THE IRISH TIMES

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IRELAND DAMAGED BY ALL BLACKS DEFEAT

Gerry Thornley
SportsMonday

“Fianna Fáil needs to show once again that, as the party of the political centre, we can be radical and we can get things done

Malcolm Byrne
Opinion

BINGEWORTHY THE BEST NEW SHOWS TO STREAM IN NOVEMBER

Arts & Ideas

Ministers and key hospitals clash over financial control

Ministers intervene to insist new €200m financial management system is used

Hospitals seek changes to reflect company law responsibilities of directors

MARTIN WALL
Public Policy Correspondent

The Government is prepared to use legislation, if necessary, to force several big hospitals, which are State funded but run by their own boards, to provide financial information to the HSE.

Ministers have in recent weeks intervened in a row between the HSE and voluntary hospitals to insist a new financial management system is introduced across the health sector to ensure “an alignment of financial reporting”.

Tallaght, the Mater, St James’s and St Vincent’s in Dublin, as well as the Mercy in Cork, are all voluntary hospitals, as are maternity centres such as the Rotunda, the Coombe and the National Maternity Hospital.

These hospitals are concerned about the impact the move could have on their independence. They are seeking changes to reflect the different legal regime under which they operate and the responsibilities of their directors under company law and legislation governing charities.

The voluntary hospitals are also worried about more than €300 million in accumulated financial deficits run up due to insufficient State funding. The hospitals obtained legal advice indicating that, in some circumstances, they may have to curtail services to avoid directors facing liability for reckless trading.

Debts and liabilities

Other legal advice provided by these hospitals to the HSE maintains that if it instructed them to continue to provide such services without adequate budgets, the health authority could be seen under company law as being a “shadow director”.

This, the legal advice suggests, could leave the HSE responsible for any subsequent debts and liabilities.

The dispute over the financial management system between the voluntary hospitals, their representative association and the HSE has been ongoing since the summer.

In September, the association told HSE chief Bernard Gloster that the reporting system, known as IFMS, appeared “to envisage a loss of control by boards over various processes that are central to the management of a voluntary hospital”.

Among assurances sought by the hospitals were that their financial decisions could not be vetoed and approval for payments would not be required from the HSE.

Independence

Mr Gloster, during a Dáil Public Accounts Committee session last month, was critical of what he described as an understanding by some agencies entirely funded by the State that their independence meant “they can buy what they want when they want”.

“We pay the bill and they pick the system,” he said.

Mr Gloster said he had communicated with the voluntary hospitals on behalf of Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill and the HSE to say “we are not prepared to accept a position where any organisation believes that is an appropriate way to discharge public money”.

Ms Carroll MacNeill wrote to voluntary hospitals the next day saying they received substantial State funding and the HSE should be able to receive data in relation to publicly funded activity.

She said the Cabinet committee on health, members of which include the Taoiseach and Tánaiste, want to see the system implemented in all publicly funded hospitals as a matter of urgency.

Ms Carroll MacNeill said new legislation would set out a number of specified public-interest purposes under which the HSE could request and receive information from entities across the healthcare sector.

The Minister said, for the avoidance of doubt, this included the voluntary hospitals.

→ Who runs the Irish hospital system?: page 4

Damage to a staircase at an IPAS centre in Drogheda, Co Louth, caused by a suspected arson attack on Friday night.
PHOTOGRAPH: BRYAN MEADE

‘The house is on fire. Please answer’

Women who lived at Drogheda IPAS centre say children are traumatised after arson attack

KITTY HOLLAND
Social Affairs Correspondent

Three women say they and their children have been left traumatised by a suspected arson attack on Friday night at an International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) centre in Drogheda, Co Louth.

The women, who have been moved 12km away to the Mosney accommodation centre, yesterday said they had hardly slept since the incident.

Gardaí investigating the fire believe an accelerant was used to start it shortly after 8pm. Four children and an adult were rescued from the top floor of the building on George’s Street by firefighters, while 23 others were relocated to alternative accommodation.

Some of the rescued children, including a 20-day-old baby and a 17-month-old, were taken to hospital for assessment.

The women, who are from Nigeria and have lived in Drogheda for two years, asked not be photographed or to have their names published.

They said they could not understand how somebody would want to burn 28 people, including little children.

One of the women, a mother of girls aged eight and 12, was at her job as a healthcare assistant at the time. She showed missed WhatsApp calls and messages from her older child from 8.11pm onwards pleading with her to answer.

“THE HOUSE IS ON FIRE. PLEASE ANSWER,” one message stated.

“I left everything and I just jumped into the road,” the woman said. “One of the Sisters drove me home. What I saw was some smoke. My children were trapped upstairs.

“I saw my daughter . . . I wanted to climb the ladder to help her but the fire brigade people said ‘No’. They started bringing them out one by one. I was shouting. I was crying. I was thinking, ‘If they die what will I say to the world?’ ”

Another mother and resident, who works in a nursing home, had dropped her 17-year-old daughter to a friend’s house and was resting in their ground-floor room when the fire alarm went off.

“I ran to the kitchen. I met one of my neighbours and I said to her: ‘Go and pick your son from your room’. I checked the main door to the hall and when I open it [it] was full of smoke. I ran out to the back. A man called the fire service and they responded swiftly.”

A third woman was with her three children – aged six, nine and 11, at church, when she was called and told of the fire at their home.

“The children were crying, asking, ‘Where are we going to sleep?’ ”,

They cannot go back to their home to retrieve belongings.

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Dalymount Park redevelopment faces delay after costs triple to over €63m

OLIVIA KELLY
Dublin Editor

The cost of redeveloping Dalymount Park football stadium in Phibsborough has risen to more than €63 million, with Dublin City Council facing borrowings of up to €34 million to fund the scheme.

The council plans to submit an amended planning application for the project next year, altering the design in an attempt to stop costs breaching €63.7 million.

However, this is expected to delay the construction of the stadium, home to Bohemian Football Club, by as much as two years.

The council bought the sports ground from Bohemians for €3.8 million in 2015. The following year it announced plans for a new stadium at an estimated cost of €20 million.

It acquired Tolka Park in Drumcondra, home to Shelbourne Football Club, in the same year with the intention of selling the land to fund the redevelopment of Dalymount as a facility for both clubs.

However, a campaign began seeking the retention of the Drumcondra ground. The council agreed in 2022 to abandon plans to rezone Tolka Park for housing and to redevelop Dalymount Park as a standalone project.

Planning permission

Planning permission was approved in February 2024 for the demolition and reconstruction of Dalymount, with a capacity of 8,034. The cost of the project, which included community facilities, bar/function room, club offices and team facilities, had then risen to more than €40 million.

By the end of last year, when the council published its 2025-2027 capital programme, the cost had increased to €56.6 million.

New estimates, to be presented to city councillors tonight, show the cost has hit €63.7 million. The council has secured Government funding of €25.6 million, another €2.6 million has been gathered from levies paid to the council, €1 million will be used from the long-term lease of Tolka Park back to Shelbourne FC, and €500,000 has been secured from Uefa. This leaves a shortfall of more than €34 million.

Councillors will be asked to approve borrowing of €34 million over a 30-year term. Repayments will be “partly funded from the annual rental income, matchday revenue and non-matchday revenue,” the council said.

Due to the “significant funding shortfall”, design changes have been identified to save €3.5 million, the council said, keeping the capital costs within €63.7 million.

Weather

Dull and blustery with spells of rain, heaviest across the west. Highs of 13-16 degrees in fresh to strong winds.

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Sports Monday

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Gaelic games: Ballygunner held off a late challenge from Na Piarsaigh to reach the Munster club SHC semi-finals.