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Charity funds spent on peacock pen

■ Former Peter McVerry Trust CEO mishandled finances, PAC told

Cianan Brennan

The former head of the homeless charity Peter McVerry Trust spent €350,000 on a driveway at a homeless shelter and built an enclosure for two peacocks while the organisation’s finances were falling apart.

The Dáil Public Accounts Committee (PAC) heard yesterday that the installations were made at Kerdiffstown House, near Naas, Co Kildare, when the charity was run by then chief executive Pat Doyle, who used the homeless accommodation as his head office during the covid pandemic.

Francis Doherty — who succeeded Mr Doyle briefly as chief executive in 2023, before resigning four months later as the scale of the charity’s financial troubles came to light — told the committee yesterday that Kerdiffstown House itself had been run at an annual loss of €1m.

He said those details had only come to light when he became chief executive in June 2023 and gained access to invoices.

Along with €350,000 spent on widening and maintaining the driveway at the period building, the charity’s funds were also spent on constructing an enclosure for two peacocks at the front of the property.

Mr Doherty said a new lift shaft was constructed at the side of the building, without planning permission, and that its purpose had been to ensure that Mr Doyle would not have to use the same entrance as staff.

He said that upon taking over as chief executive in June 2023, he discovered that the trust owed €18m to various creditors and had just €437,000 on hand across its various bank accounts.

He said he noticed two bank accounts belonging to the trust, used for social housing, had been almost emptied of cash in December 2022 — with €1.5m of that money going to two companies: Rubicon and New Directions.

He said New Directions — a private company delivering counselling services — received €350,000 and this was where Mr Doyle had planned to work once his tenure at

the Peter McVerry Trust came to an end.

Mr Doherty alleged the former chief executive had told him that the money had been transferred in order to ensure that Mr Doyle’s own future salary could be paid.

That money was later re-funded to the trust, the committee heard.

Mr Doherty said Rubicon was the main maintenance contractor for the charity; the firm’s principal officer was the brother of the Peter McVerry Trust auditor.

Mr Doherty outlined a conflict of interest involving the company, in which Rubicon sold properties not in compliance with building regulations to the trust for €975,000 in 2019, and which saw the company paid €300,000 to renovate them.

It was further revealed that Mr Doyle had been retained on his chief executive salary for two months until the end of July 2023, so that he would be in a position to answer questions regarding the charity’s administration, despite Mr Doherty having taken over as chief executive by that point.

Mr Doherty said that in the last 90 minutes of Mr Doyle’s tenure, he applied for a loan of between €4m and €5m from one of the pillar banks to bolster the organisation’s cashflows, though that loan was never delivered.

The PAC heard Mr Doyle — who was chief executive at the charity for 18 years before stepping down — has declined to discuss the goings-on at the trust ever since at the request of the organisation’s board.

Mr Doherty said he had been ignorant of the cash-flow issues in place before taking over as chief executive, given several layers of management lay between him and the chief executive office during his previous 10-year stint with the charity.

The trust, one of the most prominent homeless service providers in the country for many years, eventually required a €15m bailout in late 2023 from the State after its cashflows collapsed completely in the wake of years of underbidding for inappropriate housing contracts.

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Fleece Navidad



Gabby Krawczyk, Ronay Morey, Jazmin Harvath, Stephen Collins, Nicole Lane, and Sean Murphy enjoying College Christmas in Cork City. News: 3. Picture: Eddie O’Hare

Bank robber’s note read: ‘Thank you... I’m sorry’

Liam Heylin

A robber was handed more than €6,000 at a bank in Cork after he presented a note that said he had a gun and gave precise instructions, concluding with the words: “Thank you, and I’m sorry for this”, a court has heard.

Gardaí opposed bail for Noel O’Brien, aged 42, of 68 Maryborough Court, Douglas, Cork, claiming he poses a danger to the community and is at “significant” risk of re-offending to pay for his “chronic” cocaine addiction.

Mr O’Brien was charged with carrying out the robbery at the Bank of Ireland in

Douglas on Wednesday.

Detective Garda Tom Delaney said: “Noel O’Brien, in my opinion, poses a danger to the safety of persons in the community. His chronic addiction to cocaine has caused him to carry out this crime, and without addressing this addiction, I believe he will spiral further with his cocaine addiction.”

“Noel O’Brien is not working, and has no way of covering the cost to pay for his addiction. I believe this puts him at significant risk of re-offending and committing further crime to pay for his addiction.”

Mr O’Brien became emo-

tional in the witness box in his application for bail.

“The first thing is to apologise to everyone I caused harm to... I am here to apologise to the cashier,” he said.

“My threat in that letter is not me.”

He said he needed counselling to address his issues, and said he had to clear a €4,000 drugs debt. He said he felt on Wednesday that his options were suicide or to do what he did.

Judge John King remanded him in custody until November 27.

Det Garda Delaney told the court that just before 2pm on Wednesday, a man

entered the bank at Douglas Village Shopping Centre.

“His face was covered over; he handed the teller a note which read: ‘Hi I am Jack, I am a mute. Please do not scream or shout. I have a gun in my pocket. I want you to slowly empty the drawer and place all notes in an envelope. Remember stay calm and I will not hurt you. Put the envelope on the counter and make sure there are no trackers or dye packs in the envelope. Wait five minutes before sounding the alarm or I will come back. Thank you, and I’m sorry for this.’”

The detective said the cashier handed over €6,260

before the man left on foot. He was seen on CCTV fleeing through the shopping centre to the toilets.

“Some of the clothing worn by the culprit during [the] robbery was located in the cubicle: jacket, baseball hat, snood, and gloves,” he said.

“The culprit left the centre in a black and red checked shirt. I identified the male from the CCTV footage as Noel O’Brien of 68 Maryborough Court, Douglas, Cork.”

Det Garda Delaney said the accused later took €4,000 and got a bus, to where he had to meet unnamed persons to pay off a drugs debt.

Fans snap up flights to Czechia for playoff

Sean Murray

Airlines last night announced extra flights to Prague after all available seats were snapped up by fans hoping to see the Boys in Green on the next step of their World Cup journey.

However, the Green Army will have to dig deep after airlines hiked fares on flights to the Czech capital for the playoff just minutes after the draw was made.

After the euphoric wins against Portugal and Hungary last week, Ireland’s dreams of North America for a first World Cup appearance in 24 years remain very much alive with yesterday’s draw pairing them against Czechia in March.

If Heimur Hallgrímsson’s men win against Czechia, Ireland face a home tie against Denmark or North Macedonia to seal qualification just a few days later.

However, fans faced higher airfares within minutes of the draw yesterday.

As early as 2pm, Aer Lingus flights from Dublin to Prague were sold out — both on match day, March 26, and the day before. The cheapest flight home for the day after was over €400. Before the draw, a fare on match day was €319, which then rose to €470.

On Ryanair, no one-way ticket in the two days prior to the game, or on the day of the game itself, was available for less than €300. Flights home will be similarly expensive, with the cheapest fare on the day after the game at €277.

For comparison, a Wednesday-to-Friday trip with Ryanair the week before costs less than €190 return.

Fine Gael senator Mark Duffy hit out at the airlines for penalising “loyal supporters”, urging regulators to examine the issue.

“In some cases, the fare more than doubled in the space of half an hour. This cannot be justified in a normal and fair market.”

Sport: 30

Investigators probe fatal air crash in Waterford

Ann Murphy

A team of air accident investigators is in Waterford today probing the fatal air crash near Tramore.

One man lost his life when the Vulcanair twin engine aircraft nosedived into a field a short distance from Waterford airport at 12.50pm yesterday. He was the sole occupant of the plane, which left Sligo Airport shortly before 11.30am and turned back towards Waterford airport at around 12.20pm, according to flight radar data.

The aircraft was due to travel to Beziers in southern France but did a U-turn some 50km off the south-east coast. The crash happened after the plane attempted to make an emergency landing at the airport, having declared an emergency over the south coast shortly before 1pm.

Air accident investigators will analyse any attempts at communication made from the aircraft in a bid to piece together what led to the fatal crash. They will also sift through wreckage at the site.

More than 30 emergency personnel responded to the crash at Lisselan, on the coast road between Tramore and Dunmore East, 3km outside Tramore. Traffic was diverted as emergency services worked at the scene.

Responders included gardai, the National Ambulance Service, fire service personnel, and members of the Irish Coast Guard. The air accident investigation unit confirmed shortly after the incident that four investigators were being dispatched to the scene.



The light aircraft which crashed near Waterford Airport.

As darkness fell on the site yesterday evening, the plane remained in the field, with the front of it severely damaged by the impact.

A Garda statement issued last evening said: “Gardaí and emergency services are currently at the scene of a light aircraft collision which occurred at Tramore, Co Waterford at approximately 12.50pm this afternoon, Thursday, November 20, 2025. Initial reports indicate that there was one fatality, the sole occupant of the aircraft.”

“The air accident investigation unit is at the scene and the Irish Aviation Authority has been notified. The scene is being preserved and investigations are ongoing.”

Gardaí say their role will be to prepare a file for the coroner’s court.

Sinn Féin TD for Waterford David Cullinane said a rescue helicopter was among emergency services responding to the crash. He said it was a “shock” to the local area, adding that the community’s thoughts are with whoever was on the plane.

‘Putin could end this war immediately’

Jennifer Rankin
Brussels

Europeans must be involved in any attempt to broker peace between Ukraine and Russia, top diplomats said after reports of a US-Russia plan emerged.

The EU’s foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, welcomed any “meaningful efforts” to end the war, but said Ukrai-

nian and European input was needed for any plan to work.

“[Vladimir] Putin could end this war immediately if he just stopped bombing civilians and killing the people,” she told reporters.

“But we haven’t seen any concessions on the Russian side. We welcome all the meaningful efforts to end this war but, like we have

said before, it has to be just and lasting.

“That also means that the Ukrainians, but also the Europeans, agree to this.”

The draft US-Russian peace plan would require Ukraine to surrender territory and cede control over its political and military sovereignty to Russia.

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Inside

World

Gary ‘Mani’ Mounfield, founding member and bassist of the Stone Roses who also played with Primal Scream, has died aged 63.

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Money & Jobs

Inflation continues for the household staples, including food and energy, but there are some ways you could save money.

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