

# Garda's eagle eyes spotted sex crime on Luas

Dogged police work brought a sex offender to justice, but the deeper they dug, the more sinister the case became, writes **Cormac O'Keefe**

**K**arl Murray was off duty when he noticed something odd about a man on the Luas with him.

Both of them had just got on at the Harcourt St stop, in Dublin City centre, heading southbound on the Green Line.

It was mid-December 2019, and the Luas was busy.

Detective Sergeant Murray, in normal plain clothes, had his back to one door that remained shut for the journey. There was a crowd of people in front of him in the standing area.

"As time went on, I was standing there watching the world go by and I could see him with the phone in his hand."

As the Luas moved through Ranelagh towards Dundrum, and more people got off, he had a better viewpoint: "Further out, I noticed the phone was down lower, just below waist level."

At first, he thought, maybe, the man was watching something on his phone.

"I couldn't see his face," said Det Sgt Murray. "He was on the far side, opposite me a couple of feet, with his phone down. He was moving around a good bit with the phone down below."

The garda's antennae told him something was off: "I just thought: 'Something doesn't look right here. I suppose alarm bells just went off.'"

But he still didn't know what was on the phone: "I was trying to get a picture in my head from what he had down there, but I couldn't."

Then, reminiscent of the scene from Agatha Christie's *4.50 From Paddington*, an image was revealed to him: "I couldn't see until, at one stage, the way the Luas bends and he turned slightly and I could see a reflection in the glass of the Luas door. And from that, I could see the reflection of a woman's buttocks. She was dressed, but I could see he was filming or taking pictures."

With 25 years' experience as a garda and formerly of the Sex Offender Management and Intelligence Unit (SOMIU), in the National Protective Services Bureau (NPSU), Det Sgt Murray knew he had to act: "I knew what he was at. I said to myself: 'I can't let this go.'"

He could see the man's face now: "He looked like just an ordinary individual, any office worker, coming from a job. He had a work ID thing around him dangling, but it was turned in."

He kept the man under observation until the next stop.

"When we got closer to Balally stop, I went up to him, identified myself and I said: 'Can you step off the Luas, I want to have a word with you.'"

#### Self-doubts

As he escorted the man off, he rang Dundrum Garda Station to come down.

"I started to talk to him," he said. "He wouldn't even speak a word to me. He just totally shut down."



Detective Sergeant Karl Murray of Garda National Protective Services Bureau pictured at Harcourt St Luas stop where he first spotted Paul Boyle.

Picture: Colin Keegan, Collins Dublin

He couldn't help doubt himself: "In your head you question yourself, but you kind of go: 'No, you saw what you saw, keep going and get the assistance down.'"

Two uniformed gardai arrived quickly and Det Sgt Murray filled them in.

Garda Paul Newport tried to talk to the man, but got no reaction.

"I think because he wasn't reacting that Paul believed he was under the influence of something and arrested him for the purpose of a search and took him to Dundrum Garda Station," said Det Sgt Murray.

Under Section 7 of the Criminal Law Act, he suspected an arrestable offence had occurred and that the phone may contain evidence, and it was seized.

The man was Paul Boyle, from Scotland. There was nothing on the Garda Pulse system on him.

"He had never interacted with gardai," said Det Sgt Murray.

That was December 16, 2019, and the following day as he headed into his own office, in NPSB Domestic Homicide Review, he popped into SOMIU.

Detective Garda Colm Grogan and Det Gda Stephen Collier had worked for him when he was there.

"Karl came into the office and told us about the incident and that there was something off about him," said Det Gda Grogan, who spoke to the *Irish Examiner* along with Det Sgt Murray.

So Det Gda Grogan and his colleague, began their work.

SOMIU is the national unit tasked with supervising people on Ireland's sex offenders register, both people convicted in Ireland and those convicted abroad are subject to the act if they come to Ireland.

Det Gda Grogan and his colleague checked the Pulse system and spoke to the gardai in Dundrum station.

Given his Scottish background, they made contact with police there, through Visor (Violent and Sexual Offender Register) in Britain.

#### Sex offender

Word came back in a few days that Boyle had a conviction, for taking and possessing indecent images of children.

He had been convicted in April 2014 and received a community order of three years.

After those three years were up, he was free to leave Scotland and, at some stage, flew to Ireland. Scottish police did not inform gardai as he was no longer on their sex offender register.

But he was still subject to our register which, for the offence he was convicted of, would keep him on it for five years. He was legally obliged to inform Irish authorities of his name and address on arrival here, but didn't.

"We looked at the date of conviction, in April 2014, and he was in breach of the Sex Offenders Act," said Det Gda Grogan.

"So, we did our checks with other agencies, like social welfare, to establish when he took up employment in the jurisdiction and we were able to go back as far as 2018."

They had to get the original court documents and certified copies of conviction documents from Scotland.

While Boyle was not breaking the law when Det Sgt Murray came across him on the Luas (his time period on the Irish register ended in April 2019), he could still be prosecuted retrospectively, between 2018 and then.

Boyle pleaded guilty to breaching the act in February 2020.

Det Gda Grogan also went through Mutual Legal Assistance to get a direct point of contact with Scottish police and the offices involved in Boyle's prosecution.

"We started building a bit of a background and a full profile of Paul himself," he said.

#### Phone

"That's also when we kind of said: 'Well, we need to know what was on the phone.'"

He said gardai in Dundrum, operating under Det Sgt Ger White, had gone through the correct procedures for seizing the phone and it had been sent for phone analysis within the division.

"Daniel Cuffe was the guard down in Blackrock and he was the local phone analyst," Det Gda Grogan said.

On January 17, 2020, Det Gda Cuffe had everything in an evidence pack — containing two USB keys. He flagged that there were 40,000 images or two folders of approximately 20,000 images each.

"The system is searchable," Det Gda Grogan said. "So it separates text messages from photographs from emojis, anything recently deleted, what was on the SD card."

It's up to the investigating garda to view the images. He took sample dates and viewed the images: "You just have to sit down and do it. I was checking for upskirting or worrying behaviour. You look for places, crests on school uniforms, Luas stops, any reference point."

He said it became evident he was looking at offences under Section 15 of the Sexual Offences Act 2017, relating to "offensive conduct of a sexual nature".

At that time, there was no specific offence of upskirting, which only became an offence in February 2021 under the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 (also referred to as Coco's Law).

While many of the images were on a Luas or at Luas stops and steps, some were

also of women jogging and in the park.

#### Girls and colleagues

"We found out quickly that we had identifiable injured parties," Det Gda Grogan said, including schoolgirls.

He said they spoke to parents involved, as well as various school principals.

"Obviously, the parents were shocked, and they were angry," he said.

He said parents made decisions to try and make sure it wouldn't happen again, which may have included "taking a bit of freedom off them travelling on the Luas". In addition, the parents felt, that given the age of their children, they didn't want them to go through the process of being interviewed.

Det Gda Grogan also discovered "a significant amount of the images" were from a workplace.

They knew where Boyle had worked and contacted the HR department.

Det Gda Grogan said: "We did a walk-through outside of office hours. I had seen the images and we had from the HR department the staff that were there. Then, we were able to specifically say: 'Yes, we have this person, this person, this person.'"

In all, there were 11 identifiable victims, all female adult colleagues of Boyle.

"It was done in a very sensitive manner," said Det Gda Grogan. "We brought them into a room and showed them the images and interviewed them. They were able to say: 'Yeah, that's me.'"

He said they had no idea what Boyle was up to: "I spoke with them regularly over the last two years and it is still very upsetting for them. Look, it was shocking."

He said a 12th person was identified outside the workplace, in another business.

All 12 women gave statements. Gardai now had evidence of a separate offence: harassment under Section 10 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act, 1997.

#### Flash drive

They had enough justification to seek a search warrant for Boyle's home, and his workplace.

They arrived at his home, in a large apartment complex in Sandyford, early one morning in January 2021.

They showed him the warrant and sat Boyle down, taking the backpack he was carrying into work.

"He had a bag in the backpack and inside was a flash drive [external storage device]," said Det Gda Grogan.

"That became the main exhibit in this whole investigation — where all the evidence was, he was carrying that in a backpack with him. It was a mass amount of information transferred in December [2019]. He wanted to hold on to it."

Det Sgt Murray added: "He was still hanging on to it — he treasured it."

The flash drive was sent to Det Gda Shane Cullen in the Computer Forensics Section of the Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau, which has specialist equipment and trained officers to analyse digital devices.

#### 280,000 IMAGES

Of the half a million images on the flash drive, a staggering 278,500 were images and

video files of upskirting and harassment in work.

"His flash drive was all very organised and very meticulous and he had the folders labelled by month between June 2018 and January 2020," Det Gda Grogan said.

Over the 20 months, that would suggest almost 14,000 images, on average, taken a month — or, over the 608 days, an average of 450 image per day, every day.

He said Det Gda Cullen was able to date and locate each photo as the data contained GPS location, time, and date and the device and model of phone the photo was taken on.

In addition, his computer is able to extract child abuse imagery and located a video file of a very young child being raped.

Det Gda Cullen gave him back these files and Det Sgt Grogan moved all the relevant images together, including the video.

"It was my first time [seeing a video like that]," he said.

That video and other files went to another unit, back in the NPSB — the Online Child Exploitation Unit (OCEU).

They have a Victim ID unit and they traced the video to a

video made in the early 2000s in the US. The child in that — aged eight — had previously been identified and taken to safety by authorities.

Garda re-arrested Boyle. He was released again while the evidence was gathered by Det Gda Grogan and a file was submitted to the DPP.

In March 2021, Boyle appeared in court on a total of 23 charges, including two counts of possession of child pornography (the legal term for offences relating to child abuse imagery), 12 counts of harassment, and nine counts of engaging in sexual conduct of an offensive nature.

He was granted bail, despite garda objections. He was unable to take up bail and was remanded in custody, pending trial, scheduled for March 2022.

A month out, they were preparing for trial as there was no word of a plea of guilty. Then word came through that his counsel had contacted the DPP to say a plea would be forthcoming.

On March 11, Boyle, aged 45, of Sandyford View in south Dublin, pleaded guilty to two charges — harassment and possession of child pornography.

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"I think his own defence was quite overwhelmed with the amount of evidence we had," said Det Gda Grogan.

In addition, Det Gda Grogan's meticulous investigation file also included 12 women "brave enough" to give evidence in court.

"It was very difficult for them because they didn't want anyone to see those images," he said.

"That was very evident speaking to them, but they made the decision that they were saying 'No' to this."

"The DPP mentioned how strong the case was, there was no deviating from the fact that these 12 women were all going to come to court to give evidence, so that made it very difficult for Paul not to plead guilty, or to contest the case."

However, he said it was a "huge relief" for the women that they wouldn't have to give evidence in court.

A psychiatric assessment described Boyle as being of medium risk of reoffending and said he had a "voyeuristic disorder".

Judge Martin Nolan said Boyle had engaged in an "industrial scale" level of photographing young children and women.

#### Child rape video

The judge said the video, which was 15 minutes long, was extremely explicit and the victim was just eight.

He took a guilty plea into account and a letter Boyle handed to him expressing his remorse and shame.

Judge Nolan sentenced him to three years' imprisonment for the harassment and a five-year term for the child pornography — to run consecutive to the other sentence.

He suspended two and a half years and backdated it to when Boyle went into custody in March 2021.

He ordered Boyle never to contact any of the victims and imposed a two-year post-release supervision.

On the wider lessons of this case, Det Gda Grogan said: "We can only deal with stuff that's presented to us and in this case, there were a lot of lads on the ball for this investigation and it came together very quickly. But people need to report. I'm not saying it happens all the time. But there is a unit [SOMIU] that will look into it. In this case, we were very fortunate Karl was there."

Det Sgt Murray said that if people are suspicious of a person's behaviour they could note any identifying numbers on a carriage, and the time and location, as there could be CCTV.

Reflecting, he is left with the thought of how things could have been different.

"It was pure chance," he said. "He could have turned the phone the other way and I wouldn't have seen anything. He would have gone along."

But it wasn't just pure chance. Det Sgt Murray knew to be looking.



Detective Garda Colm Grogan and Detective Sergeant Karl Murray of Garda National Protective Services Bureau at Harcourt St Luas stop in Dublin. Picture: Colin Keegan, Collins Dublin

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# Ugly chapter a result of leaders' failure to heed warnings

It's hard to know what is more shocking — seeing smoldering ruins of meagre possessions belonging to refugees after being burned out of their camp in an act of shocking cruelty, or the glee from some so-called Christian patriots in the aftermath.

Whatever your quarrel may be with immigration and refugee policy, Schadenfreude around the dismantling and setting alight of a migrant camp, where desperate people have little to their name, should lead to some serious self-reflection

**Padraig Hoare**  
Opinion



about what kind of person you are, or the person you have become.

Those who invariably espouse Christian values on social media, who boast of their deep faith and self-righteousness amid a sea of godless leftists, revelled in the fact that fellow human beings were left with nothing amid

ash and smoke. No human being deserves such debasement, and the events around Sandwith St on Friday, May 12, were a stain on our national psyche.

They will remain a stain on our collective psyche until we get to grips with the fact that hatred of others is a growing issue in our country, and that Sandwith St will not be an isolated episode of shame until we act definitively and decisively to both stamp it out, and take more seriously our efforts to deal with our international obligations around people

fleeing desperate situations. As sure as night follows day, refugees coming to our country have become the scapegoat for a paralysis of leadership around housing, climate change, and immigration lasting for more than a generation.

More people will come here in the future as their homes across the world are destroyed not only by physical conflict, but also by nature roaring back against human-induced global warming.

Climate change has been instigated mostly by Western

progress, ramped up by unprecedented fossil fuel usage and rampant consumerism, while those fleeing bear the brunt of our folly through little fault of their own in low-emitting lands, but who are now constantly under the cosh from drought, monsoons, and other extreme weather.

Those climate events have led to war in the past as factions fight for precious tranches of land, and they will become even more fractious in the future.

We may bellow at the Government for inertia in

tackling the most pressing of issues, but manifesting that physically to attack those without a voice, the most marginalised and stigmatised, is inevitable because it is easy.

Targeting those weaker than us is the most human of terrible flaws.

It is not as if Government has not had ample warning that propaganda and othering of those who do not exactly resemble us works to dehumanise.

It was just under 20 years ago that an overwhelming majority of the population

approved an amendment to the constitution in a referendum to limit citizenship to those born to Irish parents.

It was a backlash then to perceived immigration policy failures by Government and, in retrospect, sowed the seeds to the hate and division that is metastasising before our very eyes in real time today.

We, as a collective people, must also reflect — gone are the days when we could look abroad at the likes of Germany and Italy and congratulate ourselves that neo-Nazism and far right

movements gaining a foothold in mainstream society would never come to our island on the periphery of Western Europe.

The lack of a coherent strategy from politicians, gardai, and the justice system to fight racism and simultaneously protect the most vulnerable among us has come home to roost, and unless we acknowledge our monumental collective failure, Sandwith St will be the beginning, not the end, of yet another ugly chapter in a country just over 100 years old.

## 'Men are coming to burn your tents'

■ Tensions high after camps burnt out and harassed by far-right mob

**Cormac O'Keeffe**

Shadreck didn't hang around when his phone pinged with a warning that men were coming to burn out their tents.

"I got messages, videos, saying people are protesting here and they want to burn our tents, so we moved," said the Zimbabwean man.

He and some friends went to a nearby café and watched and listened as a mob of 40 to 50, mainly men, but some women, marched on a makeshift camp on three sides of a block housing the International Protection Office on Mount St Lower in Dublin's south city centre.

Some of the group are thought to have come from a gathering organised by the far-right Irish Freedom Party earlier on Saturday.

Tensions were already high after a mob burned out a separate migrant encampment a minute's walk on Sandwith St on Friday night, just after gardai took away the occupants to safety.

"I was passing that [Sandwith] on Friday and there were people protesting," said Shadreck.

"It was scary. They started to chase us and said: 'Go, go, go, what are you waiting for?' We thought they might come that night for us, but they did not. They came yesterday [Saturday]."

He and his other friends from Zimbabwe are living in

small tents on the Mount St side.

"It's scary, because where we come from — we come from Zimbabwe — we ran away because they wanted to kill us," Shadreck said.

"So, when we come here, again we find a situation like this. It's become scary to us."

He said sleep was a problem, as their tents are so exposed: "When you sleep here, people can come and bend the tents, they can even bend you inside the tent. There is no protection. If in the middle of the night they attack us, it's going to be a problem to us. We are scared now. We are scared."

There is a total of 58 small tents on three sides of the block, many with two people living in them.

On the far side of the block, Aleksey from Ukraine talks briefly, in limited English.

"I live in occupied territory in Lisichansk [in eastern Ukraine]," he said. "I go to Russia, to Europe, to here. Russia in Ukraine is very bad, very, very bad."

However, he did not seem phased by the harassment from far-right agitators: "This is not dangerous. Ukraine is dangerous."

Lucas Mateus Guimaraes, the only person who was willing to give his full name, said the far-right group "come to make trouble [and were] aggressive".

But like Shadreck, the



The remains of a camp in Sandwith Street, Dublin, following a protest on Friday night where it was dismantled and later set alight. Makeshift tents had been erected in a laneway being used by homeless migrants. Picture: Niall Carson/PA



Far-right protesters confront a man by his tent by the International Protection Office. Picture: Niall Carson/PA

Brazilian got a phone message warning him.

"One girl told me 'Lucas, you can see on Twitter live people move in your direction, you need to tell your friends', the 25-year-old said.

"When they come they were so aggressive: 'Go back to your country, you can't stay here.' In the last tent [pointing down from him] they try and break the tent.

But, like that tent, this tent is my house."

He said it was "very dangerous" when people in the group call them "paedophiles" or "murderers".

The man living beside him is Volodymyr, from Chernihiv, in northern Ukraine.

"There were people with far-right slogans, shouting and telling us we were not welcome, refugees not welcome, Ireland for the Irish,"



Protesters walk past tents of homeless people at the International Protection Office in Dublin. Picture: Niall Carson/PA

said Volodymyr. "One tent they moved for sure and they threw a cigarette at us, but nothing serious. I've seen much, much worse."

Both he and Lucas said that left-wing groups were trying to get them involved in protests and put up banners.

"We don't need slogans here because if you put up far-left slogans surely you will attract far right," said

Volodymyr. "We're not about left or right, we are about a safe place."

Lucas said the gardai policed the protest well: "There were about 20 police, the police were perfect. They advised us to hide from this group, they were looking for trouble. The garda controlled the situation."

Shadreck said there has been a garda vehicle there since Saturday, across from



Lucas Mateus Guimaraes, at Grattan Court, Mount St, received a warning by phone. Picture: Conor Ó Mearáin/Collins

his tent, with another car doing patrols around the block.

"They are checking on us, 'guys, are you OK?'. If there is a problem to come to them."

Down the road, in the cul-de-sac off Sandwith St, there is still an acrid smell.

Debris is scattered the full length of it: Sleeping bags, remnants of food in pots and takeaways, chairs, suitcases,

charred sofas, bits of bikes, and the odd shoe.

On Mount St, Volodymyr said there is talk that their camp might be cleared this week and they will be given somewhere else.

"Where? What? I don't know," he said. "Somewhere with electricity and toilet hopefully."

Lucas added: "Somewhere that is more safe, no trouble."

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## Backlog at land registry body causing delays for home buyers

**Ellie O'Byrne**

A huge backlog at the new land registry body is causing delays for home buyers.

State agency Tailte Éireann has a backlog of 119,970 applications for land registry services, a Freedom of Information (FOI) request has revealed.

Tailte Éireann took over the duties of the Property Registration Authority (PRA), the Land Valuation Office, and Ordnance Survey Ireland in March to streamline Ireland's land registry, valuation, and mapping system.

However, it inherited a backlog of just under 120,000 stalled applications from the PRA, according to a FOI request done by the *Irish Examiner*, and an additional backlog of 2,398 applications has been added in 2023 so far.

Delays in processing land registration applications can slow down the ability of property owners to resell or remortgage homes.

A representative of a large developer who did not wish to be named told the *Irish Examiner* that delays in the system were "crazy and frustrating," and they had experienced the sale of new houses falling through due to delays.

"We've had situations where the sale of properties has been delayed or lost due to the land registry being very, very slow in turning your registry of deed docu-

ment into a folio," they said. "Some solicitors advise clients not to close the sale until the folio is issued: I've lost buyers on houses over it. I just got a first registration of a property back that has taken 14 months to go through the process."

They said that while there had been much emphasis on inefficiencies and delays at An Bord Pleanála at a time where there was a lot of pressure to provide more housing, land registry was another link in the chain that needed examining.

"It's a part of the process and another area that is backed up and inefficient," they said. "I think there should be some political involvement to say: 'Lads, we should be getting this as streamlined and efficient as possible."

"The figures speak for themselves: They're nearly a year behind. They have 120,000 applications sitting in front of them."

A total of 219,814 land registry applications were made to the PRA in 2022, with 199,585 applications in 2021.

However, the backlog in processed applications grew by 6,484 in 2022 with a further 2,398 to date in 2023, the FOI returns reveal.

The registration of houses in new developments which don't have pre-existing maps, can take longer to process and there are many other reasons, including incorrectly lodged appli-



Tailte Éireann took over the duties of the Property Registration Authority, the Land Valuation Office, and Ordnance Survey Ireland.

cations and boundary disputes, that can cause delays.

Seven per cent of the current backlog of applications relate to "first Registrations where a full examination of title is required".

Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers CEO Pat Davitt said he was aware of delays with land registration being raised by the organisation's members.

"Some of our members certainly tell us that the timespan is long," Mr Davitt said. "But I would like to see the figures on the number of applications that are incorrect when sent in, because I know that this is a serious problem."

Of 290,749 land registry applications made since the start of 2022 until the present, 35,715 cases, or 12% of applications, were rejected because they were incomplete or incorrect. These rejected applications are not included in the backlog.

The average time for processing a land registry application is currently four to five months and covid saw the service experience significant delays, a spokesperson for Tailte Éireann said.

"As with many organisations, we are still dealing with the impact that covid-19 had on our ability to maintain business levels.

### How it works

The sale of land must be registered with Tailte Éireann in order for a new owner to come into possession of the deeds of a property.

Landdirect.ie is the official land registry site for Ireland and this is now the responsibility of Tailte Éireann, under the Tailte Éireann Act 2022 which came into effect in March.

When a buyer purchases a property, a folio is opened, registering the owner of the land and mapping it. The folio also notes any dealings on the property, including boundary changes or charges against the property. It will also show if there are any planning applications lodged or approved for that land.

Anyone can view the details of a folio on landdirect.ie for a €5 fee. All dealings require a fresh application. A solicitor will make an application to the land registry office on a buyer's behalf.

There are fees to be paid to the land registry service for opening the folio and registering any mortgage on the property, as well as for processing the land registry application. These can be up to €1,090 for a property valued at over €400,000.

If there is a mortgage on the property, the bank takes possession of the deeds as collateral against the loan, but if a property changes hands with no mortgage, the owners of the property can hold the deeds, or leave them with their solicitor for safekeeping. Sometimes delays are caused when the solicitor does not complete a land registry application fully or correctly. Planning applications are not impacted by delays in land registry as you do not need to own land to make an application as long as you have a written letter of permission from the owner.

"We have experienced a significant uptake in applications received. We are actively recruiting and training staff to improve our processing times.

"It is important to note that legal rights are protected on the register from the date of lodgment of the application, rather than the date of completion. We can fast-track the processing of cases where a delay in registration will cause undue hardship to an applicant."

Applications lodged through an online registration system were completed in an average of 10 working days, they said.

A spokesperson for Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien said the recruitment of staff would speed up the process and clear the backlog of applications.

"The minister has asked that Tailte Éireann work proactively with all their stakeholders to provide guidance in this area and ensure this guidance is widely known," they said.

# Mixed views from military associations on funding increase

Sean O'Riordan  
Defence Correspondent

There has been mixed reaction from Ireland's two military representative associations to the extra €400m per year to be pumped into the nation's defence spending.

While one has given it a general welcome, the other has said it does not have confidence in the proposals.

PDForra president Mark Keane welcomed the work carried out by Minister for

Defence Simon Coveney and his officials to get the increase, bringing the annual defence spend to €1.5bn by 2028.

A number of proposals are contained in new budget to allow for increases in remuneration for the lowest paid of the country's military, but Mr Keane said no exact dates for the start of these payments has been revealed.

They include a €5,000 per year increase for privates in

the army, able ratings in the naval service and their equivalent in the air corps, bringing their annual salary to €34,500 per year.

Mr Coveney also wants to expand the naval service's sea service commitment scheme. He announced it in January 2021 to ensure adequate numbers of personnel signed up to agree a certain amount of days of sea patrols. Those who signed up for two years were offered an extra €10,000, before tax.

To get the loyalty payment, sailors must have three years' experience. More than 40% do not meet this requirement which, Mr Keane said, is causing resentment within the forces.

"We need to engage with the Department of Defence on what the widening of the qualification criteria means and when it'll be delivered," he said.

Another recommendation for increasing pay in the budget is the creation of a

lance corporal rank. Midway between a private and corporal, this allows those gaining experience an opportunity to get more money as their careers progress.

"We need clarity on when increases will be introduced," Mr Keane said. "The language is vague. It doesn't say whether they'll be introduced in three, six or nine months' time."

PDForra wants an addition to recommendations to stem the continuing exodus

of highly experienced personnel.

"We need to see long service increments introduced as well," Mr Keane said. "This recommendation was also included in the commission's report in order to retain those who have remained loyal to the Defence Forces for many years and to retain their corporate knowledge."

Commandant Conor King, general secretary of Raco said while it welcomes the

investment, there is very little good news for officers who will be called upon to deliver the much-needed leadership and recruitment training that is required to increase Defence Forces strength by 3,000 people.

He said officers will be treated "less favourably" than their enlisted colleagues in terms allowances and they are not getting the entitlements they're allowed for specialised instructor roles and are overworked by

the Working Time Directive not being implemented — which sees some junior officers working 70-plus hours a week.

"We now have the bizarre situation where a lieutenant delivering the vital instruction and training in a cadet school or training centre is being paid less than the corporal instructor who they are responsible for in terms of mentoring, supervising, career management and guidance," Comdt Ryan said.

## Sharp rise in child-on-child sex abuse

■ Many re-enact porn seen online  
■ Charity appeals for funding as waiting list increases by 160%

Cormac O'Keefe  
Security Correspondent

A voluntary therapy service has seen a 44% increase in sexual abuse and sexually harmful behaviour on children by children since the first Covid-19 lockdown.

Children at Risk in Ireland (Cari) says many young people who were stuck indoors during the various lockdowns stumbled across pornographic sites and that some acted out scenes on other children, often their own siblings.

The specialist therapy service said their ability to provide crucial and professional help to children who have been sexually abused, and support to their families, has been severely limited by a 160% increase in their waiting list.

It said its waiting list is now at five years, the longest in its 33-year history.

In a bid to try and ease the problem, Cari is launching an emergency public appeal for funding.

Emer O'Neill, national head of therapy at Cari, told the *Irish Examiner*, that, as part of its appeal, it examined trends around child sexual abuse since the first lockdown, more than two years ago.

"We have seen an increase of 44% in peer-to-peer abuse and sexually harmful behaviours in children," she said. "And our waiting list grew by 160% since the advent of Covid and subsequent lockdowns."

She said it believes that children's increasing use of the internet during lockdowns meant more were coming across explicit material.

"Pornography is a truly toxic but omnipresent phenomenon and sadly children

have more and more access to it," Ms O'Neill said.

"With the advent of Covid, when we all had to live our lives online, we believe that children stumbled across sites.

"They didn't necessarily seek them out but they did find them by default, so to speak."

She said this was a very worrying and disturbing trend and that they were trying to deal with the consequences of it.

However, she said Cari was struggling to meet the growing demand for its therapy services.

"We are running just to stand still at the moment," she said. "We're trying our utmost to get to as many children as possible but our waiting list is making this very difficult.

"The terrible irony is we have the therapy rooms, we have the facilities but we need more funding."

She said the empty waiting rooms were leaving children "in pain, in fear and in desperation".

Cari is launching a public emergency funding appeal in a bid to raise finance €100,000 in 100 days.

The charity had 254 children on its waiting list last May. Families generally take a year to go through the therapy process.

Cari estimates it will take five years to clear the lists — but that is not including new referrals. It relies on State funding from Tusla as well as fundraising.

The body says it has the capacity to see around 52 families per year across its two centres, based in Limerick and Dublin.

If it acquires the necessary funding, it estimates it could clear its waiting list within two years.

## Tradition reins strong



Ellen Kelleher from Millstreet, Co Cork, at one of Ireland's oldest horse fairs at Cahirmee, Buttevant, Co Cork.

Picture: David Creedon

## Work 'ongoing' on security strategy

Cormac O'Keefe  
Security Correspondent

The Government has said work is "ongoing" on its long-awaited National Security Strategy, citing the Covid-19 pandemic and international and domestic developments as reasons for the delay.

The strategy, the country's first, was due to be published over two years ago and was supposed to cover the period 2020-2025.

Concerns have been expressed by some security experts at the absence of a national strategy and the output of the National Security Analysis Centre (NSAC), which was set up in 2019 and charged with developing the document.

The creation of the analysis centre, within the Department of the Taoiseach, was a key recommendation of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland

(CFPI), which published its report in September 2018.

This week, a member of the now-defunct CFPI, said a "number of dramatic events threatening national security" have occurred since the centre to be "immediately" set up and provide an "authoritative" source of advice to the Government.

Donncha O'Connell, professor of law at NUI Galway, said the need for "significantly enhanced national security capacity and improved coordination" was highlighted by the cyber attack on the HSE last year and Russia's invasion of Ukraine this year.

Prof O'Connell said the Commission on the Defence Forces, published last January, said an "overarching legal and governance framework" was urgently needed to clarify roles of gardai and Defence Forces and improve their collaboration. He said

the NSAC needed to be put on a statutory footing.

A number of questions were put to the Department of the Taoiseach about the NSAC, including what documents or briefings had been produced by the centre since its establishment.

In a statement, the department said: "It is not the practice to disclose detailed information about any individual briefings or documents that are produced given that the matters at hand are security sensitive."

"That said, matters relating to cyber security, the situation in Ukraine, and the evolution of hybrid threats have been among the subjects of the centre's recent work given the nature of recent developments in the security landscape."

On the status of the National Security Strategy 2020-2015, it said: "Work is ongoing on developing a national security strategy,

and while this process was necessarily constrained by the Covid-19 pandemic, planning, consultation and analysis in preparing the draft strategy continued during this period. Further work is ongoing to reflect more recent security and defence developments, and related impacts, particularly those arising in the international environment."

On questions as to the leadership of the centre, the statement said that Dermot Woods, appointed in July 2019, remained director, but had "other responsibilities".

Mr Woods is assistant secretary responsible for the Government secretariat, which co-ordinates the business of Government meetings, including preparation of agendas, circulation of memoranda, and the communication of decisions.

Richard Browne was appointed deputy director of NSAC in October 2020 but

was appointed acting director of a sister intelligence body, the National Cyber Security Centre, in July 2021, before being formally appointed director of National Cyber Security Centre in January.

The department's statement said: "While there have been a number of personnel changes due to promotions and rotations, including the departure on promotion of the deputy director, arrangements are in train to fill those positions."

It said NSAC has secondment and liaison arrangements with the Departments of Foreign Affairs, Justice, Defence, and Environment, Climate and Communications, An Garda Síochána, and the Defence Forces.

In line with previous answers, the department declined to give information on budgets, staffing, or secondment levels in the centre.

## Dáil votes to force Watt to appear before committee over Holohan job

Daniel McConnell  
Political Editor

The Dáil has voted to force Department of Health secretary general Robert Watt to appear before the Oireachtas finance committee to answer questions on the botched secondment of Tony Holohan to Trinity College Dublin.

Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghail has written to the finance committee to say its application for compellability of witnesses related to the controversy has been approved and will go before the Dáil for a vote.

Seeking to force witnesses to appear is a rare power exercised by committees, but Mr Watt has been severely criticised by the finance committee for his lack of co-

operation in its investigation into the now-abandoned move of the former chief medical officer to Trinity.

In his letter to the committee chair, John McGuinness, Mr Ó Fearghail said the application was considered at the most recent meeting of the Dáil committee on parliamentary privileges and oversight (CPPO).

"I can advise that CPPO has agreed to recommend to Dáil Éireann that the power to send for persons, papers, and records be included in the joint committee's order of reference, but solely for the purposes of the examination of the policies and procedures relating to public service secondments, in the context of the proposed secondment of the chief medi-

cal officer to the position of professor of public health leadership and strategy at Trinity College Dublin," Mr Ó Fearghail said.

That motion was approved by the Dáil "on the nod", without debate.

Once the joint committee's orders of reference have been amended, the CPPO may then consider whether its written consent, required before a direction pursuant to section 83 of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privilege and Procedures) Act 2013 may issue, should be granted.

Subject to the approval of the motions in both Houses and pending the next meeting of the CPPO, it suggests that the Oireachtas finance committee may wish to con-

sider further correspondence with the secretary general of the Department of Health seeking his voluntary attendance before the committee, Mr Ó Fearghail said.

The committee expressed its "disappointment" to the secretary general of Department of Health over his failure to hand over documents relating to the botched Holohan secondment.

The Oireachtas finance committee has written to Mr Watt criticising his "lack of engagement" with it over the controversy, which is now subject to two separate inquiries. It claimed that despite extensive efforts to follow up on correspondence, no response has been provided by Mr Watt to date.

### Witness to war



Ukraine's ambassador Larysa Gerasko and Ceann Comhairle Seán Ó Fearghail at Leinster House viewing photos of the invasion of Ukraine by journalist Maks Levin, who was killed in March. Picture: Maxwell's

"In our view, criminal justice and health are not opponents."

Prof Smyth continued: "We believe that there is a real risk that a reduction in sanctions could cause use and associated health harms to escalate.

"The weight of evidence from national and international research indicates that sanctions have a small but important effect. Please bear in mind that small effects across large populations are clinically important."

Prof Smyth said the network views the current sanction of imprisonment for personal drug use to be "excessive and unreasonable".

Senator Lynn Ruane told the committee that "every society in the world pleases through drug use", adding that profits are being made because of the criminalisation of drug possession.

## Almost 4,000 homes purchased in May alone despite 14% increase in prices

Liz Dunphy

House prices jumped 14.4% nationally in the 12 months to May 2022, with prices soaring by more than 20% in some parts of the country.

Prices outside Dublin rose by 16.6% during that time, while prices in Dublin rose by 11.7%, said the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

The southeast saw the biggest home price hike at 21.5%, while at the other end of the scale, the mid-west saw a 11.4% rise. Houses in the southwest saw a 18% price rise.

In Dublin, house prices increased by 11.9% and apartment prices were up by 11.3%.

Outside of Dublin, house

prices were up by 16.8% and apartment prices rose by 14%.

In May 2022, 3,731 home purchases by households at market prices were filed with the Revenue, an increase of 16.3% compared to the 3,207 purchases in May 2021.

The median price of a home purchased in the 12

months to May 2022 was €290,000. The lowest median price for a house was €138,000 in Longford, while the highest median price was €601,000 in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown.

In the year to May, the Eircode area with the highest median price for a home was A94 'Blackrock' (€720,000).

The five most-expensive

Eircode areas by median price were in Dublin.

Outside of Dublin, the most-expensive Eircode area over the last 12 months was A63 Greystones, with a median price of €500,000. The second most-expensive Eircode area was A98 Bray, where the median price was €430,250. The third most-expensive was P17 Kinsale,

which had a median price of €400,000.

The least-expensive Eircode areas over the last 12 months were F45 Castlereagh and F35 Ballyhaunis, with a median price of €120,000.

Overall, the national index is 1.1% lower than its highest level in 2007.

Dublin residential property prices are 9.3% lower than

their February 2007 peak, while residential property prices in the rest of Ireland are 2.3% lower than their May 2007 peak.

Property prices nationally have increased by 120.5% from their trough in early 2013. Dublin residential property prices have risen 124.7% from their February 2012 low, whilst residential

property prices in the rest of Ireland are 124.9% higher than at the trough, which was in May 2013.

Commenting on the release, CSO statistician Vlachos Voronovich said: "Residential property prices rose by 14.4% in the 12 months to May 2022, marginally down from 14.5% in the year to April 2022."