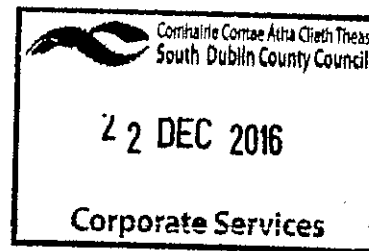


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OFFICE OF THE TÁNAISTE AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Mr Colm Murphy
Meeting Administrator
Corporate Performance and Change Management
South Dublin County Council
County Hall
Tallaght
Dublin 24



20 December 2016

OUR REF: 1206150338
YOUR REF: M19/1116

Dear Mr Murphy,

I am directed by the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Ms Frances Fitzgerald, T.D., to refer to your correspondence dated 25 November 2016 and received on 5 December 2016 regarding a motion of South Dublin County Council requesting the allocation of emergency funding to reduce delays in the processing times of special needs assistants' vetting applications.

At the outset I wish to point out that there is no particular delay in the Garda employment vetting process for special needs assistants or other categories of worker. Rather there has been a very significant improvement in vetting processing times this year.

The Tánaiste has been informed by the Garda authorities that at present 80 percent of vetting applications are processed by the Garda National Vetting Bureau in under five working days. This represents a dramatic improvement in turnaround times for the processing of vetting applications in recent years, falling from an average of 14 weeks in mid-2013. This improvement has come about as a result of an unprecedented investment by the Government and the Garda authorities in providing this service, including an increase of over 80 percent in staffing levels and the roll out earlier this year of an e-vetting system.

In April this year the Tánaiste commenced the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016 and in tandem with that An Garda Síochána launched the e-vetting system. E-vetting facilitates the on-line processing of applications and this has significantly streamlined the vetting process and contributed to a sustained reduction in processing times for vetting applications.

The Tánaiste has been further informed by the Garda authorities that the vast majority of vetting applications, over 85 percent of applications, now received by the Vetting Bureau are received and processed via the e-vetting system.

One very important feature of the e-vetting system is that the individual applicant can track the progress of their own vetting application on-line and can, therefore, see when their application has been processed and returned to the relevant registered organisation.

There have been reports of delays with regard to vetting applications in respect of some special needs assistants posts. In these cases the vetting applications were submitted in the old paper format. For vetting applications that continue to be submitted in paper format, the average turnaround time is in the order of four to five weeks from the receipt of the application by the National Vetting Bureau. This has been the average time frame for paper applications for the past number of years and this represents a minimum time frame given the administrative input required. The Garda authorities work through all of the applications received as quickly as may be but this must be consistent with ensuring that the proper checks are carried out.

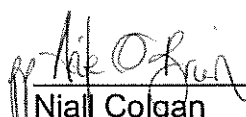
Processing times for any given application can be longer in individual cases when, for example, additional enquiries may be necessary or where errors have been made in the application. It is important to note that delays can also occur in other aspects of the application process which are outside of the control of the Garda authorities, for example, in the submission or return of applications by the registered organisations.

The primary purpose of the vetting service is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults. Accordingly, the vetting process demands rigorous procedures to safeguard its integrity and to maintain the highest level of confidence by the public and organisations availing of the service. Any vetting process will take a certain minimum amount of time to complete and, taking into account the importance of protecting children and vulnerable adults while providing an effective and efficient service, the current processing period is not unreasonable.

Given the increase in staff numbers at the National Vetting Bureau, the introduction of the e-vetting system and the concomitant sustained reduction in vetting processing times the Tánaiste does not believe that there is a requirement to provide emergency funding to the Vetting Bureau.

I trust that this has clarified matters for you.

Yours sincerely,


Niall Colgan
Private Secretary to the Tánaiste
and Minister for Justice and Equality