

NMBI under fire

Last week, two reports into the operation of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) found that the State regulatory body was highly “dysfunctional”. Both examinations were undertaken by independent bodies, and were commissioned by the NMBI. The reports noted problems in areas of governance and expenditure.

Kevin Figgis, SIPTU’s Nursing Sector Organiser, said: “The findings of these reports ... are a vindication of the concerns expressed by nurses and midwives who believed that financial and governance procedures within the NMBI ... was either not in place or, where it was, it was flawed.”

Further, he noted that nurses and midwives were right in their opposition to the 50% in the NMBI retention fee in 2015. He commented that “the degree of unaccountability for expenditure of our members’ fees is staggering.” Paul Bell, who is SIPTU’s Health Division Organiser has said that the State body has become “detached from the interests of its members and the public as a regulator”.

He has called for proper governance and oversight by the body, at the centre of which should be the “adoption of a transparent communication protocol”.

The board of the NMBI has acknowledged the findings of the reports, and agreed that mistakes were made. Essene Cassidy, President of the NMBI, said, “While the reviews did identify significant shortcomings, the NMBI’s regulatory functions were always appropriately discharged. We continue to meet regularly with the Department of Health to review progress.”

Paternity Leave uncertainty

The previous Government established a programme of Paternity Leave and Benefit, which was laid out in Budget 2016. Of late, there has been some unclear information as to when exactly Paternity Leave will come into effect. While it was stated that it will come into effect in on the first day of September, it is now unclear when exactly in September it will be available.

Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar TD has previously said that it would be September 1 (on Newstalk). However, in a recent priority questions response, he said that the date it will come into effect is September 31.

Minister Varadkar said, “The legislative proposals for the introduction of paternity leave and paternity benefit are currently being debated in the Houses of the Oireachtas ... Every scheme must have a start date and a Government decision was made that the paternity leave and paternity benefit scheme would come into effect on 30thSeptember 2016. As a result, paternity benefit will only be payable for a child born or placed on or after the 30thSeptember 2016.”

The Paternity Leave and Benefit package will provide new fathers with two weeks’ leave and two weeks’ benefit of no less than €230 per week. This can be taken any time in the first six months of the child’s birth. Where the child is adopted, it must be within six months of the first day of placement. The legislation provides for the same rights for same-sex couples.

ESRI report doubtful of Ireland meeting energy targets

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) have just published a report on the demands for energy from the residential sector, and suggest possible ways that policy could address the demand, in terms of Ireland's climate and energy efficiency goals.

The paper, entitled "The Residential Sector's Demand for Energy", was written by John Curtis and Brian Stanley. Ireland, as part of the EU, has committed to climate and energy efficiency policy targets. The report notes that 25% of the energy consumption in Ireland comes from the residential sector, and therefore, "what happens within the residential sector will play an important part in determining whether Ireland's policy targets are achieved."

It takes into account four main fuel categories: electricity, gas, oil, and solid fuels. It measures the responsiveness of household energy demands to changes of fuel prices and changes to household expenditure (or income). The main findings are thus:

- When the price of solid fuels or electricity changes, roughly one-third of the adjustment happens within one year. With oil and gas, it happens much quicker; roughly three-quarters of the adjustment takes place within one year.
- In terms of oil and gas, household response to price changes in the short-term are small but increases over time.
- As household expenditure increased, proportionally more was spent on oil and gas.
- In terms of electricity, short-term demand only reduced marginally, and over time the responsive demand was zero, and demand returned to its original levels.
- Demand for solid fuels increases as income drops; as incomes increase, demand for solid fuels will lessen as households turn to low-carbon alternatives such as gas and oil.

The ESRI research suggests the following policy changes to help reach policy targets

- A grant scheme that supports low income houses switching to low-carbon fuels;
- Carbon and energy taxes; however, the report notes that taxes would need to be quite substantial to make a difference.

Report into Console operations "disturbing"

A new HSE audit into the running of the Suicide Prevention charity Console has revealed serious misgivings in the finances and governance.

During the audit period, from 2012 to 2014, Paul Kelly, the Chief Executive of the charity, and his wife and son, used charity funds for what seems to be personal expenditure.

There were also cash withdrawals made, to the total of €87,027. There is no documentation as to what this cash was spent on. The records regarding foreign travel and clothing expenditure is inaccurate or non-existent, according to the audit.

Minister for Health, Simon Harris TD, has said that the findings of the report were "disturbing".

This week at Public Affairs Ireland

On the Blog

Ireland needs to make the most of Brexit

Tom Ferris

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Michael Williams

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Shauna Nimmo

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Tom Ferris

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This week in Dáil Éireann

Tuesday 05 July

2.00 p.m.
Leaders' Questions

2.32 p.m.
Order of Business

Motion re: Financial Resolution for the Paternity Leave and Benefit Bill 2016 (without debate)

Motion re: Technical amendment of Terms of Reference of the Committee of Public Accounts (without debate)

Motion re: Terms of Reference of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs (without debate)

Motion re: Third Report of the Selection Committee and Nomination of Chairs (without debate)

Motion re: Referral of Government Bills to Select Committee (without debate)

Motion re: Referral of Private Members' Bills to Select Committee (without debate)

Motion re: Additional Standing Order re: ECB Consultation

Motion re: Membership of Houses of the Oireachtas Commission

3.02 p.m.
Taoiseach's Questions

3.47 p.m.
Government Business: Post European Council Statements (to conclude within 2 hours 25 minutes)

6.12 p.m.
P.Q.s: Oral - Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

7.42 p.m.
Topical Issues

8.30 p.m.
Private Members Business (Sinn Féin):
Banded Hours Contract Bill 2016

10.30 p.m.
Dáil Adjourns

Thursday 07 July

12.00 p.m.
Leaders' Questions

12.32 p.m.
Questions on Promised Legislation

Election of Leas-Cheann Comhairle (without debate)
Estimates (back from Committees) (without debate)

12.47 p.m.
Weekly divisions

1.30 p.m.
Government Business: Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill 2016 [Seanad] - Second Stage (resumed if not previously concluded) (Department of Health)

5.30 p.m.
P.Q.s: Oral - Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

7.00 p.m.
Topical Issues

7.48 p.m.
Committee Report: Report of the Committee on Housing and Homelessness

9.48 p.m.
Dail Adjourns

Wednesday 06 July

10.00 a.m.
Selection of candidate for Leas-Cheann Comhairle

11.45 a.m.
SOS

12.00 p.m.
Leaders' Questions

12.32 p.m.
Questions on Promised Legislation

12.47 p.m.
Taoiseach's Questions

1.32 p.m.
P.Q.s: Oral - Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

3.02 p.m.
Topical Issues

3.50 p.m.
SOS

4.30 p.m.
Private Members Business (Rural Independent Group):
Motion re: Rural Broadband

6.30 p.m.
Government Business
Motion re: Section 38 of the Criminal Justice Act 1994 (Department of Justice and Equality)

7.30 p.m.
Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Bill 2016 [Seanad] - Second Stage (Department of Health)

10.00 p.m.
Dáil Adjourns

Friday 08 July

10.30 a.m.
Commissions of Investigation (IBRC) Bill 2016 - (Second Stage) (Department of Finance)

3.30 p.m.
Dáil Adjourns

This week in Seanad Éireann

Tuesday 05 July

2.30 p.m.
Commencement Matters

3.30 p.m.
Order of Business

4.45 p.m.
Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Bill 2016 – Order for Second Stage and Second Stage
(Department of Justice and Equality)

Wednesday 06 July

10.30 a.m.
Commencement Matters

11.30 a.m.
Order of Business

12.45 a.m.
Statements on Communications, Climate Action and the Environment
(Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment)

4.30 p.m.
Statements on Farm Safety
(Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine)

6.00 p.m.
Private Members Business
Competition (Amendment) Bill 2016 - Committee Stage (Labour Party Senators)

Thursday 07 July

10.30 a.m.
Commencement Matters

11.30 a.m.
Order of Business

1.30 p.m.
Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Bill 2016 – Committee and Remaining Stages (Department of Justice and Equality)

This week's Committee Meetings

Tuesday 05 July

Housing, Planning and Local Government (Select)
CR4, LH 2000 2 p.m.
AGENDA: Water Services (Amendment) Bill 2016 [Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government]

Dáil Reform (Sub) Room 2 (off the Main Hall),
Leinster House 4.30 p.m.
AGENDA: Private Meeting

Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht (Select)
CR4, LH 2000 5 p.m.
AGENDA: 2016 Revised Estimates for Public Services - Vote 33 (Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht) [Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht]

Wednesday 06 July

Justice and Equality (Select)
CR2, LH 2000 9 a.m.
AGENDA: Paternity Leave and Benefit Bill 2016 [Minister for Justice and Equality]

Future of Healthcare
CR3, LH 2000 9.30 a.m.
AGENDA: Private Meeting

Business Committee
Room 2 (off the Main Hall), Leinster House 1.30 p.m.
AGENDA: Private Meeting

Thursday 07 July

Public Accounts
CR3, LH 2000 9 a.m.
AGENDA: Election of Vice-Chair and consideration of work programme

Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach (Select)
CR1, LH 2000 11 a.m.
AGENDA: Single Resolution Board (Loan Facility Agreement) Bill 2016 [Minister of State for Financial Services, eGovernment and Public Procurement]