

Manor Childrens' Centre staff fighting for its future



The Childrens' Centre at Manor Saint John, whose staff have been placed on protective notice.

The staff of the Manor Childrens' Centre, who received protective notice on Friday of last week, with the prospect of closure now looming large, have vowed to fight to retain this long-standing suburban childcare service.

Waterford TDs John Halligan and Ciara Conway, along with Senator David Cullinane, have offered their support to the 16 childcare staff, while City Councillor John Hearne has also weighed in behind their respective efforts.

It is hoped that their interventions, along with continued communication between the Board of the Centre and trade union UNITE could yet save the centre, which caters for 102 children largely drawn from the Larchville/Lisduggan area.

The service, which moved into the Manor Saint John campus seven years ago, has been in operation for over 30 years in the area.

And were it to close, UNITE Regional Officer stated: "It would be a devastating blow not only to the dedicated staff, but also to the local community."

Mr Kelly added: "The solution to the centre's funding problems is not to force workers into poverty pay - rather, the solution is for the HSE and Waterford City & County Council to intervene to keep this vital resource open."

The Board of the non-profit facility, Tony Kelly explained, had sought an eight per cent pay cut among staff, "following a two-third cut in HSE funding coupled with the increase in Employer's PRSI".

He continued: "UNITE's members are unable to accept an eight per cent pay cut which would push them well below the living wage - currently calculated at €11.45 per hour - and could well make it financially unviable for them to remain in the workforce."

Staff union representative Lorraine Coady stressed that she and her co-workers are "fighting tooth and nail" to keep the centre open.

"For anyone to suggest that we're the reason the centre is in such difficulty, well anyone saying that couldn't be further from the truth. A pay cut like that would mean each of us working, here, and we're all qualified in this area, would be better off joining the dole queue, and that is something none of us want."

Lorraine added: "We desperately want to keep this centre open; it's been such a long-standing service in the Larchville/Lisduggan area, and I hope some common sense can prevail here."

As we went to press, we learned that the Centre's Board had offered a mediator/intermediary to discuss the centre's future with Union representatives.

Deputy John Halligan has arranged a meeting with Childrens' Minister Dr James Reilly this to discuss the possibility of Departmental intervention to save the Centre.

Deputy Halligan, who has attended several meetings with Centre staff and trade union representatives of late, said it is essential that the Centre is kept open for the local community, as well as safeguarding the 16 jobs at the facility.

"I have been in contact with the Minister's office and he has agreed to meet me on Tuesday to discuss the situation.

"Over 100 children are cared for at the Centre, which has proven itself an invaluable support to families across the

Lisduggan, Larchville area and further afield, who rely heavily on this Centre whilst they're at work. The knock-on effect of this Centre closing would be detrimental to the locality".

Councillor John Hearne described the Centre as "an invaluable service to the local community", adding that most of the children attending are HSE grant-aided, whose parents "couldn't afford private crèches".

"We can't have children suffering for something they bear no responsibility for whatsoever," he said.

"Both myself and Senator Cullinane have met with management and staff and will do so again if that's needed but it is absolutely vital that this service is retained."

Lorraine Coady added: "Our doors are still open, and it's important that every parent who has a child here gets that message. We're still open and we hope to remain open for many, many years to come. This service is worth fighting for, and everyone on the staff here is up for that fight."