DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM SHAINCHEISTEANNA RÍTHÁBHACHTACHA A THÉANN I GCION AR AN LUCHT SIÚIL

JOINT COMMITTEE ON KEY ISSUES AFFECTING THE TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

Dé Céadaoin, 8 Iúil 2026

Wednesday, 8 July 2026

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 6.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 6.30 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

John Connolly,	Malcolm Noonan,
Dessie Ellis,	Joe O'Reilly.
Naoise Ó Muirí,	
Maurice Quinlivan,	
Pádraig Rice.	

Teachta / Deputy George Lawlor sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

The joint committee met in private session, suspended at 6.54 p.m. and resumed in public session at 6.55 p.m.

Traveller Accommodation: Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement

An Cathaoirleach: This meeting is to discuss the issue of Traveller Accommodation with the Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement. Our witnesses are Ms Margaret Star Stokes, community development worker, Mr. Kris Stokes, volunteer history researcher, and Mr. Christopher Stokes, volunteer project worker. They are all welcome. I thank them for making the journey from Kilkenny to be with us this evening.

I do not know whether anyone is attending remotely, but if they are, I ask them to mute their microphones. No one is attending remotely.

This is a standard note we read at every meeting. As our witnesses are within the precincts of Leinster House, they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the presentation they make to the committee. This means they have an absolute defence against any defamation action for anything they say at the meeting. However, they are expected not to abuse this privilege and it is my duty as Cathaoirleach to ensure this privilege is not abused. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

Members are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or entity outside of the Houses, or an official of the Houses, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I now invite Ms Stokes to make her opening statement and we will then proceed to a question-and-answer session.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I thank the Cathaoirleach, Deputies and Senators for inviting me to address the committee today on the issues affecting the Traveller community. I am a community development worker with the Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement, KTCM.

To give some brief context, I stepped into this role recently, in April of this year. My immediate goal is to work closely with the Traveller community in Kilkenny to identify the key issues and map out our community's exact needs. I knew I could not pass up this opportunity. As a Traveller woman and, above all, as a mother, it is vital that I take every space given to me to speak out. Our community is facing a well-documented mental health and suicide crisis and, as a mother, that terrifies me. State reports have already shown the clear, devastating link between substandard, overcrowded accommodation and the high suicide rates affecting our people, especially our youth. I am here today because, as parents, we simply cannot afford to miss any opportunity to address the root causes of that reality. With that reality in mind, we acknowledge this committee for naming racism, discrimination and systemic neglect as key drivers of Traveller inequality. Traveller families have waited a long time to hear these truths recognised by the State. However, naming the problem must now lead to real change.

For years, Traveller policy has focused on treating the symptoms while failing to address the root causes. We have seen strategies, pilot projects, reports and recommendations, yet too

little has changed for Traveller families. We must ask ourselves whether we are funding real change, or simply funding the same system to continue.

Traveller accommodation cannot be separated from health, racism, poverty, education, identity or how people are treated by public services. Providing suitable accommodation, where Travellers feel safe, warm and secure, is the only way forward. We also need to move beyond a deficit-based approach that measures only disadvantage. There is clear evidence that inadequate, overcrowded accommodation leads to poor mental health and lower life expectancy. It leaves people turning to harmful substances just to ease the pain of reality and, far too often, it ends in suicide.

We need a strengths-based, community development approach that values Traveller culture, identity, family resilience and heritage, while recognising the lasting damage caused when these are disrupted. Research on intergenerational trauma shows that unresolved harm can be passed from one generation to the next. For Travellers, this is deeply significant. Our family structures, history of movement, oral traditions and connection to animals and the land are central to who we are. When housing, culture and identity are undermined, the consequences are not only social; they are physical and psychological, affecting families across generations.

Research alone, however, is not enough. We need structural change, and nowhere is this clearer than in housing. Housing is at the root of many issues affecting Traveller families. It shapes physical and mental health, education, safety, dignity and identity. When housing is unstable, everything else suffers. My family's experience illustrates this. My husband and I have eight children, including two with significant disabilities. We had to leave our social housing tenancy because the council could not provide a wheelchair-accessible, suitable home to meet our needs. Fortunately, unlike many others, we were lucky enough to be able to take matters into our own hands. We purchased a five-bedroom house and believed we had finally found a suitable, wheelchair-accessible home for are children. Instead, one week before Christmas, council officials and gardaí arrived at our home to serve an enforcement notice over a technical planning issue.

What followed was a year of legal, public and emotional turmoil before the notice was finally withdrawn.

Throughout that process, I kept asking: where was the public sector duty? Where was the understanding of disability? Where was the recognition of anti-Traveller racism? Did anyone consider the impact on the mental health of a family with disabled children?

This is not just our family's story. It reflects a system where Traveller accommodation programmes, TAPs, continue to miss targets, families face unnecessary barriers and consultation too often becomes a tick-box exercise rather than genuine partnership.

Nothing about us without us must mean more than being invited into a room. It must mean shared decision-making, accountability and Traveller leadership from the beginning.

KTCM asks this committee to recommend six practical actions: first, ensure all local authorities are held accountable for meeting their obligations under the public sector duty where systemic discrimination occurs. Second, introduce mandatory Traveller cultural awareness training for public servants, including local authority staff and teachers. Third, replace the deficit model with a strengths-based community development approach that

recognises Traveller culture, history and identity. Fourth, ensure Traveller history, culture and heritage are visible and valued throughout education, from early years to university. Fifth, create workplaces where Travellers feel safe to be open about their identity without fear of discrimination, recognising that hiding one's identity has significant mental health consequences. Sixth, introduce a Traveller accommodation health impact test. Before enforcement action, housing refusals, delays or local-connection decisions are made, local authorities should be legally required to assess the impact on children's well-being, disability needs, overcrowding, mental health, suicide risk and their obligations under the public sector duty. Housing decisions must be accountable for their health consequences, and Traveller communities must have genuine decision-making power - not token consultation - in designing housing solutions. Additionally, we ask that this report does not become another document that sits on a shelf while Traveller families continue to experience the same inequalities. We are fatigued by reports that repeat the same findings without meaningful action.

To ensure this action happens, we are calling for a national governance authority to oversee these decisions and ensure local authorities are held strictly accountable. Every housing decision, whether it involves an enforcement action, a refusal, a delay or a local-connection rule, must be overseen by this authority and strictly bound by the Traveller accommodation health impact test. This independent oversight is the only way to guarantee that housing decisions are legally accountable for their health consequences on our children's well-being, disability needs and mental health while ensuring Traveller communities have genuine decision-making power.

We ask the committee members, as elected representatives, to turn these recommendations into real changes. I thank the committee members for their time and for their commitment to these issues. Gabhaim buíochas leo.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Ms Stokes. Now we will move to questions.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: I welcome Ms Stokes and Mr. Stokes. It is a great privilege to have them here from Kilkenny as well. I am familiar with the work of KTCM in that community-development based approach that Ms Stokes speaks about so powerfully. Her statement was powerful. It highlights a lot of what this committee has been dealing with over the past year and a half. We produced a good report - she may have seen that - on Traveller health and well-being a few weeks ago as well. This is a committee that is focused collectively on trying to address the inequalities, the discrimination and the health and well-being outcomes and housing, education and employment outcomes for Traveller families and the Traveller community more generally.

The six asks are practical. They are certainly something that we as a committee would like to try and see advanced. Quite a number of them very much tie in with what we have been working on over the past year and a half as well, and we are very supportive.

I will focus on TAP and the local Traveller accommodation committees, LTACs. In her statement, Ms Stokes mentioned the token consultation. Could she perhaps give back some experience of that? My experience from the LTACs themselves is that they seem to be at variance across the country in terms of how effective they are. How does she find the engagement in that regard in Kilkenny?

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I am only in Kilkenny since April. I inquired on a couple of occasions about when is the next LTAC committee meeting. There has not been one in seven or eight months. I am not 100% sure on that but I know it has not met as often as it should be. I have asked could I sit in on that meeting.

Can the Senator ask again what he seeks?

Senator Malcolm Noonan: Ms Stokes is saying it has not met in several months. There must be a minimum number of meetings that should take place.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I only found out yesterday that they are meant to meet up at least four times a year. I probably should have known that beforehand. I do not think they have met up, or maybe they have just once, this year.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: Does Ms Stokes find that there support there from the local authority for her participation in that committee in terms of understanding the law, the regulation and the accommodation programme and how it works, etc.?

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I do not think so. From what I am hearing, because I have not sat in one of the meetings, no, to be honest. It is very tick-box. You turn up, you tick boxes and then you're out the door. It needs to be more the way a community development worker works. For example, we work from the ground up. We work with that person. We empower that person, for example, when someone comes to us for help to fill out a medical card form. Someone came to me earlier today and I said that I was rushing out the door but I promised I would come back tomorrow, sit down and do it with them. They asked could I just do it for them and I said I could not, because I am all about empowering that person. I do not want to just go and do something for someone. I want to engage with the person. I am not trying to compare a housing issue with a medical card form but what I am saying is you need to sit down, you need to engage with that person and you need to get to know their needs on a personal level, and maybe sit down and have the HSE and Tusla there as well, if there are children with disabilities or any child, and just have a one-to-one meeting. You cannot get an idea of a person's situation from an application form that goes into a housing office. You cannot just say that this person needs X number of bedrooms. You just cannot. You need to meet with that person. You need to get a sense even of their mental state. On what we went through in our housing issue, I reached out to social workers and I told them that I was a bit concerned for my mental well-being, but mostly my husband's because he was dealing with all the phone calls. I stayed home, I took care of the children and I did everything, because we share that responsibility, obviously, as a mother and father, but when it came to the enforcement notice on our housing issue, he was completely bogged down with trying to save our home. We were after giving up our Clúid house. It was a three-bedroom house. It was not wheelchair accessible. There was no downstair toilet. My son, Paddy, was having ongoing operations and we needed a bigger house. I am probably veering off here.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: No, it is all right.

Mr. Kris Stokes: I can take over for a while.

An Cathaoirleach: Ms Stokes is fine though.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I probably overly answered the Senator's question and I probably went off on a tangent.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: No. All that is important.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It is very important. Whoever is that is dealing with your housing situation, they need to come out from behind the office. They need to come out to meet in someone's home or invite the person in, and invite a couple of people - maybe a Traveller representative and, as I said, Tusla and the HSE - and have them there and maybe do a scale of zero to ten on that family on the assessment. If they are not happy, the assessment could come up that they could tip this family over the edge. We were in a crisis, as has been stated.

I was at the health report three weeks ago. I was devastated coming away from that. I am a Traveller. I am well used to talking up and highlighting what is going on in the Traveller community, but sitting there and listening to you talking was a relief, but it was a devastating relief. I felt like we were finally being heard. Your are finally admitting - I do not mean to refer to the Senator. I am saying the Government is finally admitting that there is a crisis in the community. Then you have me, a Traveller women, listening to this and being told this, that I do not have to keep proving it and telling you about it. It was a relief, but it was also very worrying, as a mother. Going home, we talked about it the whole road down. I welled up inside in the meeting talking about it. I am sorry.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: It is okay.

I thank Ms Stokes. She did very well. Does Mr. Stokes want to add to that?

Mr. Kris Stokes: It is the same thing as Margaret said. We are at a crisis. We are not here to demonise any councils or the people we think should have given more help. We are just here for help. We want to move forward. That is basically it.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: What we are trying to do is get a snapshot of the position in different areas around the country.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I appreciate that. I can see what the committee is doing. It is very reassuring. It is a relief to finally see that there are committee members here who are committed.

Mr. Kris Stokes: There are good people out there.

An Cathaoirleach: The point Ms Stokes is making is about not just talking to someone over the phone but also immersing them in-----

Mr. Kris Stokes: Especially with children with disabilities.

An Cathaoirleach: That is hugely important. That is a point that has not been raised with us previously.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: As members are probably aware, when it comes to mental health, it only takes a little thing to tip someone over the edge.

Mr. Kris Stokes: I was nearly tipped over the edge. The pressure we were put under was unbelievable. There was no help. I am not here to demonise anyone. I went to certain TDs. I will not mention names or anything like that. We went to one. They had a meeting with us and said they would get back to us.

An Cathaoirleach: We will just wind this session up.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: There is a vote in the House.

An Cathaoirleach: Do the witnesses want to finish off what they are saying?

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We are fine. It is okay.

An Cathaoirleach: We have a few minutes.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: No. Members can go ahead and do whatever they need to do.

An Cathaoirleach: We are sorry about this. Wednesday night is busy.

Senator Malcolm Noonan took the Chair.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): I apologise.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: No, we were briefed. We were told.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): We have time for one more question. I will probably have to leave very shortly, so we might have to suspend for a few minutes until the Oireachtas Members come back.

Among the six asks the witnesses have given us is the important one of recognising and educating people about Traveller heritage and culture. Thankfully, there is a Traveller heritage strategy being launched in Kilkenny during heritage week, which is fantastic to see. How important do the witnesses think that is? How important do they think it will be in educating the wider community about how rich Traveller culture and heritage is?

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I will give an example. I was heavily involved in the Traveller Pride event in Kilkenny. It gave me and the young children who were involved a sense of pride. It was not a week; it was nearly a month long. It was a couple of weeks where I felt so proud about promoting Traveller culture and history. It is very empowering, especially for our youth. The term is probably not ideal but it has been bred into children from the time they are born to hide and suppress their identity in order to get by without facing discrimination. To have a week where you are allowed to be a Traveller and it is celebrated brings a sense of relief. I will use that word again. The sense of relief, empowerment and pride that gives me – I can only imagine what it does for a young person - it is great, but it needs to happen all year round. It should not be a week here and a week there; it should happen in the school and from the early years. It should be woven into the core curriculum of schools. It should be just part of normal history like we talk about anything in school. It should just be part of it. It should not be separate. It just should be part of it. Having a child hearing about themselves will give the child a sense of hope. At the minute, there is no hope.

Mr. Kris Stokes: There is a lot of wrong information about the Travelling community. What I mean by that is that there is-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It is negative.

Mr. Kris Stokes: No, it is not. There are 1,000 years of the Irish Traveller on this island, and we are not going away. There is more. There are records of tinkers – of the nomadic tribes. These were tinker men who went around looking for work, and their wives and children following them and their wives begging. That describes our people 1,000 years ago. We are on this island. There is a deep history. We should be proud of that instead of one my children

hiding who he is, and my grandchildren having to do that. If we work at it now maybe in the future it will be better for them. That is why we are here – it is for our children.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Absolutely.

Mr. Kris Stokes: I do not want my children to go through what we went through.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): There are positive changes happening too.

Mr. Kris Stokes: There are positive changes happening but the suicide rate is sky high.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Yes, it is.

Mr. Kris Stokes: So there is something wrong.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Yes, we have heard all that here.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It is really terrifying.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It is being highlighted more about how the State has failed us. Is there real change on the ground when we look at the high suicide rate, especially-----

Mr. Kris Stokes: Is the change worth it given the high suicide rate? It is meant to be six times higher than it is among settled people, but it is actually more. We know that because it just is.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We are members of the Travelling community. We know.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): It is under-reported and under-recorded.

Mr. Kris Stokes: People are ashamed of it and they do not-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: They do not report it as suicide as well. You would only know that from inside information, family connections and whatever.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Given that what the committee will be trying to do over the next couple of weeks is get people's experiences from around the country, do the witnesses think that KTCM has been a positive intervention? There is a very strong presence now on KTCM.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: There is. There is an awful lot going on in KTCM. It quietens down a bit during the summertime. That gives us a chance then to debrief and set up for the next year. We have a wonderful summer camp this year. It is run every Wednesday for the children. We have men's mental health initiatives. We have Healthy Ireland and Healthy Kilkenny. There is loads going on.

I do not know if it is relevant here but funding could be a little bit better. We have to work on a six-month to 12-month schedule, get funding in, and we have to answer all the paperwork. It kind of slows down the work that we could be getting done. Again, I am probably veering off. I am sorry.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): No, all of this is important. It was identified by other organisations that were with us that the funding is piecemeal and just seems to come and go. There is a small funding programme for a piece of work. It comes and then is gone. It is only when participants are involved and get into a programme that it is cancelled.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: The funding stops or there is a fear that there will be an overspend. We have to stop and wait to see if we are going to get our next batch of funding and if it will come in on time. Then we have all the admin stuff. It is not fair. We are doing such a hard job, and such a well-earned job, and it is so rewarding to see Travellers come in the door because they trust very few people. It is good to see them come into a service where they trust and they can let themselves loose and be a Traveller – they do not have to hide their identity – they can come in and ask for help without feeling ashamed or stupid. That is the word I would use because that is how I would label it when you have to go and ask for help for basic little things that are a big deal to the person. When they feel they can come into a safe place and express how they are, that genuinely gives us a great sense of pride. We are doing real good work here. Then the funding caps it a little.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): It seems to be a real problem. We have been highlighting here that we are looking for multi-annual funding for projects so that there is consistency and the programmes can keep running year on year and all of the organisations know that the funding is there. The way it is being operated at the minute is very piecemeal.

I will ask a final question. The other members should be back shortly. The witnesses mentioned the Traveller health impact assessment. I think it was in the context of the sixth ask.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I will get it here in front of me so I can explain it. It is a risk assessment.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): A risk assessment.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: That is basically what it is. Because we are in a crisis and Travellers are having such a vulnerable time right now. A risk assessment needs to be carried out. They need to go and meet with an individual and assess how bad it is for a family before they enforce an enforcement notice or add more delays onto their housing application. They should just see where they are at. They should not do it by themselves. I am sorry. I am probably not explaining it.

Mr. Kris Stokes: You had Travellers with big families and maybe disabilities in the families. It is not like a normal man and woman and one child. There is a lot of pressure on these families. An enforcement notice to a Traveller family is not like an enforcement, it is an eviction notice. They are looking at this big serious thing where they have 12 weeks to go and this puts pressure on families.

We had to go through hell with our enforcement notice.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Bulldozing down our home was threatened in the letter.

Mr. Kris Stokes: We had to expose our children's disabilities on national television. The BBC got hold of it and made a documentary. We had to expose our children's disabilities in a

national newspaper. We had to do all of that. When the council knew, then, that we were not going anywhere and were fighting back, it realised we were going nowhere and after a year it backed off. Why did we have to do that? It put us through hell.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): It is about engagement in a meaningful way at the start.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: There was no prior engagement.

Mr. Kris Stokes: Why did the Kilkenny County Council not write a letter to us first? This was a family's house bought privately through solicitors. The house was in our name. The contract was signed. Why did the council, a week before Christmas, arrive at our door with members of An Garda Síochána without one prior engagement to send a letter to say "Hello, who are you? Do you have a local lead? Was your grandfather born here? Did your grandfather play hurling 100 years ago?" Why did the council not engage with us? I could have explained to it that we are from the area. My father and my grandfather lived in wagons and tents along that road. As I have often said before, and Senator Noonan has heard me say it, it is not my fault that I am of a nomadic people and that my father did not have a postcode on the door of his tent.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Mr. Stokes is making a general comment about proper engagement.

Mr. Kris Stokes: There was none of that. They just thought that the tinkers were after moving in and they would put pressure on them and get them out. It was inhumane.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): The Cathaoirleach is back. I have to leave. I thank the witnesses for the engagement. They did fantastically well.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I thank Senator Noonan.

Deputy George Lawlor resumed the Chair.

Deputy John Connolly: I welcome the witnesses again and thank them for their submission and witness statement. I agree with Senator Noonan on the power of the statement, for a couple of reasons. The first is how it sets out the specific issues affecting the Traveller community and its suggestions on how the State can help resolve those issues with solutions. To put into it their personal testimony and the experience they have endured is powerful and not easy to do. I compliment the witnesses on that. I found their statement powerful.

Before the witnesses came in, members reflected on the nature of the contributions the committee is receiving and the importance of having a diversity of contributions. It is really good to get direct statements from members of the Traveller community on the issues that are affecting them.

I hope I do not retraumatise anyone by asking these questions. As a public representative, I, like many of the other members, get a lot of queries about planning enforcement. I get queries from people who are subject to planning enforcement notices and people who have brought planning enforcement issues to the attention of the council. Sometimes I have some sympathy for the council at that middle point where a complainant is saying they have to do one thing and the council brings it to the respondent who then asks, "How can I do that?" In all of the examples I have dealt with, which is a reasonably extensive number although it is not every

case in County Galway, I have never come across a case that involved an intervention by An Garda Síochána. I have never seen or heard of gardaí being present for the issuing of a planning enforcement notice. I am really shocked to read about it.

Mr. Kris Stokes: I will set out what I have never heard of. We are a family who purchased a private house. We paid the money. The solicitor's contracts were signed, everything was done legally and everything was fine. We were in the house. Why did the council intervene straightaway, with no prior engagement, having not even sent a letter? Why did it not contact us first and ask if we had a link to the area?

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Why not ask us to introduce ourselves?

Mr. Kris Stokes: Why did they not ask, "Who are you?" There was nothing like that. Straightaway, we had gardaí and an enforcement notice to get out. That was so inhumane.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I will never forget the fright.

Deputy John Connolly: I am conscious that I do not want to retraumatise.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: No, it is fine.

Mr. Kris Stokes: We are over that. It was so inhumane. It was unbelievable. It was one week before Christmas. A man and woman, eight children, two of them with disabilities.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We were so excited to be in our first home that we bought. It was a dream.

Mr. Kris Stokes: They took everything away from us.

Deputy John Connolly: The way the process should proceed is statutory. My understanding is that the homeowner gets a warning letter.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Correct.

Deputy John Connolly: Then they have four weeks to respond. If they do not respond, the council can then move to an enforcement notice. I understood that to be a 12-week period. Reflecting on my earlier comments, the only time I ever heard of An Garda Síochána being involved previously was a case in County Meath, where Meath County Council moved in to knock a house because the case had gone through the legal process and everything else.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Who did the council think it was approaching that it needed gardaí?

Mr. Kris Stokes: A lot of people think this was an issue with the house. The house was an old house. It had been standing for ten years. This had nothing to do with the house we were living in. It was the front entrance the council had the issue with. It used a tiny bit of legislation about the front entrance being 4 ft bigger. It took that and brought it into our home. It is unbelievable.

Deputy John Connolly: Reflecting on the point I made about An Garda Síochána, was there a failure on the part of the witnesses to interact or to respond to correspondence?

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: No.

Mr. Kris Stokes: No.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We had a carpenter inside the house. He was fitting the kitchen for Christmas so we could make a dinner. He said to us there were gardaí down at the entrance. We looked out and then heard a knock. I went to the front door and there were two men in suits. Having seen the gardaí at the gate, I genuinely thought the men in suits were detectives. Straightaway, with the number of children I have and not being able to know exactly where they all are at the exact same time, I thought one of the children might have been knocked down.

Mr. Kris Stokes: We thought one of the children was dead.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I thought the men were coming to give me bad news. It brought me back to the time I lost my brother when gardaí knocked on the door to notify my mother. When I opened the door, I was relieved they told me they were from Kilkenny County Council.

Mr. Kris Stokes: They said, "Margaret Stokes, here is your enforcement notice."

Deputy John Connolly: To say I am puzzled by that is an understatement.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It was inhumane. That is the word to use for how they acted.

Deputy John Connolly: To go back to my initial point, I get complaints from people who have received planning enforcement notices and from people who have-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: If we had been there for years, had a record of antisocial behaviour or were known to be violent or something, that would say something.

Deputy John Connolly: I will move on to another point the witnesses made and the proposals that go outside of their experience, which make a strong statement. We published a report on Traveller health and we have always spoken about the different determinants that impact Traveller health and bring about the poor outcomes for members of the Traveller community in terms of health. The opening statement directly relates that to accommodation. It states: "Traveller accommodation cannot be separated from health" and that "Housing is at the root of so many issues affecting Traveller families."

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I know where the Deputy is going with that question. I am speaking from my personal experience because my personal experience is the wider Traveller community experience. We were living in an overcrowded house. We needed a wheelchair accessible house and we had eight children in a three-bedroom house. We had ten people in a three-bedroom house. Can members understand the pressure that puts on a family? There is the agitation, the annoyance with one another, the stress and the mental toll that takes. It has effects on a child going to school when they are not able to get a proper night's sleep because their room is overcrowded. I have a child in a wheelchair who has to go upstairs on his knees. I had to carry him up and down the stairs at six and seven years of age. The impact that has on a child going to school the next morning-----

Mr. Kris Stokes: It is terrible.

Deputy John Connolly: We can talk about the determinants of health, and there are many. We would say the education system is one. Some would be hereditary. Poverty would be one. Would housing be the main determinant for the poor health outcomes of Travellers?

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Yes. If someone is not happy at home and the foundation is cracked, it is going to affect every aspect.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It is going to cause problems.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It leads to depression. When you are depressed, fed up at home and not happy in your surroundings, what humour are you in?

Mr. Kris Stokes: Is it a happy home and a happy life? It is hard work being a Traveller. That is it.

Deputy John Connolly: Even with intergenerational trauma, would Mr. Stokes say housing is more of a reason for poor health?

Mr. Kris Stokes: Forty-five years ago was the first time I ever encountered racism. It was the time I went to State school. I am not demonising the school or the teachers. I was brought into a classroom and we were segregated completely. We were not allowed to mix with the settled community. They had their break at 11 o'clock and we watched them out in the playground. There would be about 700 or 800 students out in the playground and we were in the classroom. We were not learning in the classroom. We were given a box of crayons to colour in. That was it, but that is fine.

An Cathaoirleach: There was segregation in the playground.

Mr. Kris Stokes: We were not allowed out. When the bell would go you would have the settled people coming out. Then, when the bell would go again, they would go in and we would go out, so there would be about six Travellers walking around an empty playground.

Sitting suspended at 7.30 p.m. and resumed at 7.45 p.m.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I thank Ms Stokes, Mr. Kris Stokes and Mr. Christopher Stokes for their input. A lot of the issues they pointed out with the six different categories they mentioned are ones we have experienced in a lot of Traveller sites, so that is not unusual. I agree that if you do not get housing right, then you are in serious trouble. That is the experience we have, not just in the Traveller community but across all communities. Housing is such a major issue.

I do not know much about Kilkenny and I am not sure whether it is in their remit to say this. I am curious about the make-up of the Traveller community there and the housing conditions. Are there many halting sites? Is there group housing or are people generally in ordinary housing? I am not clear on what that is.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I will answer that honestly. I am from Waterford and am living in Ferrybank. I am in Waterford all of my life and have been in Ferrybank for the past number of years. I do not really know everything about Kilkenny right now because I have only been there since April. I have been thrown into the job. I am getting my head around it and I have not had a chance yet to go around and assess. I do not want to answer something I am not sure of. There are group housing and sites. I know that from Travellers coming to tell me where they are living.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It is a problem all over. I know about a site in Kilkenny. They built it approximately 20 years ago. There are approximately eight or ten families in it. About 15 or 20 years ago, it was made for eight families but those eight families grew up and have their ten

or eight children. They have nowhere to go. Where are they going to go? They are going into their father's bay. This is where the overcrowding comes in and they are not building any more sites. They are not building any more accommodation. That is what happens with the overcrowding.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It is a recipe for disaster.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It is just a recipe for disaster. We are seeing it all over.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: We have experienced that in Avila, St. Margaret's and Dunsink in Dublin. Those are the areas I am more familiar with. The witnesses were in a housing body three-bedroom former council house. There have been cases in Dublin City Council where, for a large family like theirs with disabilities, the council would buy specific houses for them. That has been done in Dublin City Council. I am curious as to why Kilkenny did not go down this route. If the situation was so bad, it would have been expected that they might dip into their pockets and go out to buy a place specifically for the witnesses. That is a bit of a puzzle.

I also agree with them about an independent body. I really think someone needs to oversee the local authorities. I hate to admit that because I do not like to see the local councillors or otherwise lose powers. However, this is so widespread in the Traveller community, whether it is discrimination, racism or other problems. We are not getting on top of it in the way we should and that is a big worry. There is also suicide. It is just horrific in the Traveller community and is at a far higher rate than anywhere else.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Deputy Ellis said he hates admitting it, and I get that completely, but they need a national governing body to oversee everything. It needs to happen. Go back to my grandmother's time, which is not too far. I am talking 50 years ago. I am not talking about six generations ago or the 1920s. I am talking about my grandmother's time in 1967. She approached the council. She was like me. She had ten children and she was living on the side of the road in a shell tent.

She was getting moved from pillar to post. She fought with the council, engaged with it and asked to be give some sort of shelter or accommodation, whether it was a house, site or whatever else. They came together and came up with the idea to give her a site. That site was three miles outside Newbridge town. It was very close to a sewerage plant. The site, which they called an official halting site at the time in 1967, was a slab of tarmac. There was no running water or electricity. There were no toilet facilities. There was no shelter. She was given this patch of concrete to use her shell tent for her eight children at the time. When she died, which was soon afterwards, she had ten children. She had to put her shell tent on that piece of tarmac. The secretary to the Minister came out-----

Mr. Kris Stokes: It was Paudge Brennan, who was a Minister at the time.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Does Mr. Stokes want to continue? I get emotional. When you talk about generational trauma-----

Mr. Kris Stokes: She fought, anyhow. This Minister came out. It was in the paper. He was out there. It was a sorrowful family. There was a mother, father and ten children in a shell tent. We have photographs there. We can show the committee. A picture speaks a thousand words. This Minister came out and said the Government would give them this slab, this piece of tarmac that was three miles from Newbridge and beside the main sewerage plant. They were

tucked away. The undesirables were put out to an undesirable location. That was what it was. That was in 1967. We have to remember that in 1967, they were building housing estates for the settled community. Why could they not come together and say, "We will have to buy Mrs. Stokes a mobile home"? Why could they not say, "We will have to buy her a caravan or build her a house"? There was none of that. They gave her a little patch of tarmac. They dotted the i's and ticked their boxes. It was a disgrace. This TD, this Minister, was out there. He is sitting down. You can look at the photograph. He was delighted. That happened in 1967. Moving on by 50 years to the granddaughter, look what the council did to us. It is a repeat.

An Cathaoirleach: It was a junior Minister at the time. They called them parliamentary secretaries at that time.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I knew I did not have the correct title.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It was horrifying.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: To go back to generational trauma and generational discrimination, we can wind on 20 or 30 years from my grandmother. My mother, from the time I was born until I was seven years of age, was in with the council, engaging with the council, asking and pleading with the council for a home for her children. She was living on a halting site. She wanted to leave the halting site and move into a house. She pleaded with the council. She was getting nowhere. After seven years, she went into a housing estate called Ballybeg. She took down the shutters and squatted in the house. The council officials came out and issued her an eviction notice. They told her she could not live there and had to go to court. They brought her to court. They knew she was not backing down. She turned up at the steps of the court. When they knew she was not backing down and leaving the house, they handed her the keys on the steps before she went in to the judge.

You have all these different scenarios, but they boil down to the dinosaur age of the county council and local authorities.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It is the county councils of Ireland. Something-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Something has to change. I get that it is not nice to admit that someone needs to be governed, but it needs to happen. There is something seriously wrong going on. I am not saying they are doing it maliciously.

Mr. Kris Stokes: To give a woman with ten children who was living in a tent a slab of tarmac in 1967 was a disgrace.

An Cathaoirleach: And then to turn up and officially open it.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: And get praised-----

Mr. Kris Stokes: And get praised-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: -----for sitting down and making himself at home.

Mr. Kris Stokes: The newspapers said, "This man feels at home with the tinkers." That is a disgrace.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: It typifies matters in a lot of the halting sites. We have one beside on Dunsink dump, which has always been a health hazard. Even to this day, it is still a health hazard.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We lived there for six months. We know that the Deputy was there.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: There is a halting site in St. Joseph's Park. Unless we get back to building group housing for Travellers to keep families and communities together,-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: That is another thing------

Deputy Dessie Ellis: That is what-----

Mr. Kris Stokes: I do not believe in 30 or 40 bays. That brings a lot of trouble. It should be small - perhaps five or six bays. They could be governed properly.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We should keep them small. We should integrate them into housing estates as well, if that is what they want. Consult them and ask what their needs are. We can see if we can meet in the middle.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Every new house built should have disabled facilities and houses or other things. That choice has to be given. I would prefer to see group housing on a small scale, as Mr. Stokes said. At one stage, there were 26 families in St. Joseph's Park.

Mr. Kris Stokes: Even Ballymun is just too big.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: There are now 13 families. On St. Margaret's Road, there is-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It is just a recipe for disaster. You cannot-----

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Half of the site at St. Margaret's Road is closed at the moment. The same has happened at the site at St. Joseph's Park. We need to keep families together in smaller groups. That is the way I think the local authorities should be going. If it is left to the local authorities, we have a problem. We need someone to oversee it.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: When they are returning millions of euro however often that happens, perhaps it is every year, that needs to be looked at. Someone needs to be holding them accountable for why they are not spending the money when there is a crisis and a need. Why is it not being spent? The county councils need to answer for themselves. They need to have real reasons.

Mr. Kris Stokes: This is a recent thing with my son. My son is a below-the-knee amputee. He is a wheelchair user, on and off. He is married and has a child. He has nowhere to go. There are no houses available. There is nothing there for him.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: He cannot afford a mortgage.

Mr. Kris Stokes: They are our responsibility. They are my children and they are our responsibility. Luckily enough, I have my own house on a two-acre site. I provided a home for my son. I never asked the Government for €10. I never asked it for anything. We bought a wheelchair-accessible mobile last year.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It was this year.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It was this year. We bought a wheelchair-accessible mobile. I heard the rumours about the new laws that will allow for having a mobile on your property and all this kind of thing. We bought a wheelchair-accessible mobile. He is married and has a child. There is their home.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: He still needs-----

Mr. Kris Stokes: He is not only our son. We are his nurses, too. He has an abnormal stump. I hate talking about it. I have to tell the committee the truth. It gets infected from time to time and we help him. He needs to be around us. We did that. We got him his little mobile. Everything is done to a tee. It is a lovely little home for him and his nearest on our property. It is not blocking anyone.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It is giving him a sense of independence while we can keep an eye on him.

Mr. Kris Stokes: We are doing no harm or anything like that. Here we go again. Eight years after the torture, on comes the council, telling us we are not allowed it.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: There was not a knock this time. There was a letter.

Mr. Kris Stokes: There was a letter, and not an enforcement notice, this time. The officials from the council learned a bit. However, they told us that we were not allowed that mobile.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: They told us to apply for retention.

Mr. Kris Stokes: We had to apply for retention.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We did.

Mr. Kris Stokes: We did, because there are rules for the settled people and the same rules apply for Travellers. We understand that. We said we would apply for retention. We paid €6,500. Money is tight when you have a big family. We paid that €6,500 to apply for retention. It went to the planners. We waited. No one on the road objected.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We were keeping an eye online.

Mr. Kris Stokes: We were keeping an eye online and no one objected. That was a good sign. On comes the council again to tell us the application was rejected. It is too big by 9 ft. We were told it was not a mobile but a chalet. It is not a chalet; it is a mobile home. There are wheels on it. It can be put anywhere.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Either way, it has to be bigger because it is a wheelchair-accessible living space.

Mr. Kris Stokes: I have never seen anything like it. I have never seen anything like Kilkenny County Council in my life, and that is the truth, for the way it is treating us. I must say that. I do not want to come across as demonising but I have to tell the truth. After we applied for retention, it was still no good.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We are engaging. We are complying. We want to do the right thing. We asked for retention permission. Give us the chance to save some money to build a house.

Mr. Kris Stokes: I knew the council then. I said it would reject it and say "No". I also knew that I had An Bord Pleanála. I thought that it might be better than Kilkenny County Council. I thought it might consider the wheelchair accessibility and the whole lot. You have 28 days to appeal. The man who was doing the appeal for me was from Kilkenny. I will not mention his name. I had 28 days to appeal. He said that we would appeal to An Bord Pleanála. I paid him €6,500. Everything was done and fine. When would you say he put in the appeal? He did so on the 29th day, so we could not appeal.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: This was an architect.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It is unbelievable what has happened to us.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It would make you question things.

Mr. Kris Stokes: I could tell the committee that he was foolish and there was neglect. However, if you put everything together over what has happened to a Traveller family through generations, eight years ago and all of this, you would have to say that it could be racist. That is what we are dealing with.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I will be brief. That picture-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: -----speaks a thousand words.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It is very sorrowful.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: What would be considered now to be a junior Minister popped out there, sat down and got his photograph taken, and thought this was something good to be doing.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Yes.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It actually says-----

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Yes, I read it there on the bottom. It is actually a-----

An Cathaoirleach: It is a 12 ft x 6 ft shelter.

Mr. Kris Stokes: Can I show one more picture of our eviction?

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It is more modern-day-----

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: In one second. I will come back to it.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I am sorry. The Deputy can go on ahead.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I just want to come back to the building beside a sewage dump. I have experience of that in my city of Limerick. We have a halting site called the Long Pavement, a temporary site that is now probably 30 years old. One of the Faulkners there died from Weil's disease, which is one that comes from rats, through dirt and contamination.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It is spread by rats. It is a very old disease.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: In fairness, it was a number of years ago. Unfortunately, this was the family that was in the news recently because of the horrific murder of one of them. I would know that family quite well.

I want to make a comment and the witnesses do not have to remark on it, unless they want to, because it is basically what they said themselves. I do not ever want to be in a situation of taking away powers from a local authority. In this instance, however, and we have said this before at this committee, the local authorities have 100% failed to deliver Traveller sites, homes and accommodation. We all know that. Representatives from the local authorities were in here recently saying they spend all the money they get each year. This shocked me, because I do not see any delivery locally in my area.

I will finish up by saying this. I believe that many of the fundamental problems we have in the Traveller community, including suicide, health and mental health issues, and low life expectancy, come back to housing. The witnesses did not have to come in to tell us because we already know it goes back to housing. There is the poor housing people are living in, the lack of accommodation and people living on top of each other.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: There is a direct link.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: There is 100% a direct link. I would support having a national authority, whatever way that would operate, to instruct the councils to do it or to make sure this is done. There is a phrase that we use in disability services as well that applies here too: nothing for us-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Nothing about us without us.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I thank Ms Stokes very much. We need to sit down and come up with some sort of solutions that Travellers would be happy with and other people would be happy with as well.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: The local authorities should be held accountable when they do not reach certain goals.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Yes. We had them in here last week telling us that they spent all their money and that they are delivering. I was working it out in front of me. They said there was €143 million, or something like that, and they delivered 713 units. I do not know what that total represented. Was it refurbishing old units?

Mr. Kris Stokes: No. They-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Yes. That is where a lot of it is disguised.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: We will drill into that in future and find out a bit more about what that was, because I do not see anything being built in Limerick. We have Rathkeale and a big Traveller population in Limerick city as well.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I am familiar with it.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I do not see anything being built there in significant numbers. I do not see anything being built, to be honest. The common denominator with Traveller sites is that they are always being put next to dumps, where sewage is and in areas where nobody else wants to go.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I will say as well that not everybody wants to live on a site. I did not want to live on a site. I did not even want to live in a housing estate. It is not that I think I am above anyone. I wanted to live in the middle of nowhere with our children.

Mr. Kris Stokes: When you get the big sites, I think too many people living on top of one another is a recipe for disaster. I did not like that. I do not mind small sites.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I dealt with a Traveller family once who were renting privately through the housing assistance payment, HAP, as it was at the time.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Even that can be a nightmare.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: The tenancy ended for them, and they were facing eviction. Limerick County Council was offering them a caravan on a halting site. Those kids were eight and nine and they had never been on a Traveller site, never mind living on a Traveller site. That family was given the offer of going to live on a Traveller site. We intervened, in fairness, and got them a house in a local authority estate. Some of the neighbours, because of perceptions, were concerned about them, but they have all told me recently that they are the best neighbours they have ever had. They bring them for hospital appointments, etc. That is neither here nor there. It was the fact that the council would offer that family a halting site for kids who have never-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Yes, it was a case of because you are a Traveller, you would automatically live on a halting site.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Not only had the two kids not lived on a halting site, they had never even been on a halting site. The mother was not a Traveller, while the father was. She told me that they did not even know they were Travellers.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It was alien to them.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Yes. It comes back to housing. Local authorities have not delivered. They have failed in what they are supposed to be doing. I believe there should be some sort of a body in charge of building the houses, which could work, or responsible for making sure they are built by the local authorities. The local authorities have the skills to do it if they want to do it.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: They do, and there should be a Traveller representative there. The family should be involved in the decisions being made about them and their living conditions. Involve everyone in the decision-making, including the local authorities. Give them a voice as well. I am not saying that their voice should be taken away. They are very well experienced. I am not saying otherwise. They should engage more with the family that is going into a house.

Mr. Kris Stokes: Some Travellers might want to live in a mobile home on their own property. They might feel at home in a mobile home instead of a house. At the end of the day, what I always say, and I go back to the thousand-year history we have here, Travellers and the settled people are oil and water. I am not saying one is better than the other. We are different. It is what it is. We are a different people and we accept it.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We accept that.

Mr. Kris Stokes: If you are a Traveller and if you want to live in a mobile home on your land, you should be allowed to do that. There should be some kind of law or legislation to support the Travellers. There should be some kind of legislation saying that Travellers are a different people, an ethnic group, and we have to support them. They have been travelling for thousands of years. It is not about travelling, but about where they want to live. If they want to live in a mobile home-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It comes back to the-----

An Cathaoirleach: It goes back to the cultural identities.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It comes back to the culture.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It goes back to the deficit model.

Mr. Kris Stokes: I lived in England, and I think the laws are better there than in Ireland. There are gypsies over there, like the English Travellers. They are able to live the way they want to live. They can live in their yards. They have them done up nicely, there are gates, and this and that, and their mobile homes. It works.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Their family is around them.

Mr. Kris Stokes: It works.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I actually have been on Traveller sites in England down in Surrey, where my uncle used to live. He was very friendly with Travellers down there. He died recently and a load of Travellers were at the funeral because he got on well with them.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: That is so right.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Those sites were a lot better than those here.

Mr. Kris Stokes: That is 100% right.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Yes.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Going back to what I was saying, I do not ever want to take away powers from local authorities, but when they have not done it properly - in fairness, they clearly have not done it properly - something needs to be done. We have said this before.

Mr. Kris Stokes: I think the councils in Ireland are living in the dinosaur age and have the same mentality as 1967. We have a Traveller family here who did not ask for €10 off the Government, are doing their own thing, and are still not being left alone. I am telling the committee that this is our personal case, but it is not really. This is happening-----

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: It is happening all over the country.

Mr. Kris Stokes: Whether you are buying your house, looking for a council house or buying a piece of ground, when I speak to Travellers in Cork, Dublin and all over, we are all the same people, and we have the same problems. It is the same all across the board. The racism is all around. To me, it is racism. I believe it is racism.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I think it boils back down to racism.

Mr. Kris Stokes: I think it was the people of that road who panicked over a Traveller family moving in. It was, "Oh my God, the tinkers are moving in". They lit a fire under Denis Malone in Kilkenny County Council. He came out without asking any questions. He just knew there were Travellers in the house. We have to give them an enforcement notice.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We better get out the guards.

Mr. Kris Stokes: He came out then with the cavalry, there was the notice, and goodbye. After a year, he still had to back down. He put us through hell. He took away the feeling you have when you buy your home and do it up. I was putting in a kitchen for Christmas Day. For a year, we would do nothing, because we did not know if we were going to be put out of it.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: We were told we would need deep pockets.

Mr. Kris Stokes: What was the point of putting a kitchen in or tiles down when we did not know if we were going to be put out of it? That is what we are dealing with. To be honest about it, it is disgusting.

An Cathaoirleach: Okay, folks. I thank Margaret, Kris and Christopher Stokes for coming in this evening.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: I thank the committee.

An Cathaoirleach: As witnesses, they have certainly given us an insight into their own individual situation, but also beyond it. The power in the picture we have seen is correct, and this is still in the psyche of a lot of people who are in local authorities. As a committee, this is something we have to battle against.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: The members can keep the copies of the picture we gave them.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank everyone again, and no doubt we will be interacting over the coming months and years.

Ms Margaret Star Stokes: Please God. I thank the committee.

The joint committee adjourned at 8.09 p.m. until 12.30 p.m. on Thursday, 16 July 2026.