

MINISTER MARY COUGHLAN LAUNCHES IRISH PENSIONERS NETWORK OF GREAT BRITAIN

Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, today, in the Irish Centre, Camden Town launched the Irish Pensioners Network of Great Britain.

“It is very fitting that we are here today in this building to launch such a great new initiative, an initiative that will bring many of the Irish pensioners groups together with a common goal,” Minister Coughlan said.

Emigration has been a feature of Irish culture since the middle of the 19th century and particularly in the 1940's and 1950's. Emigration has been in decline since 1993 and now more people are coming to Ireland to live than are leaving it. However, Britain is still the largest destination for Irish emigrants accounting for 27% of total emigration in 2002.

The Minister added: “We in Ireland are in your debt because all of you contributed so much to the Irish economy when times were hard.”

“The experiences of the Irish in Britain have been mixed. Many Irish people achieved successful and dominant positions in all walks of life and contributed much to their adopted country. At

the same time, there are many Irish in Britain who feel they did not reach their full potential and so have a sense of disappointment as a result. We know that many of those who feel let down or marginalised now use the services of Irish Welfare agencies in Britain. We in the Irish Government acknowledge the valuable service that these agencies give by allocating significant resources to the Dion Fund which in turn supports these agencies financially.”

The welfare of older Irish people in Britain is one of the main priority areas of Dion. This year over EUR 870,000 has been allocated for services to the elderly.

Minister Coughlan also stated: “I have increased the funding available for emigrant advice and information substantially from EUR 127,000 to EUR 427,000 in 2003. The 'Returning to Ireland' booklet published in partnership with the voluntary agency 'Emigrant Advice' in Dublin is one such initiative. I have also funded Safe Home to establish a website and to publish a monthly newsletter to our emigrants in Britain, keeping them up to date on all available social services in Ireland. All of the increased funding which I provided this year is in line, with the recommendations of the Task Force on Emigration Policy published in 2002 and has gone into direct information services to our emigrants.”

ENDS July 7th 2003

NOTE FOR NEWS EDITORS

Irish Pensioners Network in Britain

A nationwide network for Irish Pensioners in Britain, being development from the emergence of Irish pensioners clubs and support groups at local and regional level in various parts of the country.

Irish Centre Camden Town

The Irish Centre in Camden was officially opened on 29th September 1955. Their services have developed and grown over the years. It is now a well resourced and well staffed advice and information centre providing a wide range of personal and community services to the newly arrived immigrant and for Irish people of all ages arriving in Britain. It hosts many key annual Irish events in London.

Federation of Irish Societies (FIS)

Founded in 1973, the Federation of Irish societies (FIS) is an umbrella organisation for all of the Irish Centres in the UK. It is a non-sectarian, non-politically aligned and non-profit making organisation. It represents over 100 Irish societies ranging from social and language clubs to community welfare societies to sporting societies. It is widely regarded as the foremost Irish community representative body in Britain.

London Irish Elders Forum (LIEF)

The London Irish Elders Forum is an important and influential lobbying organisation set up in 1998, the first of its kind for Irish pensioners in Britain. It builds on the hard work over the years done by individual groups of pensioners, such as the Camden Elderly Irish Network, to ensure that issues of direct concern to older Irish people living in Britain are highlighted and addressed effectively. This pan-London organisation empowers elderly Irish

people and groups and addresses policy issues of concern to them and assesses pensions and other benefits on their behalf.

Dion Fund for Irish emigrant welfare

The Dion fund for Irish emigrant welfare in Britain is allocated by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the basis of recommendations from the Dion Committee. The Committee was set up in 1984 in response to concerns about the position of Irish emigrants in Britain. In 2003 responsibility for the fund transferred from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to the Department of Foreign Affairs as recommended in the Report of the Task Force on Policy regarding Emigrants which was published in August 2002.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

Details of grants allocated by the Information Services Unit in 2003 for emigrant advice are as follows: -

Emigrant Advice (Voluntary emigrant advice agency in Dublin)

Eur 170,000 total

Emigrant Advice Network: Eur 70,000

Immigration Council of Ireland, Eur 60,000

Mayo Emigrant Liaison Committee; Eur 25,000

Episcopal Commission for Emigrants; Eur 28,000

Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas: Eur 31,744.

Safe Home Programme; Eur 15,000

Total allocated to date in 2003 is Eur 399,744.