

SICK AND INDIGENT ROOMKEEPERS' SOCIETY

231st Annual General Meeting – 18th November 2021

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

This statement is presented to the 231st 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*'.

The year 2021 continued to be a very challenging one for the Society with the reimposition of Covid-19 restrictions at the beginning of the year, lasting for several months, which led to the enforced closure of our office. It is notable however that the Sick & Indigent Roomkeepers' continued to operate in politically turbulent circumstances one hundred years ago when enforced closure of the Society's premises, which they had occupied since 1855, was caused by very different circumstances in January 1921, due to its proximity to Dublin Castle. A Military Order of January 24th read as follows: '*Whereas it is necessary for the purpose of securing public safety and the Defence of the Realm to take possession of the under-mentioned lands, buildings and premises known as No. 2 Palace St.*' etc. A representative of the military had subsequently visited Palace Street on that same day (i.e. January 24th) to say that an extension of a few days would probably be granted but that all furnishings and fittings on the premises would have to be removed and the house left completely bare. In order to carry out the military order, arrangements had to be made '*for the storage of the Society's furniture and office fittings, and the removal of the furniture of the messenger and caretaker who lived in the house*'. (D. Lindsay, *Dublin's Oldest Charity*, Dublin 1990, p. 77). The loss of the Roomkeepers' premises to the Military caused much public indignation in the newspapers of the day. Alternative accommodation for a year was secured in Rutland Street and Dorset Street until February 1922, when the military authorities informed the Society that they had vacated Palace Street.

During this turbulent time in Dublin's history, it is a measure of the cooperation between two charities that shared a common objective to assist the poor that, in July 1922, the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society, a strictly non-denominational, non-sectarian charity, provided temporary accommodation in No. 2 Palace Street for the Society of St Vincent de Paul after the destruction of that Society's premises in O'Connell St.

Today's difficult economic climate in Ireland, the continuing impact of Covid-19 with ensuing job losses and a decline in investment income have created a difficult climate for all charities. The impact of this pandemic necessitated the closure of churches for several months, crucially for us at the end November 2020, when one of the regular sources of our income over the years, would have taken place, i.e. the annual SHARE collection for the Society, in the parishes within the canals, which is facilitated by the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. In 2019 this collection had yielded almost €17,000. At a time when donations within the Diocese have plummeted by as much as 80%, we are very grateful for news received this very week that Archbishop Dermot Farrell has sanctioned that the SHARE collection for the last week-end in November, from the churches located within the canals, will be donated to our Society, thus maintaining the established precedent of previous years. This area within the canals represents the traditional boundaries within which the Society originally carried out its relief work, an area that now represents only 18% of the parishes located within the City and County of Dublin that we now serve.

The Society benefits from The Charities Regulator Common Investment Fund, a function originally administered by the 19th century body entitled the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests. Money in this fund comes from dormant accounts or charitable donations that can no longer go to the original beneficiaries, while every effort is made to establish how the donor's intentions might be respected. The Society received €18,754 from this source in 2021 and €17,334 in 2020.

Board meetings continued to be held by means of electronic technology until October of this year and every effort was made by our part-time secretary, Vera Hussey, to operate as effectively as possible by remote working during the worst period of the restrictions. The Society greatly appreciates a three-month rent waiver for the period January to March 2021 from our landlords, Messrs Rutherfords LLP Solicitors, which was a most generous gesture on their part.

We continue to adhere to the core principle of the Society, which is to target assistance towards helping people who are experiencing temporary difficulties and in need of once-off assistance to restructure their lives and achieve or regain self-sufficiency.

The accounts to which I now refer are for the calendar year 2020. They show that the Society distributed assistance of €88,230 over 142 cases, under the following categories, as follows:

<u>2020</u>	Home Start-up/Housing	Education	Short Term Aid	Critical Need
	41%	27%	29%	3%

This compares to €128,343 distributed over 303 cases in 2019 with assistance in the various categories that year as follows:

<u>2019</u>	Home Start-up/Housing	Education	Short Term Aid	Critical Need
	33%	28%	29%	10%

The decline in the amount distributed in 2020 reflects the administrative difficulties experienced by the enforced office closure over five months due to Covid-19 restrictions and related difficulties encountered by social workers in engaging with their clients and in relation to the preparation of applications for submission. An audited Financial Statement for the year 2020 is available to view under the 'Governance' section of our website, i.e. www.roomkeepers.ie

The Society has received some very reassuring emotive letters of thanks in response to our assistance. One such applicant, a single mother, no longer in receipt of any maintenance from her former partner, wrote to us as follows upon receipt of funding for a washing machine and fridge: *'I was almost at the point of giving up when I got the news of your donation to me and my kids. I don't ever think what I write or say will show how grateful I was'*.

The Society sought to highlight deficiencies in core public funding in our letter (March 10th 2021) to the Minister of Health in respect of the number of applicants seeking financial support in order to pay for a HSE Assessment of Need for children with significant developmental delays, emphasising the fact that the current delay of 2 to 3 years can have serious implications at such a young age. These demands resulted from the unacceptable length of public waiting lists. In a further letter (March 11th 2021) to the Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage we expressed our concern at the number of applicants seeking financial assistance to meet the cost of housing adaptation assessment reports.

Financial investments are approved by the Board on the recommendation of the Society's Finance Sub-Committee. I am grateful to that team of Michael Deasy, John Martin, and John MacClancy, under the chairmanship of Margaret Judge, for their continual vigilance regarding our investment portfolio and the preparation of the annual budget. In June of this year, they prepared a ten-year financial reserves estimate for the years 2022 to 2031. This painted a stark picture showing how our finances could be eroded by 2030.

Our response to this was to devote our annual Strategy Meeting on October 9th 2021 to the topic of fundraising, as uppermost in our minds is to preserve the charity and pass it on to the next generation in order to ensure the continuation of its good work. An anonymous donor generously funded the contracting of Kevin Delaney, a non-profit fundraising consultant of the Academy Street Workshop, to act as a facilitator and to conduct a workshop for the Society on fundraising. He tailored his talk to take account of the size and scale of our charity; it was considered by all trustees to have been both innovative and challenging. In particular, he emphasised the importance of exploiting our historic roots and using our website as a showcase.

Our main source of funding remains charitable donations and bequests. At a time when our investment income is in decline, the Society was extremely fortunate to receive some very significant bequests, the first in excess of €40,000 from the estate of the late Ms Mary Roverie Fitzgerald Nixon, while a second, in April 2021, of €3,000 was from the estate of the late Ms Nora Higgins. This was followed, in May of this year, by the largest legacy bequeathed to the Society in recent times from the estate of the late Mr James Victor Hughes in the amount of €151,291. We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of all these benefactors and indeed of all the other donations received by the Society throughout the year. In line with our Donor's Charter, and cognisant of our Society's title, these funds will be used to alleviate the conditions of 'the sick and indigent', the latter being appropriately described in Webster's Dictionary *'as a level of poverty in which real hardship and deprivation are suffered and comforts of life are wholly lacking'*.

A Website Sub-Committee, established in April 2021, with the membership of Aideen Ireland and John Martin, under the chairmanship of Siobhán Fitzpatrick, has been very active and is currently undertaking a redesign of our website in order to heighten public awareness of the Society. This was very timely in view of the Irish Charities Survey Results, published May 2021, where a high percentage of respondents had said that the quality of a charities' website had a direct correlation to the impact factor on donors. Terms of reference have been adopted, and a specialist has been engaged to upgrade the current website in terms of security and functionality. A Maintenance Contract is now in place and an online donation facility is being developed.

I am particularly conscious of the excellent work that has been undertaken by the trustees/directors on Governance issues over the past number of years. A Risk Register was completed in January 2021 under the chairmanship of Michael Deasy with the aid of Siobhán Fitzpatrick, Margaret Judge, and Colette O'Daly as Sub-Committee members and was adopted by the Board on February 17th 2021. We are now fully compliant with the Charities Regulator Corporate Governance Rules.

Our Compliance Record Form, adopted by the Board on June 16th 2020, was reviewed with addenda on March 1st 2021 to reflect the changes made to our Memorandum & Articles of Association at the AGM on 19th November 2020 regarding term limits of trustees in line with recommended practice and the adoption of a conflict of interest policy. At that AGM, it was resolved that each director would be elected for a fixed term of three years and be eligible for re-election on two subsequent occasions. This special resolution, together with the adoption of a conflict of interest policy, was registered with the Companies Registration Office (CRO) on our behalf by Roger McCormack, our Company Secretary.

A Governance Record File, containing printed bound copies of all the policy documents adopted by the Board in the period 2018 to 2021, has been established and is available for auditing by the Regulator at any time. Michael Deasy has agreed to be the point of contact for the Society with the Charities Regulator and, in his role as the authorised filer for the Society, submitted our Annual Report to the Regulator in October of this year.

It has been an enormous privilege for me to have served this distinguished charity as chairman for the past three years. I particularly wish to thank Felix Larkin, our esteemed past chairman, for initially inviting me to become a trustee in 2012 and for affording me the opportunity to become involved in such a fulfilling and worthwhile task. It has been a busy three years during which we have relocated our office, coped with enforced periodic closures due to Government restrictions in response to the Covid pandemic and, sadly, seeing the retirement of our much valued Secretary/Administrator, Vera Hussey, who had served the Society so very diligently over the past seven years with total commitment, complete discretion, and genuine empathy. We welcome our new half-time Secretary/Administrator, Josephine Weafer, who was appointed to this role in August of this year. I hope that she will find the work of the Society to be both rewarding and interesting.

The Society acknowledges with regret the retirement of Marian Tannam as a trustee/director after five years of valuable service, in particular with regard to her commitment to the disadvantaged sectors of society.

I owe a huge debt of thanks to John Martin, our Vice-Chairman, for his invaluable advice and support over these past challenging years, and also for kindly hosting our monthly ZOOM meetings, to Roger McCormack for acting as our Company Secretary and for so generously allowing us to avail of his legal expertise, to John MacClancy for monitoring our insurance responsibilities.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all of my fellow Trustees/Directors for their compassionate commitment to the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society in continuing to fulfil our core mission which is to serve the poor of Dublin '**Towards 2040**' and beyond.

Colette O'Daly
Chairman

18th November 2021