

**Square deal?**

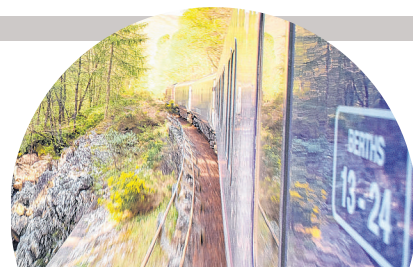
€125m sale of Tallaght centre hits obstacle

COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

**Money Matters**

Rent out a room to pay the mortgage

BRIANNA PARKINS



**Mark Paul**  
Rest on the Caledonian Sleeper to Euston was painfully elusive  
London Letter, page 7



**Rosita Boland**  
I was caught in a wholly frustrating system that exists when a customer tries to complain  
Life, page 9



**Gordon D'Arcy**  
Ireland's bench arrived largely en masse and had a pivotal effect on the end result  
Sports, page 21

**Company housing children in State care 'fabricated' staff checks**

Serious failings in screening of staff posed 'unacceptable' risk to young people in care

JACK POWER

One of the largest providers of emergency accommodation for children in State care in recent years was found to have "fabricated" pre-employment checks of staff and "altered" Garda vet-

ting clearances, according to an internal Tusla report.

Tusla, the child and family agency, uncovered serious failings in the screening of staff working for the private company, which it said posed an "unacceptable" risk to young people

in its care. The company, Ideal Care Services, has in recent years been a major provider of emergency accommodation for children taken into State care, known as special emergency arrangements (SEAs).

It is owned by Jossy Akwuobi (45) from Tyrrelstown, Dublin, who is a pastor with the Wisdom Christian Centre, an evangelical group based in west Dublin.

An internal Tusla report, completed last July and seen by

The Irish Times, found the standard of checks carried out on prospective care staff over a two-year period were "grossly inadequate to safeguard vulnerable young people".

The report said individuals involved in screening employee references had "fabricated" these checks. Instead personnel files examined by Tusla contained "fictitious accounts of conversations with fictitious persons who were presented as referees" for staff, it said.

Tusla also found evidence of "falsification" of Garda vetting files presented to inspectors, despite the fact later checks found the employees in question had been correctly vetted.

**'Unlawful'**

In other cases, staff were allowed to work with children without up-to-date Garda clearance, as the company had accepted "historic vetting from a previous employment", which the report said was "unlawful".

The company's failure to oversee proper vetting practices amounted to "a neglect of their responsibilities", which had "facilitated a risk of harm to children", the report said. Ideal Care management said "they had no knowledge of the vetting practices uncovered by inspection officers, and nor did they approve or condone them", it said.

Mr Akwuobi, who is listed as operations director of Ideal Care, said he did not wish to comment when questioned

about criticism of the company. Ideal Care was paid €8.9 million over 2022 and 2023 by Tusla, making it one of the highest-paid providers of special emergency arrangements. In a statement, Tusla said it had not placed children into SEAs run by Ideal Care "since the end of April 2023".

The agency said that, while it could not comment on individual providers, where it identified concerns it took "immediate and swift action to address them

directly with the provider". "Tusla can confirm it has, in the past year, identified private providers who have not met our standards with respect to validated staff training, qualifications, references and vetting and the agency subsequently ceased engaging with them as providers," it said.

**Company running Tusla child accommodation altered staff vetting files: page 5**

**RTÉ chair had threatened to quit, says Martin**

Minister reveals day of frantic exchanges between her officials and Ní Raghallaigh

JACK HORGAN-JONES and MARK HILLIARD

Siún Ní Raghallaigh warned she could resign before a crucial appearance by Minister for Media Catherine Martin on RTÉ Prime Time last week, according to the Minister and resisted attempts to arrange a meeting to discuss Ms Martin's disappointment in her.

During a meeting of the Oireachtas media committee, Ms Martin revealed a day of frantic exchanges between her officials and former RTÉ chair Ms Ní Raghallaigh in the run-in to the minister's appearance on Prime Time last Thursday evening, after which the chair resigned.

Following an appearance that shed light on a dramatic breakdown in relations last week, the committee has now decided to extend an invitation to the former chair of RTÉ to appear before it, as the fallout over Ms Ní Raghallaigh's resignation continues to rock the Government and the broadcaster.

Ms Martin outlined yesterday evening repeated instances of Ms Ní Raghallaigh giving her inaccurate information about the board's involvement in signing off on an exit package for the former chief financial officer Richard Collins, as well as having apologised for failing to tell the Minister she had sought the resignation of former RTÉ director general Dee Forbes.

She told the committee that she needed to rely on accurate information from the chair, and outlined that having been told last Thursday of her intention to write to Ms Ní Raghallaigh and express her disappointment about being given inaccurate information during the week, the former RTÉ chair "expressed her unhappiness" about the prospect of receiving the letter.

"The former chair was not willing to receive a letter," she said, referencing a discussion with officials. "It's quite problematic from a confidence point of view if the chair is not willing to receive a letter."

She told Ms Martin's officials that this would reflect a lack of confidence and she would have to consider her position as chair, Ms Martin said. Later in the afternoon, Ms Martin said that Ms Ní Raghallaigh told her officials that she was "not happy" about the prospect of being called to another meeting on the following morning, as had been suggested.

Ms Martin, who said she did not believe the former chair acted intentionally in misinforming her, proceeded with the Prime Time interview, and insisted at the committee that she had no option but to go ahead with it. She said that before going on air, she believed a story about the day's events was about to break, and that her advisers had told RTÉ that she would be willing to discuss it on air.

Ms Martin said she was trying to avoid expressing no confidence in the RTÉ chair on air and that she hoped the meeting that she had invited Ms Ní Raghallaigh to on Friday morning would proceed and that she hoped Ms Ní Raghallaigh's talk of resigning would prove to be "just a rash comment".

"I was remaining hopeful that was just something that was said in the heat of the moment," Ms Martin told the committee.



**Minister for Media Catherine Martin arriving at Leinster House where she faced questions over RTÉ.**  
PHOTOGRAPH: DARA MAC DONAILL

The Minister for Media said that she hoped to appoint a full-time replacement RTÉ chair within the week and that there are active consultations about the appointment.

The former director general of the Department of Arts and

Media, Katherine Licken, is also to be invited before the committee. Ms Licken received a phone call in October from Ms Ní Raghallaigh which the RTÉ board has said communicated the board sign-off for the deal.

Ms Martin disputed this yesterday, saying that the former RTÉ chair last week told officials she "imagined" she would have outlined the board's involvement.

**News, analysis and Miriam Lorr: page 2**

**Leaving Cert reforms 'advantage' private schools**CARL O'BRIEN  
Education Editor

Plans to reform Leaving Cert science subjects risk widening the social divide by giving an unfair advantage to students in fee-charging schools with better access to laboratory equipment and technicians, university lecturers have warned.

The comments are contained in a report by Irish Uni-

versity Association (IUA) representatives in response to the draft curriculum specifications for Leaving Cert biology, chemistry and physics, drawn up by the State's advisory body on the curriculum.

Leaving Cert students will be required to complete "research investigations" worth 40 per cent of marks from fifth year onwards in subjects such as physics, biology and chemistry un-

der major changes to the senior cycle. It is proposed that a total of 20 hours will be spent by students working in school laboratories on these research projects.

**Feedback**  
The changes, aimed at reducing pressure facing students in the written exams at the end of sixth year and broadening how they are assessed, will be intro-

duced to schools from September 2025.

However, the IUA report says feedback from lecturers in these subjects is that the high percentage of marks – 40 per cent – for research projects that take 20 hours "makes no sense" given that it is recommended that the entire course is taught in 180 hours.

It also questions the availability of laboratory equipment or re-

sources in schools to supply all students undertaking research projects and the "additional stress" on students who take two or three science subjects.

The report also warns of a "widening of the social divide within schools, and also between fee-paying schools that have additional sources of income and Deis schools that cater for students from disadvantaged backgrounds".

**Weather**

Patchy rain in the afternoon will give way to persistent rain from the west by the evening. Highs of 10-13 degrees.

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**Home News**

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**Courts:** Enoch Burke will remain in prison after he again refused to stay away from Wilson's Hospital School: page 4

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**Business + Commercial Property**

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**Wages:** Average weekly earnings of Irish workers were up 2.1 per cent in the final quarter of last year: page 13

**Sports Wednesday**

**Soccer:** Eileen Gleeson recorded her first defeat as coach of the Irish women's team after her side lost 0-2 to Wales at Tallaght Stadium last night: page 23

**Rugby:** Connacht have lost Finlay Bealham for the visit of Scarlets after he got a late call-up to the Irish camp: page 22

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# Two women settle cases over swing injuries

Settlements for women who suffered ankle injuries in community playground

Resolution of cases brings long-running legal saga to an end for women

Two women have settled their High Court actions alleging they suffered ankle injuries getting out of a basket swing in a Tipperary playground.

The settlements bring to an end the long-running legal saga that saw the women's actions thrown out by a High Court judge more than two years ago before the Court of Appeal ordered a retrial of both cases.

In the High Court yesterday, senior counsel for the women, Michael Counihan, said the actions have now been settled and could be struck out.

He also asked the court to record that the women were to receive their legal costs on the Circuit Court scale, including the costs of the previous High Court case.

No further details of the settlements were given in court.

In November 2022, the Court of Appeal ordered a retrial of the actions taken against Tipperary County Council by Sarah Kennedy, of Ballyknockane, Clogheen, Cahir, Co Tipperary, and Susan O'Mahoney, of Ballyvera, Goatenbridge, Ardfinnan, Clonmel, Co Tipperary.

Both women had sued over alleged ankle injuries sustained, on different occasions, as they got out of a bird's nest basket swing in a community playground in Newcastle, Co Tipperary.

It was built after members of the local community raised funds for it.

Ms O'Mahoney's injury allegedly occurred on March

30th, 2016, as she was exiting the swing which she had got on to with a child whom she was then minding, aged two years and 10 months. She caught her right ankle on the underside of the swing and suffered an undisplaced ankle fracture.

She was in a cast for six weeks, an ankle boot for four weeks, and was back working as a carer within 2½ months.

Ms Kennedy's injury allegedly occurred on July 13th, 2016, as she was exiting the swing after getting on to it with her cousin, a boy aged 16 months. She had the child in her arms as she got off and caught her right ankle in the underside of the swing.

She suffered an undisplaced ankle fracture and some ligament damage, was in a cast for four weeks, out of work for eight weeks and had some ligament damage for a short time after and she wore ankle support.

## Issue in the case

At issue in the case was the height at which the swing had been set. In the first High Court action, Mr Justice Michael Twomey accepted engineering evidence for the council that the swing was set at the right height.

However, the Court of Appeal ordered a retrial of the actions taken by the two women against Tipperary County Council. Mr Justice Seamus Noonan delivering the appeal court ruling said the dismissal of the two claims by the High Court was "erroneous".



# UCD opens €2.5m performance theatre

CARL O'BRIEN  
Education Editor

From the 1970s onwards the old UCD drama society venue fostered some of Ireland's top creative talent such as Neil Jordan, Frank McGuinness, Conor McPherson and Marina Carr.

After falling into disuse over the past decade or so, it has now been transformed into a €2.5million state of the art performance theatre with the aim of inspiring a new generation of talent.

University College Dublin hopes the Trapdoor – the name of the new theatre – will see the former venue in the Newman Building take centre stage when it comes to student creativity, production and performance.

In its near 100-year history, UCD Dramsoc has helped a

great many of our students discover their true creative voices and talents, and nurtured them towards stellar careers in the world of the performing arts," said UCD president Prof Orla Feely, speaking at the official opening of the venue yesterday.

"This new state of the art performance space, The Trapdoor, will ensure a continued stream of creative minds are given every opportunity to discover and develop their deep talents and keep UCD nestled at the centre of Ireland's creative community."

Left unused since the early 2000s, when Dramsoc relocated to the then new student centre in 2012, the redeveloped performance space is now a 144-seat theatre with professional grade lighting, visual and sound systems. Its redevelopment is styled on the black box

concept of theatre layout, typically an adaptable square room with black walls, floor and ceiling, which caters to a variety of stage and classroom configurations.

## Newhome

The venue was designed by a team including Oran O'Siochain of UCD's school of architecture, as well as Reddy Architecture and Charcoalblue, a leading theatre and venue design company.

It will serve as the new home of the UCD Creative Futures Academy, under the directorship of Prof PJ Mathews from UCD's school of English, drama and film. One of the aims of the new venue is to connect industry practitioners with students dedicated to flexing their creative talent. "This will be a game-changer for the Creative

Futures Academy (CFA) at UCD," said Prof Mathews. "A unique space dedicated to the development of creative talent, and fitted-out to industry standard, will ensure our students have the best chance of success in whatever path they choose."

"The redevelopment of the celebrated former Dramsoc theatre enables us to build on UCD's international reputation in the creative and performing arts, and to nurture Ireland's next generation of creative talent."

The Trapdoor theatre will host a range of new programmes and modules, delivered by academics and experts from the creative industries.

Among the artists-in-residence who will teach are Dónal Lunny (traditional music practice), Jenny Jennings (theatre making), and Mark O'Halloran

■ Faith Olosogba, a UCD English, drama and film student and spoken word artist, who performed at the opening of Trapdoor, a new €2.5 million theatre at UCD.

PHOTOGRAPH: NICK BRADSHAW

(scriptwriting). As part of its opening, British film director and screenwriter Steve McQueen is the first official guest at Trapdoor at a workshop with students, led by Dr Nicolas Pillai of UCD.

## 'The values'

"Steve is an embodiment of the values to which CFA aspires," said Dr Pillai.

"His work exemplifies the values of experimentation, social responsibility, and ambition that we seek to instil in students."

# Complaint about slow post upheld

JACK WHITE

A complaint about letters which remained undelivered by An Post 20 days after posting despite an advertised delivery time of up to three days was among a number of complaints upheld by the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland (ASAI).

One complainant considered An Post's advertising to be misleading when they posted 100 letters to the Netherlands through a postal option which advertised a delivery time of two to three days.

However, despite 20 days passing, the letters had not yet reached their destination, and the complainant was told by An Post that the delivery times were only an indication of the postage time frame, which was noted in the terms and conditions.

## Misleading

The complainant argued that since these terms and conditions were not mentioned on the web page, it was misleading.

"In the absence of any readily available declaration that the advertised time frame was included as a guide only, the committee considered the advertisement was likely to mislead and was in breach," the ASAI said.

The advertising standards watchdog warned An Post that the advertisement must not reappear in its current form, and recommended including a note explaining that the time frame provided is estimated.

Meanwhile, an advert from taxi-booking app FreeNow was the subject of 33 complaints, the majority of which were from taxi drivers.

The ad which appeared on buses and Instagram stated that drivers could earn up to €1,300 a week through the app, with complainants arguing that the earning potential referenced was misleading.

"The complainants said the figure mentioned was not achievable and gave a false impression that those working in the taxi industry were earning more than they were. They said it would not be possible to earn this amount of money per week without working additional hours," the ASAI said.

The ad was the subject of two separate complaint issues, with other complainants saying it was misleading as it did not specify whether the €1,300 referenced was net or gross pay. The advertisers responsible told the ASAI the figure was obtained from actual FreeNow driver earnings in 2022; however, just 7 per cent of drivers had earned that amount.

# Company running Tusla child accommodation altered staff vetting files



Jack Power

Tusla report finds Ideal Care Services 'fabricated' screenings of staff

Tusla, the child and family agency, placed vulnerable children into unregulated emergency accommodation run by a company which "fabricated" pre-employment screenings of staff.

The accommodation was provided by a company called Ideal Care Services, which Tusla has increasingly relied upon to manage accommodation for children taken into State care in recent years. An internal Tusla report found it to have "fabricated" pre-employment checks of staff, posing a major risk to young people in its care.

The company is run by a pastor in an evangelical Christian church. Over the last three years Tusla has had to increasingly rely on unregulated emergency accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts and rented properties, to house children in State care. These "special emergency arrangements" (SEAs), run by staff from private companies, have been criticised as inappropriate and unsuitable by NGOs, judges and politicians.

The rise in the use of SEAs has been in part due to lack of available beds in regulated group care homes run by Tusla, or private and voluntary providers, as well as a shortage of foster carers. More than 180 children and young people are currently accommodated in

emergency arrangements.

One of the largest private providers of emergency accommodation over the last two years has been Ideal Care Services. It is owned by Jossy Akwuobi, (45), from Tyrrelstown, Dublin, who is a pastor with the Wisdom Christian Centre, an evangelical group based in west Dublin. Mr Akwuobi is listed as the operations director of Ideal Care, which is registered to an address in Mulhuddart, Dublin.

An internal Tusla report found Garda vetting files clearing staff to work for the company had been altered, while pre-employment checks of workers had been "fabricated". The report, completed last July, said the standard of checks carried out on prospective care staff were found to be "grossly inadequate to safeguard vulnerable young people".

The report said individuals involved in checking employee references had "fabricated" these checks, with personnel files containing "fictitious accounts of conversations with fictitious persons who were presented as referees" for staff.

Tusla inspectors said there was "clear evidence" that Garda vetting declarations "had been altered post-issue". The report said that the employees in question had passed Garda vetting, but for some "unexplained" reason vetting files that had been altered were presented to inspectors.

'Significant concern' Inspectors had "significant concern that, for reasons unknown, the content of the vetting files were being fabricated by the organisation or persons acting on its behalf".

"It is certain that the ability of any staff member to act with such irresponsibility without detection, supervision or performance oversight amounts to a significant failure of governance such that the welfare of children was placed at an unacceptable and preventable risk," it said.

In other cases staff were allowed to work with children without up-to-date Garda clearance as the company had accepted "historic vetting from a previous employment", which the report said was "unlawful" under the Vetting Bureau Act of 2012.

Company management was "shocked" by the findings and stated "they had no knowledge of the vetting practices uncovered by inspection officers, and nor did they approve or condone them", the report said.

Tusla paid Ideal Care €4.5 million in 2022, making it the third highest paid provider of special emergency arrangements that year, according to figures previously released to Aontú TD Peadar Kirby. The company was paid a further €4.4 million last year, a Tusla spokeswoman stated.

In another inspection last June Tusla found a teenager in the single-unit care home had been sleeping on a mattress on the floor for some time as their bed had been broken. The company had "a lack of fundamental understanding" of how a care home should be run, with poor standards posing a "discernible risk to young people". The agency said the governance structures "fell considerably short" of what was expected, and ordered the accommodation be shut.

When contacted for comment Mr Akwuobi said Ideal Care was no longer providing accommodation for children in care. In response to criticism of the care provided by the company, he said: "I would not like to comment on that."

He did not respond to queries about his role as a pastor. The company did not respond to specific questions about the findings made by



■ One of the largest private providers of emergency accommodation over the last two years has been Ideal Care Services owned by Jossy Akwuobi.

Tusla inspectors. A Tusla spokeswoman confirmed "no new SEA arrangements have been made with Ideal Care Services Ltd since the end of April 2023".

The agency said it could not comment on specific concerns it had with individual providers. "However, where concerns are identified the agency takes immediate and swift action to address them directly with the provider," it said.

"Tusla can confirm it has, in the past year, identified private providers who have not met our standards with respect to validated staff training, qualifications, references and vetting, and the agency subsequently ceased engaging with them as providers," it said.

Ideal Care has been providing services for Tusla since 2018, the same year it was set up. The company reported having €3.3 million in assets last year, which included €2.7 million in property, financial accounts show.

The total amount Tusla has spent placing children in care in SEAs has ballooned from hundreds of thousands of euro in 2021 to more than €70 million last year. The agency ran up a budget deficit of €36 million due to the high cost of the emergency accommodation alone in 2023.

One former Ideal Care staff member said there were serious issues around paperwork and record-keeping at the company. In one incident where a child had gone missing this led to difficulties providing gardai tasked with searching for the child with accurate information. The former employee, who spoke on condition their name was not published, said Ideal Care had "boomed very quickly", and at its height was running 15

separate SEAs. "It was very chaotic working in there, there was no consistency," the former employee said. The employee stated Mr Akwuobi "never really involved any religion in the lives of the young people".

The former worker said they felt some properties used to accommodate children would not have passed inspections if they were regulated group care homes. "It wasn't a good environment for a child, it was just kept enough for the social worker to come and say 'okay they can stay here for a week'. It wasn't a welcoming place," the source said.

The former worker criticised the lack of initial oversight from Tusla, where often children's placements would be repeatedly rolled over for "another week" until they had spent months in the property.

Inside Tusla the growing reliance on emergency accommodation and the standards of care provided by companies such as Ideal Care has caused considerable concern, according to one source who was previously involved in overseeing the arrangements for the agency.

Speaking generally the source said they had seen children housed in seriously substandard accommodation, run by inexperienced staff. "I was worried. It was getting worse and worse. That's what concerned me."

Separate to its inspection regime, Tusla's internal audit team has been investigating special emergency arrangements. The agency refused to release copies of a large number of internal audits and monitoring visits of several providers in response to a Freedom of Information Act request from The Irish Times.

➔ Airbnb is a conglomerate business mostly marketing itself as an amateur pin-money sideline, but it is also very lucrative  
Lorcan Sirr, Opinion, page 10

## Harvey Norman

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## THE IRISH TIMES

## Homes by the sea

Apartments and houses in Bray from €475,000

PROPERTY SUPPLEMENT

### Ali's man in Dublin

The story of Rock Brynner, the boxer's security man in 1972 **AMERICA AT LARGE, SPORT**



**Derek Scally**  
Centenary of Hitler putsch casts an uncomfortable shadow **Berlin Letter, page 6**

**Meta task**  
Meta Ireland chief Anne O'Leary on the challenges of keeping people safe online **Business + Technology**

**Homer's odyssey**  
How the cartoon character evolved for the worse **Finn McRedmond, Opinion**

# Judge queries accounts of Molly Martens and father before sending them to prison

# McVerry Trust bought homes auditor built



**Martin Wall**  
in Lexington, North Carolina

Jason Corbett's children deliver emotional testimony in court

Molly Martens and her father, Thomas Martens, have been sentenced to serve between seven months and 2½ years in prison over the killing of Limerick businessman Jason Corbett in August 2015.

The two were led away in handcuffs from a court in Lexington, North Carolina yesterday afternoon following an eight-day sentencing hearing.

Judge David Hall imposed a sentence of a minimum of 51 months and a maximum of 74 months in prison. However, they will receive credit for the 44 months they spent in jail after a trial in 2017 for second-degree murder before those sentences were quashed by an appeal court. Following a plea agreement with prosecutors late last month, Molly Martens did not contest a charge of voluntary manslaughter. Her father pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter.

Mr Corbett was beaten to death with a baseball bat and a brick in the bedroom of the family home near Winston-Salem in North Carolina in the early hours of August 2nd, 2015.

Molly Martens and her father had claimed they had killed him in self defence after he had choked and threatened to kill her.

The judge raised questions as to why Thomas Martens, an experienced former FBI agent, had not called for police backup when he heard the commotion in the house as well as taking a baseball bat upstairs to investigate himself what was going on. He also asked why Martens's



**Molly Martens arriving for court yesterday; her father Thomas Martens (inset above); and her dead husband Jason Corbett (inset top right).**  
PHOTOGRAPH: SCOTT MUTERSBAUGH

wife, Sharon, who was in the house that night, had also not heard the police.

He said the court had not heard directly from Sharon Martens. He said based on her documented words, she had heard noise upstairs but then left it to her husband to take care of things.

"It makes no sense," he said. The judge also pointed to "an enormous disparity" between the state of Jason Corbett's body and the condition of Molly Martens and her father after the incident.

He said the delicate bracelet on her arm was not broken and neither was the nylon in her pyjamas.

The judge said Molly Martens and her father should receive some mitigation including his service in the FBI and in the national defence and energy sectors.

In a statement to the court before sentencing, Molly Martens said she truly did her best as a wife, mother and human.

"There is not a day or an hour goes by that I do not feel the weight of my actions. I deeply mourn what could have been a different path for all of us."

Thomas Martens told the court he realised his actions on the night were "excessive and in violation of the law". "I am sorry," he said. He said he had repeatedly

begged his son-in-law to let go of his wife "but when he started to drag her down the hallway to the bathroom, my instincts to protect my daughter took over".

**Emotional**  
The court heard powerful emotional testimony from Mr Corbett's two children, who were aged 10 and eight when their father was killed.

In evidence not given in open court during the sentencing hearing Jack Corbett, now aged 19, said he had been abused by Molly Martens in every way.

He said she had taught him to lie and manipulate people. "I was a liar," he said. "I never witnessed my dad hit Molly Martens."

He said his words as a child had been "weaponised" to help Molly Martens and her father to

get away with killing his father. He claimed that the entire Martens family had been "complicit" and that his father's phone and laptop had been in the house of Molly Martens's brother. He urged that she be imprisoned for as long as possible.

Sarah Corbett, now 17 years old, said Molly Martens had "taught me to shoplift, vomit and be a liar". She spoke of how Molly Martens would hit her brother and would punish them with starvation. She said Molly Martens had removed her wedding ring a few days after her husband's death and told his children to get over it.

Ms Corbett said Molly Martens had thrown a framed photo to her of her birth mother Margaret Corbett – the first wife of Jason Corbett – down the stairs and screamed at her

that the woman was dead. She said after Jason Corbett's sister had secured custody of his two children and brought them back to Ireland, Molly Martens had tried to have a plane fly a banner over her new school.

**News and analysis: pages 2-3**

Apartments sold for at least €945,000 in late 2018, property price register records

### JACK POWER

The Peter McVerry Trust bought nine apartments in Birr, Co Offaly, that were developed by the former long-time auditor of the homelessness charity, with the sale taking place while his firm was auditing the charity's accounts.

The charity bought several apartments that had been developed on a site off Main Street, Birr, by Donal Ryan, planning records show.

At the time of the sale, his accountancy firm, Donal Ryan & Associates, had been auditing the charity's accounts for more than a decade.

The group of apartments in the small residential development called The Heritage were bought by the trust in 2018 for homeless accommodation.

Donal Ryan & Associates, based at Manor Street, Stoneybatter, Dublin 7, was listed as the auditor of the charity from 2006 until May last year, annual financial filings show.

A spokeswoman for Offaly County Council confirmed planning permission for The Heritage apartments development in Birr was secured in a retention application that records show was submitted by Mr Ryan.

The property was sold for at least €945,000 in late 2018, according to an entry on a register that records property sales.

In a statement, the Peter McVerry Trust confirmed it bought nine units at The Heritage in Birr in 2018 to use as emergency accommodation. "Tenants for the units were nominated by Offaly County Council and are managed by Peter McVerry Trust," it said. A spokesman for the charity said it could not disclose who it bought the property from due to "data protection" concerns.

**Questions**  
The trust did not respond to a series of questions about whether the property deal involving Mr Ryan raised potential conflict-of-interest concerns. Mr Ryan also did not respond to repeated questions about the sale.

Francis Doherty, who took over as chief executive of the trust in June, resigned from the role in October, claiming the charity's board had made his position untenable.

In a resignation letter, Mr Doherty said he had become aware of a "substantial amount of concerning information" about issues predating his appointment, which included a "potential conflict of interest" relating to the charity's auditors.

The letter, seen by The Irish Times, did not outline details of the alleged conflict of interest. The Peter McVerry Trust has been under major financial strain, with a shortage of income and significant debts bringing it to the brink of collapse in recent months.

# Council considers raising parking charges

OLIVIA KELLY  
Dublin Editor

The removal of all free on-street parking within the canals in Dublin city and higher parking charges for SUVs and residential parking permits are to be considered in a review of parking rules next year.

On-street parking charges are to increase to up to €4 an hour from next year. However, the council is also planning an extensive overhaul of all its parking bylaws, to address

growing concerns about the use of the city's streets as free or low-cost storage for cars, particularly larger vehicles.

The council's head of traffic, Brendan O'Brien, said a number of councillors had raised the problem of high emissions vehicles and the growing prevalence of cars that are "too big", asking how they could be discouraged from driving in the city.

The council intends to "remove all free on-street parking within the canal cordon area" he said, which would include the

city centre, as well as residential areas within the borders of the Royal and Grand canals.

It would also consider increases to annual residential parking permit costs, he said. Residents pay a flat annual charge of €50 where there is an on-street parking charge.

However, Mr O'Brien said there is an argument for increasing that charge, particularly in high-demand areas like the city centre's "yellow" parking zone.

"There is increasingly an issue with the cost of the residential

permit, particularly when you're in something like the yellow zone. The parking permit at the moment is not zonal, so that's something that should be looked at," he told councillors yesterday.

"Next year we intend to do a major review of the parking bylaws," he said. "There are quite a number of things that need to be addressed in a full review of the bylaws, but for now we're just looking at the individual tariffs and ... moving them up in line with or slightly below the cost of inflation."

From next year charges for the most expensive city centre "yellow zone" will increase from €3.50 to €4 an hour, while just outside this area the "red zone" charge will go from €3 to €3.50.

The hourly rate in the outer "green zone" will increase from €1.80 to €2, while the low-demand "orange zone" will go from €1.10 to €1.20.

The "blue zone" rate – which applies to some suburban villages – will rise from 80 cent to 90 cent.

## Weather

Windy with widespread showers, some heavy and prolonged. Highs of 7-10 degrees in gusty winds.

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## Home News

**Health:** Ireland and other European countries need to prepare for the spread of mosquito-borne diseases across the Continent: page 4

**Data breach:** Electric Ireland said information of about 8,000 customers may have been compromised: page 6

## World News

**Gaza:** Qatar, Egypt and the US are reportedly mediating a deal under which Israel will agree to a three-day ceasefire in return for Hamas releasing 10-15 hostages: page 7

## Business + Technology

**Energy:** Green energy projects due to begin supplying electricity this year will not meet that deadline as rising costs mean they are no longer viable: page 16

**Monetary policy:** It is 'far too early' to talk about the ECB cutting interest rates, Gabriel Makhoulouf says: page 12

## Sports Thursday

**Soccer:** Manchester United had Marcus Rashford sent off in a 4-3 loss away to Copenhagen in the Champions League last night: page 19

**Rugby:** Munster coach Graham Rowntree expects a match of 'international intensity' against Ulster: page 21

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## Referendums fallout

Many not ready to excise mothers from Constitution

MICHAEL McDOWELL

In short the Government made a hames of it

KATHY SHERIDAN

Opinion



### Cheltenham treble

Willie Mullins has three winners on day one, including Champion Hurdle winner State Man  
Brian O'Connor, Sport



### Aberdeen Letter

The 'oil capital of Europe' contemplates its future in a net-zero emissions world  
Mark Paul, page 7



### An emigrant returns

To my surprise, Dublin has managed to charm me again  
Molly Furey, Life, page 9

## Resident sought €50,000 to withdraw objection

South Dublin homeowner had objected to council over apartment scheme

Man was paid €20,000 by developer but later asked for another €80,000

JACK POWER

A local resident sought a payment of €50,000 in "consultancy" fees from a developer in exchange for withdrawing a planning objection to the expansion of a new apartment development in south Dublin.

Red Rock Developments is seeking to add an extra floor to a 77-apartment development at Elmpark Green on Merrion Road. The developer sought planning permission last November to expand the nine-storey development, which is finished, to add a 10th storey comprising two penthouse apartments.

Correspondence seen by The Irish Times shows a homeowner living beside the site proposed dropping an objection they had lodged against the plans, in exchange for €50,000, before later increasing the demand for compensation to €100,000.

Patrick Sheeran (75), a former chartered surveyor living on Bellevue Park Avenue, initially said he would withdraw his objection to the planning application in exchange for €50,000 and other terms.

#### Required commitments

In a December 20th, 2023 letter, Mr Sheeran said the payment would cover fees for "extensive work" he had carried out examining the project, on behalf of a local residents' association.

In his letter to Keith Craddock, head of Red Rock Developments, he said he also required commitments that the developer provide a children's sports field on the site. On receipt of payment he said he would withdraw his planning objection to Dublin City Council (DCC), concluding his "past, present and future involvement of any kind whatsoever in the matter of Elmpark Green, in perpetuity".

Documents show the residents' association was offered a financial contribution towards "legal and planning expenses" it had incurred, provided it did not object to the revised plans. Following this, Mr Sheeran wrote to the developer, seeking payment to cover

fees for work he said he had carried out for the association on the planning application, before he stepped back from the group.

Lawyers for Red Rock Developments initially told Mr Sheeran he had not provided services to the developer and his request was an "abuse" of the planning process.

However, in a January 19th letter, lawyers said the developer could offer €15,000, if he withdrew his objection to the extra floor. Later that month Mr Sheeran agreed to withdraw his objection in exchange for €20,000. DCC granted permission for the extra storey several days later.

In a February 9th letter, Mr Sheeran said the developer had failed to pay the agreed "token compensation". He said he was now seeking a "full and final settlement" of €100,000, or he would appeal the approval to An Bord Pleanála.

The payment would be compensation for the apartment block devaluing his property and cutting off light to his back garden, he said. While the originally agreed €20,000 fee was paid several days later, when a further €80,000 was not paid, Mr Sheeran submitted an appeal to the planning board.

Mr Sheeran said he had not sought "go-away money" from the developer to drop his planning objection. His "top priority" had been to secure a commitment for a sports field for children to play on: "If there's a sports field and no 10th floor, that's a win for me; I don't need the money, it's not about money," he said. "I have told them how much I want in full and final settlement; if they pay me that, then I don't have a claim and it follows that I withdraw from the process and I withdraw the submission. That's it, quid pro quo."

A spokeswoman for Red Rock Developments said the company "cannot comment on this matter at this time".

➔ Homeowner paid €20,000 by developer sought extra €80,000 to drop objection: page 5

CHARLIE BIRD  
1949-2024



## A man who felt fear and faced it with courage



Mark Hennessy

Some images live on in the memory. Croagh Patrick on an April afternoon in 2022 – watching a man, gaunt and bent, make the final steps to reach its summit – will forever be one.

Thousands joined Charlie Bird that day; a few were famous, the majority were not. Each had been touched by the courage he had shown follow-

ing the devastating news, broken to him in 2021, that he had motor neuron disease.

By the end of the climb, the former RTÉ news journalist was exultant.

For months, the Climbwithcharlie project had driven him. He was helped, as always, by his wife Claire and his daughters, Orla and Neasa. And a project was needed for a man who had

learned that courage is not about the absence of fear but, rather, facing it. The climb raised millions of euro, brought the Irish together on hills and mountains across the island, dominating headlines and social media for days.

Every campaign needs a slogan. Charlie's was "the hand of friendship". For most, it would have sounded trite. With him, it never did. Yesterday, in the wake of his death at the age of 74, scores shared stories of simple encounters with him in his last few years.

Following his diagnosis, which shattered him for a time, he applied himself with relentless energy to "being useful", as

he once put it in a call before disease robbed him of his voice and it was replaced by an electronic version of himself.

He had not begun thinking the Croagh Patrick climb would raise so much. But there was a competitive streak at his heart. It was something that drove him onwards but it also often infuriated those who had to deal with him daily (and these were his friends) during 40 years of journalism when he regularly broke the big news stories of the day.

It was a competitiveness sometimes based on insecurity: his early life, his education gaps, his desire for respect that he often felt he did not get even

➔ Former RTÉ news journalist Charlie Bird has died after being diagnosed in 2021 with motor neuron disease.

PHOTOGRAPH: TOM HONAN

though he had triple-earned it.

There were many chapters in Charlie Bird's life, which was filled with the greatest challenge in the end, but not without its low moments before. But the final chapter was simply glorious, a life well lived by a man who learned the greatest lesson along the way: be useful.

➔ News and tributes: page 3

## HSE in urgent appeal to air passengers after measles case

RONAN MCGREEVY

Passengers on a flight from Abu Dhabi to Dublin have been urged to self-monitor for symptoms of measles following confirmation of another case of the potentially fatal disease on-board.

It is the third recent case of the infection in Ireland, including one fatality, and has sparked renewed appeals to the public to seek vaccinations.

The latest case, confirmed by the HSE yesterday, was detected on-board Etihad Airways flight EY45 which arrived in Dublin at 6.30am last Saturday.

Pregnant women, immunocompromised passengers and those with infants under 12 months have been urged to immediately contact the HSE or Department of Public Health.

Dr Sam McConkey, specialist in infectious disease at the

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, said public health professionals had been expecting further cases and the introduction of measles to Ireland was now almost inevitable.

"Of all the infectious viruses that we know about, measles is among the most infectious," he said, adding that between 10 and 20 per cent of the population, varying on a county and subgroup level, were not immune.

#### Urgency

The infection causes a HIV/Aids-like temporary paralysis of the immune system, Dr McConkey said, which can prove fatal, as it did in a recent case in the midlands.

"There has been an upsurge of measles cases in places like the UK and there's a huge amount of travel from the UK to Ireland... so it's almost inevitable

that measles will be introduced in Ireland and unfortunately our vaccination rates have dropped a little bit."

A HSE measles national incident management team has been established in response to the disease's resurgence in the UK and Europe.

Recent cases here include a man in Mullingar, Co Westmeath, who died last month having contracted the disease in Birmingham, England, and a teenager in the west of Ireland diagnosed last week.

There have been nine other suspected cases.

Passengers onboard the Abu Dhabi flight have been advised to look out for symptoms until the end of the month. These vary and include runny nose, sneezing and cough, sore red eyes, a temperature of 38 degrees or above, and a rash initially in the head and neck area.

## Weather

Generally wet outside Ulster and north Connacht, with rain heavy at times and possibility of flooding. Highs of 6-11 degrees

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## Home News

Migration: Up to 200 homeless asylum seekers are sleeping in a makeshift camp in Dublin amid calls for Government to provide "secure shelter": page 2

Health: Moderate exercise for two and a half hours a week improves overall health, according to HSE guide: page 5

## World News



War in Ukraine: Russia has suffered damaging drone strikes and cross-border raids by Russian anti-Kremlin militants based in Ukraine: page 7

## Business + Commercial Property

Pensions: The Department of Social Protection is set to publish a draft legislation before Easter on its landmark auto-enrolment pension scheme: page 12

Energy: Energia Group paid out €200m in dividends in the nine months to the end of last year: page 13

## Sports Wednesday

Rugby: Conor Murray followed instructions to clear to touch with two minutes to go against England last week, says defence coach: page 19

Soccer: Bohemians are in talks with former Republic of Ireland manager Stephen Kenny to return to League of Ireland: page 20

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## HSE issues moderate exercise guidelines

JADE WILSON

Moderate exercise for two hours and 30 minutes a week improves overall health, according to new guidelines published by the HSE.

The new National Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Ireland were unveiled by the HSE yesterday bringing Ireland in line with recommendations from the World Health Organisation (WHO) on physical activity.

Speaking at the event, Prof Breda Smyth, chief medical officer at the Department of Health, said she hoped to “encourage people of all ages around the country to prioritise their health and wellbeing by increasing their levels of physical activity”. Key updates in the guidelines include that physical activity at moderate to vigorous levels can be accumulated across the week, replacing sedentary time with physical activity of any intensity, including light intensity, and an emphasis on including muscle-strengthening activity.

For the first time in Ireland, there are guidelines for sedentary behaviour and physical activity guidelines for very young children. Previous research has found only 23 per cent of primary and 12 per cent of post-primary students are meeting recommended physical activity guidelines in Ireland.

Most adults in Ireland spend at least five hours a day in sedentary activity, and less than half of adults (46 per cent) in Ireland are meeting

Exercise for two hours and 30 minutes a week, says the HSE

the recommended physical activity guidelines.

“The benefits of regular physical activity, at moderate to vigorous levels, for our overall health are immense. It improves our heart health, reduces risk of developing cancer and chronic diseases such as type-2 diabetes, and can improve our mood and sleep,” Ms Smyth said.

**Sedentary behaviour**  
“In adults, higher levels of sedentary behaviour associated with cardiovascular disease, cancer and type-2 diabetes,” she said. Sedentary behaviour would include most desk-based work, driving a car, and watching television or other screen time activities.

“Replacing this sedentary time, where possible, with activity, even light intensity activity – essentially moving more everyday – is also strongly advised to protect health,” Prof Smyth said.

New recommendations from the HSE for each age group include physical activity several times a day, particularly through floor-based play for infants less than a year old, and for infants not to be secured for more than an hour at a time in prams and strollers.

Children aged one to two years should spend at least three hours in a variety of physical activities. Children aged three to four should spend at least three hours in a variety of physical activities. Children and adolescents aged five to 17 years should do at least an average of one hour per day of moderate to vigorous intensity, mostly aerobic, physical activity, across the week.

# Homeowner paid €20,000 by developer sought extra €80,000 to drop objection



**Jack Power**

Former surveyor lodged planning objection when payment not made

Tucked away about 10 minutes walk from Merrion Road, Bellevue is a quiet residential estate backing on to Elm Park in the heart of south Dublin.

Patrick Sheeran (75), a former chartered surveyor, bought a house with his wife at the end of a small road on Bellevue Park Avenue in 1988. The modest house has a decent-sized back garden, which today includes a small putting green, flowerpots of daffodils, and a table and chairs where the couple previously often ate dinner outside on sunny days.

The Celtic Tiger period saw significant housing developments and office blocks built in the Elm Park site neighbouring the estate, which can be seen from Mr Sheeran's back garden. A new nine-storey apartment block overlooking their home resulted in Mr Sheeran coming into conflict with the company behind the housing project, Red Rock Developments.

The developer, Keith Craddock, is seeking to add an extra floor to the 77-apartment development at Elmpark Green, which has recently been finished. Red Rock Developments sought planning permission last November to expand the nine-storey development and add a 10th storey accommodating an extra two penthouse apartments. Mr Sheeran had objected to the expansion when it was being considered by Dub-

lin City Council (DCC) and, after it received planning approval, he appealed that decision to An Bord Pleanála (ABP) this year.

Correspondence seen by The Irish Times shows Mr Sheeran previously offered to withdraw his initial objection to the extra floor, in exchange for a payment of €50,000 and a commitment that the developer provide a sports pitch for children in Elmpark Green.

The sole objection to the planning application had been made by Mr Sheeran on December 5th, 2023, stating the site was been overdeveloped.

The local residents' association also had issues with the apartment development. However, following talks with Red Rock Developments the group did not lodge an objection to the proposed 10th storey. One individual involved in the association said it opted to take a “pragmatic approach”, negotiating for some extra landscaping works and trees to be planted.

### Financial payment

Documents show the developer offered to make a financial payment to the residents' association, to cover some of its costs. A December 9th notice of a meeting advised residents that the developer had “offered to make a contribution towards the legal and planning expenses we have incurred to date”. One senior figure in the association said the terms of any agreement with the developer were confidential.

On foot of this, Mr Sheeran sought to strike a deal with the developer to withdraw his objection to the apartment development, in exchange for a payment and other terms.

In a December 20th letter, Mr Sheeran said a €50,000 fee would cover the “extensive work” he had carried out on the project on behalf of a residents' association, which he said had taken up “a very substantial amount of my professional time”. The letter to Mr Craddock said he would also require commitments that a section of

ground be levelled to create a sports field for children to play. “That will conclude my past, present and future involvement of any kind whatsoever in the matter of Elmpark Green, in perpetuity,” he wrote.

Along with the letter he sent an invoice for €50,000, listing services he provided as “chartered surveyor planning & development consultancy 2020-2023”.

In a January 8th response, law firm AMOSS, acting for Red Rock Developments, stated Mr Sheeran had provided no services to the developer. The letter alleged the request for financial payment was “at the very least an abuse of process” and a breach of “professional ethics”.

It said if his planning objection was not withdrawn the developer would make a criminal complaint to the Garda. If an appeal was taken to ABP the firm would seek to show it was “vexatious, frivolous and without substance”.

In a January 15th letter, Mr Sheeran reiterated his invoice was for the developer to cover services he provided for the residents' group, from which he had stepped back in early 2023. He rejected the claim that his planning objection was vexatious, adding that the apartment development had seriously devalued his home.

Mr Sheeran said he and his wife had planned to sell up and retire to Co Offaly, having previously hoped to get upwards of €800,000 for the south Dublin property. They were now facing a “dramatic” drop in the value of their home, as a result of “the loss of sunlight to our formerly beautiful back garden”, he wrote. The former chartered surveyor queried whether the developer was open to a “pragmatic and ethical business resolution”.

Following a further back and forth the developer proposed making a payment of €15,000, if Mr Sheeran withdrew his objection and DCC granted planning permission. Lawyers for



“

As per the lodgement made, a further payment of €30k by tomorrow will conclude this matter in every respect  
Correspondence from Patrick Sheeran to developer Keith Craddock

Red Rock Developments said the alternative was that a report would be made to the Garda and the developer would sue Mr Sheeran “for losses suffered”.

In January 19th correspondence, Mr Sheeran said his motivation had always been to prevent poor planning, such as building “on land set aside as public open space”. Despite that, he said he would accept “the insignificant sum of €30,000 in compensation for the current and future loss to the value of my D4 home”. He added as part of the deal Red Rock Developments would “use its best endeavours” to provide a sports field for local children.

As planners in the local authority were about to make a decision, lawyers for the developer ramped up efforts to agree a deal.

In a January 22nd email, Killian Morris, a partner at AMOSS, told Mr Sheeran €20,000 was on the table, if the council approved the planning application. “My client has asked me to emphasise that the withdrawal of the objection by close of business today is critical. If this is not done, the above agreement will no longer apply,” Mr Morris wrote.

Later that day Mr Sheeran wrote to the council requesting the objection he had made against the Elmpark Green development the month before be withdrawn. By that stage the planner's report was already written and two days later DCC granted permission for the revised plans.

The developer's lawyers said €10,000 would be sent to Mr Sheeran's account when he confirmed he would not appeal the decision to ABP, with the second €10,000 transferred after the window to appeal closed.

Instead the resident sent a revised claim, seeking €100,000 from the developer as compensation for the loss of light to his back garden and devaluation of his home. In February 9th correspondence, Mr Sheeran said

he would accept “one discounted payment for compensation in full and final settlement of €100,000”. If those terms were met he said he would “not be making a submission of objection... to An Bord Pleanála”.

Records show AMOSS transferred €20,000 to Mr Sheeran on February 14th, which Mr Morris wrote “now completes matters between you and our client”.

In a message to Mr Craddock, Mr Sheeran acknowledged the payment but said it related to a previous agreement for “token compensation”, which had expired. “As per the lodgement made, a further payment of €30k by tomorrow will conclude this matter in every respect,” he wrote.

No further payment  
When no further payment was made, the council's decision to grant permission for the two extra apartments was appealed to ABP by Mr Sheeran, on the basis the increase in height was not justified.

A decision from the planning board on the appeal could take at least a year due to the backlog of cases. This means the developer will have to let the existing nine storeys lie empty while waiting for the ruling, or abandon plans for the extra floor.

Sitting in his kitchen in early March, Mr Sheeran rejected any suggestion he had been seeking “go-away money” from the developer to drop his planning objections.

His “top priority” had been to secure a commitment for a green space that children living in the apartments could use as a sports field, he said. “If there's a sports field and no 10th floor, that's a win for me, I don't need the money, it's not about money,” he said.

His initial request for €50,000 had been on the basis the developer had offered to pay some of the fees the residents' association ran up, he said. “I wrote to [Red Rock] saying I'd accept 50k, being €33 an hour, whereas my rate is €170 an hour, so 20 per cent of the fee, I thought that was fair,” he



the recommended physical activity guidelines.

“The benefits of regular physical activity, at moderate to vigorous levels, for our overall health are immense. It improves our heart health, reduces risk of developing cancer and chronic diseases such as type-2 diabetes, and can improve our mood and sleep,” Ms Smyth said.

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