

Direct Provision for children to be increased

This month, Stephen Collins of the IRC wrote an article regarding the rights of those in the asylum system in Ireland. In it, he made comment to the insufficient amount of direct provision provided to children in the system. A Working Group also made recommendations that the paltry amount of €9.60 given to children should be raised.

The Group's report suggests that the low amount provided to children hinders their participation in education, social activities, and use of health services.

In response to this, the State has vowed to raise the direct provision amount more than three-fold. It will be raised to €29.80 per week. It is expected that this will be the case as of January at the latest, but Minister of State for Equality and New Communities, Aodhán O Ríordáin TD hopes it may be in place in the next few weeks.

While the report recommended an increase for adults, as well, the Minister said that this would not be on the cards as of yet. Speaking at the announcement, he said: "We are prioritising the welfare of children right now. For too long children in direct provision have been effectively in poverty, going back after school to remain behind closed doors, unable to participate in things like school friends' birthday parties or go on school trips because their parents couldn't afford it. This will change that."

IPHA deny Minister's claims

The Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) has condemned comments made in public, and in the Dáil, by Minister for Health Leo Varadkar TD.

The Minister spoke out about the greed he perceived in the pharmaceutical industry, both at a public announcement of the new HSE service plan, and then later in the Dáil, regarding the "unbelievably high prices" those companies are charging the HSE for lifesaving new drugs. This is in the wake of the expiration of the service deal between the HSE and the IPHA in October. Both parties are currently in talks about a new deal.

With the windfall in the HSE this year, the budget for the year does not allow for an increase for high-tech drugs. Prices for treatment of diseases is soaring, according to the Irish Times, especially for diseases like cancer and cystic fibrosis.

Chief executive of IPHA, Oliver O'Connor, said that the prices provided to the HSE by their members were not responsible for destabilising the national finances. He said: "The opposite has been the case: our members, through our agreements with your predecessors, have made significant contributions to the stabilisation of the national finances."

DRI privacy case continues

The Digital Rights Ireland (DRI), a lobbying group for privacy group, are continuing their action against the State regarding the retention of personal phone and internet service history by providers for a minimum of two years.

In this two-year period, the information can be used without the owner's knowledge or permission. The legislation responsible for this retention, both the Criminal Justice (Terrorist Offences) Act 2005 and the implementation of the EU data-retention directive 2006, are being challenged by the DRI in court action which began in 2006. They argue that the retention is a violation of privacy rights.

In 2012, the Irish High Court referred the case to the European Court of Justice. The ECJ overturned the 2006 directive in April 2014, saying that it entailed "a wide-ranging and particularly serious interference with the fundamental rights to respect for private life and to the protection of personal data".

The DRI hopes to continue this success in getting the legislation in this country overturned. They will be in court Monday 21 December, where it is expected a date will be set for the new year to hear the case.

DCC will invest in new housing projects

The modular homes in a new Ballymun development will not be available to the homeless before Christmas. This is due to protests by locals which led to a one-week delay in the construction. Dublin City Council expects that they will not be able to house the homeless families in them until mid-January.

There were 22 units planned for completion by Monday 21 December. However, there were protests at the site on Ballbutcher Lane by supporters of the CTSL co-op group, who previously had planning permission for the site. Although the group asked protesters to leave the site while they spoke with the Council, workers on the site reported continued threats of violence and destruction. Due to this, the contractor removed his workers and materials from the site.

The subsequent delay was exacerbated by poor weather conditions. This meant that only some of the modular homes would be ready in time for Christmas. However, the Council as decided not to leave some units occupied while others were empty, due to the risks it would cause. These risks would be solely the responsibility of the DCC.

The Baile na Laochra development is one of several planned by the DCC to tackle the homelessness crisis plaguing the city.

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Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from all at PAI

We would like to take this opportunity to wish all of our readers a happy and peaceful holiday season.

Our publication will cease until the week of 4 January.

Adjourned until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday 13 January 2016

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This week's Committee Meetings

There are no Parliamentary Committee meetings this week