

**Minister Reilly's Statement**  
**Joint Committee on Public Service Oversight**  
**and Petitions**  
**6<sup>th</sup> February 2013**

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you and to answer your questions in relation to the Mobility Allowance and the Motorised Transport Grant.

In terms of how this presentation will be structured, I propose to make some opening remarks regarding the complex issues which have previously been highlighted by the Ombudsman to the Committee and the considerable efforts which are being made to address these issues. Minister of State Lynch, who has responsibility for Disability, Mental Health and Older People, will talk in more detail about the schemes, their

history and how they operate. She will also outline for the Committee the significant cost implications which have been identified, so that members may understand in more detail the considerable challenge facing us in addressing this matter.

The Motorised Transport Grant and Mobility Allowance were established in good faith and with the best intentions in 1968 and 1979 respectively, to meet mobility and transport needs for a particular group of people with severe physical difficulties. The transport and mobility needs of these individuals were not adequately catered for at that time. Were we to try to meet the mobility and transport needs of people with physical, sensory, intellectual and mental health disabilities today, it is extremely unlikely that we would establish schemes of this type. This is especially

important in terms of the general policy of mainstreaming of services for people with disabilities. Clearly, these schemes in their present form do not comply with that policy.

The recommendations of the Ombudsman in relation to how these schemes have been operated are clear, and neither I nor my Department have disputed the position she has taken. The Department has previously acknowledged the inequalities in the schemes as they currently operate. However, the direct costs, in terms of expanding the eligibility criteria for the schemes, and the very substantial indirect costs in terms of the administration of expanded schemes, are completely unaffordable for the State.



In seeking a solution which will address the transport and mobility needs of all those who require supports, we are considering the group of people who are currently benefitting under the schemes. But importantly, we must also equally consider the broader group whose needs the Ombudsman has found must be looked after on an equitable basis. We have no dispute with the Ombudsman in that regard.

However, it is imperative that all members understand the financial implications. Funding for both these schemes, as they operate at present, is just E10.6m per annum in total. Any solution to this issue must be delivered within that resource capped budget. Widening the eligibility criteria, as required, will mean that many multiples of additional claimants will have to be paid out of that allocation of E10.6m.

Based on the Department's best estimate using data from the census and the disability databases, this would mean reducing both the Allowance and the Grant to a level which would severely limit the benefits to all recipients. This does not even factor in the increased administrative burden on the HSE. Were we to increase the budget for the schemes, this additional funding would have to be taken from frontline services for disabilities, mental health and older people, and I do not consider that option to be either practical or fair.

## **Conclusion**

I am continuing to consider the recommendations of the Ombudsman in relation to both schemes very carefully.

It must be acknowledged that an extension of either scheme as recommended by the Ombudsman without a dramatic reduction in the monthly payment or grant, would create serious financial pressure on the health budget in the current climate and would be unsustainable.

However, I am happy to discuss the matter with the Committee and in particular, I would be most interested to hear any ideas the members of the Committee may wish to propose as to how the matter may be addressed in the best interests of all, within the severe financial constraints imposed on us.

Following our discussion today, which I sincerely hope will be productive and positive in terms of proposing solutions to this matter, I will take further advice with a

view to making proposals as to the future of both schemes following further discussion with my Cabinet colleagues.