

Record 1

From: [Andrew Munro](#)
To: [Sile DeBurca](#)
Cc: [Miriam Dollard](#); [Amanda Reilly](#)
Subject: RE: DOT-TM- 02029-2020 ecorrespondence re CA Drugs - Favour
Date: Friday 18 September 2020 14:55:23

If you drop in to me please Sile, we can discuss.

A

From: Sile DeBurca <[Sile.DeBurca](#)>
Sent: Friday 18 September 2020 14:27
To: Andrew Munro <[Andrew.Munro](#)>
Cc: Miriam Dollard <[Miriam.Dollard](#)>; Amanda Reilly <[Amanda.Reilly](#)>
Subject: FW: DOT-TM- 02029-2020 ecorrespondence re CA Drugs - Favour

Andrew

We have some outstanding correspondence re Drug's Citizen's Assembly. But this may have moved on since? Can we close the correspondence on basis you have been speaking to the Ministers' office/Department?

Sile

From: Blaine Gaffney <[blaine_gaffney](#)>
Sent: Thursday 16 July 2020 14:01
To: Taoiseach's Webmail <[Taoiseach](#)>
Subject: Timeline for Citizens Assembly

16/07/20

An Taoiseach,

Minister for State Frank Feighan is seeking to understand what the proposed timeline for the convening of a Citizen's Assembly on the issue of Drugs will be. We are aware there is a plan to hold a number of them over the lifetime of the Government.

He is also seeking to understand what format this proposed convention is likely to take, given that the issue around criminalisation has been heavily dealt with before and during the introduction of the National Drug Strategy.

Any advice on the matter would be greatly appreciated.

Kindest regards,

Blaine Gaffney

Special Advisor to Minister Frank Feighan,
An Roinn Sláinte, Department of Health

Amanda Reilly

Protocol & General

Roinn an Taoisigh

Department of the Taoiseach

Tithe an Rialtais, Sráid Mhuirfean Uachtarach, Baile Átha Cliath 2, D02 R583

Government Buildings, Merrion Street Upper, Dublin 2, D02R583


Amanda.Reilly

www.gov.ie

ecorrespondence Ref 02029/2020

From: Department of Taoiseach <taoiseach [REDACTED]>

Sent: 01 October 2020 16:18

To: Mr. Blaine Gaffney <blaine_gaffney [REDACTED]>

Subject: Proposed timeline for convening of Citizens' Assembly on Drug Use

Attachments: [Transcript of PQs answered 290920 re CA.docx](#);

Dear Mr. Gaffney,

In reply to your correspondence to the Taoiseach dated 16 July 2020.

I am to inform you that the timing of the Citizens' Assemblies over the lifetime of this Government has yet to be worked out. The situation is complicated by restrictions necessitated by Covid 19.

You will be aware that the work of the current Citizens' Assembly on gender equality has been interrupted and delayed by the impact of Covid-19. It had originally been scheduled to hold meetings in the period from March to July and to issue its report in the Summer. The Assembly has had to adapt its methods to comply with Public Health guidelines, but will resume its work with online meetings in October and over the coming months with the aim of reporting by June 2021. The experience of the current Assembly of operating on an online basis will inform the approach to the other Citizen's Assemblies to be undertaken in line with the Programme for Government.

The Dublin Mayor Citizens' Assembly will be established with a new Chairperson and new members following completion of the current Assembly.

The Taoiseach has asked officials in this Department to engage with your Department on the matter of the approach to be taken as regards the Citizens' Assembly relating to drugs use.

The matter was raised in the Dáil on the 29th September 2020 (copy of transcript enclosed for your reference). You will see that the Taoiseach stated that work currently underway in relation to the multidisciplinary response to addiction and recovery, that is rooted in community participation, should not be delayed while making decisions and policy regarding the correct way to proceed with the Citizens' Assembly approach.

Yours sincerely,

Miriam Dollard

Head of Protocol and Civil Policy Division

Attachment: Transcript of PQs answered on 29/09/20.

Tuesday, 29 September 2020

Questions (1, 2) answered together

Alan Kelly

Alan Kelly

Question:

1. Deputy Alan Kelly asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his plans for a new citizens' assembly in 2021. [25030/20]

[View answer](#)

Mary Lou McDonald

Mary Lou McDonald

Question:

2. Deputy Mary Lou McDonald asked the Taoiseach his plans to establish a citizens' assembly in 2021. [26525/20]

[View answer](#)

Oral answers (14 contributions) (Question to Taoiseach)

The Taoiseach

I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 and 2 together.

Under the programme for Government, the Government is committed to establishing a citizens' assembly in 2021 to consider the type of directly elected mayor and local government structures best suited for Dublin. The work of the current Citizens' Assembly on gender equality has been interrupted and delayed by the impact of Covid-19. It was originally scheduled to hold meetings in the period from March to July and issue its report in the summer. It has had to adapt its methods to comply with public health guidelines but will resume its work with online meetings in October and over the coming months, with the aim of reporting by June 2021. I commend all the members of the assembly on their commitment to their work in the face of the challenges presented by Covid. Their civic-minded dedication to completing their task will ensure we can make substantial advances on gender equality, based on their findings and recommendations.

The experience of the current assembly in operating online will inform the approach to the other citizens' assemblies to be undertaken in line with the programme for Government. The Dublin mayor Citizens' Assembly will be established with a new chairperson and new members following completion of the current assembly. The programme for Government also provides for the establishment of citizens' assemblies to consider matters relating to drug use, biodiversity and the future of education. Officials from my Department are engaging with officials from the relevant Departments on the approach to be taken to these assemblies. It is envisaged they will be established

after the Dublin mayor Citizens' Assembly has completed its work, but the specific timing of each assembly has yet to be worked out.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan)

I call Deputy Ó Ríordáin, who is deputising for Deputy Kelly.

Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin

All the issues to be discussed by the citizens' assembly are important but none more so than that of drugs. The Minister of State with responsibility for the national drugs strategy has stated in the House that he has twice written to the Taoiseach to try to find out when the citizens' assembly might take place. There is a feeling that in the middle of a pandemic, all that momentum for radical drug reform that had been building for years, on issues such as drug use, addiction and recovery, has, unfortunately, been lost. When the opportunity arose within the programme for Government to announce the potential for a citizens' assembly, it was seized on by those in this area as a great opportunity. We hope the Taoiseach will give more of a commitment as to when and how that citizens' assembly might meet.

The Taoiseach knows the issues around decriminalisation are very important, such as trying to take people out of the criminal justice system and treating drug use as a purely medical issue.

I suggest that the Taoiseach has an opportunity, given that he has a Seanad space free. While political parties will do whatever they can to make sure a particular candidate meets the criteria, and while I know it is the agricultural panel, would it not be quite powerful for the Taoiseach to do what he can to ensure that somebody who advocates for drug users and those in recovery could fill that space in the Seanad? It could be somebody like Tony Geoghegan, Philly McMahon or Peter McVerry. I know the criteria of the agricultural panel have to be fit, but at the same time, such an appointment would indicate to those who care deeply about this issue that the Government cares deeply about it and that it wants somebody in these Houses who has an intimate understanding of the complexities of it.

Also, we need to know when the citizens' assembly will sit, because while I can speak about the health elements of this problem, for far too many families there is clearly a violent gang element to it as well, which is literally killing people on the streets in my constituency and throughout the country. We need a firmer commitment from the Taoiseach along the lines on which I have spoken. We need dates and we need to know the Government is on the side of these families and communities.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald

I also want to raise the matter of a citizens' assembly on the issues of drugs and drug use and misuse, as well as recovery and how the State supports and funds such an approach. I have raised with the Taoiseach the value and importance of the community participation provision within the national drugs strategy. I have brought to his attention that some within the apparatus of the State are less than enthusiastic about that community participation provision. The Taoiseach has agreed with me on more than one occasion that this participative piece of the strategy is essential in respect of the issue of drugs, drug use and misuse and recovery. I would also like to know what the

plans are for this. The dangers and harm that drugs can cause are present and real. Therefore, there is an urgency for individuals and their families as well as for communities, many of which can be readily identified and which have suffered disproportionately from drug use and misuse and from a lack of State support for services and a viable recovery model. In fact, I represent such communities. I know we will talk about the Government's shared island unit later. It is appropriate and obvious at this stage, however, not least because of the position of Boris Johnson, his Government, its Internal Market Bill and all that has arisen around the Brexit discussion and debate, that there is a need to plan in real time for Irish reunification. By that, I mean there is a need for a real-world discussion around public services, such as the health service, for example, as well as educational provision and the economic model of a reunified Ireland. All of these are key and critical issues and they will take time to consider and plan for. I have said to the Taoiseach before that it is a reckless mistake for anyone to bury his or her head in the sand at this point and to try to imagine that profound political change is not under way, because it is, and that will find constitutional expression. I am raising that matter with the Taoiseach again and I would like him to consider the establishment of a citizens' assembly or a similar mechanism - I do not mind what it is called - that clears the space for that conversation on constitutional change and a reunified Ireland, that brings the conversation beyond politicians and invites the citizenry in its entirety to be part of this conversation, which we know has started in communities across the island in an organic and real way.

The Taoiseach

There is a difficulty with the citizens' assemblies in terms of timing, organisation and logistics because of Covid-19 and that has to be acknowledged. The existing Citizens' Assembly on gender issues has been delayed but it is meeting and engaging. I am open to working out the logistics of the range of issues that we want to put before citizens' assemblies, but we have to be realistic as well. The next one after the gender issues one is complete was meant to be the Dublin mayor Citizens' Assembly. I will ask my officials to discuss this with other parties and work out the logistical requirements in the context of Covid-19 and essentially in an online format. For the foreseeable future we are looking at how effective such meetings of citizens' assemblies can be and examining if we can run some in parallel, because there are three to four of them that people would be anxious to have. Given the slower pace of them, as a result of Covid-19, there will be problems around that.

I want to stress that in no way should that weaken the resolve and the work that is under way in tackling the drugs issue and the issues of recovery and a multidisciplinary response to addiction and recovery that is rooted in community and community participation. That is still required, irrespective of whether or when we have an assembly. There should be no let-up in advances or progression on a range of issues around that because the world cannot stand still. We have to keep making decisions and policy, while getting it right with the Citizens' Assembly approach.

On a citizens' assembly on the Good Friday Agreement or on the question of Irish unity, I have set up a shared island unit within the Department of the Taoiseach, which is designed to scope out a range of issues about what it would be like to share this island and to examine how we can best share this island into the future, irrespective of

people's views on the constitutional position. The Good Friday Agreement allowed for that and the genius of it was that it essentially meant we did not have to talk about constitutional issues every single day, and rather we could get to work on putting flesh on the bones of a lot of what is in the agreement. We have not succeeded in doing that within the institutions themselves because they have been too stop-start from the beginning of the agreement and have been in abeyance and suspended for a lot of the time.

There is a North-South dimension which needs strong momentum and impetus, and that is something I am committed to doing with the existing bodies. I am also committed to looking at investment in North-South infrastructure, which has been on the agenda for a decade. We want to take the initiative on that and follow through on the commitments made by the Irish Government in respect of New Decade, New Approach agreement.

There is a lot to be done. As opposed to grandstanding and indulging in rhetoric all of the time, an awful lot more can be done on putting flesh on the bones of the Good Friday Agreement, making it work and enabling it to work. In some respects, the North-South bodies have not been given the support and momentum they deserve. They did great work in the early phase of the Good Friday Agreement. Waterways Ireland, Tourism Ireland and InterTradeIreland all do effective work, but they need new momentum and an injection of support from all sides. The Irish Government will not be found wanting in that respect.

Likewise, in terms of health we need to intensify cross-Border co-operation, particularly in paediatric, cancer and oncology services, to a far greater degree than has been done to date. The community application of information technology, CAIT, initiative is one of the first and original initiatives on a cross-Border basis on health that has been added to in the utilisation of Altnagelvin hospital's oncology services and tertiary services for paediatrics. There are two fundamentally differently structured health services, however. In the North, it is essentially the National Health Service as experienced through the UK's historic model, although it is subject to a lot of pressure right now. Our model evolved differently because we did not have the same social insurance provisions in post-war Ireland as developed in post-war Britain. In essence, that allowed for an initial voluntary hospital system to emerge from the beginning of the last century, which was religiously driven by various denominations, and then the State hospitals were introduced with the Health Act 1970. This involved the expansion of health board hospitals and then State hospitals at St. James's and Beaumont. There was a very mixed evolutionary system in the Republic and that needs much reorganisation. It is a big question in terms of the alignment of that with the structures in the health service in Northern Ireland. With the shared island unit the idea is that we would commission substantive research to inform our perspectives. That would be my approach in the first instance.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Bernard J. Durkan)

We are out of time but I can allow a quick contribution.

Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin

As the Taoiseach indicated, we cannot say we will deal with the drugs citizens' assembly question when the Citizens' Assembly meets. There was great co-operation across these Houses on the issue of injecting centres and decriminalisation.

I will return to the Seanad matter for a moment. The Taoiseach nominated Colette Kelleher to the Seanad in a previous Oireachtas and the Government took on the suggestion of appointing a Traveller representative. It would be a strong sign if the Government could nominate somebody from the drugs field and who knows it intimately if it feels the drugs citizens' assembly would be delayed. It would make good a Government mess around Senator D'Arcy if somebody of that stature in the drugs area could be nominated.

The Taoiseach

As the Deputy knows, it is a Fine Gael vacancy.

Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin

I am sure the Taoiseach has a view on it.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald

I got in to ask a question and then the Taoiseach talked down the clock. My colleague got a short few seconds but I will get none.

The Taoiseach

I did not talk down the clock. The Deputy had as much time as I had.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald

Okay. The Taoiseach has a peculiar way of looking at the clock. All the evidence in the real world demonstrates the State does not take the matters of drug use, misuse and, above all, recovery seriously. How many detox beds are available in the State? Tell us that.

The Taoiseach

I say again to the Deputy that it is not fair to say the Government does not care about drug recovery or addiction. I have been involved in that work as a former Minister with responsibility for health. I worked very strongly at that and we made much progress in our time with a multidisciplinary response and the creation of new approaches. The momentum must continue, and it will. What I am saying is that must continue irrespective of when we have that citizens' assembly.

On the Senator vacancy, in the first instance it is a Fine Gael Senator who has now left. That person was elected as a Fine Gael Senator and in the first instance it is a matter for Fine Gael to consider how it feels it is best to fill the vacancy. There will be some reflection on that but in the first instance it is a matter for that party. I will not pre-empt the consideration of another party. Others may want to nominate people as well to that position.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald

How many detox beds are there? Does the Taoiseach know? He should.

ecorrespondence request 02029/2020 answered 01.10.20

From: Blaine Gaffney <blaine_gaffney@doh.gov.ie>

Sent: Thursday 16 July 2020 14:01

To: Taoiseach's Webmail <Taoiseach@doh.gov.ie>

Subject: Timeline for Citizens Assembly

16/07/20

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He is also seeking to understand what format this proposed convention is likely to take, given that the issue around criminalisation has been heavily dealt with before and during the introduction of the National Drug Strategy.

Any advice on the matter would be greatly appreciated.

Kindest regards,

Blaine Gaffney

Special Advisor to Minister Frank Feighan,

An Roinn Sláinte, Department of Health