

THE SUNDAY TIMES

A DAY OF MUTINY AND MAYHEM FOR PUTIN

News



IRELAND'S COCAINE EPIDEMIC



Revealed: how RTE channelled undeclared money to Tubridy

Public broadcaster told star's agent to provide invoice to London firm for €150,000

John Mooney and Beau Donnelly

RTE told Ryan Tubridy's agent to send a British media company invoices, labelled as "consultancy services", which the broadcaster used for €150,000 in top-up salary payments to its star presenter.

Dee Forbes, RTE's director-general, discussed the payments with Tubridy's agent, Noel Kelly, days before an arrangement was put in place to route money from the state-funded public broadcaster to the presenter.

Today's disclosure by The Sunday Times sheds light on how the station understated Tubridy's remuneration package.

The payments were organised by RTE, which arranged for the creation of the invoices, which were labelled as consultancy services, before being settled by the British media firm Astus last year.

Tubridy's name was not mentioned on any paperwork or payments.

RTE and Astus maintained a barter relationship where services were exchanged and traded. The London firm is said to have acted in good faith at all times and there is no suggestion of any wrongdoing on its part, or on the part of either Kelly or Tubridy.

Kelly sent the invoices to RTE which forwarded them to Astus to process the payments at an overall cost to RTE's barter account of €230,760, according to sources with knowledge of the affair.

The €150,000 was in lieu of two annual sums originally intended to be paid by Renault, which previously sponsored *The Late Late Show* but which did not renew an agreement that was underwritten by RTE.

The consultancy invoices covered top-up payments of €75,000 for the years 2021 and 2022 but made no reference to Tubridy or his company Tuttle Productions. "There was an explicit instruction by RTE to anonymise the transactions and use no names," The Sunday Times was told yesterday.

Kelly was told by RTE not to mention any names on the invoices, which were generated on behalf of CMS Marketing, a company he controls. The money was paid into a bank account at AIB in Westmoreland Street, Dublin, controlled by Kelly's company and for his client, Tubridy.

The two payments made to the presenter, which totalled €150,000, were part of the €345,000 in earnings that RTE understated Tubridy had made over the past six years.

An investigation is under way to establish how a further €120,000 in salary to Tubridy between 2017 and 2019 was understated by RTE.

RTE had been enforcing a policy of salary reductions and redundancies. Forbes had also given evidence to the Oireachtas public accounts committee on how it was curtailing unnecessary



BRYAN MEADE FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

Ryan Tubridy's name was not on any paperwork. There is no suggestion of wrongdoing on his part

spending. RTE suspended Forbes last Wednesday, the day before it issued a public statement acknowledging that it had misreported Tubridy's remuneration over successive years.

Catherine Murphy, the deputy chairwoman of the public accounts committee, last night described the payment arrangement as outrageous.

"When you don't have transparency, this is what happens. This appears to be a web which is slowly unravelling. There is no legitimate reason why anyone would create invoices for consultancy services to pay Ryan Tubridy via a London firm."

"This sort of thing should simply not happen as public funds are involved," she said. "We need to know why RTE's internal financial controls did not pick this up."

The disclosure that Tubridy received hundreds of thousands of euros in additional payments in 2017-22 sent shockwaves through the broadcaster last week.

Kelly and Tubridy did not respond to questions from The Sunday Times.

Tubridy initially said that RTE's accounting treatment of payments made to him were a matter for the broadcaster but last Friday he apologised for not correcting the public record when RTE published what it believed to be his salary. His future at RTE is unclear.

RTE yesterday promised there would be "appropriate accountability" though it confirmed it had not interviewed Tubridy about his knowledge of the matter. "There will be appropriate accountability for what has occurred. There are processes in train and RTE needs to be mindful of the legal considerations and the rights

of individuals and affording them due process," it said.

The statement followed the announcement by Catherine Martin, the media minister, of an external review of corporate governance and culture at the station.

However, the Sunday Times has learnt that the public accounts committee fears RTE will use the establishment of an external review as an excuse not to appear or fully disclose what it has found in its audit.

Kelly and his companies represent other presenters including Claire Byrne, Joe Duffy, Dave Fanning and Donncha O'Callaghan, as well as Newstalk's Pat Kenny and Ciara Kelly, Today FM's Matt Cooper, the BBC's Caitriona Perry and architect Dermot Bannon. There is no evidence to suggest any other clients of Kelly's received secret payments.

Martin said yesterday she did not know why Forbes had been suspended, stating the suspension was "due to a disciplinary process. I can't prejudice that".

When asked whether she had confidence in the executive board of RTE she said: "They have moved swiftly on this issue, I am confident of that. Nevertheless there needs to be an absolute external review. I've consulted with the leaders and I have told them that this is what I feel is needed. And they have given agreement to that."

A thorn in Montrose, pages 4-5



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