

SPORT AFTER BIRTH FOOTBALLER JULIE-ANN RUSSELL

Jen Hogan Health & Family



Governance in Sinn Féin is hierarchical and driven by obedience. Which is why it responds to child abuse within its ranks more or less as the Catholic hierarchy did

Fintan O'Toole
Opinion & Analysis



IT'S TAX RETURN TIME HOW TO FILL OUT YOUR 2023-24 FORMS

Fiona Reddan
Business

Motorists could face price hikes to fund road safety

Report on RSA recommends increasing driving licence and car testing fees

Government also advised to introduce higher penalties for dangerous driving

JACK HORGAN-JONES
and DAVID LABANYI

The Government has been advised to increase driving licence and car testing fees, hike penalties for dangerous road users and expand direct exchequer funding of road safety amid a series of dire financial warnings about the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

A final copy of an external review into the agency, seen by The Irish Times, says there is a "risk of insufficient resources and focus" being allocated to road safety and education. It also recommends a wider overhaul of the RSA and the transfer of some functions to the Department of Transport, which had been expected.

The report by consultancy firm Indecon also details growing financial pressure at the RSA, outlining that the annual deficit is expected to rise from about €20 million this year to nearly €45 million in 2033, with a deficit in several operational areas.

"But for the authority's accumulated reserves, which shortly are likely to be depleted, no funding would be available for critical road safety functions," the report warns.

The consultancy firm has found that the existing model is unsustainable and recommended wide-ranging changes.

In the short term, it advises that there should be a "small increase in fees" combined with ring-fenced exchequer funding for public interest road safety activities.

Not sustainable

On fees, which have not increased since 2011-2012, it finds that they should be set to ensure that customer focused activities – like the driving licence service and the national car testing system – are self-sustainable and cost reflective.

It argues that the cost of road safety promotion and education should be funded by the exchequer.

Its analysis suggests that "the existing model is not sustainable and radical changes are required. In the short term, a small increase in fees,

combined with exchequer ring-fenced funding for public interest road safety activities, would be appropriate".

It argues that for customer services to be sustainable, the RSA "is likely to require an increase in fees in 2025 and modest increases in subsequent years".

The report says increases should be conditional on substantially meeting service level targets, where performance has slipped in recent years.

Higher fees

The prospect of introducing higher fees on the eve of an election and amid ongoing cost of living pressures would likely prove politically contentious.

It comes against the backdrop of a significant increase in road traffic deaths in recent years.

The report outlines the need for legislative change and "changes in penalties faced by dangerous road users" and for "appropriate levels of penalties, policing and detection".

Government sources said that higher fees for motorists may be offset by a greater increase in fees charged to hauliers on the basis they can be written off by such firms, although this would undoubtedly provoke a backlash from that industry.

The report finds that while the RSA is the lead agency for the road safety strategy, there is a need for "greater central government involvement" in co-ordinating activities across 19 different bodies.

It proposes transferring public interest activities back into the department and leaving the RSA to look after NCT, driver testing and other operational services.

The report is likely to be considered by Cabinet in the coming weeks, before the general election.

It outlines that under the status quo, the RSA has to fund its activities primarily from charges from motorists. "As a result, there is a risk of insufficient funds being available for road safety promotion education and co-ordination."



That winning feeling Croke Park celebrations

Annabelle Farrell, Izzy Trinkunaite and Sadhbh Blake, from St Finian's primary school in Co Dublin celebrate their victory over Castleknock Educate Together in the Allianz Cumann na mBunscol football finals in Croke Park yesterday.

Photograph: Tom Maher/Inpho

Friday favoured as leaders agree on 2024 election

Statement says 'passage of the Finance Bill is the priority for the Government'

PAT LEAHY
Political Editor

The three leaders of the Coalition parties agreed last night that the general election would be held this year – but there was no agreement on a date, or on when the election would be called.

Taoiseach Simon Harris indicated his preference for a Friday but the leaders did not

formally agree a day or date.

Officials were tight-lipped about last night's meeting, which came after the Green leader Roderic O'Gorman's call for a November 29th election caused significant anger in both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

A three-line statement was issued by the leaders after their meeting last night, which said simply that the leaders had agreed the general election will

take place in 2024, that they had agreed the "passage of the Finance Bill is the priority for the Government", and that the committee stage of the Bill will commence on November 5th.

Mr Harris has repeatedly reminded his Government partners that seeking a dissolution of the Dáil and prompting an election is his prerogative – though setting the actual date and deciding on whether there should be a three- or four-week campaign is formally a responsibility of the Minister for Housing and Local Government Darragh O'Brien of Fianna Fáil.

Sources said yesterday that the exact choreography of all

this would be discussed and agreed between the three leaders. But that does not appear to have happened yet.

A series of Bills – including the Occupied Territories Bill, the Defamation Bill and the Mental Health Bill – are now unlikely to be completed and it will fall to the next government to progress them, or leave them lapse.

Essential Bills

However, officials have advised that other essential Bills – including the Appropriation Bill and a Bill authorising spending on the Oireachtas – will still have to be concluded before the

election is called. Yesterday Minister for Finance Jack Chambers said he'd accelerate the passage of the Finance Bill through the Oireachtas to ensure it's passed before an election. When the Bill returns to the Oireachtas – after a week off for the midterm break – it's likely the Government will seek to take all its remaining stages to enable it to be passed in the Dáil that week, potentially clearing the way for an election to be called as early as that week.

In normal circumstances, it would take until the end of November or the beginning of December to clear all stages. "That's clearly not going to

happen," Mr Chambers told reporters in Dublin.

Mr Chambers, who is also the Fianna Fáil director of elections, said the three Government parties will be putting forward separate manifestos and there will be no electoral pact.

Meanwhile, Fianna Fáil TD Jackie Cahill announced last night that he will not run in the upcoming general election.

The Tipperary TD told colleagues he took the decision for personal reasons and apologised for the short notice.

➔ McDonald to make 'full' apology to teenager: page 3

Forty homeless people have died in Dublin this year

SARAH BURNS

Forty homeless people have died in the Dublin region so far this year, according to figures from the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE).

There has been a rise in the number of homeless deaths in the capital over recent years, up from 24 in 2018 to 56 last year. There were 64 deaths recorded in 2021, the highest over the past six years.

The figures, provided to The Irish Times, are deaths recorded for those accessing DRHE-funded emergency accommodation and/or rough sleeping across Dublin's four local authorities.

There were 25 deaths in 2019, and almost twice as many in 2020 (47). There were 45 deaths recorded in 2022.

DRHE operates under the aegis of Dublin City Council, as

the lead statutory local authority in the response to homelessness in Dublin, and adopts a shared service approach across South Dublin County Council, Fingal County Council and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.

In a statement Dublin Simon Community said the increasing numbers of people in emergency accommodation and rough sleeping was a direct reflection of the "deepening crisis".

Sleeping rough

Deaths this year include that of Ann Delaney (47), a mother and nurse from Co Laois, who had been sleeping rough close to a Tesco supermarket on Aungier Street in Dublin city centre last February. Her funeral heard that family, friends and professionals offered repeated support but she sadly "would not accept the help".

Last July, the bodies of Donal Scanlon (49) from Co Kerry and Alex Warnick (42), who was originally from the United States, were found in the Grand Canal. The men had been sleeping in two tents close to where their bodies were recovered from the canal. Foul play was not suspected with gardai treating it as a tragic accident.

A report from the Health Research Board (HRB) earlier this year showed that 121 people who were homeless died in 2020, an increase from 92 the previous year. The HRB's report was based on national data from closed coronial files.

Its analysis showed that those who died while homeless were much younger than the Irish average at the time of their death, with a median age of 36.5 for women and 42 for men. Almost all had a history of substance use or dependency.

Weather

Today will be mainly dry with sunny spells and scattered showers. Highest temperatures 12-15 degrees.

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Home News

Coercive control: A 48-year-old man has been jailed for eight years at the Central Criminal Court for the rape and coercive control of his wife: page 4

Rental shortage: Just 33 properties in 16 areas were available to rent under the Hap system in October: page 5

World News



War in Gaza: Israeli forces besieged hospitals and shelters for displaced people in Gaza yesterday: page 6.

Business + Your Money

Hotel losses: The Denis O'Brien-owned Ballynahinch Castle hotel in Co Galway reported a loss of €288,432 last year to bring its accumulated losses to €5.7 million.

INBS inquiry: Former banker John Stanley Purcell should face the 'highest penalties', lawyers said yesterday

Sports Tuesday

Soccer: Saudi Aramco sponsorship of the 2027 World Cup in Brazil would be a 'stomach punch' to women's football, five Irish internationals have said.

GAA: Limerick's Graeme Mulcahy has announced his inter-county retirement. He made his debut in 2009.

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