

## SICK AND INDIGENT ROOMKEEPERS' SOCIETY

232<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting – 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022

### CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

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This statement is presented to the 232<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society, Dublin's oldest charity, founded in 1790. The banner headline on our website reads: *Serving the poor of Dublin since 1790 and still serving.*

Covid-19 restrictions affected the operation of the Society in 2020 and 2021. Many of the social workers with whom we normally interact with were working from home and thus had much reduced contact with their clients. In 2021 we allocated €84,612 in assistance payments, representing a small increase over the 2020 total of €79,625, but considerably less than the €128,343 spent in 2019, the last full year before Covid struck in March 2020. Of the assistance granted in 2021, home start-ups accounted for 38%. This category covers help with purchases of furniture, electrical goods and floor coverings, often in cases where people are moving from homeless accommodation to unfurnished local authority housing and need additional resources to make it fully livable. The other main assistance categories in 2021 were education (such as helping people to retrain for new types of work) and short-term (dealing with immediate crises in people's lives), at 23% each.

As Covid restrictions were eased in the first months of 2022, we were able to resume in-person Board meetings and case review meetings. However, the number of applications received so far this year has been below our expectations, although the volume has begun to increase in recent months.

We are grateful to the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin for facilitating a resumption of the annual collection for the Society in inner city parish churches in November 2021, following a suspension of the collection in 2020 due to Covid; the collection yielded over €12,000 in much-needed funds. This included a special contribution of €1,000 from the Carmelite community at St. Teresa's church in Clarendon Street, whose generosity is much appreciated.

The Society also benefited from a bequest of €23,000 from the estate of Mary Roverie Fitzgerald Nixon, formerly of Co. Meath. Her generosity, and that of other regular donors, is deeply valued by the Society at a time when the value of our investment funds is declining. This is partly due to economic uncertainty in world markets, but also because our assistance expenditure is greater than our annual income.

To address this issue, the Board, under the chairmanship of my predecessor Colette O'Daly, arranged for the addition of a 'donate' button to our website in 2021, to facilitate online donations. Since then, a sub-committee ably led by Siobhán Fitzpatrick and assisted by Roger McCormack and Aideen Ireland has invested significant time and effort in updating our website, with professional input from Urban Brand Creative. We hope that the new

website will attract more attention from the public and will in time generate more income for the Society.

While we remain rightly proud of the Society's long history of service to the people of Dublin, we have also sought to explain in clearer terms what we do. The Society has always sought to respond to the changing needs of the people of Dublin. In this regard I would like to pay tribute to the work which John McClancy has done in compiling generic and anonymized stories about the kind of help we currently provide. We have a valuable niche role which complements the work of larger charities. Without our assistance, many of those who apply to the Society for help in times of crisis would fall through the cracks.

Colette reported in her Annual Statement to last year's AGM that our long-serving and highly experienced Secretary / Administrator, Vera Hussey, retired in August 2021. Following a recruitment campaign, the Board appointed a secretary to succeed her in August 2021, with considerable help from Vera during the handover process. Unfortunately, she resigned in December 2021, and the Board re-commenced the recruitment process. We were very fortunate to be able to appoint Edel Withers in April this year; Edel has made a substantial contribution to the running of the Society since her arrival. As the office was not staffed between January and April, Colette's meticulous record-keeping of assistance granted by trustees was invaluable, and Vera kindly responded to our request to update our ledgers on a voluntary basis in time for the annual audit in May.

Our finance sub-committee, under the expert leadership of Margaret Judge, supported by Michael Deasy and John MacClancy, continues to liaise with Cantors, our stockbrokers, in relation to the composition of our investment portfolio in terms of risk and return. Guided by recommendations of the sub-committee, the Board makes changes to our portfolio from time to time, and ensures that cash flow is always adequate to meet the Society's running costs. The sub-committee has recently set up an e-banking facility, which will facilitate electronic payments and day-to-day monitoring of changes in our current account. The sub-committee also supplements the audit role of our accountants, John Mulderrig and Company, by carrying out periodic checks on our internal financial controls.

Michael Deasy has been our main liaison with the Charities Regulator, ensuring that the Board's governance policies and practice are fully compliant with guidelines set by the Regulator. His work is much appreciated, as all charitable bodies need to demonstrate high standards of accountability and transparency. For many years past, the audited accounts of the Society have been published on our website, and we make an annual return to the Regulator. Each Board meeting begins with a declaration that each trustee has no conflict of interests in relation to any matter on the agenda.

I am privileged to follow in the footsteps of Colette O'Daly whose sterling work guided the Society between 2018 and 2021; during her term of office she dealt capably with the relocation of our office from Leeson Street, the impacts of the Covid pandemic on the way we operate, and the departure of Vera Hussey as our Secretary / Administrator. I am grateful to my Vice-Chair, Roger McCormack, for his steady support and advice since my election as Chairman last year. Felix Larkin, who served as Chairman prior to Colette, has also shared his valuable and long experience.

Finally, I want to thank all my fellow trustees for their commitment and hard work, without which the Society would cease to function. In this we are ably supported by the professionalism of Edel Withers, who in a relatively short time has established such a good rapport with the numerous social workers she deals with on a daily basis.

John Martin  
Chairman