrals from Tusla. Supported or fully supervised access is also offered depending on the needs of the particular family.

I understand that in recent times the access centre has experienced considerable demand from the family law courts, guardians *ad litem* and other parties, and has provided, where possible, supervised access for referrals from these parties. It is important to reiterate that the core work of the centre is focused on referrals from Tusla, and it is not always possible for the access centre to satisfy the increased demand from other sources. I say this while being cognisant of the emails Senator Buttimer shared with us this morning.

My Department has also received an application from the centre for community employment sustainability funding in the early years sector. Financial reserves were identified in that process, and my officials requested clarification on the use of these reserves and their relevance to child care funding. Following a response from the centre, the position is under review, and my officials will revert to the centre in due course. In situations such as this, decisions with regard to future funding levels for individual service providers are informed by the business case put forward by the provider in question and an assessment of service need in the locality in question undertaken by the relevant funding authorities. It is important that this process is undertaken and completed in order to allow for an informed assessment to be made on the funding issue raised, having regard to the available resources and competing priorities.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I thank the Minister. Would the Senator like to respond?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I thank the Minister for her reply. I hope that we can bring a

resolution to the issue. The Minister is also working with the Department of Justice and Equality in this area. It is a matter that is ongoing in other parts of the country as well. The work being done here, and the emails I read out, are testimonials from people. The amount of money involved is relatively small in the overall scheme of things, and I look forward to working with the Department and with the Minister in ensuring that we can continue the service. There is a fear that the service will close in January, which I think all of us would want to see averted because this is about ensuring that family access continues. I thank the Minister for her reply and I hope that we can overcome any obstacle to ensure the service continues.

Deputy Katherine Zappone: The case was put forward very strongly by the Senator, resulting from his ongoing commitment to and engagement with the centre. I reiterate the importance of a strong business case when the funding is being sought, and note that at least one application for funding from the centre is still under review in my Department.

Naval Service Vessels

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne, is taking this Commencement matter on behalf of Minister of State, Deputy Paul Kehoe.

Senator Paul Gavan: Go raibh maith agat, a Leas-Chathaoirligh. The Minister of State is very welcome. I want to raise the issue of defence spending this morning. We learned in recent weeks of plans by the Naval Service to purchase a new multi-role vessel, MRV. In recent years, the Naval Service has purchased three new ships, with a fourth ship on order, for a total of over €250 million. This additional MRV is likely to cost over €200 million, bringing the cost of five new ships to almost €500 million. Yet at the same time, the Naval Service is selling off its older ships for a pittance. The *LÉ Emer*, the *LÉ Deirdre* and the *LÉ Aisling* were sold for €320,000, €240,000 and €110,000, respectively. The point is that these ships could have been refurbished for a fraction of the cost of these unnecessary new warships. Ireland should only need naval vessels for fishery protection, emergency rescue and prevention of smuggling. As a neutral state, we have no requirements for aggressive warships. The misuse of the Irish Naval Service was highlighted when the *LÉ William Butler Yeats* replaced the *LÉ Eithne* in the Mediterranean for Operation Sophia, which unfortunately will result in the redeployment of Naval Service vessels from primarily humanitarian search and rescue to primarily security and interception operations. Indeed, this move has been condemned by Médecins sans Frontières and others, and is highly inappropriate for a neutral country.

Taxpayer funding for the Defence Forces is necessarily limited when we have 700,000 people on our hospital waiting lists and 8,000 homeless, including, as I heard this morning, 3,124 children. What I am trying to do is make sense of what is happening here, because over the years of the ever-growing crisis in housing and health, we have discovered that the Department of Defence has been spending money like confetti on warships. In my city of Limerick tonight, we will have 154 homeless children sleeping in hotel beds. We had 719 patients on trolleys in University Hospital Limerick in the month of October. Can the Minister of State explain why, at the time of the worst housing crisis in the history of the State and the worst health care crisis since the 1940s, her Government cannot sanction the money to build houses or hospital wings, but has been able to sanction almost €500 million in funding for new warships?

Even if we decide the money has to be spent on defence – I do not accept that argument – then other points arise, including low pay and conditions in the Army. People are voting with

their feet. My colleague, Senator Craughwell has been very articulate on this topic on several occasions. People are leaving the Army because of low pay. The Air Corps search and rescue service was in such a state of under-funding that it was unable to support the tragic rescue operation in Blacksod Bay in March. There is serious under-funding within our defence sector while we are spending vast amounts, hundreds of millions of euro, on new naval ships. I am obliged to conclude that it must be connected to our ever-increasing complicity in the new EU military battle plans.

I am seeking answers to these questions. I am unsure of the position in the constituency of the Minister of State but I have described what it is like in my constituency. We have a shocking health and housing crisis. Yet, the Government consistently believes that it is better to spend money on war ships than on housing for people or on their health. It makes no sense.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I wish to acknowledge Senator Gavan's commencement matter. On behalf of the Minister of State with responsibility for defence, Deputy Paul Kehoe, who cannot be present due to other commitments, I wish to take the opportunity to respond to the Senator on the topic he has raised.

It is a priority of the Minister of State, Deputy Kehoe, to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service is maintained to the greatest extent possible. This is primarily to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government and as set out in the White Paper on Defence.

The Naval Service is the principal sea-going agency of the State and is charged with maritime defence, fisheries protection, contraband interdiction duties, search and rescue and enforcing Irish and EU law and legislation with the Irish economic zone. This zone currently extends to 132,000 square miles. This area is approximately five times the size of Ireland and amounts to approximately 16% of all EU waters.

The Naval Service currently operates eight ships in a flotilla. Equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service to enable them to carry out the roles assigned by Government are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment planning process. In this context the principal aim over the period of the White Paper is to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements at home and overseas.

The defence capital envelope for the period 2018-21 is €416 million. This will enable investment in major equipment platforms, including the continuing replacement and refurbishment of Naval Service vessels. The White Paper underpins the ongoing replacement of the Naval Service fleet. The most significant investment of recent years by the defence organisation has been on the procurement of the new offshore patrol vessels for the Naval Service. The third ship in the programme, *LÉ William Butler Yeats*, was commissioned into service in October 2016. The three ships are performing well in operational service and have been a great enhancement to the capacity of the Naval Service.

A contract for an additional sister ship was placed with Babcock International, a British company, in June 2016. The fourth ship, to be named *LÉ George Bernard Shaw*, is scheduled for delivery in mid-2018. This aligns with the planning process in place under the White Paper on Defence, which will determine the defence organisation's maritime capability requirements. The requirement for a fourth ship is regarded as urgent and expedient given the age of the older

remaining ships in the fleet, *LÉ Orla*, *LÉ Ciara* and *LÉ Eithne*, all of which are over 30 years of age. In tandem with the acquisition of the new ships, the defence organisation has commenced planning for a mid-life refurbishment programme for the *LÉ Roisin* and the *LÉ Niamh*. The new ship will allow the Naval Service to meet its patrol day targets with due cognisance to the significant additional operational requirements for the naval fleet under the current Operation Sophia and previously under Operation Pontus in the Mediterranean Sea.

Overall, 17,500 migrants have been rescued since Naval Service vessels were first deployed in the Mediterranean Sea in May 2015 as part of Operation Pontus. The deployment of Irish naval vessels to the humanitarian mission in the Mediterranean over the past three years to engage in search and rescue tasks has been an important element in Ireland's response to the migration crisis in the Mediterranean. The operation finished in October 2017. Since October 2017, the Naval Service is participating in the EU naval mission Operation Sophia. In accordance with the mandate for the mission, the Naval Service can be involved in surveillance and intelligence-gathering operations, search and rescue operations and disposal of migrant boats and force protection operations. Operation Sophia has thus far contributed to the apprehension of 117 suspected smugglers and traffickers. It has removed 497 boats from criminal organisations and it has contributed to 278 safety of life at sea events. Most important, it has saved the lives of over 41,500 migrants.

The expenditure on the Naval Service vessel replacement programme has to be taken in context. The four new offshore patrol vessels will serve the country for the next 30 years and will provide good value for money given the nature of the assets and associated capacity involved. The acquisition of these modern new vessels combined with an ongoing maintenance regime for all vessels within the fleet and the continuous process of refurbishment, refit and repair, will ensure that the operational capacity of the Naval Service as the State's principal sea-going agency are maintained to the greatest extent.

I will address further some of the comments the Senator made in my subsequent contribution.

Senator Paul Gavan: Not for the first time, the Minister of State has been put in a difficult position. In fairness to the Minister of State, the response from the civil servants does not answer the questions I have put. I asked how the Government can justify the expenditure of hundreds of millions of euro on new boats when we could have refurbished our existing fleet and put the surplus money towards the health and housing crises that have been ever-present in recent years. It speaks poorly of the Government that its priority is to please its friends in the EU by increasing military spending rather than looking after our people at home with better health and housing.

Another point relates to the disgraceful decision to send the *LÉ Samuel Beckett* to the biggest arms fair in the world. God knows what the great man would have thought of that. Is that what has become of our neutrality? We are now sending one of our flagship naval vessels to the biggest arms fair in the world at taxpayers' expense to help in selling arms and equipment to gangsters from throughout the world. It is absolutely shameful.

I know the constituency the Minister of State is from. I cannot believe that her constituents would be impressed by the fact that we can find hundreds of millions for new ships but not for hospital beds or housing.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I do not have a written response to the Senator's remarks but I will give him some information that may be helpful. The Government is providing over €5 billion for housing in the coming years and is making steady progress. On a weekly basis, over 100 people are finding themselves housed in new homes. I believe it is not just to say that nothing is happening, because it is.

We have seen the biggest budget ever in the health service in the lifetime of this Government and things are happening in the health service. It is wrong to say that the identification of people within the health service on waiting lists and people using the service are not being dealt with. This is happening on a daily basis under the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris. The new primary care centres throughout the country add to the flexibility of people being able to arrive on the door of a primary care centre.

Going back to the provision of funding for Naval Service vessels, the Government recognises that the men and women of the Air Corps, the Army and the Naval Service provide a service that protects people whose lives might otherwise be in danger. They do so without ever complaining about the risk to their own lives on a daily basis. It is incumbent on us all, particularly those of us in government, to ensure the best vessels and equipment are provided for the Defence Forces. The Army, the Air Corps and the Naval Service enjoy an excellent reputation at home and throughout Europe. The efforts of the Naval Service which has lent its vessels and personnel to serve in rescue missions in the Mediterranean have been especially welcome. I take the opportunity to acknowledge the men and women who put their own lives at risk on a daily basis to protect others. As parliamentarians and citizens of this country, we support measures that will ensure they will have the best equipment and vessels at their disposal in order that they can continue to save lives and take part in humanitarian missions in the Mediterranean.

11 o'clock

Foreign Direct Investment

Senator Aidan Davitt: I am concerned that domestic policy decisions, the housing crisis and the planning system are leading to an uncompetitive environment in the State for the retention of foreign direct investment and damaging efforts to attract new investment. Deputy Niall Collins raised these concerns in the Dáil and has asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation to address them at the Joint Committee on Business, Enterprise and Innovation. She has not yet agreed to appear before the committee to have that discussion.

The recently published report by American Chamber of Commerce Ireland, *Growing Great Teams in Ireland: The Role of the Residential Rental Sector*, clearly illustrates the severity of the housing shortage and how it could lead to Ireland being uncompetitive in the future which could, in turn, be a deterrent to foreign direct investment. The report states more than 30,000 new one-bedroom and two-bedroom rental properties are needed in Dublin by 2022 to meet the housing demand arising from the new jobs created by foreign direct investment. The Tánaiste and IDA Ireland must outline the Government's response to this finding from a jobs growth perspective. The Government can no longer sit on the sidelines and hope the housing crisis will end and house constructions will commence. All successful projects work from the bottom up. It is easy to see that the Government's refusal to launch an organised and co-ordinated social and affordable house building programme is endangering further growth and the creation of high-end jobs in Ireland.

The housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme is not a housing policy, but it is creating division in the country by pitting marginalised and working class families against each other in the competition for housing. If it is to take the report by American Chamber of Commerce Ireland seriously, the Government can no longer simply point to its projected figures and state everything will work out and that the targets will be achieved by 2022. We have had that talk from two Ministers in the past five years but nothing has actually been done. We must have a co-ordinated plan based on a bottom-up approach. We have totally neglected social housing. The Taoiseach delivered a speech at a party conference in Cavan a few days ago which was full of bravado but which included no mention of social housing and no indication of an organised programme of house building. If this matter is not addressed in a serious way, we will have chaotic problems. Rents in Dublin are 20% higher than they were at their peak in 2008. On average, a semi-detached house costs €3,000 per month to rent in Dublin 1. That is an horrific cost in an area in which many of the people who come to Ireland to work in higher end jobs are located and in which they wish to live. We have had a lot of talk about solutions but zero substance when it comes to action. Will the Minister of State indicate whether there is a definite plan in place to commence a house building programme?

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I am taking this matter on behalf of the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

It is helpful to put our current foreign direct investment footprint into perspective by pointing out that 2016 was a record year for such investment in Ireland. IDA Ireland client companies created nearly 19,000 new jobs during the year across a range of sectors, with every region of Ireland benefiting. This strong performance has continued into 2017. Investments approved by the agency in the first half of the year will lead to the creation of 11,000 jobs, compared with 9,000 for the equivalent period in 2016. It is worth noting that 52% of all jobs created in 2016 were based outside Dublin and that the mid-year results for 2017 show that 54% of all job approvals so far this year are located outside the capital. This clearly shows that IDA Ireland is committed to increasing investment in every region of the country. It remains focused on that goal, as do the Tánaiste and the Government. In addition, IDA Ireland is working towards a number of ambitious targets, including the creation of 80,000 new jobs and 900 new investments in the period from 2015 to 2019. This would bring total FDI employment in Ireland to 209,000. The year 2016 marked the second year of implementation of the current strategy and over the first two years the agency is delivering well ahead of these targets.

The Government accepts that the adequate supply of quality, affordable housing in the right locations, to buy and to rent, is a contributory factor to Ireland's overall competitiveness. The link between the cost of housing and wage expectations means that developments in the residential property sector impact on our international competitiveness and ability to compete for mobile talent. We are now one year into the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's action plan for housing and homelessness. In that time many key actions have been delivered or put in train and it is clear from a range of housing related trends that the supply response is coming on stream. All key indicators of construction activity show that residential construction is ramping up considerably. The number of planning permissions is up by almost 50% year on year and the ESRI's latest commentary in October forecast that the number of house completions would reach 19,000 this year and 24,000 in 2018. On that basis, the Rebuilding Ireland target of 25,000 homes per year by 2020 will be met and quite likely exceeded.

In the context of the recent outcome in Athenry, the Government is also taking action to implement an efficient and speedy planning process in order to avoid unreasonable delays in

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the future. This may include the designation of data centres as strategic infrastructure developments for planning purposes, which would help to ensure future data centre related planning applications would move more swiftly through the planning process.

Ireland's value proposition is based on a highly educated and skilled workforce, an attractive environment in which people want to live and work and a transparent corporate tax regime. For foreign direct investment in Ireland, 2016 was a record year, both in terms of the number of jobs created and the value of investments won. We are on track for more strong results in 2017, in a reflection of our continuing success in attracting capital rich foreign direct investment projects to Ireland. I will cover some of the other issues raised by the Senator when I give my second reply.

An Cathaoirleach: The Minister of State has another minute.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: Okay. On the Apple data centre in Athenry, I want to be absolutely clear that while the company has not committed to proceed immediately, it has not abandoned the project in Galway. The company has insisted that its potential investment remains under active consideration. Given that the planning issues have now been resolved, we are optimistic that the data centre project will proceed. I assure the Senator that IDA Ireland is in active dialogue with the company and continues to do everything it can to support the project. Data centres remain an important aspect of Ireland's foreign direct investment as the strengths we can offer to this type of project, including our climate, energy supply and business environment, remain in place and are well known to potential investors. I will cover some other issues which the Senator has raised after he responds.

An Cathaoirleach: We are nearly out of time. I am not sure if the reply hit the spot in respect of the Senator's complaint, but his time is nearly up.

Senator Aidan Davitt: I appreciate the Minister of State coming to the House. I know this is not her remit. This is an issue which is not just important to me or to Opposition parties. The American Chamber of Commerce Ireland is telling us that we have a serious issue. On completions, two years ago we were told that we were going to have thousands of social houses. Something like 67 houses were built. Some of the figures which Ministers trot out are off the wall. We are told that we have to be delivering 40,000 or so houses a year. I do not believe we will even deliver 15,000 this year. The Minister of State stated 18,000. In June we were told there could be 11,000 to 12,000 completions. I just cannot agree with some of the figures. It is not just me, but the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland as well. That is why I am really concerned. It is a very serious organisation. It does not get excited too easily, but it is hearing it from the top down. I know the Minister of State is a great believer in social housing. I firmly believe that unless we start a real programme of social housing, which has to start from the bottom up building houses, we are going nowhere.

An Cathaoirleach: We are running out of time but I am sure this matter will arise again. I thank the Minister of State. I believe it is a case of "never the twain shall meet", but the Minister of State is only doing her job on behalf of the line Minister so I thank her for her response.

Sitting suspended at 11.15 a.m. and resumed at 11.30 a.m.

Seanad Éireann
Order of Business

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Order of Business is No. 1, Water Services Bill 2017 - Committee and Remaining Stages, to be taken at 12.45 p.m.; No. 2, motion regarding an earlier signature motion regarding the Water Services Bill 2017, to be taken on the conclusion of No. 1, without debate; No. 3, statements on health, to be taken at 3.30 p.m. and to conclude no later than 5.30 p.m., with the contribution of group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes, those of all other Senators not to exceed five minutes and the Minister to be given no less than five minutes to reply; No. 4, Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill 2017 - Report Stage (amendments from Dáil Éireann) and Final Stage, to be taken at 5.30 p.m.; and No. 57, motion 16, Private Members' business, to be taken at 6 p.m. with the time allocated to this debate not to exceed two hours.

Senator Mark Daly: The previous Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, used to talk about a scorecard for Ministers but he got rid of it because the scorecard did not show the results he wanted, which tells us a lot about how the Ministers were performing.

Senator Paul Coghlan: The Senator would be a good judge of that.

An Cathaoirleach: We should avoid a "Kramer versus Kramer" situation, with Kerry versus Kerry in this instance.

Senator Martin Conway: We hear that Deputy Micheál Martin has a scorecard.

Senator Mark Daly: If Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were like Kramer and Kramer, it all ended in divorce 100 years ago. As regards the scorecard on housing, over 120,000 households are on the waiting lists but only 1,000 units have been provided. There are 3,124 children and 5,250 adults in emergency accommodation awaiting housing, on top of those households on the waiting lists, which shows the size of the issue. There has been a success rate of 0.65% which, even using Senator Coghlan's mathematics, is not a pass.

Senator Martin Conway: Senator Coghlan is a financial whizz-kid.

Senator Mark Daly: A pass rate would be 40% but the Government is nowhere near 40%. In the Leader's county, 38 houses were provided and there were 59 in Cork city for a waiting list of 6,005 households. As Senator Coghlan will be well aware, only 11 houses were provided in Kerry.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Senator is obsessed with Senator Coghlan.

Senator Paul Coghlan: Yes.

Senator Mark Daly: Despite this, 4,166 households are waiting. I do not know, Senator Coghlan, whether you believe that is success but in my mind that is not success.

An Cathaoirleach: Through the Chair, please.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I do not think we can believe much from Senator Daly.

Senator Mark Daly: For the benefit of Senator Coghlan, these are the Government's figures. If he believes that we cannot believe the Government's figures-----

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Senator David Norris: Absolutely.

Senator Mark Daly: -----then I do not know where we can go next.

Senator Paul Coughlan: Look it-----

Senator Martin Conway: Fianna Fáil must not have figures.

Senator Mark Daly: Possibly of more importance are the figures that have come from *The Irish Times* which, as Senator Coughlan knows, is the paper of record.

An Cathaoirleach: The more interruptions the longer the delay.

Senator Martin Conway: We will keep interrupting.

An Cathaoirleach: I must give another minute now as there have been three interruptions, and consistently so.

Senator Martin Conway: Give the Senator another minute. We will keep interrupting.

Senator Mark Daly: I thank the Cathaoirleach for allowing injury time on the Order of Business.

Senator Martin Conway: The Senator should have been given a red card.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Hear, hear.

Senator Tim Lombard: Senator Mark Daly is injured.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Conway, bí ciúin le do thoil.

Senator Mark Daly: I want to wish the Danish soccer team the best of luck, as we have talked about red cards.

An Cathaoirleach: Do not go offside, Senator.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Mark Daly is well offside.

Senator Mark Daly: There is no offside in Gaelic football and that is all I have to go by.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: There is a square ball.

(Interruptions).

Senator Mark Daly: I wish the Danish soccer team the best of luck. I thank the Irish team for entertaining us over the years. It would have been a high point for the players on the Irish soccer team to go to the World Cup and we hope that there will be brighter days ahead.

Unfortunately, there are not brighter days ahead when it comes to Brexit. In fact, there are 499 days to go.

Senator Martin Conway: The Senator has gone from discussing soccer to discussing Brexit.

Senator Mark Daly: At 11 a.m. on 29 March 2019, the UK will leave the European Union.

President Obama used to talk about hope one can believe in and certainly one could believe in that kind of hope. The British Government's policy seems to be simply hope. However, it is not hope one can believe in because they do not have a plan.

Tomorrow, the British foreign affairs committee will come here and its chairman will visit the Border for the first time. The British have no plan when it comes to Brexit. They seem to be going against the customs union and the Single Market that would allow the Border to remain open. They do not want a special status for Northern Ireland and yet somehow they hope that magically it will all work out. In 499 days that policy of hope, without anything to back it up, will certainly not work.

An Cathaoirleach: The extra time is up, Senator.

Senator Mark Daly: I want to give an example-----

Senator Michael McDowell: Penalties, a Chathaoirligh.

Senator Mark Daly: -----of how hope is not a policy.

Senator Martin Conway: Go away now.

Senator Mark Daly: Honda manufactures cars in England. As many as 320 trucks arrive at its factory every day. Honda only has 15 minutes worth of stock at any one time so a delay of one hour in production will cost €880,000. How does the British Government think that having no Border policy-----

Senator Martin Conway: The Senator's time is up and he has scored nothing.

Senator Mark Daly: -----for the North, or any border policy, is a policy? Hope is simply not a policy.

We welcome the Irish Government's policy of 100 points that Leo Varadkar has put out. The Government needs to send a message to the British Government that it has not done enough to clarify the issues on the North and that discussions cannot be moved forward until such time as the North is sorted first.

An Cathaoirleach: Go raibh maith agat.

Senator Mark Daly: I thank the Cathaoirleach.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator got penalty time and injury time. I call Senator McDowell.

Senator Martin Conway: There was no score.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Daly is obsessed with Senator Coghlan.

An Cathaoirleach: Le do thoil, Senator McDowell.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Daly has repeatedly made the same point.

Senator Mark Daly: They are not.

Senator Michael McDowell: In recent days newspapers have covered further publicity about the question of having a single mayor for the greater Dublin area and four county coun-

cils or local authorities. I noticed, also in the newspapers, a reference to the annual budget for Dublin City Council which is now close to €1 billion a year with 6,000 staff. Then I considered in that context the appalling squalor which existed in Crumlin as exposed by the “Prime Time Investigates” programme where people are being housed in subhuman conditions with bunk beds in tiny bedrooms for want of inspection by the local authority. All of that makes me very cynical about the standard of local government in the Dublin area.

One particular issue from which local government has withdrawn was that of refuse collection. I have recently received a communication from one councillor in Dublin called Councillor Keith Redmond. He has told me that he has followed up the issue of what he considers to be *prima facie* evidence of a cartel among the waste collection companies whereby they are dividing the city, geographically, and not really competing with each other. If the whole idea of privatising waste collection and introducing pay-by-weight and deregulating charges was to increase efficiency, it would be a complete travesty if it turned out that there is not any effective competition and that the companies involved are engaging in geographical division and no-go areas.

The alarming thing that Councillor Redmond told me was that he had been engaged in a phone conversation, on behalf of one of his constituents, with a particular company. The person he dealt with at the end of the phone, and I will not mention the company or the person, indicated that there was such a territorial divide. So surprised was Councillor Redmond to hear the news that he decided to record the balance of the conversation and has, apparently, clear evidence of such a divide up. If that is the case then the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Murphy, or his Minister of State, Deputy English-----

Senator Jerry Buttimer: And Deputy Naughten.

Senator Michael McDowell: -----should come to the House to explain to us what procedures are in place to prevent the total absence of competition in waste collection and the emergence of cartels and market division among the waste collection companies. If the Government is going to rely on competition to keep prices down and if competition is allowed to wither away by secret deals among the waste collection companies, then the only people who will pay for all of this are the householders.

Finally, with Dublin City Council’s budget approaching €1 billion, more and more of its services privatised, 6,000 employees and no inspectors to stop the exploitation of people in housing standards then surely it is about time that somebody asked the following questions. Are we getting value for money from local authorities? Is Dublin City Council that spends close to €1 billion of taxpayers’ money every year and not doing its job fit for purpose anymore?

Senator Paul Gavan: I, too, wish to raise the issue of housing. With reference to my own city of Limerick, this Friday we will see a new budget struck by the Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael coalition. Yes, I am afraid that we have a local coalition comprised of both of the parties as well as a national coalition.

Sinn Féin’s council team reviewed the figures last Monday. We learned that there will be nothing of substance to address the horrendous housing crisis in Limerick city. There are 315 people homeless in Limerick, of which 154 are children, and there are thousands of people on the waiting list. Let us consider the most telling figures. Of the 2,443 additional tenancies that local councils provided in the past three years, more than 1,900 of them have gone to the pri-

vate sector. In other words, almost all of the so-called work of providing housing is throwing money at private landlords. That is the solution provided by Fine Gael and, I am afraid to say, Fianna Fáil. That coalition has failed the people of Limerick day after day, which is a disgrace. When will we realise that councils used to, in the worst of times, build housing? When will the Government supply the money to make sure there is sufficient housing build in the pipeline? I ask because we now know it is not.

I wish to put on the record something that we all know. This crisis is not getting better; it is getting worse. The figures in Limerick are proof. Month after month the homeless figures continue to increase. The number of people given notice by landlords, who are greedy unscrupulous landlords in many cases, continues to increase. As Senator Byrne acknowledged yesterday, rents in Limerick have increased by 11% over the past year. That is the failure of a Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil coalition both locally and nationally. I call on the Leader to arrange a debate on the issue. It is not good enough for Fine Gael to keep believing in the mantra of a privatised solution for the housing problem. It is a failure of politics and the party has had seven years to sort this out.

The second issue I want to raise relates to the football match last night. As we all know, we suffered a huge disappointment last night. Our brothers and sisters in the North had an equally sad disappointment on Sunday night. Despite our recent success in both qualifying for the European Championships and the heroic effort from players over the past 20 years, typically our teams have not managed to qualify. I hope that there might be some wise heads in both organisations - the IFA and, in the South, the FAI - who might look at the prospect of having a conversation about a united Ireland football team. Lord knows we could use it. We could have used Jonny Evans last night in defence. It is time to have a debate on the issue. We need to look forward in football. We know that we can have a united Ireland rugby team and have seen its tremendous success. I am asking for a debate with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport because it would be good if the Government were to initiate such a project. Let us see if we can have wise heads on both sides so that we can try to build a better future for football, North and South.

Senator Lynn Ruane: This morning I read an article in *The Irish Times* by the director of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive on volunteers. I was very disappointed with the language used in it. Basically, it states that it is not helpful for volunteers to be giving out food and clothes to the homeless. I do not believe such comments are helpful to volunteers who give up their time in the evening, after their own day's work, and leave their families to give out food and clothes. The article made me think of all the volunteers who, over the years, came into the hospitals in which I worked. They got to know the long-term homeless, who were mainly men, and paid attention to the type of clothes they liked to wear and the football teams they supported, etc. One man who I still visit insisted he only liked to wear a certain brand. Volunteers, when going through buckets of clothes, took the time to ensure that those men had something they liked wearing and not just anything out of a bag. They paid attention to their personalities and who they are. Such gestures might not break the long-term cycle of homelessness but I do not think that is what volunteer groups are trying to do. They are trying to show a level of human empathy and compassion to people who are on the streets and in long-term homelessness.

Years ago, in the lead-up to Christmas, I remember collecting black bags full of presents for people in two hostels where I worked. I remember two women skiving loads of them down the side of a sofa. I asked them about three bottles of perfume that were in a packet but they did not want them. They said that they could not afford presents for their loved ones and that they

had been used to the cold and living in those standards but that the stockings, gloves, scarves, perfumes and gift sets that they were receiving served them psychologically because they were able to give them to their loved ones at Christmas to show them that they were thinking of them.

Volunteers are hugely important. It may be that they are never in a position to break the cycle of homelessness, but that is up to us, as legislators, Dublin City Council and various other organisations. To dismiss the work of volunteers is unacceptable. Instead we should be thanking them.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: The instinctive nastiness of the Taoiseach's politics has been laid bare over the past 48 hours and the Government sank to new depths when issuing rhetoric around the homelessness crisis. I think every Member of the House would agree that homelessness is the biggest issue this country must face. When dealing with a serious issue, one would assume no Minister or Government would engage in victim blaming. However, over the weekend and this week, we have had the suggestion that our homelessness levels are normal, last night it was suggested that talking about homelessness is bad for our international reputation, and now we have the deplorable suggestion that homelessness is down to the bad behaviour of those who are homeless. This is the inevitable consequence of the nasty rhetoric of defending those who get up early in the morning and saying that, for those who are vulnerable, it is in a way their own fault at the end of the day. It is outrageous. Rather than having a Government which holds its hands up and states it is doing its best but that it is a difficult and complex problem on which it will work harder and better to find solutions, we are told that our homelessness rates are normal if one considers the international comparators and that we might have a better international reputation if we stopped talking about it. Inevitably, other people working in the sector are saying that it is their own fault at the end of the day.

The rhetoric from the communications unit is outrageous. What is worse about the unit is that €5 million is nothing compared to the price of demonising the most vulnerable people in this country of ours. I genuinely do not want this to turn into party political football.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Senator just made it that.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: However, this is the inevitable consequence. I am blue in the face from listening to demands in this Chamber for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to come in here. It is a waste of all our time.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Who is criticising it?

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: We need the Taoiseach in here to account for his comments and to tell us his vision for ending homeless. It is outrageous that we have two members-----

An Cathaoirleach: Senator-----

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: Hold on. This is the party that gives the rest of us lectures about social issues and Christianity.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Here we go.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: This morning two members of the Catholic church were on the radio. Brother Crowley and Fr. Peter McVerry are appalled at the rhetoric of this Government. It is disgusting that we are now blaming the homeless for homelessness. It is unbelievable. I am asking the Cathaoirleach and the Leader quite respectfully-----

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Senator has not been, so far.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: Most of us have been reasonably calm up to this point. However, we are now being told that giving tents and food to the homeless on the side of the street is wrong, that it is their bad behaviour that is causing the problem and that we should stop talking about it because it is bad for our international reputation. It is beyond time we had the Taoiseach in here to answer for his nasty rhetoric and get back to the substance of the issue and stop blaming those who are the victims of it.

Senator Martin Conway: I am disappointed to be roared at and finger-pointed by someone for whom I have quite a regard.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: I am sorry but the homeless are the ones that are being pointed at and being blamed.

Senator Martin Conway: The Cathaoirleach should have called order-----

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: Is it my bad behaviour now? Am I behaving badly?

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Ó Ríordáin, please take your seat. Senator Conway, listen to what I have to say.

Senator Martin Conway: I take up-----

An Cathaoirleach: Senator, please respect the Chair. You interrupted Senator Mark Daly three times. Senator Ó Ríordáin was very passionate and the Senator may not agree with what he said-----

Senator Martin Conway: He is well able to interrupt himself.

An Cathaoirleach: Now the Senator is interrupting me. I will ask the Senator to sit down if he does not speak to the matter he wishes to raise.

Senator Martin Conway: I take offence at being pointed at and roared at in this House.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator was entitled to make his point. I did not see him pointing at you.

Senator Martin Conway: I did, and I have a problem with my eyes.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senator has used up a minute already.

Senator Martin Conway: The point I wanted to make, although I am continuously roared at, is that there is an issue in this city and country with cyclists not using cycle lanes or abiding by the rules of the road. I would like to see a debate on this. Overall, cycling is very positive. It is good to see people out cycling because it is good for their health, mental well-being and the environment. However, when cyclists are blatantly abusing the roads and not co-operating with the traffic systems and structures in place, we have a problem. I use taxis quite a bit in Dublin. Taxi drivers will say that their biggest challenge in terms of road safety is trying to navigate around cyclists. In my parish in County Clare, we have an excellent cycle lane. It was the Labour Party's Deputy Alan Kelly who provided the funding for it when he was in government. It cost €500,000 at the time. Unfortunately, however, more often than not one will see people cycling on the road and not using the cycle lane. I would like a debate on cycling to be arranged

with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. In addition, the transport committee might examine new protocols and arrangements for dealing with cyclists.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: Along with other Members of the House, I attended a presentation in the AV Room this morning which was organised by Deputy Stephen Donnelly. It was given by David Hall of iCare Housing. I compliment Mr. Hall on his presentation.
12 o'clock I know the Cathaoirleach also attended. For those who are not aware, iCare is an organisation which was set up to help those who find themselves in mortgage arrears on their family homes and whose properties are in negative equity. I would encourage those who would qualify to look into it as a solution, because being in danger of losing the family home is a very stressful situation for any family to find itself in. There is help out there and I compliment David Hall and his organisation for taking the lead and, in many ways, showing up the lack of progress the Government has made in this area. I encourage those who think they may benefit from this scheme to make contact with iCare. It would be very worthwhile and I would encourage such people to come forward and make contact.

On a more sullen note, we were all disappointed this morning after last night's football match. I note Senator Gavan's comments and wholeheartedly agree with them. I too would encourage the Football Association of Ireland and the Irish Football Association in Northern Ireland to put their heads together. The GAA has shown great leadership in building bridges in this country in opening up Croke Park and we regularly see the whole country, North and South, without boundaries shouting on the all-Ireland rugby team in the Aviva Stadium. I ask both organisations to take a lead and play their parts, as I am sure they are well capable of doing, to ensure that one day we can look forward to supporting an all-Ireland soccer team in the Aviva Stadium.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I come into this House frequently and I watch Oireachtas TV from the Lower House. I constantly hear debates on homelessness. I constantly hear accusations being thrown across the floor from all sides. Is it not time that we came together on homelessness? Is it not time that we stood together as one Oireachtas on homelessness, instead of constantly trying to score points off one another? A country that has been starved of resources for eight years cannot be rebuilt. It cannot be done. What we can do is hold those who caused the problem and those who exacerbated the credit situation to account for their actions.

This morning I got confirmation in the post that the good days are back. These are happy days in the banking world. I was offered a home improvement loan to be paid into my account instantly. This was printed on a document and when I opened it, my name was printed at the top as part of the graphic design. These people are offering me a home improvement loan but when a young couple come to me who have €30,000 handed to them by a parent to help them buy an apartment and who have shown an ability to pay €85,000 in rent over the last five years, the bank says that they have no savings record and that they cannot be given a mortgage. Come on. Let us be honest with one another in here. People who can afford to repay a mortgage are being denied loans by banks.

In fairness to the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, I have seen him marched out day after day, but where is he to get the houses from? There is a housing estate not a stone's throw from my house which is almost complete. Not one house in it has been sold. There are barriers up to stop people going in. Why have no houses been sold? The developer is waiting until he finishes the estate and will make a serious killing then. Let us start pointing the guns at those who are causing the problem. Let us start looking

at the banks. Let us start looking at the actions of the Central Bank. Social housing needs to be provided by local authorities, but let us stop having a go at one another all the time. I know what it is like to lose one's house. I lost mine. God damn it, it is not the way to talk about it. I would not have thanked anybody for talking about it. I wanted action. I pulled myself out of it. Let us help people to pull themselves out of it.

Senator Maria Byrne: The match last night was disappointing, but I wish the IRFU all the best today because at 1 p.m. we will finally know whether Ireland was successful in its bid to hold the Rugby World Cup. I certainly wish the IRFU well. I know the Minister, Deputy Shane Ross, and the Minister of State, Deputy Brendan Griffin, have travelled with the IRFU delegation. We will know the news at 1 p.m.

This is World Diabetes Week. The Minister, Deputy Harris, launched a report this morning on free retina screening. The offering of this screening is unique to Ireland. It will certainly help to reduce the amount of blindness and related eye problems. I encourage all, especially those with eye problems, to avail of this very worthy treatment and test which is being offered.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: All across the world people have been watching the film, "The Siege of Jadotville". I have been asked again and again whether it is a true story. People are actually stunned when they watch the movie. In any other country, these people would be heroes. Buildings, schools, hospitals and so on would be named after them all around the country. For more than 50 years, however, these men had to keep their heads down. There are veterans of the Defence Forces who did not know, while serving with these men, that they were at Jadotville. Our men mounted an incredible defence of international values out there all those years ago while representing our country and the United Nations.

I thank the Senators in this House who backed the motion to have those heroes, and the family members of those who are deceased, presented with medals. I am overjoyed that is going to happen. The medals could not have been presented on Jadotville day, when these men would have been with their fellow veterans and which would have been a wonderful day. That was delayed for reasons I do not understand. That was bad enough but I have learned in recent days that the presentation will be in Custume Barracks. These men will be allowed to have one family member with them while other members watch on from a television screen. There will be one Army photographer there. This is absolutely insane. These men should be on O'Connell Street or at Áras an Uachtaráin. This should be broadcast across the world.

We know from recently released freedom of information requests that there are people in the Department of Defence who fought against these heroes receiving medals at every stage of the process. I am grateful that political leadership came through and that they are getting the medals, but those people in the Department of Defence are still ensuring, in their mealy-mouthed way, that these heroes will not get the day they deserve. Why will RTÉ, the BBC and every television camera in the country not be there? Why are we not celebrating this event? Why are we allowing this small group of Department civil servants to take away the day these men should have? I appeal to the Leader, at this late stage, to speak to the Taoiseach and ensure that we do not make a mess of this thing, having waited 56 years to give the acknowledgement these heroes, who upheld the name of our country and our reputation, deserve. They should get the day they deserve and these mealy-mouthed civil servants must be stood up to once and for all. These men must get the justice they deserve.

Senator Frances Black: I congratulate the people of Australia on the fantastic result in the

marriage referendum.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: Hear, hear.

Senator Frances Black: For the record, I am absolutely delighted that the Scottish Supreme Court ruled in favour of minimum unit pricing today. I hope that Ireland will follow suit. What I really want to talk about today is that, on my way into Leinster House this morning, I heard that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has launched its annual Christmas appeal and expects to help 50,000 people this year. The charity's president, Mr. Kieran Stafford, has said more families are struggling to put food on the table and heat their homes. Almost 140,000 children in Ireland are now living in consistent poverty. These children are forced to skip two essential meals each week. It absolutely breaks my heart that in a country as wealthy as ours so many people still need to rely on charity just to put food on the table and heat their homes in winter. People are relying on donations just to be able to give their children a present at Christmas time. Growing up in a tenement house in the inner city of Dublin I remember the hard times and did not think we would see them again. It is heart breaking, but there is a context for all of this. In recent days there have been several soundbites on poverty and homelessness from various official sources. They include: the poor will always be with us; volunteers offering food are not helpful; the crisis here is not so bad by international standards; the bad behaviour of homeless people is making things worse and journalists covering this crisis are talking down the country. I am really worried that there is an attempt, conscious or not, to normalise homelessness. I fear that we are being desensitised to the scale of the tragedy and the perverse inequality that leaves so many with so little. We should be clear - there is no acceptable level of homelessness. There is no way to explain away 3,000 homeless children. Speaking to Seán O'Rourke, Fr. Peter McVerry noted that last year the State built approximately 600 social housing units, whereas in one year in the 1980s the figure was 6,000. I urge the Government to reflect on this and debate the issue with this House.

Senator Frank Feighan: I, too, was disappointed with the result last night, but we have had some great times and next year it will be 30 years undefeated by England. We should note that fact. The call for an all-Ireland soccer team is interesting. In 1880 when the Irish Football Association, IFA, was set up, it covered all of Ireland. In 1921 the Football Association of Ireland, FAI, was set up following the establishment of the Free State. A lot of work was done between 1973 and 1978 when players such as George Best, Johnny Giles and Derek Dougan called for an all-Ireland soccer team. The GAA ban did not help, but things have changed to the point where we would love to see an all-Ireland soccer team. However, it is not a one-way street but a two-way street. If we want to get our Northern Ireland colleagues on board, we must do something about it. I congratulate supporters from Northern Ireland on what happened in France last year. Supporters from the North and the South worked together and greeted one another on the streets in France. We have, therefore, come a long way, but if we want to have an all-Ireland soccer team, we must embrace other aspects of the issue. We should consider having an all-Ireland team at the Commonwealth Games. Unless we start to act as if it was a two-way street, we will never have an all-Ireland soccer team, but it is wonderful that we are talking about such issues today. There is Donegal Celtic and I remember Linfield coming here to play. Things have changed so much that it is possible for us to dream about having an all-Ireland soccer team, but, as I said, it is a two-way street and if we believe we should have such a team, we should not be afraid to embrace participation in the Commonwealth Games and other such issues because amalgamation will require give and take. I welcome the initiative which is very positive and shows the space in which we find ourselves today.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I endorse everything Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn said about what happened in Jadotville. We discussed the issue yesterday on the Order of Business and I reiterate my support for his comments.

I wish to comment on the remarks made by Senator Michael McDowell who has brought to the attention of the House some very serious allegations about how waste management is conducted within Dublin City Council. I echo his calls for a debate on how the council is run, but I would like to extend it to a wider debate on local government and the funding of same. I would very much welcome having such a debate in the very near future. The two councils with which I am most familiar are in Cavan and Monaghan and they do an excellent job with limited resources. It is worth focusing on local authorities, the work they are doing in very difficult circumstances and the lack of funding.

I wish to follow on from Senator Paul Gavan's comments on his native county of Limerick. He castigated both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael for having the audacity to bring forward a budget. I remind him that if a local authority does not bring forward a budget, the Minister can appoint an administrator to do so.

Senator Michael McDowell: Direct rule.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: We have an example in Sinn Féin policy of how it deals with budgets when the party stood back, with the Democratic Unionist Party, with which it has been in government in the North of Ireland for more than ten years. It has stood back and will allow the British Government in the next couple of days to bring forward a budget because it failed to bring one forward as its members were elected to do. They were elected in the Six Counties to bring forward a budget on behalf of the people who elected them.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Would Fianna Fáil go into government with the DUP?

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: I will not listen to Senator Paul Gavan or any of his colleagues in Sinn Féin in condemning my colleagues on Limerick City Council or those in the Fine Gael Party who take their responsibilities seriously. They will bring forward a budget for better or worse because that is what they are there to do. They are doing so mindful of the fact that if they do not, the Minister will appoint an administrator to bring forward a budget-----

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: We do not prop up dodgy governments in the way Fianna Fáil does.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: ----- that will not be voted on by the people who were elected to bring it forward. That is a gentle reminder for Sinn Féin. Perhaps the party might look forward to bringing forward a budget with their colleagues in the Democratic Unionist Party as they have been democratically elected to do in the Six Counties.

Senator Tim Lombard: Many of the contributions this morning have been about the soccer team's performance last night. It was a disappointing outing. I agree that women's participation in sport is something the Government and the Oireachtas need to examine. We must promote the participation of women in sport and sports bodies. I say that in the light of the positive news which has come out of Cork in recent hours, that the Cork County Board has elected its first female chairperson. Ms Tracey Kennedy will become the first female chairperson of the Cork County Board. That is a very positive statement on women's participation in sport, whether in playing or administration. However, on a national level we need to have a

framework in place to ensure the level of participation of females in sport is increased. In that context, RTE must examine its policy on those who provide commentaries and are involved on panels. The coverage of female sport must be intensified. The appointment of Ms Tracey Kennedy is a very positive step, in particular for the GAA, especially in Cork, in having a female in a leading role. She is a wonderful character and I am sure she will do a very dynamic job in the years ahead. It is up to us in the Oireachtas to provide a framework and a strategy to ensure the participation of women is driven forward and that the appointment of Ms Tracey Kennedy is replicated around the country.

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: Ba mhaith liom tacú le moladh Sheanadóir Robbie Gallagher to have an all-Irish soccer team. It would be fantastic for the game, both in the North and the South. We have it in rugby, GAA and other fields. I also support the passionate contribution by Senator Mac Lochlainn relating to recognition of people who have given their lives for the country and who have given their lives passionately for others to live in a democratic society.

I wish to discuss the housing crisis, but a different area of the housing crisis. I am solution-focused. That is the world I come from. I am not interested in criticism. Unfortunately, we get far too much of that here. I am a supporter of the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Murphy, having met him several times. I support his passion and commitment as I supported his predecessor as Minister, Deputy Simon Coveney, in respect of this problem. It is a significant problem. There is no simple solution but there are levels of solutions. I will suggest a potential solution to one large aspect of the problem.

In rural Ireland we have major problems with planning permission and it is getting worse. Part of the problem is a question of getting finance from the banks, but the greater part is getting planning permission. People cannot get planning permission on family farms or land. The rules and regulations coming in are becoming more stringent every day.

We need a debate in the House. Will the Leader bring this back to the Minister, Deputy Murphy, to see what can be done in respect of the housing crisis we have in rural Ireland? In many places there are old houses that people cannot do up because of planning issues. That is one layer within which we can create effective quick solutions for people so that they can have a house and live in rural Ireland. Many are working there already and they have land. This would create greater flexibility so they could live and build there and contribute to their communities.

I call on the Leader to connect with the Minister, Deputy Murphy, on this issue. It would be a good idea if the Minister addressed the House on the overall situation on planning permission. The Apple situation in Athenry is not our biggest issue with planning by a country mile. We are dealing with it and I understand that the Taoiseach has spoken about this already. There is a bigger issue. The people are paying their taxes. They want to pay their taxes and live in their communities but cannot live there because we are not allowing them to do so.

Senator Máire Devine: Perhaps Senator Wilson's grandstanding and rhetoric could be turned into decision-making by Fianna Fáil, the republican party, with regard to the Assembly in the North. What aspects of it would he throw out, given a strong mandate for marriage equality, an Irish language Act and the cash-for-ash scandal? He would be quite comfortable standing over corruption and allowing that to go on. I would like that on the record, if Senator Wilson will put it on the record.

An Cathaoirleach: Speak through the Chair, Senator.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson: Sinn Féin and the DUP brought in that grant.

An Cathaoirleach: No interaction between Senators. Respect the Chair and address the Chair, please.

Senator Máire Devine: I congratulate those involved in the Australian vote for same-sex marriage, especially the 61% who voted in favour of it. I am proud that some of the Irish method was replicated in the campaign and that it was led by many Irish living over there. I hope Australia will legislate for it before Christmas.

I wish to highlight the alarming rise in attacks on mental health staff, as reported today. The number has gone from three in 2010 to over 150 thus far this year. This is violence on our front-line staff. I know there are challenging environments, especially in mental health settings. The decrease in staffing levels, ageing staff, younger staff walking away and volatility has contributed significantly to leaving many of our nurses disabled for life. The volatility has been caused more recently by the intensive laboratory-grown potency of synthetic drugs. Many cannot go back to work. I have represented several in the Labour Court while trying to make people accountable for what happens.

We need to address the main issues of recruitment and retention of staff, reopening closed beds, adequate step-down facilities and stopping the hundreds of thousands of elderly who have to wait more than 24 hours on trolleys or plastic chairs. This is causing at least 350 deaths per year in medical deterioration. I call on the Minister to come to the House so that we can ask about the protection of front-line workers, especially in mental health services.

Senator Keith Swanick: Once again we are facing into a winter where the only things accident and emergency doctors have are flu jabs and prayers to help them with the inevitable onslaught.

We have fewer hospital beds now than we had in 1980 and nearly 200 beds are out of action. These are statements we have all heard before and we can say them until we are blue in the face. An article some weeks back entitled, This is the winter our health system will finally collapse, should have somehow resonated with the powers that be in the HSE and the Department of Health. My comments are directed towards those officials in the HSE and the Department of Health and not necessarily towards the Minister. I have no vendetta against the Minister - that is not my style - and I think he is a good Minister. His heart is in the right place and I have great respect for him.

In the article, medical journalist Dr. Muiris Houston warns:

A slow collapse of the health system this winter will likely look like this: the influenza epidemic begins; attendances at emergency departments increase as the flu hits vulnerable groups; patients with flu complications who require admission will fill up trolleys; some people who develop respiratory and cardiac failure will be moved to intensive care; the already inadequate number of ICU beds will fill up quickly, forcing intensive care specialists to ventilate people in operating theatres and even in emergency departments. There will be no spare intensive care capacity in Northern Ireland or Britain to tap into.

As a result, even urgent cancer surgeries will be cancelled, as many patients who undergo major surgery cannot be safely operated on without an intensive care bed to transfer them to post-operatively. All elective surgery is likely to be cancelled for a period of eight

to 10 weeks, adding to the already enormous backlog of people waiting to be treated in the public health system. Emergency departments will choke up and some will be forced to close. Already overstretched GPs will not have the capacity, and for seriously ill people, the facilities, to offer treatment.

These are not the words of some dystopian novelist. His comments are accurate, realistic and utterly terrifying. There are enough faceless Department and HSE officials on large salaries to get on with the work in hand. I want to see some proactive solutions rather than reactive commentary from them, which we have seen previously. I look forward to hearing what solutions they come up with in the coming weeks.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: Today sees the commencement of the global forum on human resources for health. This is a four-day conference that will begin in the RDS. No doubt the World Health Organization, which is one of the co-sponsors, will be pointing out to us that the problem of a shortfall in health care workers is worldwide.

There are some other issues. The WHO will also tell us, by reference to reports in advance of the conference, not only that we have a problem with a shortfall of health care workers, including nurses, doctors and so on, but that this can be compounded when Brexit comes. Basically, we are looking at a situation where there will be a concerted effort on the part of the NHS in England to recruit our nurses and doctors and, in effect, poach them. That would put us in a critical position with regard to providing the proper health service we need.

We know the HSE has published the Health Services People Strategy 2015-2018 in response to the depletion in numbers of front-line health care workers, especially nurses. We know the executive is having difficulty in achieving targets in recruitment. This is because people have retired and young graduates are going abroad. An Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation study showed that many young nursing graduates intend to work abroad and that the net increase in nursing staff numbers from September to December this year was only a net figure of 13. Clearly, there is a major problem here.

One particular issue of concern is that in response to this departure or planned departure by nursing graduates from the country, the HSE has basically agreed that from now on permanent contracts should be offered to nursing graduates for 2016 and 2017 such that they would have reason to stay and build their lives here. I am very concerned about the operation and implementation of this objective by the Saolta hospital group. It is not offering permanent contracts despite the need for nursing staff. Contracts for a maximum of two years is the most which people are being offered. We all know that anyone who is looking for a mortgage or is trying to establish him or herself needs greater certainty than two years. I am aware of people in other hospital areas being given permanent contracts rather than for finite periods. The Saolta group must be taken to task over this and I ask that this matter be taken up with the Minister to ask about recruitment and how nurses who graduated between 2016 and 2017 are being treated, in accordance with Government and HSE policy.

An Cathaoirleach: Five speakers remain. Technically, I should draw the guillotine now because the time allowed is 55 minutes. Today everyone who had two minutes wanted three, those given three wanted four and those who had four wanted five.

Senator Máire Devine: It was not me.

An Cathaoirleach: I am not pointing a finger at anyone but as of now I should ask the

Leader to respond because the 55 minutes allotted have been used. There are five speakers left who I will call providing they are brief and to the point and do not blather on with speeches. If they call for a debate, it can be held when the relevant Minister comes to the House, not during the Order of Business. I will run through the five speakers who remain. If they wish to drag the Order of Business on, I will just cut them off and ask the Leader to respond.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Beidh mise gonta le cúnamh Dé.

An Cathaoirleach: Standing Orders clearly state that 55 minutes is allowed for the Order of Business. That time has elapsed and the Leader is yet to respond. There is another item scheduled for 12.45 p.m. People are not cognisant of time and scheduling. If that continues, every day I will draw the line at 55 minutes, regardless of who is left to speak. I am making an exception today because I do not wish to cut people short.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: We spoke recently about the Pobal index on deprivation which was published last week. It shows the areas that are in consistent disadvantage in matters such as employment, education attainment, housing tenure, and lone parent ratio. It is clear that it has not improved over the years. I want to connect it with the statement made by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul today, to which Senator Black referred, regarding the 50,000 families who will seek its help during the winter months. I would hazard an educated guess that most of the families will be in those areas of disadvantage. It is scandalous that we see so many people who find themselves in such a precarious situation and the fact that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul receives around 125,000 calls annually from people who are in this type of poverty trap. We cannot accept it, it is not good enough and we need to have a debate around poverty.

Many of those families will be experiencing the housing crisis that we spoke about. I find it ironic that Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin is giving us Oscar-winning performances once a week for the benefit of his YouTube following when his ministerial colleague in government, Deputy Alan Kelly, was very much one of the architects of this crisis.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: The Senator is obviously posting the video as we speak.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Absolutely.

Senator Paul Coghlan: He is a good actor.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Senator is grandstanding.

An Cathaoirleach: If the Senators do not wish me to make a ruling, they should stop this interaction. The Senator should conclude.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: We are often accused of not having solutions. A solution that I suggest for the issue being raised by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is that the Taoiseach come to the House and discuss the matter, but also that he scrap his strategic communications unit and give the €5 million he is spending on that to the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to prove that this Government is serious about tackling poverty.

An Cathaoirleach: I call Senator O'Donnell to contribute briefly. There are four speakers left and we are over time.

Senator Kieran O'Donnell: I want to reflect on the result of last night's football match. The Irish team did not have a single player from one of the top six teams in the English Premier-

ship. The players at the Ireland team's disposal are good players who give their hearts, but we should look at the type of player we have compared with ten or 15 years ago. Not long ago, both Ireland and Northern Ireland qualified for the European Cup. We must see if we can bring synergies by establishing one all-Ireland team. We had no player of the class of Eriksen in our squad. He scored two goals. We did not have a player capable of scoring.

On homelessness, all attention and focus must be on the homeless person him or herself. I am concerned that we are getting into a degree of territorialism between various groups which deal with the homeless. Everyone who is involved in the area is well intentioned. The volunteer who goes out to look after homeless people is well intentioned. What we need is for everyone to work together. The issue is not funding, it is dealing with the issues of particular individuals. We should deal with the needs of the individual homeless person and work together, rather than one person saying one thing and someone else saying the other. The whole focus must be on the person who is homeless.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: I was stunned to hear Senator Máire Devine refer to the cash-for-ash issue in her response to my party Whip. I thought that issue, on which Sinn Féin recklessly brought down the Northern Ireland Assembly, had gone up in smoke as Sinn Féin threw up a raft of other problems.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: That was about €400 million of public money.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: I did not interrupt anybody.

An Cathaoirleach: Members should allow Senator O'Sullivan to make his point, whether they agree with him or not.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: Sinn Féin has succeeded in moving the goalposts on that again. I spoke yesterday on how there is no representation as the Northern Ireland budget-----

Senator Máire Devine: Will the Senator put on record what he proposes to leave out?

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: -----is being passed by the English House of Commons in a debate with English MPs and there was not one nationalist Irish voice raised for the simple reason-----

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Will Fianna Fáil take its seats in Westminster? They are absolute hypocrites, calling themselves the republican party.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: I did not interrupt anyone.

An Cathaoirleach: I will not allow this. I am going to finish the Order of Business and that is it.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: This is a stand-up comedy act.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: I never interrupt anyone in this House and I am entitled to continue. I will not be bullied like people in the Sinn Féin Party are bullied.

(Interruptions).

An Cathaoirleach: Senator O'Sullivan should conclude.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: Sinn Féin will not bully me. It can bully its own. They will not bully me. We had no Irish nationalist voice to debate the budget for Northern Ireland. What an insult to the memory of Daniel O’Connell, Parnell, Redmond, Dillon and the rest of them. It is an insult. Sinn Féin is putting its party before its country morning, noon and night.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Sinn Féin is a republican party.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: It has become a political cult.

Senator Máire Devine: Where is the Senator’s mandate?

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: The country must come first.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: Where is the Senator’s mandate?

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Liam Lawlor, Ray Burke, Charlie Haughey. Will we go on?

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Mac Lochlainn, please.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: Sinn Féin will not bully me.

An Cathaoirleach: Members are pushing me to the point.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: Sinn Féin will not bully me. It will not bully us. They will not bully anyone.

Senator Máire Devine: We had all this yesterday.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: I welcome the announcement ----

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Fianna Fáil, the republican party.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Mac Lochlainn.

Senator Ned O’Sullivan: Look at this. This is the bullying of Sinn Féin. It is driving its own members from the party.

I welcome the announcement of €98 million to extend the Luas green line. It is very important because it is over capacity. It is a huge investment and I have no problem with it. However, recently I alighted at the railway station in Clonmel and there is not even a toilet there. The patrons are dependent on the goodwill of shopkeepers and publicans nearby. I want to note that in the context of Senator Ray Butler’s very good contribution to the House regarding what is happening in Navan and rural Ireland versus Dublin.

I will not be bullied in this House by Sinn Féin.

(Interruptions).

An Cathaoirleach: The Leader will respond. Three speakers remain but I am not taking any more contributions. The Leader will respond. We have 12 minutes left. I cautioned the Members but nobody respects the Chair. I am sorry for those who did not get in.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I thank the 21 Members for their contributions and the Cathao-

irleach. It is important that we as Members of this House reaffirm our respect and trust in the Cathaoirleach as an impartial chairman. His generosity is overstretched by Members at times, but I assure him of my support. He is a very fair man and is doing a good job.

Senators Daly, Gavan, Ó Ríordáin, Ruane, Craughwell, Wilson, Ó Céidigh and O'Donnell referred to the issues of housing and homelessness. It is a pity that Members cannot stay for the reply to the Order of Business. Some have to go to another place but they have a duty to stay. It is important that those who go on the platform or the stage that is the Chamber to perform to YouTube or the Gaiety also listen. We must take the politics out of homelessness and the homelessness sector. No one of us has all of the information or knowledge.

Let me make matters quite clear to Members who have commented on the Fine Gael Party, in particular, and the Taoiseach. Nobody on our side of the House is in denial about the housing crisis and the human impact it is having on the lives of people and families. None of us is living in a bubble or cocoon. I would challenge Members to come into any of our clinics in any of our communities. We are working with people day and night to try to get them housed, out of hotels and treated as proper human beings. Members should not come in here and pretend they know everything when they do not.

We need to deal with the citizens of our republic who deserve to be treated with respect. As Members of the House, we are obliged to work on their concerns. Senator O'Donnell is correct. Those working in the housing sector, local government and the Department need to put aside their territorial issues and work together collectively to solve this crisis. It is not just about funding. An increase of €6 billion was provided by the Government in the most recent budget. An evolving fund is available under Rebuilding Ireland. A multi-annual fund was created by the previous Minister, Deputy Coveney, which is now being delivered by the current Minister, Deputy Murphy.

Senator Ó Céidigh is correct. Let us be solution-focused about the issue. We heard no solutions today from many contributors on the Order of Business. We in Fine Gael are well aware of the seriousness of the issue. Senator Mark Daly referred to Cork. As we speak, €155 million of Government money is providing 634 units social housing units in Cork. That is a fact.

Senator Mark Daly: It is providing money but not building housing. The money is being handed back.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Members should not come in with cheap, populist rhetoric. It ill behoves them-----

Senator Mark Daly: These are facts. The Government's own facts are being denied.

An Cathaoirleach: Senator Daly please resume your seat.

Senator Mark Daly: In Kerry 11 houses were built. That is a fact. Programmes are being announced, but houses are not being built.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: There has been an increase in funding for the homeless. I am replying to the Order of Business.

An Cathaoirleach: If this is going to continue, I will suspend for 15 minutes.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I took 21 contributions. I take notes every single day. I have an

obligation to respond. I appreciate from where the Cathaoirleach is coming. Let us deal with the facts. Some €6 billion is being provided, a 20% increase in the budget. It is the largest ever housing allocation. They are the facts. This is not fake news or Senator Daly's spin.

Senator Mark Daly: The money is being provided but the houses are not being built.

An Cathaoirleach: With respect, when Senator Daly was speaking there were at least four interventions, including from the Leader. I had to give him an extra minute. I am not condoning his intervention. If one agitates the Opposition, one can expect agitation back. Bí cúramach.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: In her contribution, Senator Black mentioned normalising homelessness. Nobody on the Government side is trying to normalise anything about homelessness. Rather, we are trying to solve the problem. The use of language in the House or on the airwaves is very important. That is what the Minister was trying to convey.

I agree with Senators Wilson and Ned O'Sullivan on the position of Senator Gavan, who apologised for not being here. Sinn Féin is very good at abdicating responsibility. It must pass a budget in Limerick, as Senator Wilson said. If it does not, a commissioner will be appointed. I am certainly not happy to have a commissioner appointed to replace elected councillors who represent the people at local authority level.

Members of the Sinn Féin Party who come in here every day and criticise everything should not engage in opposition for the sake of it. They should not be cheerleaders and expect others to be responsible and go into government. I understand there is a motion on the clár of the Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis about government. Sinn Féin should be responsible and pass it. Its members should man up, come in to and take on the duties of government and be responsible to the people who elect its members, rather than walking off the pitch as it did in the Assembly in the North. Senator Ned O'Sullivan was correct, despite the protestations of Senator Mac Lochlainn. There was no voice in the budget negotiations for nationalists in the House of Commons this week. What would Seamus Mallon and John Hume have said? They started the peace process and were its architects. Sinn Féin came on board but the current political landscape means it must fulfil its duties.

Sinn Féin Members can make faces at me, but that is the reality. Those of us who have been in government, including Senator McDowell, took decisions on behalf of the people. Today, our country is in a better place because of the previous Government. Let us be real about this. Politics is about government and being responsible. It is not about being a cheerleader, waving banners and flags and organising protests. We can all do that.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: It is about the 700,000 on the waiting lists and the thousands of children who do not have a home.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: We understand that. That is why the budget is being increased. In his remarks in Cavan, the Taoiseach said our homeless figures were low by international standards. In addition, he said it was not good enough and we must turn the tide. I was standing next to him when he said it. Let us be real about this.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: That is obviously the communications unit.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Conway-Walsh's speeches are controlled by the head office in west Belfast. A single transferable speech is passed around.

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An Cathaoirleach: I remind Senators that a Minister is waiting to deal with the next matter. We are well over time.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I respect that, but I am going to give a reply to the Order of Business because it is about time some of the myths from spin merchants who have a single transferable speech from west Belfast-----

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: We will have to get a communications unit.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Leo's spin is-----

(Interruptions).

Senator Jerry Buttimer: In conclusion, the Government is well aware of the issue. We are determined to resolve the problem for everybody. No one approach will work; it is a complex matter and can only be solved by solutions.

I did not hear the remarks made by Eileen Gleeson on the radio today to which Senator Ruane referred.

Senator Martin Conway: They were outrageous.

(Interruptions).

Senator Mark Daly: The Senator is interrupting his leader.

An Cathaoirleach: It must have been Ireland's defeat yesterday. There is something amiss today.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Her remarks were badly articulated. I can only interpret what she was trying to say. In some cases, people who are homeless require myriad services and their best interaction is with the agencies who can help them. I regret the fact that she made the remarks she did. We are quick to condemn and judge a person who is trying to do her best.

Senators Mark Daly, Feighan, Gavan, Byrne and Ó Céidigh referred to the defeat of the soccer team yesterday. We are all upset by the defeat. A united Ireland soccer team is a matter we would all like progressed, if that is the will of the FAI and IFA. The result was disappointing from a soccer point of view. The joy and endeavour of the team deserves to be commended. The support the fans gave the team is also to be commended.

Senator Mark Daly referred to the fact that it is 499 days to Brexit. I again ask him to come off the horse and take off the blinkers he sometimes wears. The Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Minister of State with responsibility for European affairs have been very clear about the approach of the Government. We are building new alliances and a platform for support for the all-Ireland position and the uniqueness of our country. We will have a duty to wear the green jersey. I know Senator Mark Daly does so, but it is important that we continue to do so. He is correct about the British Government still not having a plan. That is a worrying problem.

Senator McDowell raised the issue of waste collection and the remarks attributed by him to Councillor Keith Redmond. I have great respect and time for the councillor, who is a very good public representative. It is a worry if an effective cartel is being created in parts of Dublin. That should be halted immediately and the situation rectified. There should be competition, and

I am in favour of that.

Senator Wilson also referred to value for money. It is a matter for the local government auditor. It is a debate we can have in time. I have already addressed the issue raised by Senator Ruane. It would behove Senator Ó Ríordáin, meanwhile, to engage with finding solutions rather than-----

Senator Michael McDowell: He could turn down the volume for a start.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Senator is probably going for YouTube records at this stage but we are here to find solutions. Senator Conway raised the issue of cyclists in Dublin and I would be happy to have the Minister come to the House to address that. Senators Ó Donnghaile and Ó Céidigh mentioned the former's recent briefing. I was not at that briefing and was not in fact aware of it but I would be happy to talk to the Senators on the matter. Senator Craughwell raised the issue of home improvement loans. It is certainly disappointing that our banks are once again trying to give money to people without due process. I had hoped that such a thing would not happen. We bailed out the banks and it is important that such matters be handled in a proper manner. I commend the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, and the Minister of State with special responsibility for mental health and older people, Deputy Jim Daly, for the launch today of the diabetic retina screening programme. It is a wonderful initiative and Dr. Diarmuid Quinlan in Cork was very much involved with it. In line with World Diabetes Week, it is important that we support such a programme.

Senator Mac Lochlainn has, regrettably, left the Chamber but in response to his contribution I wish to point out that we discussed Jadotville yesterday and I do not want to repeat what I said then other than to stress that the ceremony will involve full military honours. If Senator Mac Lochlainn is concerned about this then I would like to point out that the representatives from the Department of Defence I spoke to after yesterday's meeting were certainly not aware of the issues raised by Senator Craughwell. It is important to recognise, however, that the men of Jadotville are heroes and will be receiving medals and full military honours. From what I have been told by the Department, there is no ambiguity there.

I join with the other Senators in congratulating the people of Australia on their magnificent vote yesterday on marriage equality and I commend Tiarnan Brady, formerly political director of the Yes Equality campaign in this country, for leading the campaign in Australia, others like Craig Dwyer who travelled there to help with that campaign, and the many Irish people living in Australia who played a pivotal role in it. Today is a wonderful day for the people of Australia and a further sign of progress around the world. I salute and commend all involved and thank them on their work.

Senators Black and Ó Clochartaigh both referred to the report by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Ring, spoke at committee this morning and raised those very issues, namely, budgetary matters and the need for further improvement in rural Ireland, and I would be happy to have him come to the House to discuss them. In response to Senator Wilson, I would also be happy to have a debate on the funding of local government. Senator Lombard raised the issue of women's participation in sport. I join him in congratulating Tracey Kennedy on her appointment as the first female cathaoirleach of Coiste Contae Chorcaigh, the Cork County GAA board, and wish her well in her new role. Eithne O'Mahony, a woman from the Cathaoirleach's home town of Bantry, was the first female delegate some time back and it is great that Ms Kennedy has now been ap-

pointed chairperson of that board.

I join Senator Devine in asking that we all work to tackle the rate of attacks on mental health professionals. This is a worrying trend exacerbated, as the Senator said, by an ageing staff and by recruitment problems. We need to work on this. Senators Swanwick and Mulherin raised health care issues. The Minister will be in the House later this afternoon and the Senators can raise these matters then. Finally, I join Senator Ned O’Sullivan in welcoming the Luas extension and agree with him that the current situation in Clonmel train station needs to be taken into account by the Minister.

I also thank the Cathaoirleach for his indulgence. I would hate for him to think that the Members of the House do not respect him because we do, and I would be happy to speak to Members about their behaviour and the language used here. Listening to some Members one might swear that the Government does nothing-----

An Cathaoirleach: Féach ar an clog.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: -----but the facts suggest otherwise.

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, who has some of his people from west Cork with him, to the House. The west Cork people are the salt of the earth, as the Minister of State knows himself, so they are very welcome to the Seanad Chamber.

Order of Business agreed to.

Water Services Bill 2017: Committee and Remaining Stages

An Cathaoirleach: I apologise to the Minister of State, Deputy Phelan, for keeping him waiting for ten minutes.

Sections 1 to 6, inclusive, agreed to.

SECTION 7

Question proposed: “That section 7 stand part of the Bill.”

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: We in Sinn Féin are not going to delay the procedures today. I know that we have been accused of this in the past but the delay on this Bill was due to the negotiations between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. We obviously have several issues with this Bill which will not be taken on board because of the debates that took place in the Dáil and in this House on Second Stage. I want to put on the record, however, that there is still no clarification on group water schemes and where funding for these schemes will stand in the future; on the excessive use charge; on undiscovered leaks; or on the first fix fee. We in Sinn Féin still have serious issues with this Bill but we understand the people want to get paid before Christmas. We will not delay the passing of the Bill but we will oppose it at this Stage and on Report Stage.

Question put and agreed to.

Sections 8 to 62, inclusive, agreed to. Question, “That the Title be the Title to the Bill”, put and declared carried.

Bill reported without amendment.

An Cathaoirleach: When is it proposed to take Report Stage?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Now.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed?

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Not agreed.

Question put: "That Report Stage be taken now."

The Seanad divided: Tá, 35; Níl, 6.	
Tá	Níl
Burke, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.
Burke, Paddy.	Devine, Máire.
Butler, Ray.	Gavan, Paul.
Buttimer, Jerry.	Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor.
Byrne, Maria.	Ó Donnghaile, Niall.
Clifford-Lee, Lorraine.	Ruane, Lynn.
Coffey, Paudie.	
Coghlan, Paul.	
Conway, Martin.	
Craughwell, Gerard P.	
Daly, Mark.	
Daly, Paul.	
Feighan, Frank.	
Gallagher, Robbie.	
Hopkins, Maura.	
Humphreys, Kevin.	
Kelleher, Colette.	
Lawless, Billy.	
Lombard, Tim.	
McDowell, Michael.	
McFadden, Gabrielle.	
Mulherin, Michelle.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Nash, Gerald.	
Noone, Catherine.	
Ó Céidigh, Pádraig.	
Ó Domhnaill, Brian.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	
O'Donnell, Marie-Louise.	
O'Mahony, John.	
O'Sullivan, Ned.	

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Reilly, James.	
Richmond, Neale.	
Swanick, Keith.	
Wilson, Diarmuid.	

Tellers: Tá, Senators Gabrielle McFadden and John O'Mahony; Níl, Senators Paul Gavan and Trevor Ó Clochartaigh.

Question declared carried.

Question put: "That the Bill be received for final consideration."

The Seanad divided: Tá, 32; Níl, 9.	
Tá	Níl
Burke, Colm.	Bacik, Ivana.
Burke, Paddy.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.
Butler, Ray.	Devine, Máire.
Buttimer, Jerry.	Gavan, Paul.
Byrne, Maria.	Humphreys, Kevin.
Clifford-Lee, Lorraine.	Nash, Gerald.
Coffey, Paudie.	Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor.
Coghlan, Paul.	Ó Donnghaile, Niall.
Conway, Martin.	Ruane, Lynn.
Craughwell, Gerard P.	
Daly, Mark.	
Daly, Paul.	
Feighan, Frank.	
Gallagher, Robbie.	
Hopkins, Maura.	
Kelleher, Colette.	
Lawless, Billy.	
Lombard, Tim.	
McDowell, Michael.	
McFadden, Gabrielle.	
Mulherin, Michelle.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	
O'Donnell, Marie-Louise.	
O'Mahony, John.	
O'Sullivan, Ned.	

Ó Céidigh, Pádraig.	
Ó Domhnaill, Brian.	
Reilly, James.	
Richmond, Neale.	
Swanick, Keith.	
Wilson, Diarmuid.	

Tellers: Tá, Senators Gabrielle McFadden and John O’Mahony; Níl, Senators Paul Gavan and Trevor Ó Clochartaigh.

Question declared carried.

Question, “That Fifth Stage be taken now”, put and declared carried.

Question proposed: “That the Bill do now pass.”

An Cathaoirleach: The Minister of State indicated he wished to speak on this Stage. Does any Member want to contribute? I remind the House that this is not Second Stage, it is the conclusion of the debate on the Bill. Members are entitled to make a few comments. I call on Senator Murnane O’Connor, who is to be followed by Senator Ó Clochartaigh.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O’Connor: Today was crunch time. This legislation needed to be passed. It is refunding law-abiding citizens who paid a charge they were forced into paying. Hundreds of thousands of people protested against the charges, and hundreds of thousands paid. They deserve timely refunds.

Water is something many of us take for granted, but we cannot survive without it. Now this legislation is passed, we will work on educating people on water conservation. This Bill is partly about education. Everyone needs to be educated about water conservation. We need to achieve this but we also need to ensure we have an information campaign, including leaflets, and that people will know where to get the information. This is crucial.

It is crucial that, under this legislation, 30,000 cheques per day can be issued. Considering that 970,000 refunds will have to be completed, the legislation should go to the President for signature as soon as possible. We must do our utmost to refund the people who have paid because it is so important. Christmas is only six weeks away. It would be great if we could issue the refunds before then.

On the rural water scheme, we must put incentives in place for people who are paying for water. I will make sure I work on this personally. Today is a good day. Everything has been done well and we are all happy. I hope the President will sign off on the legislation as soon as possible.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Tá sé náireach ar bhealach go bhfuil an Bille seo á chur tríd na Tithe inniu in aon suí amháin. Ní chóir nach ndéanfaí mionscrúdú ceart ar chuid de

na himpleachtaí a bhaineann leis an mBille. Is cinnte nach é Sinn Féin atá ag cur moill ar an reachtaíocht seo. We need to be clear that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are the parties to blame for the delay in bringing this Bill forward to the Houses and in the making of the payments that are due. The Bill was due to be published in June but it was delayed so the pantomime of the Fine Gael leadership contest could take place. It was then due to be published and passed in July but squabbling in the background between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil delayed it even further. This is crucial because it proves Fianna Fáil's fingerprints are all over the Bill. It wanted to make sure that it could design a Bill that would, on the surface, end water charges, yet leave a mechanism in place for their return. Many people will rightly deduce that a Fianna Fáil return to power may well equal a return to water charges. If it was such a big issue during the last election campaign and helped Fianna Fáil to win back many seats, why did it not completely abolish the water charges?

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: Sinn Féin voted against everything today.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Yes, and I will tell the Senator why. It is because this Bill-----

An Cathaoirleach: This is not Second Stage.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: -----with group water schemes, as I have mentioned.

Clarification is still required on future funding and the form that funding or subsidy will take. We have issues over the excessive use charge. Will it be measured at the meter or will there be a straight-off fine? Will there be a first-fix-free policy on undiscovered leaks, or will such leaks incur the excessive-use charge? All these questions remain and could have been addressed had there been a more comprehensive debate and Bill, and if relevant amendments had been accepted in the Dáil. Instead, a very flawed Bill has gone through today, and that is why we opposed it. If Fianna Fáil had any backbone, it would have opposed it also.

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: Cuireann sé ríméad orm go bhfuil an Bille seo rite ar maidin. Tá sé fíorthábhachtach gur féidir linn dul ar aghaidh ó thaobh an fadhb mór seo a bhí ann. I am delighted the Bill has been passed today. I greatly appreciate the work, commitment and considerable effort of the committee in this regard. As an Independent and one who has come from the outside, I very much appreciate the Government party, Fine Gael, and Fianna Fáil coming together. Rather than just focusing on negative politics, they said they had got to create a solution to the best benefit of the people. If I take nothing else from whatever length of time I spend in this House, it is that I appreciate what both sides of the Houses have done. Having said that, I am equally disappointed with Sinn Féin and others, who for the sake of politics and jibing, decided to go against this process at every stage. There are people who paid money and we decided they should be repaid that money. It should have been done last summer and not now.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: The Senator knows well it is not-----

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: I did not interrupt you, Senator Ó Clochartaigh.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: I am correcting the Senator. He is incorrect.

An Cathaoirleach: The Senators should speak through the Chair and not be deflected.

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: There are some officials here from the Department. I said the last time I spoke that I really appreciate their contribution. They made a major contribution,

as have personnel from the Commission for Energy Regulation, Irish Water and others. Irish Water will be a public utility and body of which we all will be proud. As my colleague, Senator Coffey, said the last day, we will be as proud of it as we are of the ESB and others. I thank everybody for their contribution.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I commend Senator Ó Céidigh on his chairing of the water services committee. He stepped into the breach, so to speak, and did a fine job in reaching a resolution on this matter. I join with him in thanking the officials. When I have been in this Chamber when it was elsewhere, I was not immune to giving out about officials but the officials from my Department have had six water Bills in the past seven or eight years. I commend them on their efforts, particularly on this legislation, which we are finalising today. I hope there will be fewer than six water Bills in the next ten years.

I was trying to answer Senator Ó Clochartaigh's query earlier and yesterday the Senator's colleague, Senator Conway-Walsh, raised the matters to which the Senator spoke relating to section 7. I refer him to the answer I gave to her yesterday. I thank all the Members who contributed to the water debate this week and over the years. This conclusion marks the end of what has been an arduous political and legislative process over the past number of years. Debate has been robust and although people disagree on aspects of how water services should be funded, the discussion at least has now reached a positive conclusion. I will be political for a moment. It is imperative that the citizens of the State who obeyed the law of the State should receive their refund. As Senator Murnane O'Connor states, I hope as many as possible, if not all, will have this before Christmas. That was the intention of the Bill and I hope it comes to pass.

I was interested in Senator Ó Clochartaigh's reference to the Fine Gael leadership contest. He said it was pantomime. I do not know how one would describe the Sinn Féin leadership contest that ended up with Ms Michelle O'Neill. There was no contest, as far as I know.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: It was fantastic.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: The army council might be called into action again if media reports are correct about the leadership of the party in the South.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: On a point of order, there is absolutely no army council in Sinn Féin. I ask the Minister of State to withdraw it.

Acting Chairman (Senator Diarmuid Wilson): The Minister of State should speak to the Bill.

Senator Paudie Coffey: Does the Senator have contact with the leadership?

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Is the Senator having-----

Senator Paudie Coffey: The Senator has no vote.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: In enacting this Bill we are providing funding clarity and certainty for Irish Water so it can deliver a public water system that provides a safe and secure supply of water to our homes and communities, as well as the water-intensive industries that sustain approximately 400,000 jobs in the country and the wider economy. We are providing funding certainty so the utility can address major deficits in urban wastewater treatment, which

were referred to earlier, and so the public health and aquatic environment are protected. The Bill supports a strong policy framework for water services so we can aspire with confidence to achieving a modern public water and wastewater system fit for a modern society and economy. As Irish Water continues to deliver change and progress, securing water quality supplies, reducing leakages and increasing spare supply capacity and wastewater treatment capacity, all of us in the Oireachtas must constructively and regularly engage with the questions of how to improve public water services and manage this extremely important resource into the future. The public deserves no less.

Question put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 32; Níl, 10.	
Tá	Níl
Burke, Colm.	Bacik, Ivana.
Burke, Paddy.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.
Butler, Ray.	Devine, Máire.
Buttimer, Jerry.	Gavan, Paul.
Byrne, Maria.	Humphreys, Kevin.
Clifford-Lee, Lorraine.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
Coffey, Paudie.	Nash, Gerald.
Coghlan, Paul.	Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor.
Conway, Martin.	Ó Donnghaile, Niall.
Daly, Mark.	Ruane, Lynn.
Daly, Paul.	
Feighan, Frank.	
Gallagher, Robbie.	
Hopkins, Maura.	
Horkan, Gerry.	
Kelleher, Colette.	
Lawless, Billy.	
Lombard, Tim.	
McDowell, Michael.	
McFadden, Gabrielle.	
Mulherin, Michelle.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Ó Céidigh, Pádraig.	
Ó Domhnaill, Brian.	
O'Donnell, Kieran.	
O'Donnell, Marie-Louise.	
O'Mahony, John.	
O'Sullivan, Grace.	
Reilly, James.	
Richmond, Neale.	
Swanick, Keith.	

Wilson, Diarmuid.	
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Tellers: Tá, Senators Gabrielle McFadden and John O’Mahony; Níl, Senators Paul Gavan and Trevor Ó Clochartaigh.

Question declared carried.

Water Services Bill 2017: Motion for Earlier Signature

Senator Paudie Coffey: I move:

That, pursuant to subsection 2° of section 2 of Article 25 of the Constitution, Seanad Éireann concurs with the Government in a request to the President to sign the Water Services Bill 2017 on a date which is earlier than the fifth day after the date on which the Bill shall have been presented to him.

Question put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 21; Níl, 7.	
Tá	Níl
Burke, Colm.	Bacik, Ivana.
Burke, Paddy.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.
Butler, Ray.	Gavan, Paul.
Buttimer, Jerry.	Humphreys, Kevin.
Byrne, Maria.	Nash, Gerald.
Clifford-Lee, Lorraine.	Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor.
Coffey, Paudie.	Ó Donnghaile, Niall.
Feighan, Frank.	
Gallagher, Robbie.	
Lawless, Billy.	
Lombard, Tim.	
McFadden, Gabrielle.	
Mulherin, Michelle.	
Murnane O’Connor, Jennifer.	
Ó Céidigh, Pádraig.	
O’Donnell, Kieran.	
O’Mahony, John.	
Reilly, James.	
Richmond, Neale.	
Swanick, Keith.	
Wilson, Diarmuid.	

Tellers: Tá, Senators Gabrielle McFadden and John O'Mahony; Níl, Senators Rose Conway-Walsh and Trevor Ó Clochartaigh.

Question declared carried.

Sitting suspended at 2 p.m. and resumed at 3.30 p.m.

Health Services: Statements

Acting Chairman (Senator Diarmuid Wilson): I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I am delighted to have the opportunity to address the House on health matters. The Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris, sends his apologies that he is unable to attend. I know that some Senators have raised particular matters which I will address later in my opening statement. I will start by giving an overview of some recent developments.

Any discussion will probably start with money and budget 2018. In October the Minister for Finance announced a total health budget for 2018 of €15.3 billion. An additional €646 million in current expenditure was allocated, with more than €200 million for new developments. Budget 2018 will mean additional front-line staff for the health service across the acute, mental health, disability, primary and community care sectors. This will provide for better access to health services, more help for families and additional supports for people with a disability and mental health issues, as well as for old and vulnerable persons. Funding is targeted at a number of key areas which include the following: a new access programme from 2017-18; helping families with the cost of medication and care; a shift to primary care services; expanding and developing mental health services; supporting disability services and supporting the most vulnerable.

The next step for the HSE after the budget is agreed is to finalise its service plan for 2018 detailing the actual services to be provided with the moneys allocated. This process is ongoing between the Department and the HSE and should be concluded shortly. Expenditure from budget 2018 and health service planning for the immediate future must be viewed in the context of the Sláintecare report. The Government is committed to making tangible and sustainable improvements in health services and the Sláintecare report provides a framework and a direction of travel within which to do this. We have an unprecedented level of consensus and support for the vision and strategic direction outlined in the report. The Minister is determined to harness it and work with colleagues across the political spectrum and all stakeholders to move forward with the reform agenda. We have started to build around the report a process of planning and implementation which will start to translate the vision of Sláintecare into concrete change and the change into reality. In July the Government agreed to put in place the necessary structures and processes within the Department to develop a response to the report. It will include the appointment of a lead executive and programme office within the Department.

Also in July the Minister announced the following immediate actions to start implementation of the report: an impact study of the removal of private practice in public hospitals to be chaired by Dr Dónal de Buitléir; a public consultation process on the future alignment of hospital groups and community health organisations; and plans to establish a governing board to oversee the HSE's performance. These represent the very first steps and a detailed implementation report is due to be submitted to the Government. Budget 2018 also reflected the Sláintecare report, with most of the additional funding for new initiatives targeted at areas identified in the report. In the budget the Government committed, for example, €25 million for a new primary care fund; €37 million for additional home care services and transition beds; €17.5 million to reduce medicine and prescription charges from €2.50 to €2; and €75 million in targeted funding for waiting list reduction initiatives.

In addition to the steps noted above, work on the health capacity review is progressing. This will be a comprehensive review concentrating not just on acute but also on primary and social care capacity. The emerging findings from the review will also inform the development of the new ten-year national capital plan. I understand the Minister, Deputy Harris, expects to receive the final report before the end of the year.

The development of primary care is central to the Government's objective to deliver a high-quality, integrated and cost-effective health care system. The Sláintecare report also provided strong support for the need to strengthen our services as part of the overall reform of our health services. The provision of a €25 million primary care fund in budget 2018 demonstrates the Government's ongoing commitment to shifting the model of health care towards a more comprehensive and accessible primary care service in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country. This new funding will enable a range of initiatives to be progressed in 2018 which will focus on disease prevention and early intervention, particularly through the further development and expansion of GP services, community intervention teams and the recruitment of additional therapy posts. Throughout 2018 there will also be a continued focus on the development of primary care centres and primary care teams. In regard to GP care, the Minister is optimistic that agreement can be reached with GP representatives in the coming months on significant service developments that can also be introduced during 2018. As outlined by the Minister for Finance in his budget speech, this will be the start of a multi-annual change process that will enhance the role of primary care as the foundation of a more accessible and effective health service.

I would now like to talk about some developments in my own areas of responsibility. The provision of an additional €35 million in budget 2018 will help us to build on the work commenced in 2017 on the enhancement of community teams for child, adult, later life and mental health intellectual disability services. It will also help us to continue our move towards a full 24-7 service with an initial focus on increasing the provision of services on a seven-days-a-week basis. Further improvements are also planned to services for eating disorders and dual diagnosis. It is important, however, that we use this extra funding to ensure that not only are our services of a high quality but that we provide as seamless as possible a service for every service user. The HSE has been asked to prioritise this in 2018 and a further €55 million in additional funding will be provided in 2019. This will allow for a multi-annual approach to developing our mental health services, taking account of the review of A Vision for Change which is under way. It will see total additional funding provided for the implementation of A Vision for Change rise to €105 million over the period 2017-19.

Improving home care services so that people can live with confidence, dignity and security

in their own homes for as long as possible is a key commitment of Government. Home supports are crucial to helping older people and, indeed, people of all ages with particular care needs to remain where they want to be, at home in the surroundings in which they are most familiar and comfortable. The current system relies heavily on family carers who play a crucial role in helping older people and others who need help to remain living in their own homes for longer. These carers not only make a profound difference to the health, well-being and quality of life of those they care for but also make an important, often unacknowledged, contribution to the economy. This is reflected in the 2016 census results published earlier this month which identified that some 195,000 carers are providing a minimum of 6.6 million hours of care per week.

In terms of resources, the HSE will spend approximately €370 million on home care in 2017 out of a total budget of €765 million for services for older people. This figure excludes funding for the nursing homes support scheme. The HSE's national service plan provides for a target of just over 10.5 million home help hours, some 17,000 home care packages and 190 intensive home care packages, co-funded by Atlantic Philanthropies for clients with complex needs, particularly those living with dementia. In budget 2018 a further €37 million has been made available for older people's services in order to further strengthen supports for older people, in particular to facilitate speedier discharge from acute hospitals over the winter period. A significant proportion of this additional funding will go towards home care services.

The resources available for home care services, while significant, are limited and, with the increase in our elderly population, demand is growing year on year. Accordingly the services and allocation of resources to individual clients require prudent management on an ongoing basis as demands for services increase. In this context, those clients who are assessed and approved for home care and who are not being provided immediately with a service are risk-assessed and placed on a waiting list for a resource as it becomes available. It is important to note that many people also purchase home care services directly from private providers. While the existing home care service is delivering crucial support to many people across the country, it is recognised that home care services need to be improved to better meet the changing needs of our citizens. The Department is of the view that a stand-alone funding scheme designed specifically for home care, together with an effective system of regulation, is needed.

In 2016 the Department's intention to bring forward legislative proposals for the regulation of home care was indicated in the "Better Health, Improving Health Care" report. A Programme for a Partnership Government signalled the Government's commitment to the introduction of a uniform home care service. My predecessor as Minister of State with responsibility for mental health and older people, Deputy Helen McEntee, played a key role in advancing this undertaking, tasking the Department with the development of a new statutory scheme and system of regulation for home care. The new scheme will improve access to home care in an affordable and sustainable way. It will provide transparency about individuals' eligibility for services and about service allocation, and ensure that the system operates in a consistent and fair manner across the country. The scheme will also result in more effective integration with other health supports, including nursing, therapies and other primary care services.

A system of regulation will be designed to ensure public confidence in the standard of the services provided and to bring Ireland in line with best international practice. It will be important to get the balance right in this regard and to ensure that the system of regulation is effective and not overly bureaucratic. As an initial step in developing the new system, the Department commissioned the Health Research Board to undertake a review of the home care systems in place in four European countries. The review, which was published in April of this year, will

help us to ensure that Ireland's new home care scheme and system of regulation is informed by international experience.

The Department also launched a public consultation process on the financing and regulation of home care in July of this year. We received over 2,600 responses to this phase of the consultation process. The purpose of this public consultation was to enable us to find out about the views of service users, their families and health care workers on current and future home care provision. Preliminary analysis of the submissions has been undertaken and we would be happy to share details of some of the initial findings, if that would be of assistance to the House. A full report on the findings will be published early next year which will inform the Department's development of the new funding scheme and regulatory arrangements.

The nursing homes support scheme provides financial support towards the cost of long-term residential care services in nursing homes and ensures that long-term nursing home care is accessible to everyone assessed as needing it. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means, while the State pays the balance of the cost. The scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings. The scheme, or fair deal, is now in existence for over eight years. This year, with a budget of €940 million, the scheme is providing financial support to over 23,000 people and, next year, the budget for the scheme will increase to almost €950 million. The waiting time on the placement list has been maintained at four weeks since 2015.

While the care delivered to residents in our community hospitals is generally of a very high standard, many of these services are delivered in buildings that are less than ideal in the modern context. It is important, therefore, that we upgrade our public bed stock and this is the aim of the five-year capital investment programme for community nursing units which was announced last year. This provides the framework to allow for an enhanced programme to replace, upgrade or refurbish these care facilities, as appropriate. Significant work was undertaken to determine the optimum scheduling of projects within the phased provision of funding to achieve compliance with national standards.

I will now look at some of the matters I understand were raised by individual Senators. With regard to emergency departments, there is no doubt that too many patients continue to wait on trolleys for admission to hospital on a daily basis within our health service. The Minister is cognisant of the distress that cramped and overcrowded conditions in some of our hospital emergency departments cause for patients and their families, and that these crowded conditions make emergency departments a very challenging environment to work in for doctors, nurses, hospital staff and hospital managers. Notwithstanding this, there is an often untold story of achievement within a system working hard to deal with growing demand for health care services. Last year there was a 2% increase in inpatient and day-case activity over 2015, as well as an approximately 5% increase in emergency department attendances - that is over 57,000 more patients, or the equivalent to the population of County Carlow. This year emergency department attendances are up over 1.8%, or over 16,000 patients, to the end of September, including a 5% increase in emergency department attendances by people over the age of 75.

Within this context, overall trolley numbers have remained static when compared to last year, despite these increased attendances. As of 6 November 2017, HSE data show there were 0.8%, or 625, fewer patients waiting on trolleys this year as compared to the same period last year. In addition, some hospital sites have made a considerable leap forward in terms of improving their trolley performance. For example, the HSE end of September TrolleyGAR data

for St. Vincent's Hospital in Mayo, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda and Beaumont Hospital in Dublin, to name but a few, are showing a reduction in trolley numbers ranging from 30% to 50% as compared to the same period in 2016. This performance should be acknowledged.

Another issue raised was infection prevention and control of carbapenemase-producing enterobacteriaceae, CPE, and flu. Our system is working hard to grapple with the challenge of infection prevention and control, specifically the emergence of virulent antibiotic-resistant bacterial strains, or superbugs, as they are known. The Minister, Deputy Harris, recently activated the public health emergency plan to address CPE in our health system. This means the national public health emergency team will oversee an enhanced response to this on a weekly basis. These arrangements are in line with standing emergency plans which have been activated in the past in response to pandemic influenza and Ebola preparedness.

Each winter, the system must also deal with the increased demand for services due to the prevalence of the flu. Vaccination remains the most effective means of preventing infection by seasonal flu viruses and can reduce severe disease that can lead to hospitalisation and death. Since 2 October 2017, the flu vaccine has been available free of charge from GPs for all people in at-risk groups, and from pharmacists for everyone in at-risk groups aged 18 years and over. I would like to take this opportunity to urge those in at-risk groups, and those health professionals who have the highest degree of contact with vulnerable patients, to get the flu vaccine as early as possible this year.

Another issue raised is winter planning and funding. Tackling overcrowding in emergency departments, EDs, is a key commitment of this Government and I am delighted that €40 million in additional funding in 2017 has been made available as part of the 2018 budget to address winter pressures and waiting lists over the rest of this year. A further €40 million has been allocated for measures to improve access to unscheduled care and other acute hospital priorities in 2018. Some of this funding is already being utilised within the system with an additional 45 home care packages and 20 transitional care beds per week being provided for the duration of the winter period. This funding will allow for patients to return home, or to an appropriate community setting, when clinically appropriate, thus helping to alleviate some of the pressure our hospitals are currently experiencing. Funding will also be provided to increase bed capacity this winter and moving forward, as part of service planning for 2018.

University Hospital Limerick, UHL, emergency department was also raised. The ED in UHL is one of the busiest in the country, with 65,000 attendances annually. Last year the hospital experienced a 4.6% increase in new ED presentations, and demand for ED services at the hospital continues to rise. Since its opening on 29 May 2017, the new ED at UHL has seen a growth in activity. Initial data from the HSE for September indicates that ED attendances have increased by 4% and ED admissions have increased by 9.4%, as compared to the same period last year. The increased attendances may perhaps be directly linked to the opening of the new facility. The literature suggests a 10% growth in activity when new infrastructure is opened. However, this is expected to peak and return to more normal levels.

Nonetheless, the Government is aware of the overcrowding situation in the new ED of UHL. The Minister for Health has raised these concerns with UHL management, and has sought assurances that actions be taken to address the situation. As such, the University of Limerick hospital group has put in place an ED performance improvement plan which sets out in detail how performance will be improved. This is currently being implemented in Limerick.

I should perhaps mention that the new €24 million ED is three times the size of the previous ED, and provides modern, safe and fit-for-purpose facilities. It provides high-quality, comfortable accommodation that protects patients' privacy and dignity. The new ED is designed around a pod-based system and this helps to improve efficiency. Once patients have been triaged, they are assigned to different areas of the ED, depending on the seriousness of their condition. Clinical teams are assigned to these units and are responsible for the treatment, discharge or admittance of patients within their particular unit. This serves to improve working conditions for UHL staff.

Another issue raised was waiting lists. Reducing waiting times for the longest-waiting patients is one of the Government's key priorities. It is for this reason that €15 million was allocated to the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, in budget 2017 in order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients. This year the HSE and NTPF have worked effectively together to ensure the best use of public hospital capacity and the private hospital system to meet the needs of patients waiting for inpatient and day-case procedures. The inpatient day case and outpatient waiting list action plans this year focused on reducing the number of patients waiting 15 months or more for inpatient and day-case treatment or for an outpatient appointment by the end of October.

The targets set under the inpatient day case and outpatient waiting list action plans were achieved at the end of October with over 31,600 patients coming off the inpatient day case waiting list and nearly 100,000 patients coming off the outpatient waiting lists. In addition the NTPF has worked with both public and private hospitals to arrange insourcing and outsourcing initiatives. Through these initiatives over 18,200 patients have been offered treatment, and of these over 5,900 patients have accepted an offer of treatment and almost 2,600 patients have received their procedure. The impact of this focused effort on reducing long wait times for patients can be seen in the NTPF waiting list figures for the end of October. These data show that for the third month in a row the overall waiting list figures for the inpatient day case waiting list have fallen.

To ensure the continuation of this strong focus, the recent budget announced that additional funding in the region of €10 million has been allocated for the remainder of 2017 to the NTPF to fund patient treatment across a range of key specialties and procedures, such as hips, knees, cataracts, ear, nose and throat and others. In addition, further funding of €700,000 was allocated in October by the NTPF to roll out an endoscopy initiative for 2017. Approximately 700 of the longest-waiting patients will receive endoscopy procedures. The NTPF's aim is that, under this initiative, there should be no patients waiting longer than 18 months for an endoscopy at year end. Indeed, the NTPF has advised that over 2,700 authorisations for endoscopies have been issued to hospitals so far. The recent budget announced a total allocation of €55 million to the NTPF for 2018 to address waiting lists and more than doubles their 2017 total allocation.

Next year will see a continued focus towards long-waiting patients, and overall waiting list numbers. It is estimated that this funding will provide treatment to patients waiting for inpatient day case treatments across a range of specialties and procedures, through working with both public and private hospitals.

The issue of scoliosis waiting lists was raised. This will be in addition to the HSE's hospital activity funded under budget 2018. A further €10 million of funding will be made available to the HSE in 2018 to address other waiting lists, including children in need of paediatric orthopaedic and scoliosis procedures. For the first time in a number of years the waiting list

for scoliosis-related surgery is decreasing. This is as a result of additional activity within our paediatric hospitals and the outsourcing initiatives. At the beginning of February, 312 patients were awaiting spinal fusion and other spinal procedures. Currently, there are 175 patients on the scoliosis active waiting list.

The HSE is focused on maximising all available capacity, which has included the recruitment of theatre nurses in both Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin and Children's University Hospital, Temple Street, and an additional consultant orthopaedic surgeon in Crumlin who started in September. Patients have also transferred for treatment to the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital, Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital, the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital and the Portland Hospital in the UK, and St. Franziskus hospital in Germany. Further investment in paediatric orthopaedic services for next year is being considered in the context of the service plan 2018 discussions.

Another issue raised was radiation therapy at St. James's Hospital. The national plan for radiation oncology provides the overall framework for the development of radiation oncology services in Ireland. In Dublin, radiation therapy is provided in three hospitals through the St. Luke's radiation oncology network. These are St. Luke's Hospital in Rathgar, Beaumont Hospital and St. James's Hospital. Radiation therapy is also available in Cork University Hospital, CUH, and University Hospital Galway. A new facility in CUH is under construction and will provide five linear accelerators once complete. Enabling works for a new facility at University Hospital Galway, UHG, are also under way.

Public services are contracted from private facilities in Limerick and Waterford. Patients from the north west can now be referred to the north-west cancer centre at Altnagelvin Area Hospital, Derry, for treatment, under a cross-border service level agreement. The radiation therapy centre at St. James's has four linear accelerators and provides a range of services for patients who require radiation therapy. Overall, comprehensive radiation therapy facilities are available to all patients who require them. These will continue to be developed to meet the projected increasing demand over the coming years.

Another issue raised by Senators was paediatric transplant services. Currently, all Irish paediatric patients travel to the UK for heart, lung and liver transplants under the treatment abroad scheme, while kidney transplants are carried out in the Children's University Hospital, Temple Street. Organ Donation and Transplant Ireland, ODTI, has advised that the current practice in regard to paediatric liver and lung transplants is working well. Between eight and 12 paediatric liver transplants are performed each year, with paediatric lung transplants occurring approximately once every two years. There are no plans to change this practice.

Paediatric heart transplants occur five to six times a year. There is a four-hour window of time, from when a donor heart becomes available, in which a patient needs to present for a heart transplant to take place. At present, the clinical recommendation is that paediatric cardiac transplant patients should relocate to the UK while awaiting heart transplant. I recognise that this is an exceptionally difficult and stressful time for families. I have requested that the HSE facilitate those families who opt to relocate by providing support and a financial contribution to their living costs in the UK. The possibility of undertaking paediatric heart transplants in Ireland was raised earlier this year. If any change to the current system was to be pursued, it would take a considerable time to implement. ODTI has advised that it is not feasible for Ireland to undertake paediatric heart transplants until the new children's hospital is opened.

The Health Information and Quality Authority, HIQA, undertook a health technology assessment, HTA, to evaluate the treatment and transport options for priority 1 transfer patients. The majority of priority 1 transfer patients are paediatric patients transferring to the United Kingdom to undergo heart or liver transplant surgery. The HTA focuses on options for the transfer of these patients, but also explores commissioning paediatric heart and liver national transplantation centres in Ireland as a potential long-term alternative. The HTA advises, given the significant capital and staffing resources that are required, that it may be more realistic to consider the development of a transplant service in the context of the opening of the new children's hospital rather than in Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin. The Department of Health will undertake a detailed analysis of the HTA in order to consider longer-term options in detail and is working with the HSE to consider the best option to address the service need in the medium term.

The Minister gave his approval for the establishment and funding of an all-island congenital heart disease network centred on Crumlin hospital and serving as an all-island centralised hub for paediatric cardiothoracic surgery and interventional cardiology. The all-island congenital heart disease network is an example of what can be achieved in health terms by collaboration between North and South. It reflects the commitment of people, North and South, and the Government's commitment, to the provision of an optimal congenital heart disease service, with the critical mass to provide safe, high-quality outcomes for congenital cardiac surgery and associated cardiology services for all children and young people in Ireland. This network will ensure that a very vulnerable group of sick children and young people get the best level of care, no matter where they come from on the island. It clearly demonstrates the potential of North-South collaboration on health care to bring tangible benefits and outcomes for patients across the island of Ireland.

That concludes my statement and I look forward to hearing the thoughts and views of Senators on the direction the health service should take and to our continued engagement on health matters. I am joined by officials who will be taking notes and helping with responses towards the end of the debate.

Visit of Austrian Delegation

Acting Chairman (Senator Diarmuid Wilson): Before I call on Senator Swanick, I am sure that Members of the House will wish to join with me in welcoming a parliamentary delegation from Austria, led by Mr. Edgar Mayer, President of the Austrian Federal Council. On my own behalf and on behalf of my colleagues in Seanad Éireann, I extend them a very warm welcome and good wishes for a successful visit to Ireland. May they enjoy their stay.

Health Services: Statements (Resumed)

Senator Keith Swanick: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, to the House. There are so many issues in respect of our health service at the moment that it is very hard to know where to start. However, I will start on a positive note and mention that yesterday was World Diabetes Day. I thought of Senator Butler and how he successfully managed to take his health care into his own hands in order to avoid having to take up to nine tablets a day for the rest of his life. Senator Butler lost six stone and turned his life around in doing so. We all com-

mended him at the time and World Diabetes Day is a timely reminder that diabetes is a most serious disease which will affect an estimated 640 million people by 2040. The majority of those 640 million people will be affected by type 2 diabetes, or adult-onset diabetes. Some 70% of these cases could be prevented through lifestyle interventions, just like in Senator Butler's case. In these cases, it does not take tablets or operations but a lot of hard work and encouragement to do so. In July, Senator Butler called on the Government to provide for diagnostic testing which would alert people to the fact that they are in danger of developing type 2 diabetes. This testing is currently too costly for many and so I echo Senator Butler's call and urge the Government and the Minister for Health to introduce testing which we all know would save money in the long term.

On an entirely separate matter and one which I was bitterly disappointed to hear about, parents of children with scoliosis have been informed that the planned outsourcing of procedures to France is now not to go ahead. Parents had been told initially that the plan was for 20 children to travel to France for surgery. They have now been informed that treatment in France was offered to some families but those families turned down the option and that, "[u]nfortunately as families declined this offer this will not proceed at this time." I would be very interested to know why there is not a system in place to offer a declined position to another family with another child who is suffering while awaiting a life-altering procedure. According to the Scoliosis Advocacy Network, with which I have been in contact, it has asked other parents and not one family out of approximately 600 has ever had France mentioned to them. In fact, there are many on lists who were never contacted about outsourcing at all.

The goalposts are moving and it is not acceptable. We have gone from a situation where no child was to wait longer than four months for surgery by the year end to a situation where children will be offered a plan. The year 2017 is drawing to an end and still too many children remain on surgery wait lists. For some there is no hope of a date for their surgery before Christmas. They end 2017 as they started it: waiting for scoliosis treatment. I sincerely hope there will be no attempt to spin the figures when the targets at the end of the year are not met.

While I am on the topic of parents having to fight tooth and nail for health care for their children, the initial decision made by the HSE not to fund the life-changing drug Vimizim for children with the ultra-rare disease such as muchopolysaccharidosis is utterly devastating, in particular for the two families whose children are currently in receipt of the drug. BioMarin has agreed to continue providing Vimizim compassionately until 5 December 2017. After this date, vulnerable patients will no longer have access to this life changing drug. The numbers here are minute and I encourage the Minister for Health and the Minister of State to leave no stone unturned with regard to funding this drug. It is a ticking time bomb for these vulnerable patients.

One such patient who was brought to my attention is a girl called Grace McIntyre. Grace is a nine year old girl who has not really known life without Vimizim. She is one of two children in Ireland who are participating in the compassionate programme provided by BioMarin. Grace's parents are extremely fearful for her future and are living in limbo not knowing what will happen to their daughter after 5 December and the turmoil they are facing is compounded by the fact they do not have any other medication to turn to. Vimizim is, effectively, their only lifeline. Why is it that the HSE cites a lack of clinical data when Vimizim gained licensing approval from the European Medicines Agency in April 2014 and is currently funded by more than ten European countries, including Northern Ireland, which is less than 90 minutes from Dublin?

I welcome the Minister of State's comments on district hospitals and the nursing home sector. It is important to distinguish the two. I would welcome investment in the district hospital network. Those hospitals are a valuable cog in the delivery of a modern health service and should not be seen as a relic of a bygone era. As the Minister of State knows, they facilitate discharge from the acute hospitals sector and prevent admissions to the acute hospitals sector. They often act as an interface between the acute sector and the fair deal, where a person is waiting to go into a nursing home. Not to be too parochial, while the treatment in our own district hospital in Belmullet is excellent - we recently had a HIQA inspection - the building is crumbling. I have been speaking to the Minister about this and lobbying him. We need a new hospital given our distance from Mayo University Hospital, which is more than 50 miles away in Castlebar. These facilities should receive investment, especially given most of them have a quick turnaround time. Patients are not languishing in them for long periods. They are a vital cog that will take the pressure off the acute sector.

The Minister of State mentioned €25 million provided in the 2018 budget for primary care, which is welcome, but it really is a drop in the ocean. I have spoken about this to my niece, who is in her final year of her medicine degree in Limerick. If we want our young graduates to enter the specialty of general practice and to entice our young GPs back from abroad, we need to see at least a partial reversal of the FEMPI cuts. The whole sector has been decimated since the introduction of those cuts. It is a scary figure but 900 GPs will retire in the next five years and young GPs are not there to replace them.

We try to be solution-driven. Will the Minister of State consider one proactive initiative, namely, the establishment of a 24-hour emergency line for general practitioners to enable them to access the CAMHS for adolescent patients who may be suicidal? It is a service that is badly needed. In some parts of the country children can wait over a year to access the CAMHS. The service would not be abused. In my busy practice I would not expect to have to ring it more than twice annually. It would ensure young vulnerable patients would be seen within 24 hours and be able to skip the queue because they were suicidal. Far too often they end up in emergency departments, which is wholly inappropriate in terms of their assessment by a psychiatrist. I would appreciate it if the Minister of State would consider that initiative.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I welcome the Minister of State and his officials and thank him for such a comprehensive report. Health is a wide brief and he has chosen to focus on particular issues which Senators have raised in the House.

A service which is close to my heart and to which I have referred regularly in the House is the national rehabilitation service. There is a real need for a master plan or to receive an update on previous plans. What might happen in County Roscommon or in Munster? I was present a number of weeks ago at the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dún Laoghaire when the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris, turned the sod for the development of a new 120-bed facility. It will replace an existing 120-bed unit. It is important, therefore, that we do not get too excited over it. The Minister of State referred to upgrading. It is right that we do so to ensure facilities are fit for purpose. I acknowledge that it is a real start. Of greater concern, however - this is a matter I have raised in the House often - is that on 1 January this year 12 beds were closed in the hospital. I have engaged regularly with hospital management, the Minister and the Department and been drip-fed responses and answers. First we were told that all of the beds would be open by the middle of the year. That did not happen but two were opened eventually. We were then told that the problem was the lack of staffing resources. Where the staff had gone? In recent days the hospital authorities have confirmed that there are

now four beds open, which means that eight still remain closed since 1 January. It is frightening to look at the huge waiting list for the service, but the patients in question are not at home but in other acute beds in other hospitals that could be freed up for others. They have been identified as patients who require intervention in the National Rehabilitation Hospital, yet there is no facility that will take them. When I spoke to hospital management again this week, I was told that there were four beds open. I appeal to the Minister to produce the necessary resources or explain the reason he is presiding over a situation where eight beds remain closed at the National Rehabilitation Hospital because it is unacceptable.

In his acceptance speech on becoming leader of Fine Gael, the Taoiseach promised leadership in the health service. Today I looked at his speech again and one of the things he emphasised was the need to lead from the front in the health service. I acknowledge the hard work done by the Minister who is very diligent and keen to deliver within the limits of the resources available to him, but it is not an easy brief but a tough one.

Will the Minister of State clarify something about Sláintecare? Originally, it was to be centralised in the Department of the Taoiseach rather than the Department of Health but now we hear reports that it will be centralised in the Department of Health. What does that tell us about how health services will be prioritised? How is that leading from the front and recognising that this is an important issue? It is important that we be told in coming days what is the future of Sláintecare. Who will co-ordinate it? Who will lead from the front? Who will assess it? Where will the unit and its funding be based? There is an issue in that regard.

In press reports yesterday we heard from the consultants' association that there were 400 vacant posts. Why is that the case? This is an issue we must explore in detail. Research which was published recently showed that in 2016, 83 consultant posts were advertised but no applications were received. We must ask why people do not believe they can expect to have a meaningful job with proper remuneration and everything that goes with it. What is the problem and how can we address it?

There are ongoing issues in hospitals. I single out Tallaght hospital since there were reports in several newspapers this week that there were 425 patients on trollies there this month. At one point, there was not a single senior consultant in place to oversee the emergency department in the hospital. That is serious. It is a question of having confidence in health services. One does not really engage with the health service until a loved one or a family member or oneself is sick and needs to access services. The ongoing trolley delays are unacceptable and we have not even faced the worst of the winter problems that occur annually. It is not acceptable that there are hundreds of patients on trolleys in hospitals. Someone told me recently of how they had not been lucky enough to be even on a trolley; they had been put in a wheelchair because there were no trolleys available in the hospital in question.

The Minister of State has covered matters such as the health budget, the HSE and the national service plan. I referred to Sláintecare and hope we will receive clarification on the matter in the coming days. I welcome the funding for the National Treatment Purchase Fund. It is interesting that when the Government has a focus and sets targets and budgets, things seem to happen. Therefore, I welcome what the Minister of State set out on the National Treatment Purchase Fund. Once treatment is provided and we deliver the service, I do not care who does it. I have no ideological hang up about who should provide the service, once it is professional and responds to the needs of patients. We need to get over that hurdle because people ask about the policy. If it is possible to have something done outside the public system for patients on

waiting lists, we should proceed.

I am somewhat disappointed by the figures for scoliosis patients. A few days after a sad and harrowing documentary produced by RTE's "Prime Time" programme, the Minister responded. He organised an interview to give a response. He needs to return and honour and deliver on the promises and commitments he made. We must deliver on the promises made to scoliosis patients because it is important that we do so.

I again thank the Minister of State and his officials for being here.

Senator Colm Burke: I welcome the Minister of State and thank him for the comprehensive overview. It is important to thank everyone in the Department, across the HSE and everyone involved in the provision of health care which is always demanding.

It is important to begin on a positive note. We regularly speak about waiting lists. It is right that we raise the matter and try to deal with it to make the service more efficient. Nevertheless, we should recall the figures. There are 3.2 million attendances in outpatients departments annually, or 63,000 weekly. There are 1.2 million attendances in accident and emergency departments, which is 23,000 weekly, and 16,000 patients attend hospitals each week for day care procedures. Although a large amount of health care is being provided across the board there are still bottlenecks in some areas so it is important that we deal with them.

While I welcome the increase in the budget, my concern is the use of that increase. We must ensure that we deal with the areas where there is an urgent need for reform and improvement. I have raised this issue previously. There was an increase in the budget over the last two years, but there was also a substantial increase of over 2,000 in administration and management from December 2014 to April 2017. At the same time there was an increase of only 39 in the number of public health nurses. That imbalance should not arise. When we provide additional funding it is important to ensure that we are also providing additional people on the front line. There is a need for an urgent examination of management within the HSE and of why certain places appear to have difficulty with retention and continuity. As I have pointed out previously, I am aware of one hospital that has had ten managers in 18 years. There is a problem if that is occurring. Either the pay or the supports are inadequate, but nine people have moved on and the hospital is now on its tenth manager. This is not a small facility. Something must be done so that when such an issue arises management at senior level in the HSE can respond to it. If there is no continuity in management, there will be a problem.

Another huge concern for me is the development of further facilities in the Cork area. My colleague spoke about the rehabilitation services. It is 15 or 20 years since we first talked about opening a rehabilitation unit in Cork. There is a need for such a unit in the Munster region. It could be included in the development of a single major new facility in Cork. The Fitzgerald report in the 1960s suggested that Cork should have two major hospitals. We built one but we appear to have forgotten about the second. The national development plan should include the provision of funding for a new state-of-the-art medical facility that not only caters for the increase in population in Cork, which has increased by over 130,000 in the city and county over the last 30 years, but also for the increase in population in the Munster region. That is extremely important. Rather than obliging people to transfer to Dublin where the expertise is, we should also grow that expertise in Munster. The Dublin facilities are already under substantial pressure.

An issue that has come to light and been discussed extensively over the last two or three years is support for general practitioners. The report published by Trinity College in the last few days must be carefully examined. It studied a number of jurisdictions and how to develop and provide the necessary supports for general practitioners so they can provide services and, as a result, keep people out of hospital and reduce the number being referred to hospital. It also examined the issue of e-health. This is now in the Cork area and is also being introduced in the rest of the country in respect of maternity services. The system is becoming computerised. It is up and running in Cork and Kerry and there is talk of developing it in Dublin. It is about ensuring that all the management of this area would be computerised. I am aware that there was an initial problem in Cork. While the system was put in place and was up and running for the patient and the hospital, there was a disconnect in the system for general practitioners.

The report, which was published last Monday, highlighted the need for connectivity between hospital services and GPs. In one of the countries studied, Israel, patients can go online and get access to their files. Denmark and Germany were also studied. We are way behind in that regard. While the roll-out of new services is important, it is also important to engage with modern technology and ensure it is in place so GPs can get access to it. That access is not just about referral and getting the results of the work done in the hospital, it is also about getting diagnostic reports. In a huge number of cases the GPs know exactly what is wrong with their patients but they must have it confirmed by getting access to diagnostic services. This must be given priority.

We also must consider the funding for GPs. My understanding is that it is 4.5% of the overall health budget. That must be examined if we wish to keep GPs in this country. My colleague, Senator Swanick, raised the number that will retire from the service. I was in Plymouth recently with the National Association of General Practitioners. We were in one area where all the GPs who were serving 20,000 patients handed in their contracts and walked away from the practice. They could afford to do it because they knew they could get jobs somewhere else. The local hospital was forced to employ other GPs to ensure some level of cover was provided. That is a challenge this country will face in the next five to ten years unless we start to deal with the concerns of GPs. It is extremely important to deal with those in the new contract for GPs.

Finally, I wish to raise the issue of respite care. I received a report from the HSE in the last two weeks. I refer to respite care not just for elderly people but particularly for people with intellectual and physical disability, where parents are caring for children who are now adults. We have a huge ageing population of carers who have been looking after their children for 30, 40 and 50 years. The HSE has identified a need for 2,244 extra respite places between now and 2021. We must prioritise that and see where we can develop at least 500 new places per year between now and 2021. I ask the Minister to give priority to that.

Senator Máire Devine: I am sharing time with Senator Warfield.

I welcome the Minister of State. I wish to record my dissatisfaction with having statements on this because they appear to prevent action. Yesterday in my local hospital, St. James's Hospital, there were 15 patients left on trolleys. The national number was 428. One does not often think of this with respect to children but in 2016 Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin had the highest number of children on trolleys. By the end of this year it will have had more than 1,000 children on trolleys. Up to November, almost 10,000 elderly people have been left waiting for over 24 hours for accident and emergency treatment.

These problems and a myriad of others, and I can give many examples, are directly linked to the fact that overall public health service employment has decreased since 2008. Recruitment and retention in the public health service are the core reasons the sector is on its knees. I wish to focus on that and I seek clear answers from the Minister of State on the Government's plan to tackle these issues. In November 2014, Dr. Stephen Thomas of Trinity College Dublin's centre for health policy and management said that we had experienced the biggest proportionate drop in health care across Europe as we had lost almost 20% of our health funding and at least 12% of our staff. The IMO quoted that we have a "manpower" - maybe it meant woman power - crisis within hospitals. It rightly acknowledged that the HSE is no longer an employer of choice, and the skills of a growing number of doctors, nurses and midwives are actively sought by European and international health organisations.

Some facts that the IMO has identified about this issue include that at any one time there are up to 400 vacant consultant posts. Those posts, when advertised, often attract no applicants. Nursing is the backbone of the health service. A total of 78% of final year nursing and midwifery students have already been offered full-time permanent posts in other countries. They have more attractive terms than those available here. Pay, training supports and career progression, along with poor working environments, are the key factors in decisions to emigrate. The shortage of doctors, nurses and midwives is leading to unsafe work practices and negatively impacting on patients. We are not replacing those staff who leave and young nurses without experience are being left to cope.

In a recent response to a parliamentary question from the HSE we learned that the number of nursing students has increased since 2008, which I welcome, but the number of staff nurses has decreased by 10%. We are not striking the balance well in terms of recruiting those who are newly qualified and retaining the experience and expertise required to keep the health service running smoothly. We have a brain drain and we have a massive haemorrhage in the experience we need.

Many times in my nursing career my experience served me well and that is then passed on to younger nurses who will then take over the helm, but that is not happening at the moment. It is part of the informal training and sharing with the newcomers and shaping all the talent they have into being a good practitioner. However, if we are not fostering conditions to incentivise experienced nurses to stay in their posts we will end up with a young nursing workforce left with no elders from whom to learn. That compromises the duty of care and endangers the lives of patients.

The reality is that Ireland cannot compete with the UK, Australia and others to retain new graduate nurses. The offer a few years ago of the insulting yellow pack graduate scheme began the exodus of nurses who said they had enough. We also have incentives and bonuses provided by private companies of between €3,000 and €5,000 for signing up with them. The impact of the shortage of staff is enormous and results in the curtailment and closure of services. I invite the Minister of State to comment on the proposed closure by the end of this month - we have two weeks - of the high observation unit in Tallaght Hospital. Cappagh hospital has a nine-bed unit but six of those beds are permanently closed, although there is a massive waiting list because of staff shortages.

There is a curtailment in the development of psychiatric services. I ask the Minister of State to also explain why we do not even the basic maths involved in our spending on the child and adolescent mental health service, CAMHS. The HSE does not do budgetary oversight.

In order to work as a nurse or a midwife in the Republic of Ireland one must obtain a certificate of registration from An Bord Altranais, the governing body, but there is a real problem with highly skilled experienced staff. More than 100 nurses unsuccessfully tried to obtain registration. I raised the issue previously and it has been discussed. I spoke to those nurses who are now working in non-health care settings because of the inflexible criteria of hours that must be divided between theory and practice by An Bord Altranais. We must examine the issue and add flexibility that does not compromise patient safety or care. It is a short-term objective and it is doable. The Minister of State should meet with An Bord Altranais to progress the issue.

Sinn Féin seeks to propose increasing nursing numbers by adding 500 each and every year over a five-year period, bringing the total to 2,500 which would be followed by further recruitment. The more people one has that are active and excited about working in pleasing and satisfying conditions the more people will want to join. Sinn Féin is often unfairly and wrongly accused by other nasty Senators of not offering solutions to problems. We have given several solutions, including the comhlísta initiative and this morning Deputy Louise O'Reilly launched on our behalf an approach to the trolley crisis, which sets out comprehensive proposals and analysis on tackling the problem. I ask the Minister of State to outline in detail the Government's approach to tackle the issues I have addressed. I also urge him to work with the trade unions on staffing so as to make the health service fit for purpose.

Senator Fintan Warfield: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, for coming to the House. I wish to talk about sexual health. In 2016, HIV transmission rates in the State rose to more than 500 new cases in a year for the first time this century. We are going in completely the opposite direction to our European counterparts. As part of the Department of Health's national sexual health strategy from 2015 to 2020, two of the key recommendations were to develop and implement guidelines for the appropriate use of antiretroviral therapy in HIV prevention.

We must ask what is driving the increase in HIV rates because it is not due to those who know their status; it is due to terrible sexual education in schools, poor access to services and a lack of availability of PrEP, pre-exposure prophylaxis. I was in Baggot Street clinic last night. The place is condemned. Paint is falling off the walls. One is required to go to the bathroom to conduct part of the test but the lights are not working in the bathroom. It is not a pleasant place for a sexual health service to be located, although it is quite a good service.

As the Minister of State is aware, PrEP has been hailed as a step forward in the fight against HIV and it is the most suitable response to the HIV crisis we are in at the moment. Two years on from the launch of the high profile strategy the PrEP working group is assessing PrEP for HSE availability and it recently announced that it was conducting a cost-benefit analysis of Truvada. Last week in the High Court, Gilead lost an injunction case which will allow generic manufacturers to produce PrEP and provide it to Irish users, but the drug will need to be assessed by the HSE. My question is about if and when it will happen. As I indicated, 500 new cases of HIV are being loaded onto an already stretched health service every year. The longer that goes on the more embarrassing it is for Ireland and the longer it goes on the further we will fall behind our European counterparts. Not only are we not being proactive in tackling the issue we are literally stopping people buying the drug online as it is being picked up by Customs at ports. I urge the Minister, Deputy Harris, to speak publicly about sexual health. His silence has gone on for too long.

Senator John Dolan: I welcome the Minister of State and his officials to the House. The Minister of State began his contribution by setting the debate in the context of the budget for

2018. We have gone from 2014 until 2017, and we are into the fifth year post-recession, since the troika left Ireland. I do not enjoy saying that the recession has not ended for people with disabilities and mental health needs when it comes to the health service. It is very interesting that the Taoiseach said on the night he was elected on 14 June that we are renewing our commitment to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities this year. There are six weeks to go to the end of this year. He also committed to improving services available to people with disabilities, especially respite care and emergency residential places. They did not figure in any obvious way in the Budget Statement. It is quite interesting that two issues the Taoiseach named, two among many, have been raised again by Senator Colm Burke and others. There is a real issue if something the Taoiseach prioritised the day he was elected does not turn up four months later in the budget.

Several areas were mentioned in respect of needs of people with disabilities, for example, personal assistants, a range of community and home supports such as home help, and access to various therapies. We could call that a basket of community supports. The Minister of State mentioned in his extensive speech that there are 23,000 people in nursing homes. Approximately 5% of them are young people with disabilities who should not be in nursing homes. There are 1,200 people our age and younger in those nursing homes. A person's average length of stay in a nursing home is two years and the next location is a grave. It is absolutely unacceptable by any metric that young people with disabilities, regardless of their critical needs, are in that situation. Part of the reason for it is that all the instruments in the community, home supports and personal assistants have been shaved, year in year out. When people from the HSE come along the only tool in their box is an application for a nursing home. That costs the State money.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities refers to deprivation of liberty and changing legislation to deal with that. If we just changed how we provide services we might not deprive people of so much liberty, not only their own but that of their family members. These are young people, many of them in family situations. They are real issues. I am grateful that I can depend on Senator Boyhan to mention the 12 beds in the National Rehabilitation Hospital, NRH, four of which are now open. These are for the same group of people who are locked away in acute hospitals which have huge pressures. They cannot get into the NRH and the problem is how to get from there to their homes and all that involves.

I was in Longford last night at St. Christopher's Services for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities. The Minister, Deputy Harris, was there a few days earlier. I thought they had spruced the place up because I was visiting, then I realised the Minister had been there. The critical areas were mentioned to him, such as access to psychological and behavioural support services. They are trying to get through with one tenth of a professional per week to support people. That is just an example of the problems.

A councillor who spoke to me during the week had made representations on behalf of a 40-year old woman with multiple sclerosis, MS, whose situation had deteriorated significantly in the past year, from being ambulant she is now using a motorised wheelchair. I am not slugging the HSE but somebody said the only way that woman would get a service is when somebody else who has MS dies. That is not an isolated case. There are many such cases. There is a crisis but it is behind people's doors and does not burst into the open. It is important for the Department of Health to own up to the fact that there is a real problem, then let us see if we can work towards fixing it. That will take time. The demographics are going against us. People are living longer. The census has told us the number of people in the State with disabilities has

increased by 0.5%, from 13% to 13.5%.

I have tried, time out of number, on the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health to get estimates or guesstimates of the projected need for people with disabilities and mental health needs in this State. An estimate may change. It is like budgeting but there is a reticence to say these are the issues that we have. We cannot deal with them if we do not put them up front. Does the Minister of State or the Department have figures and estimates for waiting lists, the closing of waiting lists and some sense of the issues confronting this country? I will be the happiest person in the world and will come back here and go on my knees if I am wrong and apologise. The whole problem of disability and mental health needs is going to burst open on us. This is surfacing and people are taking it on the chin in their homes in every town and townland in the country. Please give us the estimates and figures. Let the people of Ireland know what we are dealing with so that we can say honestly we will or will not do something about it. Right now, the situation is totally unacceptable.

Senator James Reilly: I welcome the Minister of State and his officials. I also welcome the fact that there has been an increase in the health budget this year, after several years of increases. That is truly welcome because for many a year when I was Minister for Health all we had was a diminishing budget. Health is such a huge area that it is not possible in five minutes to address it comprehensively in any real way so I will focus on an area that is on people's minds, namely, primary care and community. It is of note that in a recent survey by Professor Tom O'Dowd mental health services were top of the list for 1,000 people interviewed. That is a very important area. On-site X-rays were next, followed by minor surgery, blood tests and lifestyle advice. I will come back to that last point because I often said when I was Minister for Health that I felt I was Minister for ill-health as we seemed to talk only about illness and disease, instead of about keeping people well, prevention and early intervention.

Reform remains key and capacity in our hospitals is an issue but we need a transitional fund if we are going to move the focus from hospital care to primary care. I welcome Tony O'Brien's comments in this regard. If we do not have that we cannot achieve it. Any time we want to change things it requires energy and resources. We did not have the money in the past to do that but we do now and I welcome the fact that this is acknowledged in the ten-year Sláinte-care report. I firmly believe that we need to treat patients at the lowest level of complexity that is safe, timely and as near to home as possible, and affordable for the patient. I see that echoed in the report and welcome it.

In his report on primary care, Professor O'Dowd also says that the secret sauce at the centre of successful outcomes for patients is regular contact with a good and caring doctor. That brings me back to the old definition of general practice, which still holds true for me, namely, primary, personal continuing care. The two words in the middle are very important, "personal" and "continuing", that patients go to the same doctor who know them and their history, so that particularly in respect of mental health issues they do not have to open up to somebody new and go through their whole story again. I have met many patients who have been frustrated by this and cease going to their clinic because there is a different doctor there every time they go and they do not have the energy to go through it all again, whereas meeting somebody on an ongoing basis who can help to manage a patient's condition, knows his or her story, family and community is very valuable for him or her.

As everybody understands, we need a new GP contract. I heard Senator Keith Swanick mention the FEMPI legislation. This will be a sore point for many doctors because while we

had to take these measures during the financial emergency, they see many sectors coming out of it but do not see any progress at their end. That will be a problem. That aside, a new contract needs to focus on well-being and health. I again refer to the survey of lifestyle advice about keeping people well.

We also badly need more day hospitals. The Minister of State is familiar with the hospital in Bantry which is in his neck of the woods. There are also Nenagh, Ennis and Louth county hospitals. We need more day hospitals in Dublin where patients can undergo inpatient procedures for a hernia, gall bladder, etc. We need one in Swords which would be convenient for people living on the north side of the city who would come out against the traffic. It will allow Beaumont and the Mater hospitals to run outpatients' clinics which would be much more convenient for patients. In the new primary care centre in Balbriggan, which is up and running, we need diagnostics. Patients want to access X-ray facilities. It is included in the survey but doctors know it. There is nothing new in this. In County Donegal where a high value has always been placed on primary care services because of the geographical spread of services, there were X-ray facilities in four areas. There was one in Killybegs, but I cannot remember the others now. I heard Senator Keith Swanick talk about one in Belmullet. That is the way forward. We cannot keep doing the same things in the same way. Reform is key.

We need to expand primary care teams with more allied health care professionals. When I had a physiotherapist in my practice, instead of reaching for the prescription pad to prescribe a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory, I reached for the pad to refer a patient to the physiotherapist and the outcomes were better. If we have these facilities in the community, we would keep people well. It is never as sexy politically or as attractive for politicians to be involved in good public health policy as it is to launch a new MRI scanner or a new hospital wing, but we have to focus on public health policy. I welcome the tobacco and alcohol control Bills and the sugar tax, but we need joined-up thinking across the board. From the point of view of the health budget, we need this transitional fund to make these changes happen because acutely ill patients take precedence, rightly so, but if we keep doing this, we will never address the flow into hospitals.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: While I am disappointed that the Minister for Health, Deputy Simon Harris, is not present, everything I am about to say I have said to him directly and have put in a letter to him. He has been in County Donegal on several occasions, but I will reiterate the points made today.

Letterkenny University Hospital is the sixth largest hospital in the State. It caters for over 23,000 inpatients every year, but one would not know it from its budget. The budget allocated to it is one third of that allocated to the four major hospitals in Dublin. I appreciate that they deal with specialties and deserve more money, but a sum three times more cannot be justified.

The implications for Letterkenny University Hospital are profound. The number of patients on trolleys is the highest ever in the history of the State. Sick and elderly patients have to wait a long time and are then left in the undignified situation where they are left on a trolley or in a bed which is not specific to their needs. Many are forced to be on trolleys in the hospital. The waiting list runs to almost 17,000. If we include those waiting in south Donegal to access Sligo hospital, one in eight people in my home county is on a waiting list that is growing all the time. I note that the previous Minister, now Senator James Reilly, acknowledged that there had been years of under-investment in the health service. Now we have a crisis. The recent budget was an opportunity. Deputy Pearse Doherty and I put together a document entitled, *The Need to Invest in Letterkenny University Hospital*, which we submitted to the Government, the HSE

and Saolta. We expected to see a clear signal in the recent budget that in 2018 there would be a serious attempt to address the crisis in Letterkenny University Hospital and elsewhere, but no new net investment was provided for. Given the expenditure already committed to and the need to allow for growth in the population, there is no new investment. The crisis in Letterkenny University Hospital will continue. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael supported the budget. Both parties need to take responsibility for the continuing crisis in the health service and the fact that it will not diminish in 2018 because of the failure to provide adequate funding. Instead, the Government has provided for marginal tax cuts across the board. That is wrong when there is a crisis and people are suffering throughout the State.

A short stay ward with 20 beds in Letterkenny University Hospital has not been deployed for a long time. The hospital has asked for approximately €2 million to open the ward to take the pressure off the emergency and other departments, but that funding has not been forthcoming. It really needs investment justice in order to receive a fair share of investment that will reflect the number of patients for whom it caters. It is a major hospital; it is the sixth largest in the State, yet it is getting a fraction of the investment hospitals in Dublin receive. The funding allocation system for hospitals is totally wrong. There is no good in Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael politicians speaking on their local radio stations and pleading on this issue when they have just passed a budget that will not address the crisis in 2018. That was a huge mistake, but it was a choice they made. I believe the implications of that choice will be evident in the hospital system in County Donegal and elsewhere this winter and in 2018. That is completely unacceptable and wrong.

Senator Colette Kelleher: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne. Many of my questions would be more appropriate to the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, who has departed. If the Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne, is not in a position to reply to them, I would be grateful to receive a reply in writing. I acknowledge that a commitment to provide for dual diagnosis was given in the Minister of State's statement, Senator Frances Black will want more specific detail on the improvements that will be made.

I am concerned about the provision made in the 2018 HSE service plan for the 55,000 people with dementia and the specific priorities and commitments given. The statement was light on detail on services for people with dementia. Does it include an expansion in the number of dementia service advisers to build a national network? The all-party Oireachtas group on dementia services, for which I am co-convenor, called for an investment of €1.6 million to move from eight dementia service advisers nationally to 30 and to build on that figure year on year. When we met the Minister last week, he said he would get back to us, but I have still not heard from him. I would like to know where we stand.

I am also seeking an update on the call for €6 million ring-fenced dementia-specific home care funding. There was mention of home care but not dementia-specific home care. The all-party group also asked for money to be set aside for assistive technology innovations, the continuation of the general practitioner prepared project as well as €1 million support for people with Down's syndrome and dementia. People in that group get early onset dementia and they are not really catered for either in the disability or older people's sectors. I would be grateful for some specifics and if the Minister of State cannot give them to me now I appeal to her to write to me.

Will the Minister outline proposals for the extension of home care? I heard this morning that €37 million is being allocated for older people. The allocation is not all going to home care.

One of the officials at the Joint Committee on Health said two thirds of the allocation would be for home care. I am seeking a transparent figure on the budget for home care for 2018 versus what it was for 2017.

I also heard this morning at the Joint Committee on Health that it will take two to three years to roll out home care under the statutory scheme and regulation. That is too long for the people who are waiting for home care. There are 195,000 carers waiting and the wait is simply too long. I call for a greater sense of urgency.

Will the Minister for Health outline progress in his Department on adult safeguarding? Since the Adult Safeguarding Bill passed Committee Stage considerable development work has been undertaken, including two hearings at the health committee, new research from the Institute of Public Administration published in October and newly-commissioned research currently under way at UCD. Will the Minister for Health give an update and note my readiness to work with his officials on this important aspect of public policy? I have written and offered. I am doing a good deal of work on this, but I cannot simply talk to myself.

What provision is the Minister for Health making to tackle the waiting lists in the Central Mental Hospital? The Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, was here to hear me speak on the matter last year. Some progress is being made but the lists are still among the highest in the country. I know the doctors there are looking for €2.7 million to maintain progress for running costs. I want to know the position with regard to that figure.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: The first issue I wish to raise is the crisis in physiotherapy in Mayo. Hundreds of children and adults are waiting for physiotherapy. Some are waiting for an initial appointment while others have been clinically deemed as desperately needing physiotherapy on a weekly basis but they have not had physiotherapy for months. I appeal to the Minister of State and the Minister to address this. It has been going on for months.

Whole swathes of the county have been left without any physiotherapists. That is not right either on a social or humane level or a financial level either. We have people who cannot be discharged from the acute hospitals, either Mayo University Hospital or University Hospital Galway, because they do not have the necessary physiotherapy services in the community. There was a panel of physiotherapists. It is not as if we could not recruit them. I know this because I have seen a physiotherapist myself for months. They were all on a panel waiting to be appointed but they were not appointed by the HSE. This happened even though the positions were there, whether it was a case of maternity leave or those on long-term illness. The HSE would not actually appoint people in the positions to provide the medical attention that others needed. It is not right to leave these people in pain. It also means that they cannot be discharged to the district hospitals.

I heard my colleague, Senator Swanick refer to Belmullet District Hospital earlier. I was surprised and puzzled by this promotion of district hospitals. I have a deep belief in the value of district hospitals, including the hospital in Belmullet, but the truth is that Fianna Fáil cut half the beds in the hospital in 2010. This was in spite of a local action group begging and pleading for the beds to be left open. I find it somewhat perplexing that those in Fianna Fáil now say they value our district hospitals and that we need to have them upgraded and so on. Why then did that party cut the beds by half only a couple of years ago? That perplexes and bamboozles me. Perhaps there has been a change of policy and they now realise that these services have to be delivered locally or that as many services as possible should be local to the people.

We have seen how centralisation and privatisation has not worked. The centre of excellence in University Hospital Galway hospital is good but we still have people sitting on chairs and dying of cancer while begging for treatment. That is the reality, I am not making it up. Indeed, it has been the reality for many years. Wards have been closed because ceilings are falling in. Everyone knows that we need proper capital investment and a proper refurbished purpose-built hospital with parking and everything else that is needed at Merlin Park University Hospital. The grounds are available. All that is needed is the capital. We are told that we are in the recovery and that things are going well. Those of us in the west deserve a hospital and proper treatment. We deserve a hospital that will meet the needs of the population in the west. We will not let up until we get that hospital. We deserve it.

I wish to raise the issue of the approval of Translarna. I thank the Minister for Health, Deputy Harris, for agreeing last Friday to meet Anne Marie Harte and Lewis Harte, her son. He is one of the little boys who desperately need Translarna. He is six years old. Only two little boys in the country need this drug. It has to be approved. As I said to the Minister the last day, I am begging with him not to get entangled in the legal process. There is a window of opportunity for negotiation between the drug company and the HSE. They need to sit down for the sake of these two boys who are eligible at the moment. Only three other boys will become eligible. I appeal for a commitment from the Minister or the HSE to meet the drug company. I know the Minister has agreed to meet Muscular Dystrophy Ireland. That is important. He should also meet Dr. O'Rourke, who is an expert in Translarna. The drug must be made available sooner rather than later because time is of the essence for these boys.

I could cover many other issues on health, including the other topics referenced this morning such as home help and carers and so on, but I will keep those for another day. I want to secure a decision on Translarna and proper physiotherapy services in Mayo.

An Cathaoirleach: The Minister of State will respond. While she is gathering her thoughts, this is something we might look at in the Committee on Procedure and Privileges. I noted on the monitor that the Minister of State, Deputy Daly, spoke for 35 minutes. That is probably his entitlement but several Members are confined to either eight or five minutes. Then the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, has only five minutes to respond. We should look at the possibility of greater time to respond to the queries of the Senators. That used to happen under the last Government and probably the one before that, when I was Leas-Chathaoirleach. It is not your fault, Minister of State, but it is something we should look at. When Members call for a debate on an issue and raise pertinent questions, then the Minister who responds should be in a position to respond. I am not saying it is your fault, Minister of State. It is a general problem that I see and we should look at it for future debates. You have five minutes to answer many questions. You were probably not here to deal with some of them but ar aghaidh leat.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I thank all Senators for their input to this afternoon's debate. There are many issues that I will be unable to address, unfortunately. I have taken numerous notes. The Minister of State, Deputy Daly, was here before me and I know he has committed to follow up on some of the points as well. I will proceed with my statement and then after that I might be able to address some of the other points raised.

I thank the Senators for giving us the opportunity to speak today. I note that my colleague, the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Jim Daly, updated the House on a wide range of topics, including budget 2018 and the Sláintecare report as we move towards the

implementation phase. He also updated the House on developments in his areas of responsibility, older people and mental health. I know he listened with interest to the contributions, which covered a wide range of issues. Where an undertaking was given, Senators will be provided with the necessary follow-up or any additional information requested. I can assure the House that the Government is committed to making tangible and sustainable improvements to our health services and as the Minister of State, Deputy Daly said, the Sláintecare report provides a framework within which this can be achieved. I know that the Minister, Deputy Harris, is dedicated to use the levels of support and consensus around the report to build a health service where people feel valued, respected and well cared-for.

Of course we cannot underestimate the challenges we face. Too many patients continue to wait on trollies for admission to hospitals in cramped and overcrowded conditions, though Deputy Daly did note some improvements in this area. An ageing population will bring increasing pressure, as we all know, on our health services in the years to come.

I would now like to touch briefly on matters relating to my own responsibilities. As Minister of State with responsibility for Health Promotion and the National Drugs Strategy, I am determined to improve health outcomes and address health inequalities for the most vulnerable people in our society, including those with addiction issues, the homeless, Traveller and Roma communities, and refugees and asylum seekers. It is generally accepted that people from diverse marginalised groups experience poorer health outcomes than the general population. They tend not to access health services readily and often only present to services when their health has deteriorated. This is especially true of people affected by homelessness, who can present to services with complex needs, due to poor physical and mental health and problems with drugs and alcohol addiction.

I secured €7.5 million in budget 2018 for new developments, which will support a range of measures to improve access to health-related services for these vulnerable groups. Regarding homelessness, the emphasis in 2018 will be on supporting housing-led solutions and providing people who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness with the supports needed to secure and sustain permanent tenancies in line with the Rebuilding Ireland action plan for housing and homelessness.

My main focus this year has been on putting in place a new strategy to respond to drug and alcohol use in Ireland. The new strategy, known as Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery, will cover the period from 2017 to 2025. It promotes a more compassionate and person-centred approach to people who use drugs, treating addiction first and foremost as a health issue. As part of this approach, I brought forward legislation earlier this year to enable the establishment of a pilot supervised injecting facility. This facility will provide a clean, safe, health care environment where people can inject drugs, obtained elsewhere, under the supervision of trained health professionals.

The HSE is currently leading a procurement process to provide a medically supervised injecting facility in Dublin city centre on a pilot basis. I chair the National Oversight Committee which will oversee the implementation of the strategy and includes members from the statutory, community and voluntary sectors, as well as clinical and academic experts. The committee held its first meeting in September and will meet on a quarterly basis to keep progress in implementation under review during the lifetime of the strategy.

On behalf of myself and my ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health I would

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like to thank Members for the opportunity to speak here today and for their contributions. I will turn to one or two of the contributions. I was not here for the first part of the debate, but I know a number of issues have been raised, particularly from Senators Swanick, Boyhan, Burke, Devine, Dolan, Reilly and other Senators.

I will reflect on what Senator Kelleher has asked for. I have taken down a number of notes, and unfortunately, the health issues that the Senator raises are not under my remit. I will speak to the Minister of State, Deputy Daly, on them and ask him to come back to the Senator on a personal basis. I apologise if in the past the Senator has been told that people would contact him and they have not. That is wrong. If we give a commitment to people, we should come back to them. The same applies in my own role. When I am asked a question when taking any Topical Issue matter in the Dáil or during a debate here, I make it my business to come back to people, particularly on issue that has been raised.

In response to the Senator who has raised the issue of Translarna, I will raise that with the Minister, Deputy Harris. A number of people have called into my office regarding this drug, thinking that it is part of my remit but it is not. On many of the other issues that have been raised, I hope Members are not offended if I do not individually answer their queries. I appreciate that Members have been present at this debate for a lengthy period. I was asked to appear here at short notice because the Minister of State, Deputy Daly, had to go somewhere else.

I apologise again to the Cathaoirleach and to Senators that the Minister, Deputy Harris, Harris unfortunately could not be here for this debate. However, I will confer with my colleagues here from the Department to try to provide answers on some of the major issues that have been raised and address Members' concerns around the different issues, which we have noted.

An Cathaoirleach: You are here so frequently-----

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I will be back in another half an hour.

An Cathaoirleach: We should make you an honorary Member of this Chamber.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: You should.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Minister of State. Any comments I made were not in any way directed at you, it is a general comment about how things work here.

Senator Colm Burke, would you move to suspend the House until 5.30 p.m.?

Senator Colm Burke: I move to suspend the sitting until 5.30 p.m.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Senator.

Sitting suspended at 5.20 p.m. and resumed at 5.30 p.m.

Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill 2017: [Seanad Bill amended by the Dáil] Report and Final Stages

Acting Chairman (Senator Diarmuid Wilson): This is a Seanad Bill which has been amended by the Dáil. In accordance with Standing Order 148, it is deemed to have passed its First, Second and Third Stages in the Seanad and is placed on the Order Paper for Report Stage.

On the question “That the Bill be received for final consideration”, the Minister may explain the purpose of the amendments made by the Dáil. This is looked upon as the report of the Dáil amendments to the Seanad. For the convenience of Senators, the Cathaoirleach has arranged for the printing and circulation of these amendments. The Minister will deal separately with the subject matter of each related group of amendments. I have also circulated the proposed grouping in the House. A Senator may contribute once on each grouping. I remind Senators that the only matter which may be discussed are the amendments made by the Dáil.

I welcome the Minister, Deputy Flanagan, and call on him to speak on the subject matter of the amendments in group 1.

Question proposed: “That the Bill be received for final consideration.”

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I thank the Acting Cathaoirleach and I am pleased to be here to discuss a number of Dáil amendments, most of them technical in nature. I note that the Acting Cathaoirleach has, for the purposes of this debate, divided the amendments into three groups: amendment No. 1 on its own; amendments Nos. 2 and 3 together; and amendments Nos. 4 to 10, inclusive, together. I take it that is agreed.

I hereby introduce Dáil amendment No. 1 and refer the Seanadóirí to section 51(j) on page 9 of the Bill as passed by Dáil Éireann. This provides that a court may only make a periodic payments order where it is satisfied that the continuity of payments under the PPO is reasonably secure. Subsection (2) sets out the matters which the court shall have regard to when considering whether the continuity of payments is reasonably secure.

I tabled this amendment following a request from the Motor Insurers’ Bureau of Ireland. The bureau noted that when similar legislation was introduced in the UK some years ago, its equivalent organisation, the Motor Insurers Bureau, was not specifically designated as being “reasonably secure”. This, unfortunately, led to a situation where the Motor Insurers Bureau, UK, had to provide evidence to the court in each case where a periodic payments order was proposed for an MIB claimant to establish that payments made by the MIB under a PPO would be “reasonably secure”. This situation gave rise to increased legal costs for the MIB, which were, as is of course always the case, passed on to motor insurance consumers. It also had the effect of delaying the introduction of PPOs for claimants under the MIB scheme. Following discussions with other stakeholders, including the State Claims Agency, the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I am satisfied that to avoid the issues that arose in the United Kingdom, we should make an amendment to this Bill that will clarify that payments eligible to be paid by the Motor Insurers’ Bureau of Ireland are regarded and defined as reasonably secure for the purposes of the making of the order.

On grouped amendments Nos. 2 and 3, amendment No. 2, concerning indexation and the periodic payments, states: “In page 11, line 13, “may” deleted and “shall” substituted.” The effect of amendment No. 2 would be to make it mandatory for subsequent reviews of the index applying to periodic payments orders to be carried out five years after the previous review. This amendment was proposed by Deputies Clare Daly and Mick Wallace. I can see the merits of the amendment and I agree that a mandatory review provision would, in the circumstances, be advantageous and beneficial.

With regard to amendment No. 3, the new section 51L deals with the issue of indexation of

payments. The section provides for the annual adjustment of a payment under a periodic payments order in line with the prevailing rate under the harmonised index of consumer prices, HICP, and provides for a review of the application of that index after a five-year period. Section 51L(4) provides for the making of regulations where a review of the prevailing index has concluded that an index other than the HICP would be more appropriate for use in catastrophic injury cases. This amendment, which was also proposed by Deputies Daly and Wallace in the Dáil, would make it mandatory for the Minister to make such regulations. Again, I can see merit in the proposal. It makes sense to me that if an alternative index were considered more suitable for use in periodic payments orders, the Minister should be required to make the necessary regulations, subject, of course, to the consent of the Minister for Finance.

Group 3 comprises amendments Nos. 4 to 10, inclusive. Amendment No. 4 is a technical drafting amendment. Part 4 concerns open disclosure. Amendments Nos. 4 to 10, inclusive, are technical amendments to sections 16, 17 and 19 to include commas in some places, merely for consistency. Amendment No. 5 is merely a technical drafting amendment, whose purpose is self-explanatory. Amendment No. 6 is a technical drafting amendment on page 32 and it concerns section 17. Amendment No. 7 is similarly technical, as are amendments Nos. 8 to 10, inclusive.

Question put and agreed to.

Question proposed: "That the Bill do now pass."

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I acknowledge the co-operation of Seanadóirí, particularly their engagement earlier in the debate. It is important that we re-emphasise the reasons this Bill was introduced. The courts award damages for personal injuries to try to ensure the injured party is put in the same position as he or she would have been in if he or she had not sustained the wrong for which he or she received compensation. At present, damages for personal injuries in catastrophic cases are paid by way of a lump sum. The Working Group on Medical Negligence and Periodic Payments identified deficiencies in the lump sum system as it applies to persons who have suffered an injury that might be described as catastrophic. In this regard, the group recommended that, to address those deficiencies, legislation should be introduced to enable the courts to award damages in catastrophic cases by means of periodic payments. The Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill 2017 seeks to address the issues raised by the working group.

Although the Bill is short, its provisions are somewhat complex. The Bill grants courts the power to make periodic payment orders in cases of catastrophic injury, provides that payments under periodic payment orders are secure and will last for the lifetime of the injured party, provides that payments will be indexed initially in line with the HICP, provides for a review of the index after a five-year period, provides for the treatment of periodic payments in bankruptcy, and provides for the treatment of periodic payments for income tax purposes. The Bill also contains detailed provisions on the issue of open disclosure of patient safety incidents.

Unfortunately, things sometimes can and do go wrong in health care. I believe that we all share the view that when this happens, patients should feel supported by the health system and should at all times be given appropriate and proper information. The open disclosure provisions in the Bill will go some way to ensuring that a culture of safety and openness is firmly rooted in our health service and that the health service can learn from mistakes to make the service far more safe for patients.

This Bill, which allows the courts the power to award periodic payments in cases of catastrophic injury, is extremely important. It will ensure that people who have been catastrophically injured will receive the care and assistance they require during the course of their lives. I thank the Seanadóirí for their input on this important legislation.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I thank the Minister for attending for the passage of this important legislation. As a practising solicitor, I can see the merit in it. It was about time something like this was provided for. Quite often, lump sum payments are made and do not have an actual benefit for the claimant. This is an absolute travesty and we have corrected that this evening. I thank the Minister for co-operating with Members of this House and Opposition Members in the Dáil to allow them to have a real input into strengthening the legislation.

Senator Michael McDowell: I, too, thank the Minister for being present today. I am very glad this legislation has gone through the legislative process and has been passed. I fully accept its underlying logic. When I was in the Minister's position, it often occurred to me that such legislation should be passed. Curiously, in those days the insurance industry seemed to be the biggest opponent, for some reason. I believe it was afraid of it and preferred at the time to have a file marked as finished and completely dealt with. Obviously, circumstances have changed in the meantime.

When someone who is catastrophically injured gets his lump sum, it is supposed to do him for the rest of his life, so to speak. Sometimes, unfortunately, the individual dies very shortly thereafter and, under existing law, the fund itself is distributed among the individual's heirs or on intestacy. That will cease now. That makes perfect sense and I have no problem with that. It does strike me, however, and maybe this is a matter for another day, that while we compensate parents and siblings sometimes in the event of a death to the limit provided for in the Civil Liability Acts, whatever that limit is now, it is somewhat strange that somebody who is in that position will not get any compensation whatsoever for seeing his or her loved one, be it the husband, wife, son, mother or whoever, reduced to a catastrophically injured person and then dying subsequently. There is no compensation at all for that if it does not happen within the limitation period. Perhaps that is something that some law reform Minister will have to think about at some stage in the future. In the past the residue of the money frequently went to compensate the relatives, which was too much probably.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Oftentimes it was not intended.

Senator Michael McDowell: Exactly. On one occasion I remember meeting somebody who in very strange circumstances seemed to have a lot of money. He looked at me and said that he knew what I was thinking, that being, where he got the money from. He went on to explain that a situation like this had actually happened. It is an issue that dependants, within the meaning of the Civil Liability Act, of a catastrophically injured person will get nothing under this system. Perhaps they should be put on the same pedestal as somebody who has suffered a death because very frequently the consequences are worse for the relatives than an immediate death. I congratulate the Minister on getting this through and I am glad it is becoming the law.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I thank the Minister for attending today and I commend the passing of this legislation. I reflected on the earlier debates on the Civil Liability Bill and I do think the amendments have strengthened the legislation. I commend those who have moved and, as Senator Clifford-Lee mentioned, the co-operation and understanding between parties and between the Government and Opposition in trying to progress what has been in many ways

an anomaly for all of the reasons that Senator McDowell outlined. We have all said thus far, and I am sure we all accept and concede given the passing of this Bill, that the system thus far has not always been appropriate or ideally suited to those who were in receipt of the lump sum payments. These periodic payments will be more appropriate and much better suited to the needs of patients and people who have suffered those catastrophic injuries as outlined. It is important and positive legislation that will make a direct and tangible impact on people's lives for the better. I thank the Minister, the officials and all those who strengthened this legislation.

Senator Martin Conway: There is little for me to say that has not been said. It is good to see this legislation. It will impact very directly on the lives of people who have been injured. It also brings us into line with best international practice. The idea of a lump sum, shut, done and over with in a case does not really reflect the ongoing needs. The complex, difficult and challenging medical needs of a person with a catastrophic injury could require significantly more resources to deal with it in ten years. When payments are made, we are relying on trustees and people behaving appropriately, which does not necessarily always happen either. This is a lesson in terms of how this Minister in particular is prepared to listen to reasonable observations from other quarters. I refer to those amendments that were made as outlined by the Minister. I have to confess that probably like everybody else here, I had not studied them in advance of the debate. On listening to the logic of changing even a word, such as proposed by Deputies Wallace and Daly, it made absolute sense. When something is a good idea and it comes from whatever quarter, that good idea should always be embraced, enhanced, developed and made part of the Bill. That is good politics. That is what the people who elect us and give us the privilege of serving here expect of us. I commend this Minister. It is nothing less than what I know he would do anyway and that I would expect of him, but it is great to see it in practice. The Houses of the Oireachtas should acknowledge that of this Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Acting Chairman (Senator Diarmuid Wilson): I thank the Senators. I ask Senator Conway to move the suspension of the House.

Senator Martin Conway: I move we suspend until 6 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 5.55 p.m. and resumed at 6 p.m.

JobPath: Motion

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: I move:

That Seanad Éireann recognises:

- the significant involvement of private, profit making companies in the operation of JobPath where tax payers' money is used;
- that the method and manner in which candidates are chosen for inclusion on JobPath very often includes people who are not long-term unemployed;
- that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection does not publish the individual fees paid to the providers because of commercial sensitivity, and that this is unacceptable where tax payers' money is involved;

- that JobPath is also having a detrimental impact on other job activation schemes – Local Employment Service referrals are down across the State and there are issues filling Community Employment Scheme places;

- that training and preparation of JobPath participants is inadequate and poorly focused; and

- that many of the personal advisors working for JobPath are not adequately trained;

and calls for:

- the immediate suspension of any further referrals to the JobPath scheme;

- transparency of the contract between the Government and these private companies that deliver a public service; and

- increased funding to other back to employment schemes such as the Rural Social Scheme, the Community Employment Scheme and the Local Employment Service.

I thank the Minister of State for her attendance. I am disappointed that the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, is not present to discuss this important matter.

Tonight's motion on JobPath comes from a major engagement with jobseekers currently on this scheme which was undertaken by my colleagues, Deputies Denise Mitchell and John Brady, as well as the numerous attempts that I, along with my colleagues in the Seanad, have made to get answers on the scheme. While carrying out our examination we have been contacted by numerous people who are very concerned with JobPath but afraid to officially complain due to fear of losing their benefits. Sinn Féin is fully supportive of local employment schemes and other initiatives that help long-term unemployed. I have previously worked in delivering back to work enterprise schemes, so I know the supports and services that are necessary to enable people to avail of opportunities and to fulfil their potential. I have seen the lives of certain individuals changed forever after receiving the correct supports, services and opportunities. I approach the issue of JobPath from a genuine position of support for many other schemes and services that enable people and provide them with a pathway to employment and enterprise. I and my colleagues in Sinn Féin care about people getting back to work in a way that is sustainable and which benefits the local community as much as possible.

I know from the answer to a parliamentary question from my party colleague that the Minister has read the JobPath Exposed report. She states that it is merely anecdotal and that she is satisfied that the results of the internal JobPath satisfaction survey are an accurate reflection. I wish it was. Does the Minister really think that we would give up our Private Members' business time in the Seanad if we did not have evidence to support our analysis? I am afraid that the report was prepared to fit into the narrative that the best decision was made at the time around JobPath. It is my firm belief that those who agreed to this contract, and indeed those who prepared the tender for the contract which excluded organisations and companies with a turnover of less than €20 million, now have to justify this decision. Many local and Irish companies were excluded from the scheme because of this. Perhaps the Minister of State could tell us who made the decision and why it was made. Was it a financial decision? Was a cost benefit analysis carried out?

When I worked in the area of delivering services and supports one of the main criteria from all Departments was the avoidance of duplication. Can the Minister of State explain why the Government thought it was necessary to privatise this service, displacing existing services and engaging British companies where there was no EU procurement or legal obligation to put such service out to tender? Why are participants on JobPath forced to bypass their local employment offices to go to appointments which are miles away and not accessible by public transport? I sent an example of this from Achill. We are constantly told that Ireland currently has full employment, but the Minister of State probably knows that in Achill the unemployment rate is 21%. It is not the case that we have full employment there. Participants in JobPath there are being asked to bypass the local employment service and travel 20 or 30 miles, in an area where there is no proper public transport, just to fulfil an appointment.

This motion seeks that JobPath will cease, and furthermore we want the scheme to be referred to the Committee for Public Accounts. We have not done this lightly. We have done it because we cannot get the answers that we need. We cannot get answers around the original contract. I do not accept that there is commercial sensitivity. We cannot hid behind commercial sensitivity where taxpayer's money is being paid to private companies.

Many people have told us about being referred to JobPath when they were not long-term employed. I understand it was within the remit of JobPath that people had to be long-term unemployed. One person said he or she had been referred to JobPath having been out of work for just 26 days. Many referrals were of individuals who had one or two part-time jobs and young teachers who had recently qualified and were under pressure to find positions within weeks of finding out they had qualified. Many newly qualified teachers who cannot find work immediately or need to stay at home rely on substitute work for a few months. One respondent complained that substitute teachers were on call and, therefore, there were weeks when they were working full time. A teacher questioned how they were supposed to hold down two jobs and keep two employers happy while also attending JobPath. All of these cases point to one thing - that JobPath is causing serious problems for individuals. All of the individuals concerned are not long-term unemployed. Many of them want to access community employment, Tús and rural social schemes in their own areas. Those running these schemes want participants and this is what suits them, yet they are barred from such participation and told they have to participate in the JobPath programme. When they engage with it, they are almost owned for 12 months and told what to do and where to go, even in situations where it does not suit them. People with mental health difficulties and many vulnerabilities are forced into these positions, which leads me to believe they are revenue generators for a private company. It is not right and it is having a devastating effect on individuals and the schemes being provided.

I ask the Minister of State to clarify what the budget for the local employment service is in 2017 and was in 2016. I know from the answers to questions we put to the Taoiseach when he was Minister that he estimated that JobPath would cost €65 million in 2017. Over the lifetime of the contract which seems to be top secret, we estimate that it will cost in the region of €350 million. That is a significant amount of money to pay to a private company.

Why is Intreo not referring people to support services already being provided by the State? Why are people being referred directly to JobPath? Is it to make up the numbers? How many people has the State guaranteed to send to JobPath on a yearly basis? What will happen if the number of referrals required is not sent? Given the information vacuum, we can only suppose that there are some clauses in the contract which state a certain number of people have to be referred. If this number is not referred, there must be penalty clauses. Many questions need

to be asked and I hope the Minister of State will have the answer to some of them. If we had received answers to them, we could have conducted an analysis of the information and there might not have been a need for a referral to the Committee of Public Accounts. In the absence of full information, however, that is the only road left open to us, unless we can get a guarantee from the Minister of State that JobPath will be closed. I look forward to the Minister of State's response.

Acting Chairman (Senator Ned O'Sullivan): I welcome the Minister of State.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Ba mhaith liom tacú agus cuidiú leis an rún seo. Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire Stáit. I second the motion.

For some, JobPath looks just like another job activation scheme which is aimed at getting jobseekers back to work and which runs alongside other schemes such as the LES, the community employment scheme, Tús, the rural social scheme and Gateway. However, the manner in which it was set up and operates makes it unique. Any scheme which engages over 105,000 people is one that must be closely monitored. As no two jobseekers are the same, a one-size-fits-all scheme such as JobPath is entirely inadequate.

Even if we set aside all of the issues explained by JobPath participants and the devastating impact JobPath is having on the sustainability of other schemes, privatisation remains our fundamental concern. The secrecy, lack of transparency and commercial sensitivity surrounding JobPath raise two questions. How much taxpayers' money is being handed to these private companies? What jobs are being sought for jobseekers? The same issues have been highlighted repeatedly by JobPath participants. I commend the report compiled by my colleagues, Deputies John Brady and Denise Mitchell, in that regard. There are six issues of concern highlighted in the report: the referral of jobseekers to JobPath; the threat of the loss of the jobseeker's payment; the training opportunities for jobseekers with JobPath; the level of training of personal advisers dealing with jobseekers; transport, travel times and the cost of attending meetings; and movement to other schemes. The Department of Social Protection prioritised JobPath as the go-to scheme for jobseekers, above all other readily available schemes.

Those involved in other job activation schemes such as the community employment scheme and the Local Employment Service have described JobPath as the greatest threat to their sustainability, an issue which has been raised with me by community employment scheme supervisors across County Galway. I have raised the issue in the House on a number of occasions. JobPath seems to magically get a list of people coming onto the live register before anyone else can have access to it. By the time other scheme organisers look for participants, they have been snapped up by JobPath. Community employment schemes are struggling to fill places across the State. Every Local Employment Service office in the State, with the exception of one, saw a reduction in the number of referrals from the Department of Social Protection in 2016. Despite these realities, the Minister apparently insisted that neither scheme was suffering as a result of the emergence of JobPath.

I would like to focus on the way the company does its business, based on the personal experience of some of those employed as advisers with JobPath. In the development of the report we were told that virtually no initial training was provided for new personal adviser recruits and that staff turnover was exceptionally high. We were also told that new staff would sit with a personal adviser for two days to learn the ropes and would then be assigned their own jobseekers.

On the referral of jobseekers to Turas Nua, staff were led to believe selection for JobPath was random, but they had reason to believe it was at the discretion of Department of Social Protection case officers. Individuals were sometimes referred to JobPath as punishment because case officers did not like them or found them difficult to deal with. It was stated the invitation to attend JobPath was more of a threat to jobseekers than anything else. We were told that it appeared there was no proper screening of the individuals being referred. We were also told that individuals who had been unemployed for a very short period were referred to JobPath. When the former Minister, Deputy Joan Burton, launched this wonderful scheme, she told us that it would not replace but augment the Department's employment services and focus on the long-term unemployed.

A significant issue is that many applicants travel quite a distance to attend meetings which only last about 15 minutes. A woman in her 60s living in the Carna area in Connemara was told that she had to travel to Carraroe to attend a meeting with JobPath, only to be told that there was no public transport service that could bring her there and back on the same day. She was given leave not to attend the meeting. However, the following week her sister received a similar invitation from JobPath, even though she lived in the same house and was in virtually the same circumstances.

On the JobPath contract to be signed by jobseekers, we were told that significant emphasis was placed on ensuring clients signed JobPath contracts at the first meeting. An employee stated, "We were basically told not to let those people out of the building without signing a contract." In one instance an assessor witnessed a client who had refused to sign being called into a private room with a manager who sat with the person concerned for over an hour until he signed the contract. We are told that very few left without signing a personal progression plan.

With regard to data protection, at least one case was witnessed where staff were directed to delete emails and files on a client. We were told that the client had raised issues with the then Department of Social Protection and had written to the then Minister, Deputy Varadkar, about her personal data in the possession of Turas Nua. When management in the office was informed of this it had all data referencing this individual removed.

As regards the questionnaire to be completed by jobseekers at initial meetings we were told that the 90 questions are very personal and confidential: "Some of these questions are highly personal, and shouldn't be asked. They dealt with things like mental state, financial situation and general health. If a garda asked me I wouldn't answer them." With regard to travelling to appointments we were told: "Travel reimbursement was not always offered to customers, some of whom might have been able to afford their bus or train ticket, but it was supposed to be paid to every customer who attended appointments on submission of their travel ticket for scanning."

We were told that the pressure on JobPath's personal advisers is immense and more focus is placed on administration work than on dealing with clients. They likened it to working in telephone sales. They said pressure was placed on staff to reach a quota of meetings per week with 100 to 120 clients. Some of them believe there was no value in the clients attending the scheme. In some cases we are told that in order to reach the quota of clients per week, advisers would often organise a group of clients to come in and sit at a computer bank applying for jobs. I was also told that on more than one occasion individuals with very poor literacy skills were witnessed being handed leaflets and told to read them. Older people with no computer skills and who previously worked in manual labour or transport jobs were put in front of computers with little to no help. We were told that Turas Nua is constantly recruiting because it cannot

retain staff for more than a few months as “anybody with an ounce of dignity, self-respect or a brain won’t stay”.

Who is involved in Seetec and Turas Nua? Recently, one of the companies operating this job activation programme has been accused in the Dáil of fraud. We are told that Seetec Limited fraudulently claimed that it had got a participant a job. It forced a man to sign documents confirming he was present at sessions he did not attend as otherwise he would not have been paid. Consider the parent companies of the two companies from England that are running these schemes. One of them is accused of engaging in systemic fraud by its former chief auditor. According to a newspaper article, in evidence given to the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts the firm’s former head of internal audit, Eddie Hutchinson, claimed that “fraud and irregularity became so extensive and disruptive to the work of the internal audit team ... that by May 2008 ... both [auditors were] suffering from exhaustion and stress due to the immense physical demands being placed on us as we chased such incidents at many locations across England, Scotland and Wales”. There is also another company where the CEO had to step down due to questions.

I agree that the Committee of Public Accounts should be allowed to investigate these contracts, how they are working, what money is being spent, how it is being spent and the track record of these companies. What due diligence was carried out when these contracts were given? We seriously oppose this privatisation. I am disappointed that Fianna Fáil in its amendment appears to fully endorse the privatisation of these services. It is a very retrograde step.

Senator Ray Butler: I move amendment No. 2:

To delete all words after “That Seanad Éireann:” and substitute:

“recognises:

- the significant progress made by this Government in reducing the number of people on the live register through its management of the economy over the past number of years;

- the achievements of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in moving from a passive income provider of social welfare supports for working age people to an organisation that is now focused on helping unemployed people find work;

- the use of contracted service providers such as local employment services, Job-Club providers and JobPath service providers alongside its own Intreo service has enabled the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to reduce the ratio of jobseekers to case officers from over 2,000:1 to about 200:1 and to increase the number of jobseekers who have access to case officer support;

- that the JobPath service providers are focused on delivering an intensive activation service tailored to the needs of long-term unemployed jobseekers;

- that JobPath service providers are required under contract to offer jobseekers a customer service guarantee covering matters such as the allocation of a dedicated case officer, frequency of engagement with case-officers, access to training in CV, interview and other skills, a transparent complaints process and post-employment

support for a period of at least three months and up to 12 months following commencement of employment;

- that jobseeker satisfaction with the service offered by JobPath providers, as measured in independent customer satisfaction surveys, is high and that employment outcomes are ahead of target with people using the service up to 34% more likely to secure employment than people who are not engaged with the service;

- that the JobPath service contracts were awarded following a competitive public procurement exercise and that the service period for these contracts extends to 2020;

- that to publish the detail of the individual fees secured under this public tender process would place the State at a disadvantage in any future procurement exercise;

- that funding and staffing levels for local employment services have been maintained and that the availability of JobPath has enabled the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to reduce the caseloads carried by the local employment service so that it too can provide a more intensive service to individual jobseekers;

- that cancellation or suspension of the service would immediately result in a significant diminution in case officer services to unemployed jobseekers, the loss of up to 700 jobs among JobPath service provider staff and, in the absence of due cause warranting such a cancellation prior to 2020, could create a significant financial exposure for the State; and

welcomes the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection's commitment to continue the JobPath service and to commission a full econometric evaluation of the service later this year."

The State's public employment service is managed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and is delivered directly by the Department's Intreo service as well as by contracted private companies such as JobPath, local employment services and job club providers. The Department has contracts in place with more than 60 companies for the provision of these services. These include two contracts with JobPath service providers Turas Nua and Seetec.

JobPath provides activation services specifically tailored to the needs of long-term unemployed people. JobPath is a new contract model whereby the providers are paid by the results, with the results being measured in terms of sustained employment outcomes for the jobseekers. Outcome supplement payments are made in respect of employment of a minimum of 30 hours per week sustained for a minimum period of up to 13 weeks. Up to four outcome payments in respect of each employment outcome can be made covering a period of 12 months.

The first referrals to JobPath service providers commenced in 2015 and the contract term runs until 2021. The purpose of JobPath is to complete and augment the existing service capacity of the Department, including the local employment services. There has been no reduction in the budget allocated to the local employment services. As part of the contract terms, JobPath providers are required to offer a minimum service guarantee to jobseekers covering matters such as the allocation of a dedicated case officer, frequency of engagement with case officers, access to training in curriculum vitae, CV, interview and other skills, a transparent process and

funding for out-of-pocket job search expenses and post-employment support for a period of at least three months and up to 12 months following commencement of employment. To date, over 125,000 long-term unemployed persons have been referred to the service.

The overall response to JobPath has been positive and there have been very few complaints raised to date relative to the number of clients referred to the service. The total number of complaints is 389 or 0.31% of those who have participated. In January 2017, the Department published the results of an independent customer satisfaction survey which indicated that between 76% and 81% of customers were satisfied with the service provided. Only between 5% and 8% expressed dissatisfaction. Over 90% of customers reported that JobPath staff made them feel valued and that they had a good relationship with their JobPath adviser. They also felt that the service had improved their chances of getting a real job. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection publishes quarterly cohort performance reports on JobPath. The most recent report shows that people who availed of the service were up to 34% more likely to find a job than those who did not avail of it.

Sinn Féin recently published a report entitled, *JobPath Exposed*. The report, based on responses to a Facebook survey, is essentially a collection of negative, unproven anecdotes from people who claim to have participated in the service, some local employment service staff and one person who claims to have worked for one of the JobPath service providers. The theme of the motion that has been proposed reflects the allegations in the report and the matter was addressed recently by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection in reply to an oral parliamentary question on Tuesday, 7 November last. No evidence has been presented to support the claims made and the claims are at odds with the independent customer survey, reported employment outcomes and a few complaints received by the Department.

The cancellation or suspension of the service would immediately result in a significant undermining of case officer services to the unemployed jobseekers, the loss of up to 700 jobs among JobPath service provider staff and the absence of due cause warranting such a cancellation prior to 2020 could create a significant financial exposure for the State.

Senator Catherine Ardagh: I would like to speak to Fianna Fáil's amendment to this motion. Fianna Fáil will table an amendment to the Sinn Féin motion on JobPath. Our party is, of course, in favour of measures that support people in getting back into employment, and we recognise that employment support schemes have in many respects made positive contributions to thousands of people, assisting them in moving from social welfare into paid employment. However, Fianna Fáil is acutely aware that JobPath is not perfect, and that a number of criticisms have been levelled at the initiative. Unlike Sinn Féin's motion, which offers no solutions other than suspending any further referrals to the scheme, our amendment offers a pathway forward for improving JobPath. We are calling on the Government to ensure that JobPath is operating in the best interests of participants; that it is a route to good quality, sustainable employment; that sufficient mechanisms are in place to deal with complaints in order that participants may have the appropriate action taken where necessary; that those tasked with delivering JobPath are adequately trained to deal sensitively and appropriately with those who are long-term unemployed; that JobPath does not prevent people from participating in community employment, CE, schemes; and that JobPath is not draining those schemes of participants.

Our goal is full employment, but at the heart of any activation programme must be the individual and his or her needs. We believe that the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, should comprehensively address concerns that have been

raised by Sinn Féin today, and ensure that first and foremost, JobPath is delivering for those it is supposed to serve.

We know the background to JobPath, so I do not think we need to go into that today. Obviously, some of the concerns around to JobPath, as raised by my colleague, concern private contracting for employment services. Fianna Fáil is aware of a number of concerns that have been raised by the contracting of two private companies, namely, Turas Nua and Seetec, to deliver services on behalf of the State. For that reason, in our amendment we have called on the Government to put in place safeguards that will ensure that those participating in JobPath are offered suitable and appropriate employment; to conduct a review of the type, quality and sustainability of employment that people have entered into after participating in JobPath; to ensure that sufficient mechanisms are in place for participants who may wish to make a complaint or raise concerns about JobPath and the two companies tasked with delivering the service; to ensure that any complaints against the two companies tasked with delivering JobPath are properly investigated, and that appropriate action is taken where necessary to rectify any issues identified; and to ensure that those tasked with delivering JobPath are adequately trained and properly equipped to deal sensitively with the myriad of issues that may result in an individual being long-term unemployed.

We are mindful that JobPath is a payment-by-results model, and this may create conditions where jobseekers are pushed into jobs that are wholly inappropriate as it is in the company's financial interests to place these jobseekers in these jobs. It is imperative that JobPath places people in good quality sustainable employment that is suitable and appropriate for their needs, and Fianna Fáil does not support any initiative which coerces participants into unsuitable employment, or is punitive in its approach to dealing with people.

People who are long-term unemployed or who are at risk of becoming unemployed may for a variety of reasons have difficulty entering the workforce. Factors may include family breakdown, alcohol or substance misuse, health issues including mental health, and literacy problems, etc. It is imperative that these companies are trained to deal with such issues and treat jobseekers in an appropriate manner. We need more scrutiny of these companies and of the move towards privatisation of Irish employment services. The success models clearly depend on the mechanism in place for monitoring quality and performance. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection needs to continuously engage with all stakeholders involved in activation in order to improve it. It is, therefore, important that the Minister listens to the experience of service users, and takes on board any criticisms of this programme. The Department cannot afford to repeat the mistakes associated with JobBridge. We need to ensure effective outcomes for jobseekers and for the State resources. While Fianna Fáil supports meaningful activation programmes and recognises the many benefits associated with employment and working, we do not support coercion or measures that place unrealistic and punitive demands on participants.

Another issue raised by my colleague concerns participants not being able to access CE schemes, as JobPath takes precedence. Those who are offered the JobPath procedure can no longer participate in CE schemes. For that reason, Fianna Fáil has tabled the following amendment calling for the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to review the impact that JobPath is having on other employment support schemes and CE schemes, in particular with a view to ensuring that those who wish to continue to participate on CE schemes are able to do so, and also to ensure that JobPath is not draining the CE schemes of participants. We also call for an appropriate assessment to be carried out at the time of entry to JobPath or

shortly afterwards, in the form of a probationary period, to ascertain whether the individual is best suited to the proposed programme, or whether further engagement and participation in a CE scheme would be more beneficial.

Fianna Fáil representatives from across the country have received complaints from people who have been offered a place on a CE scheme, but are then subsequently referred to JobPath, and must participate in that rather than take up a place in the CE scheme. Many of those people who have contacted their public representatives would prefer a place on the CE scheme. In many instances, a CE scheme would be more appropriate and suitable to their needs.

Furthermore, it has also been claimed that JobPath is eroding CE schemes to the detriment of communities and those who benefit from vital services that CE schemes provide. It has been reported that CE schemes cannot fill vacancies because of JobPath. In December 2016, the manager of the Offaly Centre for Independent Living claimed in a presentation that JobPath is causing untold damage to existing community employment schemes. At the meeting, it was claimed that many CE schemes have vacancies which they cannot fill, and JobPath is being blamed for suffocating them of supply by removing a referral process and imposing even more stringent constraints on the eligibility criteria.

CE schemes have grown to develop great social and economic benefits, and we must be mindful of the impact that JobPath is having on them. While the goal is, of course, to move the majority of people into full-time sustainable employment, we need to be cognisant that a one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable for everybody. There needs to be a degree of flexibility from the activation system and an awareness of people's age, skill set, previous experience, needs and goals. The social welfare system should not completely remove a person's right to choose, and should be flexible enough to allow people, if they have the choice, to choose between a CE scheme or JobPath. Fianna Fáil's amendment seeks to comprehensively address the concerns that have been raised about the impact that JobPath is having on those who wish to participate in the CE schemes and on the schemes themselves.

We welcome the fall in unemployment, but we are cognisant that the recovery has still not reached all sections of society, and many people continue to live in the margins of our society. Employment support schemes are important, and in many instances are of benefit to the State and to those who use such services. We must recognise that for some individuals there are multiple barriers that prevent them from entering into employment. Employment schemes must be holistic in their approach, and must be centred on the individual. The use of private for-profit companies to provide state services must be carefully monitored, examined and subject to scrutiny. I agree with my colleagues who made this point. It is important that the State continues to provide services to its citizens, and does not outsource all services to companies operating for profit and not necessarily in the best interests of citizens.

The Government has a duty to ensure that the companies operating JobPath are doing so in a manner that puts participants first, and which treats its participants with dignity and respect. The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection cannot and should not turn a blind eye to any issue raised by anyone in the House on this initiative. It is imperative that she takes on board the outcome of today's debate, and enacts changes where necessary and without delay.

Senator Maria Byrne: I second the amendment proposed by Senator Butler. I welcome the Minister of State and thank her very much for her attendance today. This is a very important issue. In my experience of dealing with people that have come through the JobPath system, the

majority have found it to be a very positive experience. The difference between JobPath and the CE scheme is that the CE scheme is intended more for people who want to work part-time, whereas JobPath is about supporting people and putting them back into full-time employment. Maybe some people do not realise the difference between the two. JobPath has been quite successful in putting people back into full-time employment. The fact that participants are also supported for up to 30 months is quite positive because I know a number of people who have been sent on courses. They did not have the confidence to go back to work, or they were not confident about the job they were applying for. The courses and the support put in place through JobPath have made for a very positive experience for some of these people. It has led to them going into full-time employment. People may not have worked for a number of years or been through the interview process. There is also a support system in place where a person's CV can be checked and enhanced. People can also be upskilled and trained, which is very important as it gives confidence to people to re-apply and go for jobs.

The CE schemes are great and work in a lot of communities. For people who want full-time employment the JobPath scheme has proved a very positive experience. A number of companies have been very involved in the scheme. The companies have been forthright and forthcoming in offering people jobs once they have been trained and upskilled.

The number of unemployed has decreased and the situation has been helped by the likes of these schemes. I know about Turas Nua and the PAUL Partnership in the Limerick area that have been around for a long time. I wish to pay tribute to them. They were originally set up to deal with CE schemes but they now have many strings to their bow. They deal with people who have been long-term unemployed and put supports and services in place to bring people back into employment.

Overall, I think JobPath has been positive. The scheme has helped people to get into full-time employment. The upskilling and training have been a real success, which should be built on. Once people are in employment, they need support and an ability to upskill and train is positive. The Department should consider these aspects in the long term.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: I welcome the Minister of State to the House. I thank the proposer of the motion and the proposer of the amendment.

There are certain things with which we can all agree. For example, the idea that it is important people are given supports to access appropriate routes out of unemployment, be that education, training or employment and that there is a need to give people a range of skills and options in terms of courses. However, we must ask a few questions about JobPath. Is JobPath an appropriate tool? Is it adequate? How is the scheme operating? To be clear, everybody who is here is concerned about ensuring that the State does more to support people and give them options. The problem is that JobPath does not seem to be properly designed and fit for purpose in order to achieve that goal.

Much of what I want to say is in the form of questions for the Minister. Much as I am very happy to have the Minister of State here, I regret that the Minister for Enterprise and Social Protection is not here to answer questions directly. We will follow up on this matter because it will be considered by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection.

I support the Sinn Féin motion because it has very positive points. However, there are some valid and constructive points in the amendment tabled by Fianna Fáil. As I have said before

on occasion, I hope that in future we move to a situation whereby amendments to motions are tabled rather than replacements of motions and that we have a little more co-operation across the House to ensure we get changes. I would like to be here today speaking in favour of a combination of the elements mentioned. What is very strong and important in the Sinn Féin motion is that it rightfully asks the questions that need to be asked about the privatisation of a public service. What I think is very strong in Fianna Fáil's amendment, and also in Senator Ardagh's speech that was good and strong, was the emphasis placed on a need for choice, and principle of choice, in terms of what is offered to people. I refer to the respect and dignity that must be shown to people who access services. I also wish to refer to the specific reviews on specific aspects of JobPath that have been called for in the amendment. These are strong points in both the motion and the amendment. I hope that we can work with everyone to bring these forward in meetings of the committee.

I wish to diffuse the situation. Let us remember that this is a non-binding motion and, therefore, we will not see 70,000 suddenly become unemployed. We will see a strong alarm signal being emitted in respect of JobPath and how it operates that the Government would be wise to listen to. As was said earlier, alarm bells were sounded in respect of JobBridge and how it operated. There was also information from the ground as to its problems and anomalies. As a result the scheme ended up being discontinued altogether. It behoves the Government to listen to the concerns that have been expressed and I urge it not to adopt a defensive mode. Again, surveys were used to justify JobBridge. Unfortunately, there were abuses and anomalies and it is important to listen to them.

I have questions that need to be answered by the Government. I remember when the tender for JobPath was first proposed because I attended the Social Inclusion Forum as a representative of an NGO in civil society. At the time we queried the tendering out of these services to private companies. We were told that it was necessary as we moved into a new era of public procurement in Europe. In fact, European public procurement rules, including the new rules that were introduced in 2015, give considerable scope to Governments to protect the public delivery specifically of social protection services. They do that for good reason. They do it so that governments can ensure the accountability of their social protection services. If we discover that JobPath fails, what policies and strategies are in place? Does the Government have the capacity to move away from the privatisation of the service and return it to public delivery?

We need more case workers but JobPath was proposed at a time when there was a public recruitment freeze. We no longer have a freeze on public recruitment so why not have more case workers who are accountable. This aspect is important because, as we have heard, when there is a private company involved and one has someone who works for a private company then in the end he or she is not simply and not directly a public servant. The person seeking assistance is not necessarily the key and only main client for the JobPath individual. The person performing the interview is answerable to a company that has shareholders and profit targets that must be met. The companies are answerable to a contractor. In many cases there is also inattention because of instances where they are answerable or seeking, as a key relationship, the companies that they may regularly send large volumes of people to.

There are questions about where the focus of case workers lies. I am saying this again not to identify any of the individuals, and I am sure there are many committed individuals who work for JobPath. I wish to say that there is a concern when there is a privatised service. We have seen what incentive schemes have done in other countries. We have seen the very serious concerns about fraud in the UK because people try to hit targets and figures rather than simply

working to secure not only an outcome but the best outcome for the individual who the person is supporting as a case worker.

There is also a question about the percentage and weighting that exists in the giving of contracts to Seetec and Turas Nua. I refer to the training, the training level and ongoing training of such staff and front-line case workers.

Acting Chairman (Senator Ned O'Sullivan): The Senator has one minute left.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: I have not said a fraction of what I want to say.

We have a serious concern about how JobPath was set up and we have serious concerns about how it has been rolled out. As I have only one minute left I will focus on one of my key areas of concern but I will raise all of them again and at meetings of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection. I am seriously concerned about the personal progression plans that are being pushed forward at present. I understand that people are being asked to sign personal progression plans that include them being asked to surrender inappropriate data. They are asked to make a contract with a private company in which they give information about their spouses and about their children, which should not concern that company because it does not concern their access to employment; it only concerns their entitlement to payments. They are also asked to say that they will inform that company of any other job they get externally. Why is that necessary? If somebody has decided that they have found employment separately, he or she should be able to leave the service. They should not be required to pass information in respect of an employer which they have sourced independently to a private company. We have heard of very serious concerns in terms of how Turas Nua and Seetec have contacted employers and impressed them in fact-----

Acting Chairman (Senator Ned O'Sullivan): The Senator is over time.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: The missing piece in this is the local employment services which provide the kind of holistic wraparound services and supports which we saw in the youth guarantee. That is able to give the big picture of supports. I am very concerned that local employment services are not an option for people. I am concerned that none of the motions tonight talk about education as an option for unemployed people because that is a crucial option that does need to be a choice on the table.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Ned O'Sullivan): I call on Senator Devine who has eight minutes.

Senator Máire Devine: Many of the problems have been identified by my colleagues and are also seen in the area of Dublin South Central which the Minister knows well. I refer to the problems of inadequate training, the threats of the loss of jobseeker payment, lack of real opportunities and the waste of public money going to private companies.

I want to raise a point in regard to small and medium-sized businesses. I know that many small business owners are being inundated with CVs from JobPath centres with some reaching unmanageable levels of 200 a day. They state that not only is this method of job searching wholly inadequate for finding suitable candidates but it puts undue administrative stress on ordinary small businesses who end up at a loss to find the right candidate for the post. It is a tsunami of CVs sent out so another box is ticked. It also means that capable and suitable candidates for the posts will be lost in the pile of unsuitable CVs and applications. This is extremely

frustrating for all involved, except for the profit-making Turas Nua and Seetec of course.

My consistent message is that we need to foster and empower our communities. The privatisation of assisting jobseekers has gutted the community of this task and I can see that we have lost the spirit of looking out for one another. Those involved in job activation schemes like the community employment and the local employment services have described JobPath as the greatest threat to their stability. They cannot fill places as they do not have the people to do so. The Minister insists that neither scheme is suffering but that is blatantly misleading I believe.

Senator Butler dismissed the method of research with the use of Facebook and Twitter. However, I need to let the Senator know that was precluded by face to face interviews with stakeholders including employees and personal advisers who had left Turas Nua. There is an attempt to skew the figures with 5% to 8% dissatisfaction reported with JobPath. That is very low. I find that really surprising. There are reasons if one peels back those layers. Most people do not know how to make a complaint. It is made deliberately difficult and the information is kept from people and they are not clear on how to complain. They do not know the process or procedure. If they did know the process and procedure which we are trying to expose and if people were comprehensively informed I imagine that the figures would skyrocket as we found in our face to face interviews with people. This is a bad policy. I had hoped that this House would support our position this evening but that is doubtful given the two amendments by the Government and their buddies in Fianna Fáil.

Acting Chairman (Senator Ned O'Sullivan): I call on Senator Paul Daly who has eight minutes.

Senator Paul Daly: I welcome the Minister here this evening. I will be brief. I am not going to rehash what has already been said. It is quite obvious from all sides that there are issues with the JobPath scheme. They have been identified and highlighted. From a personal point of view what I came across first, and which has been mentioned, is that one becomes ineligible for a CE scheme if one happens to be referred to JobPath. That is having a detrimental effect in rural areas and within rural communities, voluntary committees, Tidy Towns, social clubs and sporting clubs. They are unable to recruit and are losing very good recruits they had working for them because of the inadequacy in the scheme where if one is on one scheme one cannot qualify for the other.

I will be seconding the Fianna Fail amendments. While I do agree with much of what is in the Sinn Féin motion, there is a sense though of I will not say knee-jerk reactions but throwing the baby out with the bath water. Just suspending is not good enough for the people who have not been mentioned or have been mentioned very little this evening. We have all highlighted and concentrated on the negative. However, there are a lot of very good positive success stories related to JobPath. There are many people in employment today who possibly would not have been and they would say they had a very good experience with the scheme. I think just suspending because there is a problem is not the answer.

Therefore I will second our amendments which look at the scheme in a more constructive manner and propose tweaks and changes. Our amendments highlight a correct and proper complaints procedure for participants which I think is lacking in the scheme. It has been mentioned by previous speakers. Some people, because they are long-term unemployed and have the needs that the scheme is there to provide, would be afraid that by complaining they would be in danger of losing benefits, of losing status or losing the possibility of the job that they were

going to get. It is an important part of our amendments that there would be a correct complaints procedure for the recipients of the scheme.

It is also vitally important that we have a close look and monitor the whole delivery process where it is a payment by results model. Incentive payment is a very good model within the private sector to maximise productivity or output from employees. However, we are referring here to productivity which is dealing with the lives of people. People may get a job that is not suitable to them yet through circumstances they must stay in it. That is psychologically detrimental. We have somebody who is going to get paid because a person takes that job, so questions do have to be asked about the procedures that would be used and the suitability of the client that ends up in the job. It is a model that works very well in productive situations in private enterprise but I would have serious reservations about its use where people's lives and futures are at stake and somebody potentially gets a reward by placing people.

One size does not fit all. The scheme has had its positives but there are major problems. The reason we have tabled our amendment is that a knee-jerk reaction of just suspending now because there are problems would be detrimental for people who are in situ and are still depending on their personal advisers. Our amendments look at the faults in the scheme and also suggest solutions to those problems.

Acting Chairman (Senator Ned O'Sullivan): I call on Senator Feighan who has eight minutes.

Senator Frank Feighan: It is very encouraging that we are not losing sight of what has happened in the past seven years. Unemployment, at 6%, is now at its lowest rate in seven years and every region is expecting a boost in the number of people back at work. We see it in Dublin where traffic has increased and hopefully in rural towns as well. I have noticed an increase but we need to do a little more.

Some 225,000 more people are at work since the launch of the Government's Action Plan for Jobs five years ago. As we are all aware, the main challenge is to address the needs of the long-term unemployed. That is what JobPath is all about. It is a service aimed at assisting long-term unemployed persons to find secure jobs.

Reference was made to ensuring the outcomes were suitable for the person concerned. The Department was as careful as it could be in designing the JobPath service to ensure payments to contractors were conditional on people not simply finding a job but sustainable employment. In addition, the Department has built in controls for the service. For example, should one of the companies fall below the standards expected by the Department in terms of performance, customer satisfaction or quality of service delivery, it can retain the fees due to the company. How many companies have fallen foul of this requirement?

Sinn Féin is right to raise this issue on the floor of the House because some have questioned the feasibility and suitability of JobPath. However, whereas I do not believe it is as bad as those in Sinn Féin have made out, it is no harm to have a medical check on JobPath to ensure what was to be delivered is being delivered. The Department conducts audits and inspections and monitors customer satisfaction and the performance of companies on an ongoing basis. Retention of fees which can reduce the level of payments to contractors applies if contractors fail to meet contractual performance commitments or if they do not deliver a satisfactory level of customer service, as measured by the Department using independent customer surveys.

All of this highlights an important point. JobPath is a payment by results model and all costs are borne by the companies. I understand regular on-site checks and inspections to monitor compliance, some of which are unannounced, are carried out to ensure JobPath is being delivered in accordance with the terms of the contract. Inspectors monitor compliance with the service level agreement and the contract generally. It includes monitoring the suitability and standard of accommodation; staffing levels; Irish language compliance; customer service and customer feedback; checking clients' personal progression plans; and review meetings compliance. All of the evidence available to the Government thus far indicates that the reaction to JobPath and the jobseeker schemes continues to be positive in the context of the number of clients who have commenced using the service. The Minister of State said that, as of the end of last October, some 129,418 clients had commenced with the service and that 412 complaints had been made. The complaints represent a small percentage, at 0.32%. If there are complaints, I urge people not to be slow in making them as the Department is relying on feedback. I am keen to know how many checks have been made by the Department since people have raised questions about unsuitability or highlighted difficulties. Much of it may be unnecessary, but the Department should go out of its way to ensure complaints are dealt with rigorously.

The Department commissioned a customer satisfaction survey to be carried out at the end of 2016. It was conducted on a representative sample of 2,000 JobPath clients, with 1,000 from each provider. The results indicated that up to 81% of jobseekers had taken the view that they were receiving a good service, while more than 90% had taken the view that the contractor staff made them feel valued. Up to 77% had taken the view that the service had improved their chances of finding a job. These percentages are high. I have no doubt that it is an independent and impartial survey, unless someone proves otherwise. To me, it seems to be independent and impartial. If it was not, I am sure there would be hell to pay. We can only go on the evidence we have and it is clear that most clients have an entirely positive outlook on JobPath. I understand a new client satisfaction survey is being undertaken.

In the broader context, it must be highlighted that we have witnessed the greatest drop in the level of long-term unemployment in the past 12 to 18 years. JobPath and other initiatives must be welcomed since they have contributed to this decrease. The Government is determined to continue to reduce the level of unemployment through measured policies.

We must create an environment in which business can succeed. I was in business. I employed 30 people in three or four businesses. It is not easy being an employer. Certainly, it has not been easy in the past seven years, during which most of these businesses, including retail businesses, have gone to the wall. They went to the wall because they were probably not fit for purpose, but it was brought on by the recession. Most of the business people I know lost everything in trying to save their businesses and the jobs of their employees. Senator Ray Butler has highlighted the fact that it is like keeping a small farm. The small farmer spent everything until it was all gone. I put in €800 a week for five years to save my business. The only reason it closed was that there was nothing left in the pot. If I had had €1 million, I could have kept it open for a further 20 years. That is mad, but, unfortunately, that was simply the way it was. This is a two-pronged approach. I come from a certain sector and with a vested interest. I was an employer. The vast majority of employers went out of their way to protect their employees because they were valued. Sometimes businesses went to the wall. That is what the recession did, but perhaps those businesses were not fit for purpose. The days of buying something, doubling it and customers paying for it will not recur. That is where Lidl, Aldi, Tesco and the various super-stores come in. That is what people are doing.

I compliment Sinn Féin on bringing the motion before the House. There are issues. I have heard many anecdotal stories which indicate that people are not happy with JobPath and this is the right Chamber in which to debate the matter. It is welcome that we can address these things in a manner that enables us to think of the people on the live register and also think of employers, for whom the scheme has also been of great benefit.

Senator Frances Black: I welcome the Minister of State to the Chamber. I commend the Sinn Féin Senators for raising this important issue in the House. I completely share their concerns about JobPath and similar schemes.

Recently I heard Deputy Catherine Murphy refer in Dáil Éireann to a concerning case of a man who had been treated terribly by Seetec, the private company contracted to run the scheme. He had some casual work, but he was always reliant on social welfare support. However, under threat of losing his payments, he was made to participate in a JobPath programme that was not suitable for him. He felt it was not linked with his skills and goals and that it actually made it impossible for him to keep his casual work. It meant that he lost it and then became fully reliant on social welfare payments. That is the opposite of what we should be achieving and shows how the system is sometimes unable to deal with specific complex cases. While participating in the scheme, the man in question was told not to accept an offer of external employment. Ultimately, when he took up an offer, he was asked to fill in forms linking it with his participation in JobPath. He said he had sought out Deputy Catherine Murphy as he felt a duty to highlight that this was happening. Throughout the process he was deeply concerned and felt he was being hounded to sign documents and follow directions under threat of sanctions.

I am deeply concerned that this is an example which highlights a broader trend whereby people feel trapped and disrespected and that they are being threatened with sanctions when they seek the State's help. I imagine many Senators and Deputies have seen the BAFTA award winning film "I, Daniel Blake". Anyone who has not seen it should go see it as it is a fantastic film. It tells the tragic story of what it is like to be at the sharp end of these schemes. It is horrible. When I was younger, I had some bad experiences when I separated from my husband. At the time I had two young children. Doors were closed at every turn. The process can have a major impact on a person's physical and mental health. We have to ensure we will not go down that road. People must always be treated with dignity, respect and compassion. I would hate to think people were being threatened with sanctions or made to feel lesser when they seek support. In general, I am fully supportive of schemes that can help people to find work or participate in education or training. With respect to the counter-motion tabled by Senator Jerry Buttimer, I know that many people have really benefited from these programmes when they met their specific needs and goals. This is something we should commend and build on. I believe, however, that, as legislators, we also need to call out the negative cases when we encounter them and reject a creeping trend of cruelty in the treatment of people seeking help. My Civil Engagement colleague, Senator John Dolan, has previously referred in this Chamber to the difficulties people with disabilities have had in job activation programmes such as JobPath. We need to make sure these cases are not forgotten.

That we are contracting out these schemes to private companies raises a serious risk of abuse. This is as true for JobPath as it is for direct provision centres and all of the other vital support services that are under the authority of the State but run by companies with a clear profit motive. I totally support the calls for transparency in that regard. The public have a right to know what their money is funding.

On the motion and the amendments tabled, I offer strong support on the concerns expressed by Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil Senators on this issue. We need to ensure transparency on the contract and in the conduct of this service, ensure proper funding for other employment support services and make sure further referrals to JobPath will be made only if the scheme is running as intended. Similarly, the focus on extensive review, safeguarding and complaints mechanisms in an alternative motion tabled by Fianna Fáil is important. I commend the Senators for raising these issues and offer them my full support.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I thank Senators for their contributions and expressing their concerns. I have taken some detailed notes. Unfortunately, the Minister cannot be here. Hence, I am in attendance. I will not be able to answer many of the questions asked, but the Minister has provided me with a statement which I will read. I hope it will address one or two of the issues raised.

As a human being and Minister of State, I believe any person who is unemployed should be treated with the greatest of respect and dignity by any individual or company when attending any service. I totally condemn any action by any service or individual that would make anybody feel he or she could not participate in any service. That is wrong. People should be treated with dignity and respect.

On an issue raised by Senator Frances Black, I was in the Chamber when Deputy Murphy referred to an individual who believed they were being unfairly treated. All I can tell the Senators is that the Deputy's office was contacted by the Minister's office about the allegations made. It asked that details be supplied in order that it could have a full investigation carried out. To date, the details have not been supplied to the Minister. I am making this point in case people believe matters are not followed up.

I am thankful to have the opportunity to attend on behalf of the Minister, Deputy Regina Doherty, to speak about her Department's activation policies and, in particular, the important role of the JobPath service. The JobPath service has made and is continuing to make a difference to those who have been unfortunate enough to find themselves in the position where they are long-term unemployed. The results are positive. The feedback from those who have participated in the initiative has been overwhelmingly positive. We all know that a small number of poor outcomes for participants can attract negative commentary. A young girl came to my office who had a difficulty with what she had been asked to do under the JobPath programme. I contacted the Minister and the office and believe the matter was dealt with substantially. I have only encountered one case, but I assure the House that independent reviews of outcomes of initiatives are very positive.

The JobPath service was designed to improve and complement the Department's existing employment service capacity, including that provided by the Intreo service, the Local Employment Service and the Jobs Clubs service. The additional capacity provided through the JobPath service has allowed the Department to provide services of the type and intensity required by jobseekers, particularly those distant from the labour market. The JobPath service is particularly tailored to meet the needs of the long-term unemployed. It was designed to address capacity issues within the Department's internal activation service which now caters mainly for the short-term unemployed.

For the purposes of the JobPath service, all long-term unemployed persons on the live register are categorised into groups based on their duration of unemployment, for example, one

to two years and two to three years. Selection by the Department of long-term unemployed persons for referral to the JobPath service is by means of stratified random sampling using groupings such as those I have mentioned. The objectives are to ensure equity in selection and that people referred to JobPath are representative of the long-term cohort on the live register. The Department refers each customer selected to the JobPath service for a period of 12 months.

There are two contractors delivering the JobPath service - Turas Nua and Seetec. Generally, Turas Nua provides services in the southern part of the State, while Seetec provides them in the northern part and Dublin. The contractors provide services from locations that are accessible to the customer by public or private motorised transport, with a normal journey time of no more than 60 minutes. Where such transport services are not provided, the Department will quickly engage with the JobPath provider to ensure they are, or that our clients are supported in gaining access to the service.

It is important that I set out how the JobPath providers engage with the clients referred by the Department and some detail on the level of service provided for each client. In this context, I remind the House that before the implementation of the JobPath service, long-term unemployed persons received very little support from the State's employment services. That is why the Government has focused considerably on putting resources in place to make sure all unemployed persons receive an employment activation service.

The JobPath service provider writes to each individual jobseeker referred to it by the Department, inviting him or her to attend an initial information session presented jointly by an official from the Department and a representative of the contractor. The initial letter or invitation includes a standard notification to the customer about the need to engage with the JobPath provider and the nature of the services that will be provided. The first engagement for referred customers is a joint information session hosted by departmental officials and the JobPath provider. In this session customers will be provided with information on customers' rights and responsibilities; the JobPath programme; the service provided by the contractor; and a copy of the service statement. After attending the information session, customers are given an appointment for their first one to one meeting with a personal adviser provided by the JobPath service provider. This meeting should take place as soon as possible after the information session. The date of the first one to one meeting is the start date of the 52-week engagement period on the programme. At the first meeting with the personal adviser, each customer receives a guaranteed baseline service and is assisted in developing his or her personal progression plan. The personal progression plan sets out the skills and competencies of the customer, identifies barriers to employment and helps the customer to identify his or her particular goals and interests in a return to employment.

With the JobPath service, jobseekers have access to a personal adviser who works with them in two phases. In the first phase of 12 months' duration the adviser provides practical assistance in searching, preparing for, securing and sustaining employment. The second phase starts if the jobseeker is successful in finding work. During this phase the personal adviser continues to work with the jobseeker to provide any support needed for a period of up to 12 months.

Senators will be aware that when the Department has referred a customer to the JobPath service, it requires that he or she engage appropriately with the service provider. The JobPath service provider is required to make every effort to encourage the customer to attend. Customers who do not attend or engage with the service can be referred back to the Department by the service provider. In such cases, the Department will consider all of the circumstances of

non-attendance and seek to facilitate the customer's engagement with the JobPath provider. I stress that any decision on entitlement or payment is made by officials of the Department alone, not by the staff of the JobPath provider. JobPath is a payment by results model and all costs are borne by the companies themselves. The payments made to a JobPath provider include an initial registration fee which is only paid on completion of a personal progression plan. Fees are only paid when a client obtains employment and sustains that employment. Sustainment fees are paid where clients sustain employment outcomes of 13, 26, 39 and 52 weeks duration. The gross cost of the service since July 2015 to the end of September 2017 is €71.2 million. The overall cost of the service will be determined by the number of people who engage with the service and the number of jobseekers who successfully sustain employment.

The Department publishes performance reports on JobPath, and should Senators wish to examine them in detail, they are available on the Department's website. The initial data on the impact of the service is encouraging, showing high satisfaction levels among clients of the service, and that people who engage with the service are more likely to secure employment than those who do not. The JobPath service was rolled out across the network of JobPath provider's offices over the period June 2015 to July 2016. The numbers referred initially were low but have increased, with over 125,000 customers having commenced with the service to date. Statistics on outcomes have been published on a quarterly basis this year, covering persons who commenced with service between the third quarter of 2015 and the first quarter of 2016. The next publication is due shortly and will include those who commenced with the service in quarter two of 2016. The latest published data indicates that full-time job starts under JobPath exceed the target rate of 36%. The results of an independent customer satisfaction survey undertaken earlier this year indicates that jobseekers feel that they are receiving a good service, and that JobPath has improved their chances of securing employment. The customer satisfaction survey indicates that jobseekers feel that they are receiving a good service under JobPath. Between 76% and 81% of customers were satisfied with the service provided and only between 5% and 8% of customers expressed dissatisfaction. Over 90% of customers reported that JobPath staff made them feel valued and that they have a good relationship with their JobPath adviser. They also felt that the JobPath service has improved their chances of getting a job. These are very important findings by the independent review carried out for the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Doherty, and her Department.

I note concerns regarding the operation of the contracts. I can assure the House that there is significant oversight of the operation of the contracts and the delivery of the service through a robust complaints process and a rigorous inspection regime. Where a client has a complaint or where he or she feels the service he or she has received is deficient in some way, each JobPath provider has a complaints process, which it is obliged to have in place and to which clients are directed to in the first instance. There have been only 400 complaints out of over 125,00 people who have engaged with the service. The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Doherty, does not agree with any suggestion that people are afraid to make complaints. In the Department the inspections regime monitors compliance with the service level agreement and the contract generally, including the suitability and standard of accommodation, staffing levels, Irish language compliance, customer service and customer feedback, checking the client's personal progression plan, review meetings compliance and payment issues. To date, 46 on-site inspections have been carried out at provider service delivery locations, nine of which were un-notified. It is intended that the Minister and her Department will commence a full review of the performance and delivery on the contracts commencing the end of this year.

I would like to speak to some of the points within the proposed amendment. In 2016 local employment services, LES, providers were asked to increase the frequency with which they engage with jobseekers to enhance the quality of the services they provide. To facilitate this more intensive engagement, caseloads were reduced in each LES company. For 2017 the Department has contracted 22 private contractors for the provision of LES in 26 locations. The funding for the LES is being maintained at existing levels. Prior to the introduction of Intreo and JobPath, the Department had a total of approximately 300 case officers, including LES, working with over 471,000 people when the live register was at its highest. This was an extraordinarily high ratio of clients to case officer, far in excess of what it should be. The Department has increased the number of case officers to approximately 1,250, including in Intreo and JobPath services. With the reduction in the unemployment rate from a peak of 15% in 2012 to 6% now the average caseload today is around 230 clients to one case officer. In order to maintain a more intensive level of service to the long-term unemployed the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is seeking to maintain LES and JobPath caseload ratios of between 100 to 125 clients to each case officer. This is in line with OECD caseload benchmarks for the long-term unemployed.

The impact of an increasing number of people at work and the continued reduction in live register are all factors in recruitment to work programmes. It is also important to note that the number of people on community employment, CE, fluctuates on an ongoing basis as vacancies arise and are filled on schemes. However, the numbers on CE schemes at the end of September this year are almost the same as they were in mid-2012. In recent months the Department has introduced changes to CE, including reducing the qualifying age from 25 to 21 with the purpose of broadening the availability of CE to a greater number of people on the live register.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection does not generally encourage moving from one activation service to another until each service has maximised the available benefit to the customer. In regard to having an assessment or probation period when a client is referred to JobPath, the House may wish to note that any client referred to JobPath has been long-term unemployed and as such they will have benefitted from the services of the Department's own internal activation service where they would have an opportunity to express an interest and if appropriate apply for a CE scheme during one on one sessions with a case officer. Clients referred to JobPath should have these opportunities available to them prior to their referral.

We are all to be encouraged by the improvement in our economy and that we are experiencing a jobs led recovery, a phenomenon that did not happen when we emerged from previous recessions. This is very welcome news for all of us, but particularly for those who are returning to work. We know that it is hardest for those who are long-term unemployed to return to the workforce for a variety of reasons, and JobPath is one of the targeted measures introduced by this Government to assist those returning to the workforce. The results are encouraging and exceeding expectations and we hope to see continued successful delivery of the service in conjunction with other activation and employment support measures, including the local employment services, the jobs clubs service and employment opportunities which follow from participation on community employment schemes. We have seen and heard a lot of negative, uninformed and unsubstantiated criticism of the JobPath service. This is a disservice to those who are benefitting from the JobPath service and it is insulting to those who are striving to deliver it. In all this criticism we have not heard any positive proposals on what alternative form of activation service should be delivered. I join the Minister of Employment Affairs and Social

Protection, Deputy Doherty, in welcoming constructive engagement on these matters and any proposals which we have heard this evening and which merit further consideration will be given just that. On behalf of the Minister, I thank the members again for the opportunity to speak and look forward to further discussion on the matter this evening.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Has the Minister of State seen the film, “I, Daniel Blake”?

Deputy Catherine Byrne: No.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: I would recommend that, at the earliest opportunity, the Minister of State watches this film. It will be the best two hours of her life, especially as a Minister of State who represents a working class community in Dublin. It is a film directed by the wonderful Ken Loach, who has done much for Irish history with some of the films he has made about our island. “I, Daniel Blake” is the story of one decent human being who is driven demented by a system that is heartless, that is results driven and that takes away the uniqueness and the humanity of the person, in this case a person who had worked all his life. To give away some of the film, he has a heart condition and can no longer engage in physical labour. They push him into all sorts of schemes and break him down, and take away his money and his supports. It is a vital film for people in government to watch, to remind themselves about their responsibility to be decent, to look after human beings and to understand that there but for the grace of God, go I. People who find themselves unemployed are supposed to have solidarity and assistance, not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Before I became an elected representative, I used to be an activist with the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, INOU, which is a superb organisation. What I learned from it was about solutions. It came up with the idea of the back to work allowance scheme and the enterprise allowance scheme, which have very good, solutions-oriented approaches. One of the things the INOU taught me, and which I thought it had taught the Government, was that a one-size-fits-all approach to people in unemployment does not work. A tailor-made approach is needed for each individual. They need to sit down with a human being - not the customer, but the human being who is in front of them - the person who deserves dignity, who is a citizen and who has often worked most of their life and paid taxes. They need to sit down with those people to look at their skills and abilities and try to find a job, or a CE scheme or Tús scheme, that suits the people and that serves society’s and their best interests.

That is not what this scheme is about. It has simply passed on from right-wing politicians to private companies the responsibility that should be the State’s. Of course, those private companies, like all private companies, are driven by profits, by results and by ticking the boxes to earn another contract down the line. That is entirely wrong. It is not the way to do social policy. Unfortunately, we see some - I want to be clear I mean “some” - of the people who work in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection the length and breadth of this State in the way they treat people who find themselves in unemployment, as I have found myself in my life, looking down their noses at them like they are dirt. It is not acceptable. I think there is a certain mentality in politics and in the Civil Service that sees those who are unemployed as people who have to go into a category which is then given to a private company - we could not possibly do this ourselves, but a private company can do our dirty work for us. That is what is happening here. Let us call it out for what it is.

The other issue is in regard to community employment schemes and Tús schemes. I, and

many others, have come across places in this State which are struggling to find participants because people are being forced into this approach. These CE and Tús schemes perform a vital role in our communities across the State. I will refer to County Donegal, which I know best, but this applies as well to all the other communities in the State. If it was not for the community organisations in my county, I do not know where we would be. We were economically devastated. CE and Tús schemes are a practical way of helping to deliver services to communities while upholding the dignity of the human beings who participate in those schemes.

I go back again to Daniel Blake. I ask the Minister of State and the former Minister who introduced this, Deputy Joan Burton, although I do not see any of her colleagues present, to watch “I, Daniel Blake” and to rediscover their humanity and decency. They should watch that movie and understand that it is our job in politics and in government to treat every single human being, every single citizen of this State, with dignity and with respect, and to find a solution to their problems. Let us not take that away. That is what this scheme does. It is right-wing, it is cold-hearted and it is totally unacceptable.

Senator Colm Burke: I work in an area where at one stage unemployment went from 40% up to 80%. I was elected in that area, where a lot of work has been done by community groups. I was involved in community groups for a long period, serving as chairperson of a local community association which was providing accommodation for over 41 different organisations. At the time, I was chair of the board of management and had 30 people employed under a community employment scheme, so I am very familiar with this whole area.

In regard to JobPath, of course there are cases where individuals have not been treated appropriately, but I think the number of cases where that has occurred is very small in real terms. The whole point of JobPath has been to help people, not just with finding jobs but in terms of retraining and reskilling. I was in the European Parliament in 2009 when Dell in Limerick closed. I was instrumental, working with Brian Crowley MEP, in meeting with the Commissioner to get the rules changed on how the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund would work. At the time, the rule was that the jobs had to be going outside Europe, whereas the jobs in Dell were going to Poland, and, therefore, Limerick did not qualify for funding. We got the rules changed in order to provide retraining.

This is what JobPath has done in regard to identifying the role of people who are unemployed. It was not just about finding jobs but also about providing the appropriate training to allow people to find work. The whole issue in regard to employment is that it changes. There was a time when a person could come out with a qualification for life, whatever the qualification was. Now, we find that people have to go back and retrain because the job they have been doing for the past ten years is no longer available. JobPath has been very successful in directing people to training programmes which are successful. The proof of this is that we have brought unemployment down from 15.1% to slightly over 6%, which is a huge achievement. The evidence is that the people who have gone into retraining have got the skills and this has entitled them to get employment. For example, one person I am very friendly with was involved in the building line whereas he is now involved in providing care in a medical facility. He loves the job because that is what he really wanted to do - he wanted to give a commitment to people. There are people out there who were unemployed who wanted to make a contribution and, whether through community employment or retraining to get back into full-time employment.

I agree with Senator Mac Lochlainn on one aspect, namely, there are challenges in regard to community employment and this is an issue that needs to be revisited. One problem I found

with community employment was when I was trying to get someone into a CE scheme recently only to find the person could not be employed because a review was going on. When I asked how long the review was going to take, I could not get a straight answer, and it went from three weeks to over three months. Even as I speak, I understand that review has not been completed and, therefore, the organisation that wanted to take on someone under a CE scheme has not been able to take on that person. There is also the issue with employment where the JobsPlus scheme has worked extremely well. Something I worry about for Sinn Féin is that its Senators come in here and criticise Ministers or schemes. What is great about Sinn Féin to be able to do that? They declined to enter into negotiations about going into government with anyone here, they failed to go into the Northern Ireland Executive, they failed to take their seats in the House of Commons and yet they feel quite free about coming in here criticising everyone and everything.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: How dare we?

Senator Máire Devine: We are the Opposition. On a point of order, what has the Northern Ireland Assembly got to do with JobPath?

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: It is not a point of order.

Senator Colm Burke: Can Senator Devine not now take the criticism?

Senator Máire Devine: What has the assembly got to do with JobPath?

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: It is not a point of order but Senator Colm Burke might stick to the motion.

Senator Colm Burke: I will stick to the motion but let us be constructive.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: Senator Colm Burke should go up and stand in the North and take his seat in the House of Commons.

Senator Colm Burke: We went into government in 2011. There was 15% unemployment. We took on the issues. Critics stated it was all pie in the sky and they are disappointed now because it turns out that it was not pie in the sky and we delivered. We will deliver on housing and we will deliver on health care. I hope that Sinn Féin is still in opposition when we do that as well.

Senator Paul Gavan: It is worth taking a moment to reflect on the history here. When we think of JobPath and we think of the originators of JobPath, and it is a shame that none of them is here this evening, it proves the point that the Labour Party in government gave Fine Gael the cover it needed to introduce some of the most right wing, draconian policies ever seen in this country.

Let us be absolutely clear. When one privatises a job service, one is taking a leaf directly from the Thatcher play book. It is Thatcher economics. Of course, that is what Fine Gael is - the Thatcher party. God knows, we have suffered enough over the past seven years to understand that.

It is a shame, and it is deeply ironic, that the leader of the Labour Party was the champion of privatising the employment services. That takes some doing. One could not make it up. It is a pity. We could have had a potentially really beautiful YouTube moment here tonight where perhaps one of our Labour Party colleagues could have repented publicly for the cameras but I

guess they are busy this evening. It is a real shame.

In terms of JobPath, the Senators know what it is about on the ground. Frankly, I am surprised the Minister, being from a working class area in Dublin, does not know what it is about. It is about the guy whom I spoke to the other day in Limerick who explained to JobPath that he would not be able to attend his interview because he was looking after his invalid mother and was told that if he did not attend he would have to attend at social welfare to explain why and have his payment cut off. That is what it is about. It is about harassing recipients. They start by going once a month. Then they are told to come twice a month. Then they are told to come each week. It is about driving them, unfortunately, for the most part, into precarious work. When we hear these wonderful job figures trumpeted by Senator Burke, he does not tell us about the significant growth in precarious and low-paid work because that does not suit.

Senator Ray Butler: Who is Senator Burke?

Senator Paul Gavan: Senator Colm Burke.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: He is in Fine Gael.

Senator Paul Gavan: He is right behind Senator Butler.

Senator Colm Burke: But the jobs are there.

Senator Paul Gavan: I can introduce Senator Butler later. There is no problem.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Gavan without interruption.

Senator Paul Gavan: Here is the point. Fine Gael has always been a sister party of the Tories in Britain. Privatising job services was straight out of the Tory play book. I spoke to an old lady in Castleconnell, my own home village, who happens to be a CE supervisor and she explained to me the frustration she felt because it is so difficult to secure funding for increased places. As my colleague, Senator Mac Lochlainn, stated, the CE schemes do wonderful work here but they are now relegated to second class because of the new model of privatising everything that moves to drive those feckless unemployed into any work at all so that they can massage the figures.

Let us be clear. The city I am from, Limerick, is the most socially divided city in this country. That is what Fine Gael delivered over seven years. That is what Fine Gael did.

Senator Ray Butler: What did Sinn Féin deliver in the North only bombs? That is all it delivered.

Senator Paul Gavan: Is that the best Senator Butler can come up with?

Senator Ray Butler: It will not go into government. It is the negativity party. It would not go into coalition. Is that why it had 14 TDs?

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Order, please. Senator Butler, with respect, has already contributed. Senator Gavan without interruption.

Senator Paul Gavan: Senator Butler does not like the facts-----

Senator Ray Butler: Senator Gavan does not like facts.

Senator Paul Gavan: -----so he tries to play the man rather than the ball.

Senator Ray Butler: Senator Gavan does not like facts.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Butler, will you obey the Chair please?

Senator Paul Gavan: You should know better, Senator Butler.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Gavan, please, through the Chair.

Senator Ray Butler: Senator Gavan is arrogant. He has been arrogant since the day he came in here with his communism-----

Senator Máire Devine: I cannot believe it.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Gavan without interruption.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Butler, please obey the Chair.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Can the Leas-Chathaoirleach confirm is that Senator McCarthy or Senator Butler over there?

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I am hearing Senator Gavan. I do not want anybody else to speak while Senator Gavan is speaking.

Senator Paul Gavan: It is no surprise to hear the red scare tactics from across the Chamber. Fine Gael has been doing that since the 1920s.

Senator Ray Butler: Sinn Féin will not go into government. Senator Gavan is arrogant.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Butler, please.

Senator Ray Butler: No. Every time Senator Gavan stands up, he is an arrogant man.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Butler-----

Senator Ray Butler: He is an arrogant man. He is not a nice man; he is an arrogant man. That is what he is.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Butler, you have already contributed, please.

Senator Ray Butler: It is not worth listening to an arrogant man.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I call Senator Gavan.

Senator Ray Butler: Every time Senator Gavan stands up he is arrogance personified. He is an arrogant, arrogant man.

Senator Ray Butler: Senator Butler is out of order.

Senator Paul Gavan: I am being told I am arrogant by a man standing up and waving his fingers, and pointing them.

Senator Ray Butler: An arrogant, arrogant man.

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An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Butler, you are out of order.

Senator Paul Gavan: I am just trying to think who Senator Butler reminds me of. He reminds me of Mussolini. Did he used to look like Senator Butler and stand up and point fingers as well?

Senator Ray Butler: It takes a lot from Senator Gavan.

Senator Paul Gavan: In fairness, Senator Butler has the same-----

Senator Ray Butler: He is some sort of arrogant person.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Butler, you cannot personalise this. Please, you have had your contribution.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator Butler will obey the Chair. Senator Gavan, please address the motion.

Senator Paul Gavan: I had better begin to summarise. It upsets Fine Gael to hear the truth that it is a Thatcherite party. It is what it does and it is what it did. It is a pity the Labour Party is not here to at least own up to the fact that it was the champion of privatising the job services, but here is the real point. Ordinary decent people are the victims of this policy and we deserve to do much better for those people than Fine Gael has done. I believe this Republic deserves better than a socially-divided society where it is tax cuts for the rich and hospital trolleys for the rest of us. The Fine Gael Senators should be ashamed of themselves for JobPath and none of their rants or raves will change anything in terms of how they have not delivered for working class people.

Senator Ray Butler: He is an arrogant pig.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Now, please. Senator Gavan, I think-----

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: On a point of order, I take the Leas-Chathaoirleach's ruling but "an arrogant pig" is not parliamentary language for one Senator to be using about another.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I have ruled on that, that it is out of order, already.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I am asking the Leas-Chathaoirleach to make a ruling.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I have said that. I do not want to personalise any remarks. That is out of order.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: The specific use of "arrogant pig"-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I have already ruled that is out of order.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: Thank you. You might make reference to it, a Leas-Chathaoirleach.

Senator A: Would the Leas-Chathaoirleach ask Senator Butler to correct the record?

Senator Paul Gavan: To be fair, I would-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Withdraw that, Senator.

Senator Ray Butler: I withdraw it.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: That is withdrawn.

Senator Paul Gavan: We know the story. When one does not have an argument, one plays the man.

(Interruptions).

Senator Paul Gavan: It is fine.

(Interruptions).

Senator Paul Gavan: I thank the Leas-Chathaoirleach for allowing me time this evening.

I commend our colleagues for raising this issue of JobPath and for raising the shameful privatisation of the employment services. Each of us knows how this service is continuing to fail ordinary people every day. We can and must do better.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I wish to share time with Senator Coffey.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: There is a subtext to the motion and I am amused at some of the contributions. Senator Colm Burke pertinently put it. It is about offering people progression. It is people we are talking about here. When this party came into government in-----

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: The Minister called them “customers”.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Senator Ó Clochartaigh, there are times when it would be best if you listened.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We cannot have Senators addressing one another across the Chamber.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Dún do bhéal agus éist.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: “Customers” is what Senator Buttimer called them.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Listen, bí ag éisteacht-----

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Tá mé ag éisteacht.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator, address your remarks through the Chair.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I will. There are people at work today because of the Government we were part of from 2011 to 2016. Senator Gavan said he is sorry members of the Labour Party are not present. The Labour Party took responsibility by going into government. I realise that causes angst for Senator Devine as she rolls her eyes to heaven.

Senator Máire Devine: Here we go again. Please address me only. You have a problem with focusing.

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Senator Jerry Buttimer: The reality today is that the people we represent-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senator, you must speak through the Chair.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I am speaking through the Chair. The people we represent and the people who benefitted from JobPath are back in employment, are being paid and are making a contribution to society. The difference between members of Sinn Féin and members of our party is that we take ourselves seriously and consider being in government a responsibility. We act on behalf of the people. It is easy to come in here to criticise, rant, rave, procrastinate and obfuscate.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: There is only one ranter and raver here tonight.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: You are fairly good at it yourself, Senator Ó Donnghaile, to be fair.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I give it a good shot.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Do not personalise this.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I am not doing that. The issue here is the people we all represent who want to be in employment. I spent 16 years as a director of adult education. One of the best things a society can do is offer people a second chance at education and a chance to upskill and improve themselves, in whatever shape that takes. That is the philosophy I come from and uphold. I do not stand here as a member of the elite, a conservative or a Tory, but as a republican who wants all our citizens to have an equal opportunity to be the best they can be so they can contribute to society. I make no apologies for that. I wear no flag or emblem of anything. I am a citizen of this State and I want all of us to be equal.

My record as a public representative and a citizen is open to scrutiny. Members of the House know what I stand for and about the work we do in Cork on behalf of the Fine Gael Party and the Government. I would go to the ends of the earth to defend us as a Government. The Minister is speaking about ensuring that people are successful in finding work. It is about ensuring that men and women, be they in Dublin, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Roscommon or elsewhere and be they 60 or 18 years of age, are in employment and that they can get up in the morning and look forward, or if they are not able to work that the State can support and care for them. That is the party to which I belong. It is called a just society. Last weekend, we published, Building a Republic of Opportunity. I challenge the Members who disagree with me to read it, just as I read the commentary on their weekend Ard-Fheis and the manifesto brought forward from it. However, do not come to this House and say that the Fine Gael Party is a Tory party, because it is not. I will defend our party all the time.

Senator Paudie Coffey: It is always welcome to have a debate on employment, JobPath or anything that will get people back to work and give them an opportunity in this life. Members of Sinn Féin come in here and talk about their political ideology, but I take offence. I come from a working class community. I served my time as an apprentice and I served in a trade union. Sinn Féin Members in this House pontificate as if they are representing the working people. They are not. They are trading on division - political division and even class division.

I am proud to be a member of a party that stepped up when this country and its economy were on the rocks. Unemployment was over 17% and in my region of Waterford and the south

east it was over 20%. Rather than complain, point the figure and pontificate, as Sinn Féin does, the Fine Gael Party gets down to finding solutions. JobPath was one of the solutions. We were laughed at in 2011 when the Action Plan for Jobs was announced. We said we would create over 100,000 jobs. Sinn Féin and the Opposition laughed at us but we proved to be right, through dedicated Ministers and dedicated people throughout our public service. SOLAS training centres and education and training boards, ETBs, redirected people who were unemployed into retraining. Using systems such as JobPath we have driven unemployment down. We have worked to recover our economy. There is still work to be done but I will not take lectures from Sinn Féin on unemployment or how to run an economy.

Sinn Féin criticises the Fine Gael-led Government in this part of the island, but in Northern Ireland it pays unemployment benefit of £75 which equates to approximately €80. That is the measly sum paid in Northern Ireland where Sinn Féin is supposedly trying to form a government.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The Senator's friends in the British Tory party pay that.

Senator Paudie Coffey: Sinn Féin has never taken responsibility. It blames the Tory government. Why will it not go into government and take control of the budget in Northern Ireland? Why will it not go into government and take the difficult decisions? Its members stand on their soapbox and pontificate on how to run an economy but they have never taken a decision that calls for responsibility.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Did Martin McGuinness take a decision?

Senator Paudie Coffey: They trade on cheap political stunts.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Did Martin McGuinness take a decision?

Senator Paudie Coffey: They trade on protest politics.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Senators, please.

Senator Paudie Coffey: Sinn Féin stands for nothing in my eyes.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Absolute hypocrites.

Senator Paudie Coffey: The Irish people are copping on to it. That is why we see it going down in the polls and why we will see it going down in the next general election.

Senator Máire Devine: Where is your mandate?

Senator Paudie Coffey: Sinn Féin trades on misery and division. That is all it has ever done.

Senator Lynn Ruane: It is an election rally comedy tonight. Give over.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: The people who are watching this debate are people who are affected by JobPath, people who are owned by a private company, people who are told they cannot go on a CE scheme, people who are ordered to do things, people who cannot read or write but are given leaflets by the JobPath providers, people who are experiencing domestic violence and people with mental health difficulties. The type of Government we have is very obvious to them, not to mention JobPath.

I find that arrogance and ignorance, and I am sorry to use the last word, are displayed here about what is happening in the North. Eamonn Mallie put it well when he was summing up with regard to the North and the Irish language Act. The crux of the problem is that it is simplified here, such as saying that Sinn Féin does not wish to go into the institutions in the North. Of course we do. We want effective institutions up and running. However, the things that are happening there are as fundamental as one man, one vote and one woman, one vote.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Hear, hear.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: That is basically what is involved. When people say “you will not go into government and you will not sit in the seats at Westminster”, it is imbecilic. It does not even warrant a response. I will return to the issue, because that was a tactic on the part of Fine Gael to deflect from its importance.

It has been said throughout the debate that amendments, suggestions and positive things could happen with this. One could have said that 12 months ago. We were in the House 12 months ago and at the time we put all those issues to the then Minister, Deputy Varadkar, who is now the Taoiseach. He gave his responses and we told him what had to be done with JobPath, what had to be done to protect our most vulnerable citizens and what had to be done to give people genuine supports and pathways into employment. It made no difference. We told him the same thing again in March and on another occasion after that. Afterwards my colleagues in the Dáil produced the report. We have been listening to people from all over the country tell us the same things about JobPath and what it has meant to them.

We will oppose both amendments. Even at this late stage I ask Fianna Fáil to reconsider. We have been trying to do the right thing here for the last 12 months and Fianna Fáil is preventing us from doing it this evening. It is in Fianna Fáil's gift to support the motion and ask for this scheme to be stopped. We are asking that there be no new referrals.

If, however, Fianna Fáil Members choose not to do this, in spite of their own colleague in the Dáil, Deputy O'Dea, speaking about how JobPath and the linking of sanctions and activation remind him of 1830s England and Oliver Twist in the workhouse, it will not wash. Are Deputy O'Dea's comments not enough for Fianna Fáil to support the abolishment of this scheme, along with the 12 months we have spent trying to persuade its members to change it? Talking about a knee-jerk reaction after 12 months just does not wash. I ask Fianna Fáil to think about this again because it is in its gift to support the motion here today.

The Fine Gael side suggested earlier that we do not know the difference between community employment schemes and JobPath. For God's sake, that does not even warrant an answer. Other things were said in respect of JobPath and how wonderful and good it was. The questions we have been asking about the scheme for more than 12 months still have not been answered. That is the bottom line. I cannot accept that. That is why, if this motion is not passed here, I will be asking for it to be referred to the Committee of Public Accounts. Perhaps it will get some of these answers which people deserve.

As the Minister of State has said, we have spent €71 million on this. We have had nine unannounced inspections. If a person is delivering a farming training course over the course of a week, a five-day period, chances are that there will be inspections on three of those days. It is not acceptable that there were only nine unannounced inspections when we have spent €71

million. This is a complete waste of public money, leaving aside what it is doing to the people on the scheme. The solution is to allow flexibility in the funding for local employment services and other service models. They need the funding to do the job which they are there to do and which they have always done. I am hugely disappointed. I am also very disappointed and angry that the Minister in charge, Deputy Regina Doherty, is not present to answer the questions about this scheme.

Amendment put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 19; Níl, 22.	
Tá	Níl
Burke, Colm.	Ardagh, Catherine.
Burke, Paddy.	Black, Frances.
Butler, Ray.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.
Buttimer, Jerry.	Daly, Mark.
Byrne, Maria.	Daly, Paul.
Coffey, Paudie.	Davitt, Aidan.
Coghlan, Paul.	Devine, Máire.
Conway, Martin.	Gallagher, Robbie.
Craughwell, Gerard P.	Gavan, Paul.
Feighan, Frank.	Higgins, Alice-Mary.
Hopkins, Maura.	Horkan, Gerry.
Lawless, Billy.	Kelleher, Colette.
Lombard, Tim.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
McFadden, Gabrielle.	Mullen, Rónán.
Mulherin, Michelle.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.
Noone, Catherine.	Ó Céidigh, Pádraig.
O'Donnell, Kieran.	Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor.
Reilly, James.	Ó Donnghaile, Niall.
Richmond, Neale.	O'Sullivan, Ned.
	Ruane, Lynn.
	Warfield, Fintan.
	Wilson, Diarmuid.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Maria Byrne and Gabrielle McFadden; Níl, Senators Paul Gavan and Trevor Ó Clochartaigh.

Amendment declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach: I acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of a former long-standing and esteemed Member of this House, Ann Ormonde.

Senator Catherine Ardagh: I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “That Seanad Éireann:” and substitute:

“ recognises:

- that full employment, where possible, is the aim of all parties in this House;
- the importance of and need for activation measures which assist people moving from welfare into employment;
- that employment support schemes have assisted thousands of people into employment;
- that careful consideration and ongoing scrutiny is required of private companies that are hired to do work on behalf of the State;
- that poorly designed activation measures and programmes can have negative consequences and adverse effects on those participating in such programmes;
- that Jobpath has been the subject of several criticisms and concerns have been raised about the operation of the initiative; and
- that concerns have been raised about the impact that Jobpath is having on other activation schemes and Community Employment (CE) Schemes in particular;

calls on the Government:

- to ensure that all employment support schemes treat participants in a respectful and dignified manner;
- to put in place safeguards that will ensure those participating on Jobpath are offered suitable and appropriate employment;
- to conduct a review of type, quality and the sustainability of employment that people have entered into after participating in Jobpath;
- to ensure that sufficient mechanisms are in place for participants who may wish to make a complaint or raise concerns about Jobpath and the two companies tasked with delivering the service;
- to ensure that any complaints against the two companies tasked with delivering Jobpath are properly investigated and that appropriate action is taken where necessary to rectify any issues identified;
- to ensure that those tasked with delivering Jobpath are adequately trained and properly equipped to deal sensitively with the myriad of issues that may result in an individual being long-term unemployed;

calls on the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to review the impact that Jobpath is having on other Employment Support Schemes and CE schemes in particular with a view to ensuring that those who wish to continue to participate on CE schemes are able to do so, and to also ensure that Jobpath is not draining CE schemes of participants; and calls for an

appropriate assessment to be carried out at the time of entry to Jobpath, or shortly afterwards in a form of a probationary period, to ascertain whether the individual is best suited to the proposed programme, or whether further engagement and participation in a CE scheme would be more beneficial.”

Senator Mark Daly: I second the amendment.

Amendment put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 14; Níl, 25.	
Tá	Níl
Ardagh, Catherine.	Burke, Colm.
Craughwell, Gerard P.	Burke, Paddy.
Daly, Mark.	Butler, Ray.
Daly, Paul.	Buttimer, Jerry.
Davitt, Aidan.	Byrne, Maria.
Gallagher, Robbie.	Coffey, Paudie.
Higgins, Alice-Mary.	Coghlan, Paul.
Horkan, Gerry.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.
Mullen, Rónán.	Conway, Martin.
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Devine, Máire.
O'Donnell, Marie-Louise.	Feighan, Frank.
O'Sullivan, Ned.	Gavan, Paul.
Ó Céidigh, Pádraig.	Hopkins, Maura.
Wilson, Diarmuid.	Lawless, Billy.
	Lombard, Tim.
	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.
	McFadden, Gabrielle.
	Mulherin, Michelle.
	Noone, Catherine.
	O'Donnell, Kieran.
	Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor.
	Ó Donnghaile, Niall.
	Reilly, James.
	Richmond, Neale.
	Warfield, Fintan.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Gerry Horkan and Diarmuid Wilson; Níl, Senators Paul Gavan and Trevor Ó Clochartaigh.

Amendment declared lost.

15 November 2017

Question put: "That the motion be agreed to."

The Seanad divided: Tá, 11; Níl, 31.	
Tá	Níl
Black, Frances.	Ardagh, Catherine.
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Burke, Colm.
Devine, Máire.	Burke, Paddy.
Gavan, Paul.	Butler, Ray.
Higgins, Alice-Mary.	Buttimer, Jerry.
Kelleher, Colette.	Byrne, Maria.
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Coffey, Paudie.
Ó Clochartaigh, Trevor.	Coghlan, Paul.
Ó Donnghaile, Niall.	Conway, Martin.
Ruane, Lynn.	Craughwell, Gerard P.
Warfield, Fintan.	Daly, Mark.
	Daly, Paul.
	Davitt, Aidan.
	Feighan, Frank.
	Gallagher, Robbie.
	Hopkins, Maura.
	Horkan, Gerry.
	Lawless, Billy.
	Lombard, Tim.
	McFadden, Gabrielle.
	Mulherin, Michelle.
	Mullen, Rónán.
	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.
	Noone, Catherine.
	O'Donnell, Kieran.
	O'Donnell, Marie-Louise.
	O'Sullivan, Ned.
	Ó Céidigh, Pádraig.
	Reilly, James.
	Richmond, Neale.
	Wilson, Diarmuid.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Paul Gavan and Trevor Ó Clochartaigh; Níl, Senators Maria Byrne and Gabrielle McFadden.

Question declared lost.

Seanad Éireann

An Cathaoirleach: When is it proposed to sit again?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Ar 10.30 maidin amárach.

The Seanad adjourned at 8.32 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 16 November 2017.