

Post Plus

• MONEY • ASSETS • MOTORS

Pensions special
Now is the time to
get your pension
on track
pages 5-7

**The Sunday
Business Post**

June 17, 2018
businesspost.ie



Illustration: Peter Hanan

He holds one of the country's key portfolios, yet Independent Alliance TD Shane Ross's ministerial career has been a litany of broken promises, as public appointments go unfilled, constituency issues take precedence and high-level figures are left waiting for decisions that never come...

THE MISSING MINISTER

By **Michael Brennan**

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Shane Ross is in charge of an annual budget of €1.7 billion and a workforce of 515 civil servants. He is the man who has a key role in influencing the development of the tourism industry, the state's airports and seaports, and its sporting facilities.

to page 2



Smurfit Executive Development
UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School

UCD DIPLOMA IN CORPORATE GOVERNANCE



Executive Education
Ranking 2018

WWW.SMURFITSCHOOL.IE/EXECUTIVEDEVELOPMENT



WHAT IS THIS PROGRAMME?

The UCD Diploma in Corporate Governance is a one-year part-time fully accredited programme (NFQ Level 9) led by Prof. Niamh Brennan at UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School.

PROGRAMME IMPACT

Whether the issue is financial resilience, corporate strategy, executive compensation, or regulatory compliance, this programme will help participants promote sound governance. Divided over two 12-week semesters, it provides participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out the increasingly onerous duties and responsibilities of company directors.

WHO IS THIS PROGRAMME FOR?

Current & prospective Company Directors, Senior & Middle Managers expected to occupy board positions, and those in both Public and Private sector management with governance responsibilities. In addition, the programme is suitable for executives in organisations which do not have a legal board, but have equivalent governance arrangements.

COMMENCING SEPTEMBER 2018

The UCD Diploma in Corporate Governance offers an in-depth study of all aspects of corporate governance and is beneficial for senior executives and directors. The experience is challenging and personally satisfying. The benefits are immediately applicable professionally. A superb experience which I would highly recommend.

Eilish Finan, Chartered Director

HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE?

For further information please contact Liz Knight on (01) 716 8801 or liz.knight@ucd.ie

2 Shane Ross

from page 1

But during his two years in cabinet, he has spent much of his time pursuing the re-opening of Stepaside Garda station in his constituency and fighting with the country's judiciary – both areas outside his brief.

Tourism and transport figures complain that it is near impossible to get a meeting with him. Yet he manages to make time to attend the agms of residents' associations in his Dublin Rathdown constituency.

An investigation by this newspaper has found that he has missed key targets in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and has alienated many of those who hoped he would make a difference. Last year alone, there were strikes on his watch in Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus and Iarnród Éireann, on top of a previous Luas strike in 2016.

This newspaper spoke to Ross in his ministerial office last week about some of the key complaints made about his reign.

Swimming in controversy

There are not many ministers with their own private swimming pool. But Ross received permission from Wicklow Co Council to construct an 11x5 metre outdoor swimming pool at his Georgian home in Enniskerry back in 2006. He had just bought it for €6.2 million. The pool takes 77,000 litres of water to fill up, which was more than the local water supply could bear. Planning files show that the council required him to fill up the pool from the local river "or alternatively by water tanker".

Now one of Ross's political pet projects is to get €10 million spent to re-open Glenalbyn public swimming pool in Stillorgan in his Dublin Rathdown constituency.

This is despite the fact that another new public swimming pool is opening shortly around six kilometres away in Ballyogan. Ross has been very quiet about this pool development.

The Southside People newspaper reported how some local children from Ballyogan 'pranked' Ross last year during a soccer competition by posing for a picture alongside him with an inflatable pool bearing the words 'Ballyogan swimming pool'.

There are also other nearby public swimming pools in Monkstown and Meadowbrook, as well as private pools in UCD and Blackrock College. Kilmacud Crokes GAA club is not enthusiastic about the plans for a new pool beside its grounds, but Ross has got Sport Ireland to provide a mediator. He was also quick to welcome a €150,000 sports grant for a hockey pitch to the fee-paying Wesley College in his constituency, even though he later insisted he had nothing to do with the process.

Ross responds: "Glenalbyn swimming pool is in my constituency. I campaigned to keep it open when I was in opposition. The idea that I suddenly move into government and say 'I've

forgotten about that' is completely unacceptable."

The Clones GAA fiasco

When it comes to other sporting projects, he can be more reluctant to act. Back in 2016, then minister of state for sport Patrick O'Donovan was concerned about the poor state of St Tiernach's GAA stadium in Clones in Monaghan. It was an iconic ground, but there were fears it would lose its traditional hosting of the Ulster final to the soon-to-be redeveloped Casement Park in Belfast.

There was around €135,000 available in unused end-of-year funding from the Department of Transport which the GAA agreed to match. But Ross refused to sign off on the deal. Records obtained from his department under the Freedom of Information Act show that the first email from Monaghan GAA about the funding was sent in September 2016. It has sent another 14 emails since over the past two years, without success.

GAA director general Paraic Duffy, a Monaghan native, even sent an email last year before he stepped down from his post.

And this newspaper understands that Ross was also lobbied by former taoiseach Enda Kenny, current Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and local minister Heather Humphreys to release the money.

But this newspaper's queries in recent weeks on what had happened may have had an effect. After two years of delay, Ross has finally signed off on the funding after getting a 'reminder' from his officials a few weeks ago.

Ross responds: "I said 'okay, this is a good project'. Everybody is in favour of it. I think I should be in favour of it. And I cleared it. It was prompted by officials saying 'what's going on'. It's a large sum of money. It's a wonderful project."

Missing in action

There have been private complaints in the tourism and transport sector about how difficult it is to get a meeting with Ross. One senior tourism industry figure said he was not engaged with his tourism and transport portfolio, except for the drink driving legislation.

To test this out, this newspaper submitted a Freedom of Information request seeking the names of all the organisations that had requested to meet him – and the number that had been turned down. However, his department turned down the request, saying it would require too much work.

Ross said he was not conscious of any discontent. "There may be some groups that I haven't met."

The tourism sector has grown used to seeing Minister of State for Tourism, Brendan Griffin, turning up at events to deputise for Ross. The same can happen in the Dáil.

Last week, Griffin was left to deal with a topical issue on the proposed new bus corridors for Dublin because Ross had left

“For a man who was always writing in the papers about the system, when he got a chance, he couldn't break the system”



after finishing his ministerial questions. Green Party leader Eamon Ryan said Ross should not have 'slinked out'. "He does not have the courage to answer a question. It is a disgrace," he said.

In the early months of Ross's time in office, Leaders' Questions was put in as a diary item on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. It has since vanished from his diary. So, while independent ministers including Denis Naughten and Katherine Zappone do turn up at Leaders' Questions to show they are part of the government, Ross rarely does.

Ross responds: "I think I've spent more time in the Dáil than any other minister. I've taken through a lot of legislation, some of it has taken an awfully long time, which has kept me there for hours and hours. I guess I've taken more topical issues than anybody else."

Huffing during the Rugby World Cup bid

As a teenager, Ross attended Rugby boarding school in England. And it is the sport of the same name that he attends most as a minister. He was in Soldier Field stadium in Chicago for Ireland's first-ever rugby victory over New Zealand last year. So it was no surprise that

Ross was enthusiastic about Ireland's bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023 on a North-South basis.

Due to the all-island nature of the bid, there was careful planning of the launch to avoid alienating the unionist community. There were to be two representatives from the South, Taoiseach Enda Kenny and Tánaiste Frances Fitzgerald, and two from the North, the late Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness and the DUP minister Simon Hamilton.

As a result, an official in Ross's department drew up a draft speech and briefing material for Fitzgerald. She checked in with Ken Spratt, a well-regarded senior official in the department who previously captained the Erin's Isle GAA club in Dublin to an All-Ireland title. "That's fine with me," wrote Spratt in an email response.

But then Ross got wind of the fact that he was being left out of the launch and insisted that he be included. "He threw his toys out of the cot," said a government source.

It worked. Ross was added into the launch, even though that meant there were now three Southern reps to two Northern reps. A few days later, he wrote an article for his former newspaper, the Sunday Independent, about how he was "privileged to share the podium" with Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness.

Ross responds: "There's a general agreement that events of this sort will be shared if you are in a partnership government. In other words, Fine Gael don't get all the good ones, we don't get all the good ones. The Independent Alliance was not represented in any way at that press conference. And we said: 'Hey, where's the Independent Alliance rep, who happened to be the Minister for Sport?'"

Despite being so keen to be included in the launch, Ross left the work of securing the necessary votes to the Rugby World Cup bid committee. His ministerial diary does show that he was given briefings by his officials about how the bid was going. However, he did not travel abroad to any countries to personally seek their votes, even though it turned out that the lack of support from our neighbours Scotland and Wales proved to be decisive.

Ross responds: "I volunteered to do anything they wanted me to do. I'd have gone anywhere they wanted. Leo did most of the donkey work there. He was the Taoiseach, so he carried more weight. Getting a call from the Taoiseach is far better than a call from the Minister for Sport."

Non-existent leadership group for

women in sport

Back in late 2016, Ross took umbrage at his then minister of state for sport, Patrick O'Donovan, for having proposed a 30 per cent gender quota for women on the boards of sporting organisations. He publicly embarrassed O'Donovan by ruling out any cuts in funding for organisations which failed to make the quota. Instead, Ross declared that he would set up "a leadership group in early 2017, with the aim of promoting women in sport, so that potential candidates for these positions may be identified". The only problem is that he never set it up. It continues to be mainly 'jobs for the boys'. The IRFU board, for example, currently has one woman and 17 men.

Ross responds: "We are publishing our sports policy in July and our commitment to gender equality will be very well spelled out in that. It's not to gender quotas."

The missing policies

Ross has failed to produce many of the other new policies that he promised. The first-ever national greenways strategy has been repeatedly delayed, even though it is a key plank of the government's plan to boost regional tourism and rural jobs.

Forget the Cold War – Russia holds the power to deliver a very cold winter to Europe



Feargal Quinn
The EU, and Ireland, should be moving to reduce its dependence on Putin's supplies of natural gas

The EU currently imports more than half of all the energy it consumes. This €1 billion per day import dependency is estimated to be 90 per cent for crude oil, and 69 per cent for natural gas. What is most concerning about this is the fact that a very significant proportion of this comes from Russia. The EU is particularly dependent upon Russia for supplies of natural gas.

As a result of this reliance, several EU countries are vulnerable to politically rooted supply disruptions. Using the gas flow as a means of enforcing its will is a tactic that Russia is well used to deploying. Supply cuts were experienced by Ukraine in the 1990s, and again in 2006 and 2009, over pricing disputes. Cuts to supply were also experienced in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea.

More recently, Russia's delinquency has given rise to additional international sanctions and has again brought to the fore concerns around Europe's dependence on imports of natural gas from the country.

It has been foolhardy on the part of several EU member states to put themselves in a position where they are so dependent upon Russia for their energy supplies. Italy, Turkey and Britain are significantly dependent on Russian gas supplies, but their reliance pales in comparison to Germany's.

With its direct connection to gas supplies from Russia via the Nord Stream gas pipeline, Germany is the EU's largest user of Russian gas. Approximately 40 per cent of Germany's gas requirements are supplied by Russia and that dependence seems set to increase in the years ahead as some of Germany's other supply options dry up.

As it matters weren't bad enough, Germany is working on plans for the development of a new gas pipeline to Russia, 'Nord Stream 2'. One has to wonder to what extent Germany's dependency on Russian gas has been softening Germany's, and in turn,

the EU's political stance towards Russia.

Eastern Europe's dependence on gas supplied from Russia stems from Russia's willingness to continue to supply gas to its post-Soviet neighbours at heavily reduced prices. It has served as a powerful tool to dissuade former Eastern-Bloc countries from completely turning their backs on Mother Russia. Worryingly, some of those countries do not have access to alternative gas supplies and in some instances they do not have gas storage facilities.

In 2014, the European Commission published its Energy Security Strategy, which aims to ensure a stable and abundant supply of energy for European citizens and the economy. Among the long-term measures proposed in the strategy are a proposal to increase energy production in the EU, to diversify supplier countries and routes, and to increase energy efficiency. Completing the internal energy market and building infrastructure links so as to enable a quick response to supply disruptions are also aspirations. But they remain just aspirations.

The EU has already set targets for the reduction of Russian gas imports; however, in spite of this, imports have been rising and reliance on Russian gas has not been reduced. In fact, the EU's vulnerability in this regard looks set to continue, as the demand for natural gas within the EU greatly exceeds its production capabilities. Even if demand were to level off, the requirement for imports looks set to continually rise as gas production in Europe reduces.

The EU's continued dependence on Russian gas, and Ukrainian gas transit, led the European Commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker, to again champion the development of an Energy Union. Last September in his 'state of the Union address' he pledged to build a 'resilient Energy Union'.

But we have seen similar pledges, made in earnest, before.

The European Commission's 2015 Communication on the Energy Union placed a strong emphasis on delivering a greater



degree of diversity of energy sources, particularly gas supplies. This included plans to construct new infrastructure, including the Southern Gas Corridor which will facilitate the supply of natural gas from Caspian and Middle Eastern regions to Europe.

It would also lead to the development of the Mediterranean Gas Hub which would provide European countries with access to gas supplies in Algeria as well as the new gas resources in the East Mediterranean.

The Commission's Energy Union proposal also committed to the development of LNG facilities, reduced import dependence on imported oil and the development of indigenous resources. This would allow the EU to tap into new LNG supplies from North America, Australia, Qatar and East Africa.

It makes sense for the security of gas supply to be addressed in a coordinated way at EU level as this should be more efficient, and should preclude nationalistic measures which might have adverse effects on other countries. The EU's 2017 Regulation on the Security of Gas Supply enshrines the solidarity principle under which EU countries must help each other always to guarantee gas supply to the most vulnerable con-

sumers even in severe gas crisis situations. It also requires EU countries to cooperate with each other in regional groups to assess common supply risks together.

So why do EU member states find themselves so exposed to Russia's whims?

By always opting to buy from the cheapest provider, gas providers in Europe have not had an incentive to find and create alternative and more stable supply sources. This over-reliance on cheap natural gas has skewed Europe's approach to diversification of supply sources and has hindered the development of its energy supply infrastructure. Europe needs to re-consider what were previously off-limits gas sources and should also look again at developing infrastructure which, in the context of cheap Russian gas, initially seems disproportionately costly and uncompetitive.

Supplies for Ireland

For us, Europe's high dependency on Russian gas is not just someone else's problem. Ireland has its own dependency on gas imports. Natural gas meets 27 per cent of our primary energy requirement and is availed

JAZZ

SUNDAY SESSIONS
AT THE UNITED ARTS CLUB

No. 3 Upper Fitzwilliam Street,
Dublin 2, D02RR50

FEATURING NIGEL MOONEY &
THE JOHNNY TAYLOR TRIO

NON MEMBERS WELCOME
4-6PM
FULL BAR

Tel: 01-6611411
email.office@dublinarts.com

ADMISSION
only €10

UNITED ARTS CLUB
No. 3 Upper Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin 2



Shane Ross, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (centre), pictured aboard the first tram to run on the Luas Cross City tram test at O'Connell Street in Dublin

was in his department's statement of strategy back in 2016. Ross said it was due, but not imminent.

The first ever national sports policy was promised in Ross's statement of strategy in 2016, but is only coming out next month. Ross said the promise to have a performance system in place for the country's ports by the end of last year was "being done, but I don't know when it will be ready".

Traffic congestion is increasing in step with the growth of the economy. The most pressing problem is on the M50, where Transport Infrastructure Ireland has been putting pressure on Ross to introduce tolling along the route to try to stop vehicle numbers going over 140,000 per day.

But Ross, who successfully campaigned as a newspaper columnist for the M50 toll bridge to be eliminated, has been unwilling to take the political hit. The inevitable result is that traffic numbers on the M50 will continue to grow and it will become even more of a parking lot at peak times.

Independent TD Michael Fitzmaurice, who left the Independent Alliance before it went into government, said that Ross was now "politically toxic".

"Everywhere you go, people mention his name. Councillors think he is useless at getting money for roads. For a man who was always writing in the papers about the system, when he got a chance, he couldn't break the system," he said.

Fighting with the judges

Ross's ministerial diary shows that he has had several meetings with Minister for Justice Charlie Flanagan and the Attorney General Seamus Woulfe about his political priority project – having judges nominated for appointment by a council with a majority of lay people.

But very few realised how close Fianna Fáil came to defeating him during its final stage in the Dáil last month. For most of the final amendments to the bill on Thursday, May 31, it looked like half of the Fianna Fáil parliamentary party had gone home to their constituencies. But government chief whip Joe McHugh became suspicious that the party was preparing an ambush.

"He spotted that it didn't look right well ahead of anybody else. There were too few Fianna Fáil TDs there," said a government source.

Sure enough, when the final vote was called on the judicial appointments bill, the number of Fianna Fáil TDs rushing in nearly doubled from 20 to 39.

But McHugh had lined up the Fine Gael and government-supporting independents to join with the Sinn Féin TDs who had agreed to back Ross. The bill passed by 55 votes to 49.

"It was the presence of Sinn Féin that saved the government," said one Fianna Fáil TD ruefully of their failed ambush. The bill now goes to the Seanad, where many Senators are lying in wait for it.

Ross responds: "It was an attempt by (Fianna Fáil justice spokesman) Jim O'Callaghan to pull a coup. The Law Library and the judges would have given him a banquet for that. Thank God they didn't succeed. But I hear they were going around saying goodbye to people and they were hiding up in their rooms. And they all suddenly appeared."

Unfilled state board appointments

Ross has been trying unsuccessfully to gain political leverage by halting the appointment of judges until the new judicial appointments bill is made law. He has had to back down dozens of times, which has been gleefully reported.

However, his own failure to appoint people to the boards of the state companies under him has not got the same scrutiny. When he was campaigning for election, Ross portrayed himself as the man who would get rid of "cronyism" on state boards.

Yet, on his watch, there has been a consistent failure to fill positions promptly on the state boards under his jurisdiction. He was unhappy with the appointments process for state boards, because he was being given dozens of names for state board positions, but had no knowledge about their ability to do the job, or whether they had political connections.

Back in August 2016, Ross had left 47 state board positions unfilled due to a row about the selection process.

There has not been much of an improvement in the past two years.

According to the latest update from his department, there are currently 30 vacancies on 14 different public bodies of note.

These include the Dublin Airport Authority, the Irish Aviation Authority, Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann, Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and Sport Ireland.

Being short up to four members for a prolonged period of time raises real concerns about the ability of the boards of these organisations to exercise proper corporate governance.

Some of the delay is down to the fact that Ross has set up a second vetting process of his own – with a four-person panel personally interviewing people nominated by the Public Appointments Service. They then present him with a short list ranked in order of preference.

Ross responds: "I'm not parachuting anybody in to a state board. There isn't a single director I don't think who hasn't gone through a formal interview. That's a completely new process. Next week, I am going to appoint people to the board of CIE and the three subsidiary companies. And they are going to be people whose experience of disabilities is a primary consideration."

Tourism bottleneck

In his department's recent annual report for 2017, Ross cited the "strong growth" in tourist numbers, which were up by 3 per cent to 9.9 million.

The main reason for the increase in visitor numbers is the extra flights arriving into the country from the US, China and mainland Europe. But Dublin Airport is already reaching peak capacity on its main runway, so it needs to build another one to relieve the bottleneck.

It has planning permission, but one of the conditions of planning is the appointment of an independent noise regulator to deal with any complaints from local residents.

The Dublin Airport Authority (DAA)

was alarmed at the lack of any sign of the necessary noise regulator bill from Ross's department. So its chairman Padraig O'Riordain met Ross in his ministerial office in Leeson Lane last September. Then the DAA's chief executive trooped in a month later. Last November, Padraig O'Riordain was back to meet Ross.

For 18 months, Ross and his officials said that the Irish Aviation Authority could do the job of being the independent noise regulator for Dublin Airport, on foot of advice from the previous attorney general Máire Whelan. Then he suddenly got advice from the new Attorney General, Seamus Woulfe, that this was not possible. He brought a memo to government last February to say that Fingal Co Council would do it instead.

Either way, Ross has not even published the bill for the noise regulator, let alone got it passed into law. And yet one of his high-level strategy goals is to "maximise air transport connectivity".

Fianna Fáil transport spokesman Robert Troy said it was a sign of how the department was drifting under Ross's stewardship.

"If there is no captain on the ship, it's hard for it to sail in any direction," he said.

Ross responds: My officials who are doing this are confident they will have the legislation in time. We realise the urgency of it. But it is complex, as can be seen from the fact that two attorney generals have come up with different judgments on this."

Road safety campaign

One area where Ross has got more praise than criticism is in relation to road safety legislation. When he took over as minister, he made time early on to meet with road safety campaigners who had lost loved ones on the roads. They were happy to support his bill to give every drink driver an automatic driving ban, instead of penalty points, for those between the 50mg-80mg alcohol limit.

And road safety campaigners are grateful that Ross has persisted in standing up to a small number of rural TDs who were determined to filibuster his bill, because it will save lives. He has also stuck with his plans to allow Gardai to seize the vehicle of an unaccompanied learner driver and to prosecute the owner. This is known as the 'Clancy' amendment – because it has been campaigned for by Noel Clancy whose wife and daughter were killed in a road crash involving an unaccompanied learner driver.

It was notable that Taoiseach Leo Varadkar was present in the Dáil chamber last week in a show of political support during the late-night debate on the bill. It is expected to finally pass in the Dáil next week.

The fate of the

Independent Alliance

It is not a good sign that Galway East TD Sean Canney is still listed on the website of the Independent Alliance despite having left it a month ago. There is an email list which Ross and the remaining three TDs use to keep in touch with Independent Alliance councillors.

But there are worrying signs about the strength of the Alliance heading into another election. This newspaper made contact with almost all of the 16 unsuccessful candidates who ran for the Independent Alliance in the 2016 general election. So far, not one has confirmed that they intend running for the Alliance in the next general election. Independent Cork councillor Mick Finn said he was out, as did former Longford-Westmeath candidate James Morgan and former Cork North west candidate Diarmuid O'Flynn.

Independent South Dublin councillor Deirdre O'Donovan said she would not be running again because of the high cost. "I'm still paying off the €22,500 it cost me the last time," she said.

However, some former candidates are thinking of running under the Independent Alliance banner again. Independent Sligo councillor Marie Casserly spoke warmly of Ross and other Independent Alliance ministers for helping to deliver infrastructure to Sligo, such as the western distributor road and a flood defence project for a local nursing home.

"I do have to say they have been exceptionally supportive to me and exceptionally helpful," she said.

Independent Meath councillor Joe Bonner said he would certainly be looking at running again.

Ross responds: "We haven't asked anybody at this stage to run for us. But we will be fielding a slate of candidates. We're looking at a smaller number of people who we think have got really good chances of winning seats. The Independent Alliance is not in trouble. We will have a think-in in September at which we'll present our budget requirements."

If Ross was a Fine Gael minister, he would have much to fear in any cabinet reshuffle. But the government depends on his support, so his job is safe until the election. When he leaves cabinet, he may be happy with just getting his drink driving bill and the judicial appointments bill passed into law. He may even get Stepaside Garda station and Glenalbyn swimming pool re-opened. But there was potential for him to do so much more.

Ross responds: "This is thrown all the time and I'm blue in the face answering the judicial one. These are in the programme for government. I am to a large extent their guardian and their champion. I spend no time on Stepaside. The idea that it distracts me from taking an interest in transport issues is nonsense."



Russian president Vladimir Putin signs an autograph on a natural gas pipeline in Vladivostok
Picture: Getty

large-scale ships, for storage and subsequent distribution in countries which don't have a sufficient indigenous supply of natural gas. Because of the nature of the task of unloading the gas, LNG ships require a special terminal which has storage facilities. Ireland is one of the few countries in western Europe which lacks LNG capability.

An LNG terminal at Shannon has been planned for quite some time. In 2008, Shannon LNG received planning permission to build an LNG import terminal in the Shannon Estuary at a point between Ballylongford and Tarbert. However, the terminal was never built and while the planning permission has since expired, it may be renewed. Interestingly, the current programme for government explicitly references the Shannon LNG project (p.125) and states that "prospect of such a facility would be a positive step for the island of Ireland".

Perhaps somewhat encouraged by the slowness of the Shannon project to get off the ground, last year the Port of Cork signed a memorandum of understanding with a US LNG company called NextDecade which could result in the construction of an LNG terminal at the port. NextDecade believes this facility could enable it to supply Ireland with one third of its natural gas needs.

While the transportation cost of LNG is likely to be higher than pipeline transmission costs, in the interests of reducing our reliance on supplies from continental Europe (and Russia), putting in place the infrastructure required to access LNG is essential.

In the event of the escalation of Europe's tensions with Russia, we can expect that Russia will deploy every tactical weapon at its disposal in order to increase pressure on Europe in the hope that it might capitulate. Such tactics are highly likely to extend to reducing, or cutting-off entirely, gas supplies. While a UCC study from earlier this year seemed to conclude that concerns of a major interruption are misplaced, it seems unwise to be so dismissive of the prospect.

Europe, and indeed Ireland, should no longer stand for a situation where, come winter in Europe, Vladimir Putin's hand still rests on the thermostat. We in Europe need to wean ourselves off our addiction to cheap Russian gas. In return for a move towards zero dependence on Russia, European consumers should be prepared to pay more for their gas.

As an island nation with a strong dependence on gas and oil imports, Ireland should be at the forefront of helping to make the Energy Union a reality.

Feargal Quinn served as a member of Seanad Éireann for 23 years and is president of Sencheer Holdings

of by approximately 678,000 domestic, industrial and commercial customers across Ireland. According to a paper published by Ervia, natural gas accounted for an average of 49 per cent of the fuel used in electricity generation over the past five years.

Ireland currently has access to two local supplies of natural gas – the Corrib, which fulfilled 54 per cent of 2016 demand, and Kinsale, which provided 6 per cent. The balance is imported from Britain via an undersea pipeline from Scotland. While the Corrib supply has reduced our import dependence to 40 per cent, like other countries in Europe we remain vulnerable to geo-political developments which can impinge on the supply and pricing of gas. The fact that the Corrib gas field has an estimated producing life of just over 15 years (it is scheduled to cease operating in 2031) means that Ireland needs to take a far longer term view of its gas supplies.

One means of diversifying Ireland's gas supplies is through the import of liquefied natural gas (LNG). LNG is natural gas that has been condensed into liquid form by cooling it to about -160°C. It can then be transported from its country of origin, in



Like other countries in Europe we remain vulnerable to geo-political developments which can impinge on the supply and pricing of gas

New €750,000 Competitive Start Fund for Fintech and Deep Tech

Fintech and deep tech are two of the fastest growing Irish sectors. That's why Enterprise Ireland is launching the new Competitive Start Fund for ambitious start-ups in both areas.

Successful applicants will each receive up to €50,000 in equity investment, as well as access to Bank of Ireland's Innovation Team and masterclasses provided by industry experts, hosted at its Fintech Innovation Lab.

Call opens: **Tuesday 19 June**
Call closes: **Tuesday 3 July**
Apply online: enterprise-ireland.com/fintech

#GlobalAmbition

A Sunday Business Post investigation has revealed that Fine Gael gran Mary, are the owners of a sprawling Co Meath site that is zoned for



The vacant Bruton housing site on the Maynooth Road, Dunboyne, opposite the Dunboyne Castle Hotel. Half of this land is zoned for housing, as is another full family field behind it
DISTANCE FROM TOWN CENTRE: 650 metres

THIS LAND IS T



The vacant housing site beside Dunboyne train station. Owned by developer John Connaughton, it is zoned for housing but was used this year for growing winter barley
DISTANCE FROM TOWN CENTRE: 850 metres

The housing sites lying dor



The out-of-town greenfield site (on the far right) is zoned for housing despite the opposition of Simon Coveney, who called it 'detached and distant'. The M3 parkway rail station is on the left of the photograph
DISTANCE FROM TOWN CENTRE: 2km



Michael Brennan
Political Editor

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and his ministers are looking at increasing the vacant site levy in this week's budget to tackle land hoarding. But an investigation by *The Sunday Business Post* has revealed that one cabinet member has a significant stake in a long-dormant housing site which could provide badly-needed accommodation.

The site belongs to Minister for Education Richard Bruton; his brother, former taoiseach John Bruton; and their sister, Mary. It is located in Dunboyne in Co Meath, where there is a severe shortage of new homes in the town, both for buyers and renters.

It is across the road from the Dunboyne Castle Hotel, within 650 metres of the town centre. But even though it has been zoned for housing development for the past 18 years, it is currently only being used for farming purposes, with silage cut there over the summer.

All the other main housing sites in the town are currently inactive, despite the demand for new supply. Worse again, Meath County Council has responded to the housing shortage by rezoning land for 500 homes on an out-of-town site.

All of which makes the Brutons' Dunboyne site a classic case study of the factors behind the national housing crisis.

'Why should they be forced to build?'

The land opposite the Dunboyne Castle Hotel has been in Bruton ownership since their father Joe first bought a 400-acre farm in Dunboyne back in 1942. He quickly became known as one of the most progressive beef farmers in the country. The house where he brought up his sons John and Richard and his daughter Mary is still located down a cul-de-sac opposite the hotel.

When Joe Bruton died in 2009, at the

age of 99, his estate was valued at €5.8 million. He allocated 35 per cent shares to Richard and John and the remaining 30 per cent to his only daughter Mary. And he provided for the setting-up of trust funds of €50,000 for each of his grandchildren until they reached the age of 25.

Most of the farmland that Joe Bruton passed onto his three children is still zoned for agricultural purposes. Since 1999, however, a large site on the farm opposite Dunboyne Castle Hotel on the Maynooth Road has been zoned for housing. But it is currently only being rented out for farming purposes. The family home is also being rented out. Richard Bruton lives on Griffith Avenue in Dublin while representing his Dublin Bay North constituency; John Bruton lives around five kilometres outside Dunboyne, in Cornelstown.

The view locally is that the Brutons do not want to sell their site zoned for housing in Dunboyne, and that they are under no financial pressure to do so. While no one has ever described the amiable Richard Bruton as a Bull McCabe-type character, the desire to hold onto family fields does run deep.

There are those, like local Fine Gael councillor Maria Murphy, who believe that the Bruton family should be allowed to keep it as farmland rather than housing land. "They have never indicated a desire to build. Why should they be forced to?" she asked.

The housing crisis in Dunboyne

There are obvious pull factors to Dunboyne. It has a lively mix of long-established businesses, pubs, shops, restaurants and cafés along its main street. There is huge demand for housing from workers in Dublin, who are desperate to settle in a town which is only 25 minutes by rail to the city centre. The state spent more than €160 million to reopen the rail line between Dublin and Dunboyne in 2010, with the aim of helping the town to develop sustainably.

But Dunboyne is experiencing a chronic housing shortage. No new estates are being built, and there is only one property available for rent on the Daft.ie - a three-bed house for €1,900 per month.

Thomas Byrne, the Fianna Fáil TD for Meath East, said there was a huge demand in Dunboyne for housing, espe-

cially from people in their early thirties who had grown up there.

"It's a great town. People would love to live in the area, but they can't," he said.

The shortage is obvious in the Property Shop on Main Street, which has red 'Sold' stickers on almost every Dunboyne house displayed in its shop window. Its owner, Eugene Murray, said the shortage of property was the worst since he had opened the office in 1999.

Repeating the Celtic Tiger mistakes

The Bruton site opposite the Dunboyne Castle Hotel is not only one of the few housing sites available in the town - it is one of the best-located. But due to the inactivity on the Bruton housing site and others, Meath County Council is now poised to repeat one of the classic Celtic Tiger planning mistakes: building lots of houses far outside the town, on a greenfield site with few or no established services.

The council came up with a plan last year to rezone a greenfield site which was two kilometres outside the centre of Dunboyne. It would contain 500 homes as well as new office accommodation to provide jobs. This site was owned by a company belonging to developer Sean Reilly, one of the 'Maple Ten' investors who bought shares in Anglo Irish Bank as it teetered on the verge of collapse.

Reilly had around €373 million of property loans from Anglo Irish Bank which were transferred into Nama during the property crash. They were later bought for €220 million by the Lone Star vulture fund. But his building company, McGarrell Reilly Group, still had sites to develop around the country, including the one on the outskirts of Dunboyne.

Coveney's hard line

Meath County Council's decision to rezone Reilly's land set off alarm bells among senior planners nationally. Last year, they brought it to the attention of the then Minister for Housing Simon Coveney, who had the power to overturn any council rezonings which breach sustainable planning guidelines.

Coveney issued a draft direction in June 2016 telling the council to scrap the rezoning. He said that the planned 500 homes would be "detached and distant" from the centre of Dunboyne.

This was on foot of advice from his se-

nior planning adviser, Niall Cussen, that the most sustainable way of developing Dunboyne was to use the 33 hectares of land zoned for housing around the town centre. The council could have also brought forward permission for land which is only zoned for housing after 2019.

This could have benefited the former All-Ireland-winning Meath Gaelic football manager Sean Boylan. He had lands zoned for future housing use near the herbal medicine clinic that he has run for many years opposite Dunboyne train station.

But rather than backing down in the face of Coveney's draft direction to cancel the rezoning for 500 homes outside Dunboyne, Meath County Council went to the trouble of obtaining its own legal advice from a senior counsel to justify its actions.



The view locally is that the Brutons do not want to sell their site, and that they are under no financial pressure to do so

Local councillors were won over by the promises of housing and badly-needed jobs at the out-of-town site. Almost half of the workers who live in Dunboyne are travelling into Dublin every day, so there is a desperate desire to have local employment. All 28 councillors who were present at the earlier council meeting in May 2016 supported the rezoning.

But it was notable that the decision was also independently examined by a new regional planning body, the Eastern

and Midland Regional Assembly. It has 40 councillors from 12 counties on it. A majority of them voted against the Dunboyne rezoning decision. They said building out-of-town housing would create a new community "remote and detached from the existing urban fabric of Dunboyne" and was in breach of regional planning guidelines.

But while Meath County Council management had to take account of this verdict, it was not legally binding.

Coveney's climbdown

Coveney was facing a united front in the form of Meath County Council management, the councillors themselves and the site owner, McGarrell Reilly Group.

In the wake of all the pressure, there was a climbdown. Coveney sent a letter withdrawing his draft direction to Meath County Council in August last year. It meant the council was free to go ahead with the rezoning of the out-of-town site for 500 homes. This was highly unusual, to put it mildly. It is the first time in recent memory that a minister issued a draft planning direction and then withdrew it three months later.

Coveney's main reason for the u-turn was the continued lack of new housing supply in Dunboyne town itself. He noted there was a lack of development on lands already zoned for housing "despite considerable demand".

These lands, of course, included the Bruton site.

Meath County Council's view is that Coveney's change of heart was due to the detailed and comprehensive 283-page rezoning report it had prepared for him. It also promised that it would not allow any houses to be built on the site if jobs were not in the pipeline as well.

There are already some companies there, which could help to attract others. The Avoca café is on the other side of the M3 motorway, as well as the Kilsaran Concrete site, and the pharma giant Shire is to employ 400 people in a new manufacturing plant there.

But there is a risk that additional jobs will never materialise for



John and Richard Bruton pictured in 2006: the family have owned the Dunboyne land since 1942
Photocall Ireland

dees Richard and John Bruton, and their sister housing, but is being used only for silage



HEIR LAND



mant in Dunboyne



Brutons face the prospect of having to pay a vacant site levy

The vacant site levy is one of the government's key policy tools to bring unused housing land back into use.

It amounts to 3 per cent of the market value per year – so a site worth €1 million would attract a levy of €30,000 per year.

On the face of it, the Bruton site on the Maynooth Road in Dunboyne ticks all the boxes which are required.

According to the official guidelines, the vacant site levy is meant to apply to land that has been zoned for housing but is “lying dormant and undeveloped”.

The Bruton site has been zoned for housing since 1999. Bruton's position is that the land cannot be considered ‘vacant or idle’ because it is part of a working farm, with a crop of silage recently cut there. However, the official guidelines for vacant site levy state that it can be applied to such farmland because it is not being used for its designated purpose – which is housing.

Meath County Council has confirmed that it was taking the necessary steps to identify potential vacant sites.

The levy is due to start in January next year.

Vacant house on Brutons' land has fallen into state of disrepair

The Brutons' site is also an example of another nationwide problem which is contributing to the housing crisis – vacant homes.

There is a vacant house in the corner of the site which is zoned for housing on the Maynooth Road in Dunboyne. The house was previously rented, just as the original Bruton family home nearby currently is.

But locals say it was damaged by vandals many years ago and then boarded up. There are nettles and weeds in front of its blue front door, and the backyard is full of overgrown bushes. It would cost a considerable sum of money to refurbish. But there would be no shortage of renters for it in Dunboyne. And getting vacant houses

back into use is currently a key plank of the government's plan to tackle the housing crisis.

Still, there is no sign of the Bruton family renovating the house at the moment. A spokesman for Richard Bruton said the structure was in a state of dilapidation and is not suitable for accommodation. He pointed out that many farms around the country had such properties.

Last year's census found there were 183,000 vacant houses and apartments around the country. But while other countries will not allow any new building until such abandoned houses are either restored, demolished or completely rebuilt, here there seems to be an acceptance that such eyesores are just part of the landscape.

council to reserve part of the site for the new school that would be needed if the homes are built.

Then there is the impact of putting 500 houses right beside an interchange to the M3 motorway. No traffic assessment was done, but there is the potential for 1,000 cars coming in and out at peak times.

Dunboyne's other key housing site

Meath County Council's determination to build 500 houses outside Dunboyne seems all the more baffling when there is another high-profile housing landbank right beside the town centre, owned by the town's biggest developer.

John Connaughton grew up in Westmeath, but lives in the affluent Dublin suburb of Killiney. By one estimate, around 700 of the 2,000 homes in the town were built by him over the past three decades, including the Beechdale, Chestnut Grove and Mill Farm estates.

His remaining landbank includes a huge site of over 20 hectares right beside Dunboyne train station. It has been zoned for housing for eight years.

If houses and apartments were built there, the residents would be able to take a train into Dublin city centre every morning. They would also be within a five-minute walk of the town's main street. But its main use this year has been to grow a crop of barley.

Connaughton himself is now 85 years old, and there is scepticism in the area about whether he will ever build again. But he told this newspaper that he was currently in discussions with the council about building 400 houses and apartments on the site beside Dunboyne train station – and then following up with 200 more. “We're anxious to develop,” he said.

Connaughton has the financial firepower to go ahead, as his building company did not get into difficulties during the recession. It has reserves of €31 million, according to its 2016 accounts. And Connaughton said his son Darragh, who has his own building company, was keen to work on the Dunboyne project with him.

Locked out of housing

Last year, a volunteer committee in Dunboyne raised around €40,000 from local

businesses and residents to build a 1916 memorial garden on the Main Street. Local Fianna Fáil councillor Damien O'Reilly, who chaired the committee, said it only took them a few weeks to gather it. “There is great community spirit in Dunboyne,” he said.

The committee shipped in a nine-metre flagpole from China to display the Irish tricolour. They then put in seven seats and seven trees to commemorate the seven signatories of the Proclamation. And they displayed the Proclamation itself on a marble slab, with one of its best known pledges engraved on the three of the four sides. “This Republic guarantees religious and civil liberties... equal rights and equal opportunities... to all its citizens.”

But what has happened in Dunboyne over the past year has damaged the chances of young families hoping to raise their children there – and in other towns just like it.

Given that the Bruton site was designated for housing in 1999, how has Richard Bruton avoided public scrutiny on it for so long? It is partly due to the high standing he and his family have in the area. He has held four ministerial posts over the years; his father Joe was involved in fundraising for the parish church and other community projects; his brother John is a former taoiseach, and was a popular local TD.

Those living locally who know about the Bruton field's potential to provide homes for people, rather than silage for cows, do not want to criticise the family publicly. There have been grumbles over the years about the lack of housebuilding on the land at local Fianna Fáil cumainn meetings. But that is about as far as it has gone.

Richard Bruton would not say if he personally would be willing to sell the site for housing. A spokesman for him said the land was a working farm which had been in the Bruton family for 75 years.

“As the land is owned jointly by Minister Bruton and a number of other individuals, it is not open to Minister Bruton alone to make decisions on the future of the land,” he said.

The Bruton site fits the definition of a vacant housing site. The levy is due to start in January next year, but Meath County Council has still not published its list of vacant sites. So there is no way of knowing whether Bruton and his co-owners will end up paying a levy that he himself approved at cabinet.

Eyewitness report

Violence has exposed the state of Spain as a repressive regime



Eoin Ó Broin

As part of a monitoring team at last Sunday's referendum in Catalonia, I saw at first hand the attacks by Spanish police on young and old alike

Antonio is 83 years old. He arrived at his local polling station in La Barceloneta at 7am. Just after 9am the Spanish police attacked the crowd. Antonio was badly hurt and had to go to hospital. After the doctor bandaged up his arm and leg he returned to the polling station and waited for hours to cast his vote.

Born in Catalonia to Spanish parents, Antonio believed that the time had come for the country of his birth to become an independent state. He was born in 1934, the year Catalonia was last declared independent by the Left Republican politician Lluís Companys. By 1940, General Franco had installed a brutal military dictatorship and Companys had been executed.

Having lived through the dark days of Franco's regime, the transition after his death, and Spain's fragile liberal democracy, Antonio told me that he was worried that history was about to repeat itself. What was his response to the violence meted out to him and his neighbours by Spanish police last Sunday? A quiet, dignified and peaceful determination to cast his vote.

Last Sunday's Catalan independence referendum did not come out of nowhere. For 14 years, successive Catalan governments, led by nationalist and unionist parties, have been trying to renegotiate their devolution agreement with Spain.

Hard line on national question

In 2005, the Catalan Parliament drafted a new statute of autonomy. The proposal, which sought to devolve more fiscal and judicial powers and described Catalonia as a nation, was supported by 120 of 135 MPs.

A watered-down version passed through the Spanish parliament led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's socialist government. The Catalan people supported the proposal with a massive 74 per cent in a referendum in June 2006.

However, the leader of the Popular Party in Madrid, Mariano Rajoy, challenged the legality of the agreement in the Constitutional Court. After four years of wrangles, the court stripped the agreement of much of its powers and removed the reference to Catalonia as a nation.

In response, more than a million citizens took to the streets in Barcelona demanding their right to decide their own future, not Spanish judges in a court in Madrid. A conservative and centralised Spanish state was facing down a popular democratic movement for change. The more intransigent the behaviour of the state became, the more that support for independence among ordinary Catalans grew.

The situation deteriorated when Mariano Rajoy's People's Party (Partido Popular) won the 2011 general election. The new government took an even more hawkish line on the Catalan question. Repeated attempts to resolve the situation by Catalan politicians were rebuffed.

Meanwhile, peaceful protests in support of self-determination grew, with two million Catalans forming a human chain in September 2013 along a 400-kilometre stretch of road spanning the country.

Attempts by the Catalan parliament to secure a legal referendum, as in Scotland, were rejected by Madrid in April 2014. A non-binding plebiscite called by the Catalan government was banned in September of that year. On September 27, 2.3 million Catalans voted with 81 per cent choosing independence. In response, the Spanish state prosecutor took the Catalan president Artur Mas to court, banning him from holding office for two years.

Support for self-determination

In advance of the 2015 Catalan elections, the leading pro-independence parties formed a coalition. Junts pel Sí, promising a formal referendum on independence if they won a majority. While the coalition fell short, they secured support from the radical left CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy) giving them a slim majority.

Carles Puigdemont was elected president of the Catalan parliament in January and the referendum plans proceeded.

The Spanish government responded with criminal proceedings against 400 elected officials including the speaker of the Catalan parliament. Websites promoting the referendum were shut down. Campaign material was seized by the police. Companies were banned from accepting tenders from the Catalan government for the provision of ballot boxes and papers.

As the referendum day approached, Catalans believed that the vote would take place and then be ignored by the Spanish government. Nobody was expecting October 1 to play out the way it did.

From 7am that morning to 11pm that evening, I was part of an election monitoring team accredited by the Catalan Electoral Commission. Some of the invited politicians were supportive of Catalan self-determination. Others were not.

Unprovoked and unjustified violence

We witnessed, at first hand, the unprovoked and unjustified use of violence by the Spanish National Police and Civil Guard. They attacked voters young and old alike. They attacked local Catalan police and firefighters. They stole ballot boxes and papers, electronically blocked the online vote register and physically denied 800,000 people the right to vote.

In response, those queuing to vote reacted with the same peaceful stoicism as Antonio. Despite being beaten with batons and hit with plastic bullets they returned to the polling stations and quietly waited to cast their ballots.

More than 2.26 million Catalans voted on October 1. The 42 per cent turnout would undoubtedly have been higher if the Spanish police hadn't intervened. Of those who voted 90 per cent supported independence – the highest level in recent electoral history.

President Puigdemont indicated that his parliament would move to declare independence within days and called for dialogue and EU mediation between Spain and Catalonia. Prime minister Mariano Rajoy banned the upcoming sitting of the Catalan parliament. The Spanish state prosecutor indicted the head of the Catalan police and the leaders of the Catalan National Congress, the country's leading pro-independence civil society organisation. King Felipe VI refused to condemn Spanish police violence. The Spanish army were sent to barracks outside Barcelona.

The immediate future is uncertain. The coming days may well turn out to be a turning point. We could even be witnessing the end of Spain itself. Faced with a peaceful, democratic and cosmopolitan Catalan nationalism, the Spanish state has exposed itself to the world as a repressive, unresponsive and undemocratic regime.

What are needed now are dialogue and mediation to avoid the political crisis spiralling out of control. For 14 years, Catalans have been trying to get the Spanish state to respect their rights. The international community cannot stand idly by in the face of Spanish intransigence and violence.

Eoin Ó Broin is a Sinn Féin TD

the site outside Dunboyne – and that there will simply be 500 homes stuck on their own.

The cost factor

The site does have the benefit of being close to the M3 parkway rail station. But the rezoning is going to require substantial investment, because there is absolutely nothing on the greenfield site such

as schools, pubs or shops.

Irish Water has said that it will have to build out a new drain to the site and a new pumping station to send the sewage from the new houses back two kilometres to Dunboyne. Meath County Council is drawing up plans for cycle lanes, footpaths and improved roads to connect it to Dunboyne town. And, ironically, Richard Bruton's own Department of Education has asked the

Brutons sitting on prime vacant site in Dunboyne

BY MICHAEL BRENNAN
POLITICAL EDITOR

Minister for Education Richard Bruton and former taoiseach John Bruton are sitting on a prime vacant housing site in their home town despite the severe shortage of homes there.

They and their sister inherited the land in Dunboyne in Meath which was part of the original Bruton family farm. But it has been designated

for housing by the local council for 18 years because of its prime location just 600 metres from the town centre.

However, the Brutons have not applied for planning permission for the site on the Maynooth Road opposite the Dunboyne Castle Hotel, or put the land up for sale. It is instead being rented for farming activity.

It comes at a time when the shortage of homes in the town is severe, with only one home

for rent and no new estates currently under construction.

A spokesman for Minister for Education Bruton said the land was a working farm which has been in the Bruton family for 75 years.

"As the land is owned jointly by Minister Bruton and a number of other individuals, it is not open to Minister Bruton alone to make decisions on the future of the land," he said.

The land had been owned by Bruton's father Joe, who

died in 2009. He bequeathed 35 per cent shares to each of his sons Richard and John and the remaining 30 per cent to his only daughter Mary. His overall estate was valued at €5.8 million.

When contacted, former Taoiseach John Bruton declined to comment on the housing site. "I'm not going into that," he said.

Due to the shortage of homes in Dunboyne, Meath County Council will have the

option of applying the new 3 per cent vacant site levy on the Bruton site zoned for housing from next January onwards.

Richard Bruton's position is that the land cannot be considered 'vacant or idle' because it is part of a working farm. However, the official guidelines for vacant site levy state that it can be applied to such farmland because it is not being used for its designated purpose - which is housing.

Due to the lack of housing

currently being developed in Dunboyne, Meath county council controversially opted to rezone land for 500 homes far outside the town last year.

This was despite a warning from previous Minister for Housing Simon Coveney that the site would be "detached and distant" from the existing urban area of Dunboyne which already has well established infrastructure.

Full analysis: Post Plus, pages 4-5



An abandoned house on the Bruton lands in Dunboyne

‘Obfuscation is a difficult weapon to abandon’

McGuinness and Cowen clash over water



BY HUGH O'CONNELL
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

The Fianna Fáil TD John McGuinness clashed with the party's housing spokesman Barry Cowen over water charges legislation in a scathing email exchange last week.

McGuinness has raised several issues with Fianna Fáil's approach to the Water Services Bill, which will refund water charges and implement charges for excessive waste, at parliamentary party (PP) meetings in recent weeks.

His latest intervention led to a bitter email exchange with Cowen that was copied to every Fianna Fáil TD and senator and has been seen by *The Sunday Business Post*.

The emails followed last Wednesday's parliamentary party meeting where McGuinness expressed concern that motor tax revenue was funding Irish Water and that there was no clarity over what proof would be needed for medical exemptions from excessive waste fines. He also said the state spending watchdog, the Comptroller and Auditor General, should be directly auditing the utility's books.

Believing he had addressed McGuinness's concerns in an email sent last Tuesday, Cowen emailed him again after the meeting on



Wednesday to say: "I believe you raised this issue at PP but didn't inform the [meeting] of my email to you on the matter yesterday. I hope you correct the record next week."

Cowen then forwarded his emails to the entire parliamentary party last Thursday afternoon, pointing out that McGuinness had "failed to inform the meeting of correspondence to clarify his concerns which I had sent to him directly on email some days ago". He said the emails he sent to McGuinness had provided further clarification.

However, in his response which was copied to the entire parliamentary party, hours later, McGuinness told Cowen: "Thank you for your recent report from the front. I am delighted that we are finally getting replies and in writing, even if your ideas of clarification only add to my confusion."

"But I know obfuscation is a difficult weapon to abandon. It might be that whoever whispered in your ear didn't give you an accurate account of what I said or had an ulterior motive?"

McGuinness went on to outline his concerns, saying it was his belief that the party, and not he personally, should table amendments to the Water Services Bill, a possibility that was still open as the deadline for the submission of amendments had not passed - contrary to what Cowen had claimed.

McGuinness said that while he hadn't read Cowen's email prior to the PP meeting, it would not have changed the questions he had raised. He added: "I didn't mislead anyone. It's not my style."

In closing, McGuinness wrote: "It could be, Barry, that it is simply a question of bettering the communications from the party leadership, elected and unelected, to the troops."

"This might prevent such issues arising in the future. It's as easy as that, but I wonder. What do you think? If you would like a chat, please don't hesitate to call."

The email exchanges came after a PP meeting where several rural TDs vented their frustration at party leader Micheál Martin over the confidence and supply deal with Fine Gael. McGuinness, Niamh Smyth, Marc MacSharry, Pat 'The Cope' Gallagher, and Sean Fleming were reportedly among those expressing anger at the meeting.

Some TDs believe they do not have enough input into decisions being taken by Martin and his senior advisers.

"They want us all to follow blindly because they want everything shoved through," said one frustrated TD. "There was uproar last week about the whole Fine Gael thing. They're having the best of times and we're getting fucking blamed for anything."

John McGuinness (left) and Barry Cowen

NEXT SUNDAY OCTOBER 15th

with *The Sunday Business Post*

BUDGET 2018

MAGAZINE

Your guide to Budget 2018. Expert commentary and insights in association with KPMG.

Essential reading on how the budget will affect your family and what it means for your business.

Get your copy in next week's Sunday Business Post.



Emergency housing inspections won't examine B&Bs or hotels

● Charities face full oversight – but private sector exempt from draft inspection standards

BY JACK HORGAN-JONES
CHIEF REPORTER

Up to half of all emergency homeless accommodation centres, including all hotels and B&Bs, will be excluded from a new inspection regime being considered by the government.

Under a draft new inspection and standards regime proposed by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive

(DRHE), hotels and B&Bs would be exempt from inspection as they are privately owned, while facilities owned by charities will be subject to full oversight.

The proposals were developed to provide oversight of emergency homeless accommodation centres along the lines of the regime deployed by the Health Information and Quality Authority (Hiqa).

A slide presentation on the

regime has been seen by *The Sunday Business Post*.

However, Sinn Féin housing spokesman Eoin Ó Broin said the inspection and oversight element of the regime would only apply to so-called section 10 and section 39 bodies, which are usually charities and other not-for-profit organisations.

"That means that private hotels and B&Bs would not be covered by these standards or by the inspection regime," Ó Broin told *The Sunday Business Post*.

"Fifty per cent of families in emergency accommodation are in commercial hotels and

B&Bs." He praised the work done by the DRHE and other bodies on the quality standards framework, which he said was "very good", but urged the government to ensure it was extended to all facilities and independently run.

"What I've said is that it should cover all accommodation and the office of quality standards should not be in the department, a local authority or the DRHE."

Ó Broin also said that the inspection regime, as currently constituted, would end up leading to a dual system of inspection.

Decobake creditors 'will get over 50c on the euro' in liquidation

BY TOM LYONS

The liquidator of Decobake, the cake decorations and baking products maker, told a creditors meeting last Friday he expected to be able to repay them over 50 cent on the euro.

Declan de Lacy of PKF O'Connor Leddy & Holmes also prepared a report for creditors that outlined how he had been forced to engage in a series of legal actions involving the owner and director of the business Paul Coyle.

De Lacy's report states these cases, which include an application for the return of funds transferred by directors out of the business subsequent to his appointment and application for various injunctive reliefs, "[restrains] the directors and other parties from interfering with the conducting of the liquidation and the company's trade".

He said he also had to deal with various applications by Coyle in relation to the ownership of intellectual

property as well as dealing with an application by his daughter Emily Coyle, a former employee of Decobake, to the Workplace Relations Commission.

De Lacy said he believed the best outcome for creditors could be achieved by continuing to trade the business as it had a large amount of stock and there was an opportunity to sell the business once its various legal issues had been resolved.

He said the business resumed trading on July 17 and had achieved a turnover of €250,000 to September 30.

He said, however, that he had encountered a number of difficulties in resuming trade including finding that the businesses telephone and computer networks were inoperable and may "have been remotely interfered with".

He said staff had been "reluctant" at one point to return to work because they were "discouraged" by the direc-

tors and people connected with them.

He said customers and

suppliers were also discouraged from cooperating with him as liquidator.



Trustee Decisions

Trustee Decisions is a specialist company providing impartial and independent trusteeship as well as advice to private and public group pension schemes. Trustee Decisions supports trustees in carrying out their responsibilities in compliance with the best standard of pension scheme governance and pension laws as well as providing trustee board evaluation services.

www.trusteedecisions.com

Trustee Decisions Limited, Fitzwilliam Hall, Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin 2
T: 01-806 2750 E: enquiries@trusteedecisions.com

Trustee Decisions Limited is authorised under the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010 to carry on business as a "trust or company service provider" (TCSP) in accordance with section 89(6) of the Act.

6 Mary Lou McDonald

“I’m a very practical kind of person. I’m not an airy-fairy fluffy kind of person. I believe in doing things with a very practical view in a real kind of way”

In an exclusive interview, Sinn Féin’s leader Mary Lou McDonald holds forth on suspended TDs, her party’s attitude to Ireland Inc and the challenges of life after Gerry Adams



Michael Brennan,
Political Editor

New Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald has spent the last seven weeks “galloping at a furious pace”. After taking over as leader from Gerry Adams, she was instantly thrust into two weeks of ultimately fruitless talks on restoring pow-

er-sharing. Then she was off to Brussels to visit Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier and then to the US for Sinn Féin’s annual St Patrick’s Day fundraisers.

“I’m still in the process, truth be told, of getting my feet under the desk. Sinn Féin is a very big organisation. We’re organised nationally – we’re not a regional entity like Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael. I dare you to print that,” she jokes.

McDonald is in good humour and her party’s opinion poll ratings were up by two points to 16 per cent in the last *Sunday Business Post*/Red C poll. But Sinn Féin TDs are waiting to see if she can increase that support level as the next general election nears.

In a lengthy interview with *The Sunday Business Post* in her Leinster House office, McDonald talks about her willingness to think outside the box on a

United Ireland, her choir singing days and bringing ‘change management’ techniques into Sinn Féin.

McDonald has taken over the fifth floor office in the Leinster House 2000 complex that Gerry Adams previously occupied. She has a clear view of the Irish tricolour, which had to be moved onto the back lawn of Leinster House because of the repair work taking place around its former position on top of the roof.

Political opponents who want to portray her as a puppet of Gerry Adams will be disappointed to learn there is no photo of him on the wall. There is a picture of a waterfall behind her desk, but it is a standard issue one from the Office of

Public Works rather than McDonald’s own collection. She jokes that Adams even took a comfortable reclining chair that used to be sitting in the corner of the office.

So far, she is sticking with the key Sinn Féin policies adopted during the latter period of Adams’s 34-year reign. But she is not that bothered about shutting the Dáil bar, which was a minor obsession for him. “I always tell our members that you don’t drink when you’re at work,” she says.

McDonald has not had much time for watching television in recent weeks. But she did catch the end of last week’s Room To Improve, where a young teacher clashed with Dermot Bannon over his renovation of a farmhouse in Tipperary. Katie Ryan attracted a lot of negative social media comments, but McDonald liked her forthrightness (and her china collection). “I thought she was great,” she says.

The corridor outside McDonald’s office has yellow coloured posters for the Eighth Amendment campaign stacked up against the walls with the slogan: “Trust Women – Repeal the Eighth.” It is a sign that she intends to follow up her promise to go knocking on doors in favour of a Yes vote.

But just five years ago, the late Martin McGuinness had been describing Sinn Féin as “an anti-abortion party”. Now, one of McDonald’s first actions as party leader has been to suspend Laois-Offaly TD Carol Nolan for voting against the referendum bill, in defiance of the agreed party position.

“Carol is a great person, a very fine person whom I think very highly of and I have a very good relationship with. She’s not being thrown out – she’s been suspended for three months. I had had the conversation with Carol in advance and there’s absolutely no hard feelings,” McDonald says.

But why has McDonald ruled out a free vote, even after seeing how much the application of a rigid whip divided Fine Gael during the protection of life legislation in 2013?

She said the notion of having a “conscience clause” on abortion was rejected by Sinn Féin members at three ard feiseanna.

“I’m very clear in my mind that we’re not Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael. You know the kind of thing: ‘Do whatever you want, make your own arrangements, let’s fudge this issue.’ And it is a hard issue. And Sinn Féin is no different to any other element of society. We have people with all sorts of views, right across the spectrum. But the difference is that I, and we, are prepared to have the debate, even when they are difficult debates, and to arrive at a position,” she says.

Reaching out to unionists

In her opening address as the new president of Sinn Féin, McDonald pledged to reach out to the unionist community. That was something that Martin McGuinness did by shaking the hand of Queen Elizabeth II. Nelson Mandela acted similarly by greeting the South African rugby team – the ultimate symbol of Afrikaner culture – on the pitch before they beat the All Blacks to win the 1995 Rugby World Cup.

So would McDonald be prepared to march in an Orange Order parade to show that she was willing to accept a key part of unionist culture?

“I’m not sure they would want me on one of their marches,” she says. But she goes on to say that she does want to meet officially with the Orange Order.

INTERVIEW



Mary Lou McDonald says unionism has to ‘start thinking for itself’
Picture: Fergal Phillips



It doesn’t matter what political stripe you are, it can be very daunting. For women in particular, it can be a challenge. It’s a very, very male atmosphere

“I think for Sinn Féin to officially meet with the Orange Order – what harm can it do? I think these discussions and these dialogues at a minimum achieve the very positive thing of people showing the respect to each other of sitting down with each other,” she says.

But while McDonald says she feels liberated as a new leader to make “big gestures” to unionists, her use of the IRA’s “Tíocfaidh ár lá” slogan on becoming party leader last February did not help her case. Her repeated warnings – most recently in a speech at Queen’s University Belfast last week – that unionists are going to be outnumbered by nationalists could further alienate them.

McDonald says she has raised the demographic trends many times because it is a “fact”.

“It’s an electoral fact that the unionist vote dipped beneath the 50 per cent margin both at the last Westminster and the last Assembly election. The reason that’s significant is that the Northern state is constructed on the notion of an inbuilt unionist majority – but they never thought it would get that tight,” she says.

McDonald says she does not want to be seen as “lecturing unionism”, but adds that they have to start “thinking for themselves”.

“My option is Irish unity, but we don’t live in that reality. For almost a century, we’ve had a partitioned Ireland. We’ve had to come up with Plans B, C, D, E and F, even if they weren’t always very good plans. I think it’s necessary for unionism to start thinking that way,” she says.

There have been suggestions that instead of having one parliament in a future United Ireland, the Stormont Assembly would be left in place to run the North – while the Dáil would continue to have jurisdiction over the South.

McDonald says that this is something she will not rule out at a time when the prospect of a United Ireland is coming on

the table as a real conversation.

“It’s at a point now where people can intervene and say: ‘Hang on a minute, this is what we think, or let’s consider this.’ I think all of those ideas – I’m not going to discount or rule out anything because that is not the way you have an open or respectful conversation with people,” she says.

But she jokes that Cork will not want to take the opportunity to look for its own parliament.

“There would be people in Cork looking for the same, which is more dangerous. The Cork thing really bothers me.”

All of this comes at a time when the Northern Assembly has been suspended for more than a year. Sinn Féin and the Irish government have been calling for an intergovernmental conference to be set up in line with the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. But this has been resisted by the DUP, and in turn by the British government, which relies on that party for support. Instead, Northern Ireland Secretary of State Karen Bradley has been talking about having a “shadow assembly”. McDonald has dismissed it out of hand, on the grounds that it would have no power.

“That really would be a talking shop,” she says.

By becoming leader of Sinn Féin, McDonald has managed to get to the top of what has been – and still largely is – a male-dominated political system. It was said of Margaret Thatcher that she did nothing to encourage other females to follow in her footsteps, with her close friend Baroness Young being the only woman she ever appointed to cabinet. But McDonald says she understands she has a role to play in advancing the political careers of other women.

“You know, what do they call them, ‘I’m all right jills’, instead of ‘I’m all right Jack’? I don’t want to be an ‘all right jill,’” she says.

McDonald says part of her plan is a new project with the party’s councillors to provide more training, communications and wellbeing support.

“It is hard. People elected in here, it doesn’t matter what political stripe you are, it can be very daunting for people coming in. This is, as they say, senior hurling. It isn’t for the faint-hearted. For women in particular, it can be a challenge because it’s a very, very male atmosphere,” she says.

Now that McDonald is in charge, she has an opportunity to put her own stamp on Sinn Féin policy as she attempts to broaden its appeal. But this is always a sensitive area for the party, given the accusations over the years of it having a ‘command and control’ leadership structure. So McDonald is quick to downplay her potential policy influence.

“Despite all of the talk about coronations and ascension into heaven, this is



Build practical managerial skills and deliver bottom-line value for your organisation

with an IMI Diploma in Management

The IMI Diploma in Management is widely recognised for its innovative approach to learning. It will provide you with a comprehensive, intensely practical and critical overview of best-practice management in a broad range of areas.



Each IMI Diploma is validated by UCC (Level 9) Minor Award on the Irish National Qualifications Framework. The Master of Business is based around a framework of fifteen IMI Diploma Programmes and BRP. Each IMI Diploma is a step towards getting a Masters.

Spring 2018 IMI Diplomas in:

- Strategy and Innovation
- Organisational Development and Transformation
- Business Finance
- Executive Coaching
- Management
- Leadership
- Regulatory Management
- Organisational Behaviour
- Data Business
- Strategic HR Management
- Digital Business

Start Dates: 23 April 2018 - Dublin | 23 April 2018 - Cork

t: Freephone 1800 22 33 88
e: programmeadvisors@imi.ie
w: imi.ie





McDonald on Sinn Féin's attitude to business

Even though Sinn Féin has a new leader, the business sector remains sceptical of the party with its plan for an additional 7 per cent tax on incomes over €100,000. One business group said privately that it was difficult to get meetings with Sinn Féin because the party was on a charm offensive with the trade unions – and did not want to be seen as close to employers.

But McDonald said she had met employers' groups such as Isme and Ibec, and would be making every effort to work with business in a positive and constructive way.

"It's not a zero-sum game – business versus labour and business versus unions. And it's certainly not a case of business and enterprise versus Sinn Féin. That's certainly not where it's at. But it's not our job to be a lobby for business. Business does that well for itself," she said.

However, Sinn Féin's policy of increasing the minimum wage from €9.55 to €10 per hour, followed by a "living wage" of €11.70 per hour, is not favoured by many small business owners. That does indeed look like a zero sum game, with workers gaining, but employers having to generate more revenue to pay them.

But McDonald's case is that a living wage would give workers more spending power, which would in turn benefit small business people who were struggling to get by.

"The struggle is made all the harder if you are in a society where people have no disposable income. If I'm running a butcher's shop or a hairdresser or whatever, I need people in my locality to have the general wherewithal to avail of my product or service," she said.

Michael Brennan

that he was somehow, on behalf of others, controlling Dublin city councillors. Nothing of the sort. And Nicky felt so strongly about it that he took the case.

"Nicky was an IRA volunteer when he was young. He was involved, he was in jail. All of those things are true. He also, having come through all of those experiences, still works very hard in his community.

"He is a fine person, and anybody with any dealings with him will tell you that. He felt really aggrieved that, because he had been a political prisoner, somehow it was fair game on him. I think he was putting down a marker, not just for himself, but for others."

A commission to tackle the 'B' word

During our interview, McDonald doesn't mention the 'B' word. But the spate of internal bullying allegations, which have seen party members, councillors and even a senator depart in frustration, have damaged Sinn Féin.

That is one key impetus for McDonald's decision to set up a commission on "equality, respect and inclusion" after Easter with Sinn Féin's 14,000 members North and South.

"We are going to have a very structured conversation with the entire party, with the grassroots, to actually test the temperature of what's going on around the country. And also to start having conversations about a party that is welcoming, friendly and dynamic, a party that can make room for new members and capitalise on the experience of more seasoned members," she says.

McDonald has pledged to use "change management" techniques to address Sinn Féin's internal problems. "We still have, and I have to address this, certain ways of doing things and certain management techniques and habits that are very much tailored to a much smaller organisation. We have to go through a change management thing. We need to apply organisational theory," she says.

By the time you read this article, McDonald will have attended the state commemoration of the 1916 Rising in Arbour Hill cemetery in Dublin, where the bodies of the executed leaders are buried. Then it's on to Sinn Féin's own separate parade, from the General Post Office on O'Connell Street to the 1916 plot in Glasnevin Cemetery. Then the plan is to visit her "mammy".

"I'm a very practical kind of person. I'm not an airy-fairy fluffy kind of person. I believe in doing things with a very practical view in a real kind of way," she concludes.

actually a democratic party, so Mary Lou doesn't get to call all of the policies – nor should I," she says.

However, a long-starting party demand is the abolition of the €80 million in state support for teachers' salaries in fee-paying schools. Former Labour education minister Ruairi Quinn reduced it in one budget, but had to back off after that due to opposition from Fine Gael backbenchers. But Sinn Féin kept it in its alternative budget proposals, year after year during the Adams era.

McDonald, who herself attended the fee-paying Notre Dame school in south Dublin, interrupts because she can see where this question going. "That's because you know I went to one. That's the policy. You'll have them throwing tomatoes at me," she says.

In an aside, she remembers how she used to go with her school to Wesley College, which has been making headlines lately after it got a €150,000 grant from Minister for Transport Shane Ross for its hockey pitch.

"I know Wesley College well. I know people who went to Wesley. It's a very fine school with fabulous choirs. We used to go there for choir competitions, just to let you know. So I bear no grudge to people who go to Wesley, or the fine staff or students or parents," she says.

But McDonald says she cannot stand over a system that puts students at such a level of advantage against others. According to her, "if Pearse Doherty was Minister for Finance", he would be getting rid of the state subsidy. But she says she respects the choices being made by parents who want to send their children to fee-paying schools because she has children herself – Iselt (14) and Gearoid (11) – with her husband Martin.

"I know that parents, when they are looking at the education of their children, they are weighing up what is best for Johnny or what is best for Mary. I don't want to convey a message of hostility to the school communities, but the party policy is to phase out those subsidies," she says.

Separating Church and state

Another controversial issue in the education sector is what will happen to the 90 per cent of primary schools that are under the patronage of the Catholic Church in an increasingly secular society.

McDonald has committed herself to a policy of separation of Church and state in the midst of the campaign to repeal the Eighth Amendment.

"I am very conscious there are so many people for whom their religious beliefs are such a central component of who they are, and how they live their lives. I don't think the state has any right to disrespect and set that aside."

But she says she wants to see the Catholic Church handing over the ownership of schools because public policy and laws cannot be driven by "any single theolog-



Despite all of the talk about coronations and ascension into heaven, this is actually a democratic party, so Mary Lou doesn't get to call all of the policies – and nor should I

ical instinct".

"In my view, the 'Home rule is Rome rule' reality of this state was bad for society and it was also very bad for the Church. That didn't work out well for anyone. And equally, in the Northern state, the 'Protestant Parliament for a Protestant People', the 'cold house for Catholics', that was an absolutely awful regime. If any people should know just the necessity of rendering unto God what is God's, and unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, we should be the leading world experts on that, because we have the scars," she says.

McDonald has been repeatedly asked about how she will deal with her predecessor Gerry Adams, who still looms large over the party after 34 years in charge. Her standard answer is that she will be walking in her own shoes as leader. But when Bertie Ahern stepped down as leader of Fianna Fáil, he was rarely seen in the Dáil chamber at the same time as his successor Brian Cowen. Eamon Gilmore did the same when Joan Burton took over as Labour leader, and Enda Kenny has been seen very frequently in the chamber since Leo Varadkar became Taoiseach.

Adams has broken with this tradition by sitting high up in the backbenches behind McDonald, who is down in the front row. Would she have preferred if he had stayed away to give her some breathing space?

"No, I've plenty of breathing space. Gerry is still the TD for Louth and Meath East. So he has a job to do, of course he has to do it. Listen, Gerry is in no doubt that I do the job my way," she says.

"I don't feel in any way restricted. I know he is up there behind me. I wave

up at him. I asked him the other day 'Are you having altitude sickness?' So he said he wasn't."

But McDonald is still keeping Adams close by for advice, having described him in her acceptance speech as her political mentor and a great friend.

"Certainly, if I needed advice, if I sought advice or guidance from him, there is no doubt he would be forthcoming. He is very experienced, let's face it," she says.

Scrapping with the media

One of the most heated moments in the 2011 presidential election campaign came when RTÉ Prime Time presenter Miriam O'Callaghan asked Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness during a televised debate: "How do you square, Martin McGuinness, with your God the fact that you were involved in the murder of so many people?"

McGuinness was furious and demanded to see O'Callaghan afterwards to complain in person about the question. O'Callaghan said later that she would never apologise for asking tough questions.

The incident came back into public focus recently due to McDonald's criticism of O'Callaghan's interview in a book about McGuinness's life.

She says that she still believes that the interview "well overstepped the mark". "I don't think it was about getting to the truth. And I thought at the time, and I still think now, that it was bad form and bad judgment from a journalistic point of view. I stand by that."

As if anticipating more headlines along the lines of "McDonald slams O'Callaghan", the Sinn Féin leader says that she was not "attacking anybody".

"I'm sure I'll take my share of journalistic criticism and some of it will be deserved. Then journalists can't get so sensitive if they are answered back. Because that's how conversations work, isn't it?"

There were mixed views in Sinn Féin about the decision of party political manager Nicky Kehoe to sue RTÉ for defamation. He won damages of €3,500 after comments made about him on the Saturday With Claire Byrne show on RTÉ Radio 1.

Many felt that Kehoe had laid down a marker for the media that it was no longer open season on party members who had previously been in the IRA. But others were angry that he gave testimony that he was "not proud" of his time in the IRA and was ashamed about it "in a context".

Sinn Féin has confirmed that Kehoe will have to pay his own legal fees for his private action. However, McDonald says she had no problem with Kehoe taking the case.

"As far as Nicky was concerned," she says, "this wasn't about money, but a very, very damaging and insulting allegation was made against him on a radio show

INSPIRATIONAL LEADERSHIP AT KYLEMORE
16-19 OCTOBER 2018
A Galvanizing, Transformational Experience for Successful Leaders
At the University of Notre Dame's Global Centre at Kylemore.

APPLY TODAY! mendoza.nd.edu/leadershipkylemore
For More information call 095 41815

Inspirational Leadership at Kylemore is a holistic transformational week for the experienced, successful executive leader seeking a new perspective on the challenges of a highly competitive and complex environment. At this pivotal point, seek and gain immeasurable insight bolstered by the expertise of a world-class faculty, a highly skilled personal executive coach and your accomplished peers.

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
Mendoza College of Business