

Chapter 13: Dublin Union/Pelletstown/St Patrick's, Navan Road/Eglinton House

Introduction

- 13.1 St Patrick's, Navan Road, Dublin 7, originally known as Pelletstown and subsequent transfer to Eglinton House, Eglinton Rd, Dublin 4 is one of the institutions which the Commission is specifically mandated by its Terms of Reference to investigate. In accordance with its Terms of Reference and the criteria set out there, the Commission chose the Dublin Union¹ as one of the county homes to be investigated. In practice, Pelletstown and the Dublin Union were really one institution with separate premises. Pelletstown was frequently referred to as the 'Pelletstown Auxiliary' as it was an auxiliary building to the South Dublin Union. Both sets of premises were owned and financed initially by the Dublin Board of Guardians and subsequently by its successors in title (for example, the Dublin Board of Assistance from 1931, the Dublin Health Authority from 1960-1970 and the Eastern Health Board from 1970 onwards).
- 13.2 Pelletstown closed in 1985 and a new facility was opened in Eglinton House. This also was a mother and baby home but it was a very different type of facility to Pelletstown. It was owned by the Eastern Health Board.
- 13.3 A total of 15,382 women and 18,829 children were resident in Pelletstown and Eglinton House between 1920 and 1998.

Origins

- 13.4 The origins of the Dublin Union and the Pelletstown Auxiliary lie in the poor law - see Chapter 1. The South Dublin Union premises were in James's Street on the site of what is now St James's Hospital. The North Dublin Union and the South Dublin Union were amalgamated in 1918 as part of the changes to the poor law and the South Dublin Union premises then became the Dublin Union premises.

¹ Changes to the Poor Law were made in the period just before and just after 1922. In most counties, the workhouses which were to be retained in use were renamed county homes. The Dublin Union workhouse was never given this name. Like all other former workhouses, it started to be called by a religious name at some stage – St Kevin's. Locally, it was generally called simply 'the Union'. There was also a St Kevin's Hospital on the site; it amalgamated with a number of other Dublin hospitals in the early 1970s and then became known as St James's Hospital.

- 13.5 As stated, Pelletstown² was owned by the Dublin Board of Guardians and its successors in title. It was run by the Company of Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul.³ The Sisters and other staff who worked in Pelletstown were local government employees and paid as such. The Daughters of Charity became involved in Pelletstown in 1910; they were already involved in running a number of workhouses in Ireland including the North Dublin Union workhouse in North Brunswick Street.⁴ They were brought to Pelletstown at the request of the Board of Guardians and with the approval of the Archbishop of Dublin. A document⁵ compiled in Pelletstown in May 1921 states that the house was founded on 26 April 1910. The staff who worked in Pelletstown, including the members of the order, were public employees and were paid accordingly. It was an integral part of the poor law/public assistance system.
- 13.6 From 1910 to 1919/20, Pelletstown was a National School and orphanage for the South Dublin Union.⁶ The Daughters of Charity became involved in Pelletstown in 1910. They were initially asked to provide 'care instruction and industrial training of the children of the Poor'. They were expected to cater for boys from age 3 to 14 and girls from age 3 to 15; they were then expected to 'place the children in situations suited to their capacity'. The 1921 document states that there was an agreement between the Daughters of Charity and the Board of Guardians. The guardians/administrators were responsible for all liabilities (including costs of improvements); the Sisters received an annual salary plus vegetables and milk; the document describes the provision as 'adequate'.
- 13.7 Some commentators have made the mistake of believing that there were two separate institutions - one called St Patrick's, Navan Road and one called Pelletstown. This is due to confusion about the name itself and confusion about the name of the religious order that ran the institution. For example, Kilcummins et

² The Commission has decided to use the name Pelletstown in order to avoid any confusion with the many other institutions such as industrial schools, children's homes and hospitals which are or were also called St Patrick's.

³ They were, and sometimes still are, known as the Sisters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul. As a result they are sometimes confused with the Irish Sisters of Charity (who are also known as the Religious Sisters of Charity). The Commission intends to use 'Daughters of Charity' in order to minimise any such confusion but it should be noted that 'Sisters of Charity' is used in some of the documents quoted.

⁴ This workhouse amalgamated with the South Dublin Union workhouse in 1918 but the Daughters of Charity continued to operate the infirmary in North Brunswick Street until 1929.

⁵ Provided to the Commission by the Daughters of Charity; it appears that a similar document was compiled in all houses of the Daughters of Charity.

⁶ One woman who entered Pelletstown school in 1912 when she was 10 years old remained in Pelletstown until 1980. She was a 'legitimate' child and there is no evidence that she was a mother.

al⁷ when describing the establishment of various mother and baby homes, state ‘The Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul opened a similar institution on the Navan Road, in Dublin, in 1918...’. The authors state that one of the three special homes provided by the poor law authorities was at Pelletstown in Co Dublin. The special homes were financed by the local authorities but were run by religious orders. Pelletstown is described as having been run by the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul. Pelletstown and St Patrick’s, Navan Road are, in fact, the same institution. This is repeated by Gwynn Morgan in the Ryan Report⁸ and by O’Sullivan and O’Donnell⁹ who use the term ‘Extern Homes’ to describe those which were established by the local authorities. (The others so described are Tuam and Kilrush; none of these was an extern home; institutions such as Bessborough, Castlepollard, Sean Ross and Dunboyne were extern homes).

- 13.8 The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul were (and sometimes still are) also known as the Sisters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul but are now generally described simply as the Daughters of Charity. They were founded in France by St Vincent de Paul and St Louise. They were involved in a number of workhouses (including the North Dublin Union workhouse) and industrial schools in Ireland from the 19th century. They are now mainly involved in providing disability services; for example, they run the St Vincent’s Centre on the Navan Road and the disability services which are provided in St Anne’s, Sean Ross (the Sean Ross mother and baby home was run by the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary - see Chapter 19). They also provide child and family support services and they have a number of primary, secondary and special needs schools.
- 13.9 In the past, they were distinguishable by the large starched cornette which they wore on their heads. They were described as the ‘big bonnets’ in letters between leaders of the 1916 rebellion.¹⁰
- 13.10 The role of Pelletstown was changed in May 1919. From 1919, Pelletstown was expected to cater for all mothers and infants; motherless children; all healthy children under age 5; and all sick children such as the medical officers considered

⁷ Kilcommins, O’Donnell, O’Sullivan and Vaughan *Crime, Punishment and the Search for Order in Ireland*, (Dublin 2004).

⁸ David Gwynn Morgan, *Society and the Schools* in Ryan Report Volume 4, (Dublin, 2009)

<http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL4-09.PDF>

⁹ O’Sullivan and O’Donnell (eds) *Coercive Confinement in Ireland*, (Manchester, 2012)

¹⁰ Prunty and Sullivan (eds) *The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland*, (Dublin, 2014)

would be suitably treated there.¹¹ It was at this point that it began to become a home for mothers and children (but not necessarily confined to unmarried mothers). The care of senior children was transferred to Cabra Auxiliary¹² (which was part of the North Dublin Union and was also run by the Daughters of Charity).

- 13.11 Pelletstown was not exclusively a mother and baby home. In later years, while it was mainly a mother and baby home, it continued to house very sick children (including those for whom nothing further could be done in the children's acute hospitals), abandoned children and children who were considered not suitable for adoption. Sometimes it housed children who were awaiting a place in an industrial school.

Sources

Dublin Union/Pelletstown institutional records

- 13.12 The originals of the Pelletstown records are held by the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) and were made available electronically to the Commission. The Daughters of Charity retained paper copies of some of these records and made them available to the Commission. The records are organised into five categories: mothers' admission cards; children's admission cards; mothers' medical charts and related ante-natal and puerperal documents (some include letters of introduction from local doctors, laboratory results, correspondence with maternity hospitals, ultrasounds, consents to operations, correspondence with psychiatric hospitals, especially from the 1960s onward); children's medical charts (for the early period these are cards often attached to the admission cards; some include laboratory results, detailed medical reports for the duration of the child's stay, which may span years, IQ testing reports, reports from and correspondence with maternity hospital and/or children's hospitals, psychological and developmental assessments from the Child Study Centre, correspondence with An Bord Uchtála, correspondence with solicitors); and miscellaneous files, usually social reports, but which may also contain correspondence with the mother, birth certificates, baptism certificates, occasionally tracing files, correspondence with various hospitals,

¹¹ Correspondence between the Daughters of Charity and Dublin Union.

¹² Cabra Auxiliary had housed the North Dublin Union workhouse school. It remained an integral part of the Dublin Union until 1925. In 1925 it was decided to end its workhouse school role and board out the children who were there. However, this did not prove entirely possible because of the number of children with intellectual disabilities who were living there. In 1925, it became a school for children with intellectual disabilities and was renamed St Vincent's by the Daughters of Charity. While it was no longer an integral part of the Dublin Union, it continued to be inspected and, to some extent, supervised by the Board of Guardians and its successors in title.

correspondence between paediatricians in Pelletstown and institutions where they were hoping to place the children from Pelletstown, scrapbooks, photographs, mothers' consent to adoption forms etc.

Records of the local health authorities

- 13.13 The records of the Dublin Union and the Dublin Board of Guardians/Assistance are held in the National Archives of Ireland and were examined and analysed there by the Commission's researchers. The Commission has been unable to find any relevant Dublin Health Authority (1960-1970) records. It is clear from other sources that the Dublin Health Authority did carry out regular inspections of Pelletstown but it seems that the records have been destroyed or are lost. The minutes of the meetings of the Eastern Health Board (EHB) are available online.¹³ The EHB had visiting committees which visited and reported on the various hospitals and institutions in its area, including Pelletstown. In the early 1970s, the reports of the visiting committees are included in the minutes but, from about 1975, the existence of the reports is noted but the report is not reproduced. Sometimes there is a discussion about the contents of the report. The discovery provided by the Daughters of Charity included some of the visiting committee reports. Apart from these, the Commission has not been able to locate the visiting committee reports that were not included in the EHB minutes.

Department of Health

- 13.14 The Department of Health provided a number of files to the Commission. The main files used for this chapter are:

NATARCH/ARC/0/525678

NATARCH/ARC/0/404289

NATARCH/ARC/0/403856

INACT/INA/0/467784

INACT/INA/0/467782

INACT/INA/0/469756

INACT/INA/0/467780

INACT/INA/0/426512

INACT/INA/0/435467

CCP/IMP/0/45958

NAI HLTH/A8/61

¹³ www.lenus.ie

NAI HLTH/SA8/115

NAI HLTH/L50/38

Documents provided by the Daughters of Charity:

- 13.15 The Daughters of Charity provided the Commission with a wide range of documents. The provincial of the order told the Commission that, after Pelletstown was closed in 1985, a Sister and two administrative assistants began copying and typing the information contained in the various registers in order to assist with the large number of tracing inquiries which they were receiving at the time. When Eglinton Road closed, all the original documents were given to the Eastern Health Board (who were the owners). The Daughters of Charity retained copies but did not retain any of the originals; these copies were provided to the Commission. The Daughters of Charity also provided the Commission with a range of documents including personnel files on the Sisters who worked in Pelletstown; documents relating to administration; and documents dealing with vaccine trials which had originally been prepared for the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Commission). Documentation about transfers of children to other institutions, particularly St Philomena's, was also provided. The Commission recognises that the Daughters of Charity adopted a thorough and systematic approach to the provision of documents.

Published information on the Daughters of Charity

- 13.16 The following publications provide background information on the Daughters of Charity:

O'Brien, *Leaving God for God: The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in Britain 1847–2017*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 2017

Prunty and Sullivan (eds) *The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in Ireland: The Early Years*, Columba Press, Dublin 2014. The involvement of the Daughters of Charity in Pelletstown is only mentioned in passing in this book but it does outline their involvement in workhouses.

Published material and unpublished but publicly available material

- 13.17 This material is referenced in the text.

Governance

- 13.18 Pelletstown was a public health authority owned and financed institution. The religious and lay staff who worked in it were public employees. The only difference between the Sisters and other public employees was that the Sisters did not have to go through a public selection process; they were appointed to Pelletstown by their order and the appointments were then approved by the relevant minister: the Minister for Local Government and Public Health until 1947 and the Minister for Health after that.
- 13.19 The local health authority, that is, the Dublin Board of Guardians and its successors in title, (the Dublin Board of Assistance, the Dublin Health Authority and the Eastern Health Board) was effectively the governing body of the institution. It made the major decisions on spending subject to the approval of the relevant minister. Initially, it seems to have made many of the day to day decisions as well but the Daughters of Charity were very much involved in those decisions and it seems that the Daughters of Charity gradually came to have considerable control over the day to day decisions.
- 13.20 The Department of Local Government and Public Health (DLGPH) and its successor the Department of Health had little day to day involvement and at times seemed to have been quite badly informed about what was being provided in Pelletstown. They did have a significant involvement in decisions about finance and staffing.
- 13.21 The local health authority did not generally distinguish the cost of running Pelletstown from all its other expenditure. As a result, very little is known about its finances but such information as is available is included below.

How unmarried mothers entered the Dublin Union / Pelletstown

- 13.22 The Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor (which was established in 1925 and reported in 1927) heard evidence from a number of witnesses about the system by which unmarried women approached the Dublin Union for assistance. The then chairman of the Dublin Union described how unmarried women simply presented themselves at the Dublin Union institution (in James's Street) for admission. The standard procedure was for the male porter to meet them at the door. The woman was then brought to the admission ward where a male admission officer interviewed her, asking her a series of questions which appeared on an admission form. This was to allow the officer to get as much details about her circumstances as possible.¹⁴ Usually the unmarried woman was pregnant when she sought admission and was looking to be given shelter both during and after her pregnancy. During this evidence, the chairman of the commission drew attention to concerns that had been raised 'that the cross examination of that poor girl by the man when she goes to be admitted has been so minute that it rather shocks her or at any rate, gives her a great deal of mental trouble'. The Dublin Union chairman defended the procedure, saying the form contained a series of regulation questions 'and I do not see anything that is terribly shocking in them'. He further added that it was essential for the Union to get as much detail as possible as it was 'necessary for our administration'. (This procedure no longer applied when pregnant unmarried women started to be admitted directly to Pelletstown - see below).
- 13.23 The information gathered by the admission officer was then used to fill in details about each new admission in the Indoor Relief (Admission) Register of the Dublin Union. These registers are now kept in the National Archives of Ireland (NAI). Of relevance to the remit of this report are the 30 volumes, designated BG79/G/158 - BG79/G/186, which cover all admissions into the Dublin Union from November 1921 until August 1938. Each volume covers a six-month period and contains, on average, about 5,000 individual entries.
- 13.24 The registers record the admission date of every new resident ('inmate' is the word used for all residents of the Union). Each was assigned a unique register number.

¹⁴ Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, Minutes of Evidence, Fifth Day, Tuesday, 23 June 1925. These minutes are held in the Oireachtas library.

In addition, the names, ages, marital status, address prior to admission, occupation (if any), religion, disability (if any) and the date of subsequent discharge are all recorded in the registers. There is also a column marked 'observations'. In the case of unmarried women entering the Union, they were marked as 'unmarried' under the marital status column. If they were pregnant on admission, this was also clearly marked. Once the child was born, a new admission record for the child was created in the register and the child's date of birth was used as the admission date in the register. The register number and/or name of the mother was entered alongside the child's details to identify them as the child of a resident with an existing record in the register. The child was also clearly recorded as 'illegitimate'. If an unmarried mother came to the Union with a child, the child's details were recorded directly below that of the mother's in the register and the child's register number was usually the next sequential figure to that of the mother. Again, the child was clearly marked as 'illegitimate' in the register. Children found abandoned or deserted who were admitted into the Dublin Union were identified as such in the records. The register also records where those children were found and by whom, if that information was available.

13.25 Following her interview with the admission officer, the unmarried woman was given a medical examination. If she was pregnant, she was placed in 'the body of the house', that is, she was housed within the Dublin Union itself (in James's Street). When the time came for her to give birth, she was taken to the maternity wing of the hospital within the Dublin Union. Following the birth, the mother and child were moved to Pelletstown. The timing of the move was dependent on the Dublin Union's doctor certifying the mother and child as fit for removal. Unmarried mothers who entered the Union with their children were always sent directly to Pelletstown after an interview with the admission officer and a medical examination. Likewise, abandoned or deserted children were sent to Pelletstown once they were recorded in the admission register.

13.26 Concern was raised by members of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor about this system. One member pointed out how objectionable it was to place an unmarried pregnant woman among all the other residents of the Union, 'where her condition is known, where it is known to everybody what she comes there for, and where, probably, the class she would most likely to associate with are not the most desirable class'. He went on to express the opinion that

association with other 'inmates' could further undermine the woman's morality. In the commission's final report it identified the procedure of retaining pregnant unmarried women within the Dublin Union institution until they had given birth as a defect of the Dublin Union's system. It recommended instead that Pelletstown should have on its premises a 'probationary and maternity department' which would allow pregnant unmarried women to be sent there immediately on their admission to the Union. In this way pregnant unmarried women would only associate with themselves and would be kept apart from the general population contained within the Dublin Union institution.¹⁵

- 13.27 Prior to 1938, no records were kept in Pelletstown of the women residing there. The standard practice when transferring women and children from the Dublin Union to Pelletstown was to regard them as 'on pass', by putting their names on the pass book and sending out the relevant admission and discharge docket. These dockets contained only the name, age and religion of the person concerned and were of no assistance when further information on these residents was required.
- 13.28 From 1935 onwards, the system was changed to follow more closely the recommendations of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor's report. In June 1935, a maternity hospital was opened in Pelletstown to allow unmarried pregnant women to give birth there. A new system of recording the details of women and children in Pelletstown was introduced in 1938 - see below.

The 1920s

- 13.29 Information about Pelletstown in the 1920s was garnered mainly from the minutes of the Board of Guardians, the evidence given to the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, the report of that commission, the annual Reports of the Department of Local Government and Public Health (DLGPH) and documents provided by the Daughters of Charity.
- 13.30 The Dublin Union Board of Guardians met approximately once a fortnight. The minutes of these meetings show that issues in relation to unmarried mothers, deserted and abandoned children and Pelletstown facilities were frequently on the

¹⁵ *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, Including the Insane Poor:*
<https://www.lenus.ie/handle/10147/238535>

agenda in the 1920s. The minutes of the meetings also include details of inspections of boarded out children.

13.31 The Board of Guardians had 72 elected members. In practice, about 25 members regularly attended the meetings and they carried out most of the work. Initially, the board had a ladies committee drawn from the elected female members. In 1923, the Minister for Local Government and Public Health asked his inspector to conduct an inquiry into the workings and duties of the Board of Guardians. This resulted in the minister concluding that ‘the duties of the Guardians of Dublin Union are not being duly and effectively discharged’. The Board of Guardians was dissolved and its powers and duties were transferred to commissioners. Among other things, this meant that there was no longer a ladies committee. The commissioners usually met weekly and heard reports from the inspectors appointed under the Children Act (see Chapter 1).

13.32 The report of the departmental inspector who had conducted the inquiry had also commented on the issue of child welfare. It stated:

The neglect in dealing with this important aspect of Poor Law just prior to the present administration was, to say the least, painful. To the credit of the Committee dealing with this Branch I am glad to say that serious efforts have been made to grapple with this situation. What has been done, however, serves but to demonstrate what a big task is presented and how very much remains to be done. The evidence shows that an actual system of Baby Farming has been indulged in and this applies principally to the child that is adopted for an immediate monetary consideration. The house where 6 babies died in two weeks is painfully illustrative of this. The unregistered Nursing Home is an equally grave danger and the practice of boarding children by Voluntary Societies in unhealthy and dirty areas should be immediately discontinued. I would suggest that the Voluntary Societies dealing with child welfare, together with those responsible for the management and control of the Union should hold a Conference to see how best the interests of the child may be protected from all the evil influences with which it is already threatened. There would appear to be serious need of legislation under which Nursing Homes, private or otherwise, would be compelled to register before accepting the care of any child. This is an essential step and severe penalties should attach to non-compliance

therewith. Children are, in some cases, merely got “rid” of, and the methods used are devised to evade criminal prosecution. This is first perpetrated by the mother in giving the child to unsuitable foster parents and secondly by the person who receives a lump sum for its supposed care and maintenance. It is a reflection on the whole administration and calls for immediate and decisive remedies.

- 13.33 While it existed (until 1923), the ladies committee was very involved in activities which included the inspection of Pelletstown and Cabra. It also was involved in decisions about the boarding out of children, including the approval and withdrawal of approval of foster parents, and it made recommendations about the prosecution of people who had children at nurse without being registered. The ladies committee reports for each Board of Guardians meeting usually included details of the children who had been discharged, those who had been boarded out, how many had been inspected, who should cease to be acceptable for taking boarded out children and who should be prosecuted for failure to register as having children at nurse. When the ladies committee ceased to exist, reports on Pelletstown and Cabra were provided by the resident medical officer/superintendent. The minute books show that he submitted a weekly report on the Dublin Union and it often included observations on the general health of residents in Cabra and Pelletstown and any issues with these two institutions.
- 13.34 The Board of Guardians¹⁶ discussed Pelletstown facilities and requirements in some detail right throughout the 1920s. As a result, the minutes of the meetings provide some information about the residents in Pelletstown and the conditions there at that time. The discussions covered a very wide range of issues including practical maintenance matters and significant policy issues.
- 13.35 The Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor met from 1925 and reported in 1927. Its meetings and final report also provide information about conditions in Pelletstown. The reports of the Department of Local Government and Public Health (DLGPH) provide some information about occupancy levels and death rates.

¹⁶ The term the ‘Board of Guardians’ is used to cover the entire period of the 1920s including when its role was carried out by the Commissioners.

- 13.36 On 15 June 1921, the Board of Guardians discussed buying washing tubs for Pelletstown: the finance committee recommended acceptance of an estimate for 22-inch tubs costing 9s 6d each. At the same meeting they agreed a reorganisation of facilities at the Dublin Union, James's St to include provision for a nursery and crèche for mothers and children pending their being sent to Pelletstown.
- 13.37 The minutes of the Board of Guardians include information about deserted and abandoned children who were brought to the Union. They were usually baptised and given a name by the priest.¹⁷ In the early 1920s, there were significant numbers of abandoned/deserted children, for example, the minutes record that six abandoned children were taken into the Dublin Union in the period June-September 1921 and, in 1922, 17 were taken in. People who found abandoned children and brought them to the Union were paid for their time if they asked; the payment in the early 1920s was 10s.
- 13.38 The clerk of works report on the consumption of gas at Cabra and Pelletstown was discussed at the 8 February 1922 meeting of the Board of Guardians. The clerk noted that the consumption of gas at Cabra was 35,000 cubic feet per week, and 25,000 at Pelletstown. He wanted to reduce the consumption and improve the lighting by adopting more modern fittings. 'If the Board desire, the Gas Company would fit up, free of charge, a few types of these modern economical fittings for demonstration purposes'. It is not known if this happened.
- 13.39 On 22 February 1922, the board was told that two women and five children were sent to Pelletstown that week.
- 13.40 A Pelletstown resident asked that she be allowed stay with her two children for a few months. The ladies committee recommended that the board write to the Sister in charge in Pelletstown to ask her to get 'a signed statement from this woman giving particulars of her place of birth, and that of the children, and her reasons for being here, and any other information she can supply, and any means that she has'.

¹⁷ Sometimes the surnames they were given related to the street in which they were found, for example, O'Connell; a child found on the North Circular Road was given the surname North. This occasionally resulted in very unusual names and some concern was expressed by members of the board that the allocated names were not sufficiently Irish.

- 13.41 On 1 March 1922, the board discussed a case of a mother and her twin children who had been sent to the Dublin Union from London and then moved to Pelletstown. The grandmother then took the children out of Pelletstown and had them placed at nurse (see Chapter 1). The ladies committee reported that the children were in a very neglected condition; their poor condition seemed to have been attributable to the arrangements at nurse. The board ordered a report on why the children were discharged and why the mother was still in Pelletstown.
- 13.42 On 15 March, the ladies committee reported that the matron had submitted samples of infants' clothing including shirt, binder, heavy flannel petticoat, dress, pinafore and head shawl which the committee considered very comfortable and satisfactory.
- 13.43 On 22 March 1922, a member of the ladies committee suggested that children were being sent out from Pelletstown 'almost naked'. The medical officer disputed this and said that children were very rarely discharged from Pelletstown but rather were discharged from James's Street. The only child who had been discharged directly from Pelletstown had been supplied with an outfit by order of the Board of Guardians and obtained by the same member of the ladies committee. This was discussed again at the 5 April 1922 meeting of the Board of Guardians where it was decided to issue a rebuttal to the papers in which the original report appeared.
- 13.44 The ladies committee visited Pelletstown and Cabra on 24 March 1922. They found the children 'particularly bright and clean, general health satisfactory'. They noted that the babies' skins were clean and healthy and there were no cases of measles. They also noted that the boots of the young children were worn very soft and some had no boots; they recommended that the board would provide the necessary boots. Two dozen cots were required and the Sister in charge had asked that the new wire mattresses be supplied as soon as possible. The Sisters had complained that the quality of buttons supplied for the children's clothing was of very inferior quality as they caused the clothes to rust.
- 13.45 On 12 April, the ladies committee recommended the 'adoption'¹⁸ by the board of a child resident in Pelletstown. The child's mother was in the Magdalen Asylum,

¹⁸ There was no legal adoption at the time but the word was used when a person or, in this case, a public body, accepted responsibility for a child – see Chapter 32.

Lower Gloucester St.¹⁹ The ladies committee reported: 'She has been leading an improper life and is an undesirable custodian'.

- 13.46 On 26 April, the Board of Guardians discussed what happened when a deserted child died in Pelletstown. It was noted that it had been the practice for years to report the deaths of deserted children to the coroner who could decide to hold an inquest. The Pelletstown medical officer complained that he had had to attend a post-mortem examination and give evidence, without being paid a fee, about the death of a deserted child. The bodies of children who died in Pelletstown were taken to the mortuary in James's Street as there was no mortuary in Pelletstown or Cabra. The master (of the Dublin Union) had now been told that he could not remove the bodies to James's St, without the coroner's permission. He noted that the greater number of deserted children lived only for weeks or months after admission. There was another child now dead at Pelletstown; the coroner had accepted the medical officer's certificate as to the cause of death (acute gastritis) and allowed the removal of the body. As there was no mortuary in Pelletstown, the medical officer asked the board to consider providing one or having abandoned children looked after elsewhere, boarded out or provided for in James's Street.
- 13.47 On 3 May 1922, the board was told that there were 64 cases of measles in Cabra.
- 13.48 Members of the ladies committee visited Pelletstown on 8 June 1922 to consider the issue of having a mortuary built there. They reported to the Board of Guardians meeting of 14 June 1922. They identified a building which was being used by a carpenter as a suitable location. The committee recommended the work should be begun at once as the facility was urgently required. The estimated cost to complete the modifications was £47, which was approved by the committee.
- 13.49 On 19 July 1922, the request from the superior at Cabra and Pelletstown for 'extras' on the feast of St Vincent de Paul, 19 July, was granted as had been done in former years. The master had had to transfer ten children suffering from measles from Pelletstown to Cork Street fever hospital.²⁰

¹⁹ This was a Magdalen Laundry; Gloucester Street was subsequently renamed Sean McDermott Street.

²⁰ The House of Recovery and Fever Hospital, Cork Street was a voluntary hospital: <https://rcpi-live-cdn.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Cork-Street-Fever-Hospital-and-Cherry-Orchard-Hospital.pdf>.

- 13.50 On 26 July 1922, the steward at Pelletstown reported on the production of hay: the three-acre field there had produced 20 tons of hay, the bulk of which had been stored there in the hay shed. He anticipated a good second crop of six tons in about a month from the same field.²¹
- 13.51 On 2 August 1922, the clerk of works wrote to the board about the heating of the Pelletstown buildings. He proposed having a separate heating system to heat the western block of the building which housed the mothers and babies. It would be a low pressure hot water system which was safe and reliable and could be looked after by unskilled labour. The heating system and radiators would give a temperature of 12°C in the rooms when the outside temperature was 0°C. The estimated cost for this work for the western block was £1,310.
- 13.52 On 17 August 1922, it was agreed that the clerk would write to the Archbishop of Dublin about the names given to children found deserted when they were being baptised by Catholic clergy. The board also considered whether it was worth pursuing putative fathers.
- 13.53 The ladies committee visited Cabra and Pelletstown on 20 October 1922. They reported that the children's boots in Cabra were very much broken with holes in the soles and generally in very bad repair. In Pelletstown, the committee recommended that a woman be removed as she required 'watching'. She had tried to get away several times and was not capable of minding her child. It was decided to remove her to the workhouse (James's Street) and leave the child behind in Pelletstown.
- 13.54 The ladies committee again drew the attention of the board to a number of women at Pelletstown, whose children were over a year old. They had recommended several times that these women be 'returned to the House', that is, to the Union workhouse in James's Street.
- 13.55 On 15 November 1922, it was reported that a 'girl' in Pelletstown had been very 'abusive and impertinent'. She had been reported before for her insubordination

²¹ There was an active farm at Pelletstown which seems to have provided milk for the institution but the Commission has very little information about it.

and the ladies committee approved of the master's action in having her charged for this offence and were of the opinion that all similar cases should also be charged.²²

- 13.56 The ladies committee visited Cabra on 17 November 1922 and found the children very well. However, they again highlighted the poor state of the children's boots and requested more stock be given as the children cannot have the boots repaired if they do not have a spare pair to wear. 'The Ladies Committee are of the opinion that a strong effort should be made to have some of the children at Cabra boarded out'.
- 13.57 On 6 December 1922, the ladies committee complained about the quality of the material sent to Pelletstown to make up the black dresses for 'girls' going out.²³ The board saw a list of 'girls and boys' from Cabra who were classified as workers but who are 'incapable of being sent out to situation being wanting in intellect or deformed'; they were all aged between 18 and 26. The ladies committee had asked for the list as they wished to know why they were left in Cabra after the age of 15; the committee was satisfied that the reasons given were sufficient explanation for keeping them there.

Attitude of the Dublin Board of Guardians

- 13.58 The guardians (three females and one male) met the Ministry of Local Government on 2 January 1923 to discuss the proposed scheme to federate the existing rescue societies in Dublin. The guardians' statement says they had no details of the proposal so were unable to comment. They set out their views on the 'best method of dealing with the very serious problem of the unmarried mother and her child - as a result of our experience in the Dublin Union'. The following are extracts from their statement:

In any scheme dealing with this question the first consideration should be the welfare, physical and moral, of the mother and of the child. Many of these girls are ignorant and uneducated, some are weakminded, and few of them are up to the normal standard of girls of their class.

They need training and education before confinement; the best way to provide this is in an institution run by nuns; they would get training and be less liable to further lapse; it would also benefit the health of the mother and the child.

²² It is not entirely clear if this is a reference to internal disciplinary procedures or to a criminal charge but it seems likely to have been a criminal charge.

²³ It is not clear if this refers to the mothers or the babies but seems more likely to have been the mothers.

After the birth, the child should be with the mother for at least nine months in order to enable breastfeeding: to remove the child a short time after its birth is positively wicked and could not be too strongly condemned; the girl could get further training and could be involved in the work of the institution; after the nine months, the girl would be in a position to go out and be self-supporting: she will have developed her maternal affection for the child and will not wish to lose sight of it. In the Dublin Union many of these girls contribute to the support of their children and look forward to a time when they will be able to provide a home for them...; the children could be transferred to an orphanage or foundling home and as soon as possible should be boarded out in suitable homes in the country. Many of the children are weakly or suffer from physical defects or are perhaps not up to the normal standard. Institutional treatment for children in large numbers is not desirable.

- 13.59 The statement reported that in Pelletstown, 472 girls had been admitted since it opened for this purpose in February 1920; 132 had been sent to situations and not one had returned as a 'second offender'; 120 were still there, some were taken out by the rescue societies, the rest had gone home to their friends. It further stated that the practice of the rescue societies was to place girls in lodgings in the city; 'this is undesirable as they are placed in squalid slum tenements'. The situation was even worse for the children: 'Few people realise the extent to which this practice of putting infants out "to nurse" obtains in the city of Dublin'. The guardians had four inspectors whose duties were to visit the children at nurse, inspect them and report on them. There were 1,128 children on the nurse children register on 27 December 1922. In the nine months ending 30 September, the inspectors paid 7,379 visits. Some of the rescue societies had visitors who visited the children in the homes but some did not and they met the foster mothers in offices. The guardians said that their standards were not high because of the difficulty of finding homes and suitable foster mothers but the societies had placed children in homes that the guardians had condemned as being unsuitable. The statement also referred to the practice of 'adoption' for a lump sum of money, which was described as a 'wholly vicious system'. 'No doubt there are some genuine cases of adoption but the vast majority are cases where the foster mother takes the child for the sake of the money involved...' 'Many of these children come to the Dublin Union ill or dying...'

- 13.60 In January 1923, there was a fire in the infants' schoolroom in Cabra. It was noticed by the night-watchman at 3am. The Sister in charge told the board that the press where the fire started contained loose matches and candles and she reckoned that the fire was started by rats gnawing at the articles. The estimated cost to claim on insurance was £76 10s.
- 13.61 The ladies committee considered applications for overcoats for children who had been boarded out but were no longer on the books; the committee did not grant the applications.
- 13.62 Two members visited Pelletstown to investigate the complaints made by a mother about the condition in which she found her two children when she had visited them the previous week. They saw the two children and found them both clean and healthy and well-cared for, and their heads free from vermin.
- 13.63 The ladies committee visited Cabra and Pelletstown on 19 January 1923. They noted that there were several cases of 'crippled boys' in Cabra for whom something could be done. One was a partially paralysed boy who was said to be an 'imbecile'; however, the committee did not consider him so as he could read and write well. He has been in Cabra for many years, 'and it is a pitiable sight to see a boy for whom something might be done to improve his condition had he been taken in hands some years ago'.
- 13.64 They also visited the schoolroom where the recent fire had broken out. They noted that the school was infested with rats and it was absolutely necessary that some means should be taken to get rid of them as they were evidently the cause of the fire.
- 13.65 The ladies committee visited Cabra and Pelletstown on 16 February 1923. As a result, a resident was charged before police magistrates for refusing to work as ordered by the matron and for using obscene language. She was sentenced to seven days in prison.
- 13.66 In February 1923, an orphaned child in Pelletstown was being handed to the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland (CPRSI) in order to have him 'adopted'. His mother had died in the Union and the Union had claimed the £106

in savings which she had. It was proposed to give £50 to the CPRSI to arrange the child's 'adoption'. In March 1923, the Minister for Local Government and Public Health refused to approve this payment.

- 13.67 In March, the ladies committee considered a request from the medical officer for a grant to the children's infirmary for toys for Easter. The committee declined as the children were supplied with toys by outside societies at Christmas and it was not customary to supply toys at Easter.
- 13.68 The ladies committee visited Pelletstown and Cabra on 16 March 1923. Their report stated that: 'small sizes sent out are useless...' The committee ordered the useless boots to be returned to the stores and replacement boots bought. They also complained of the delay in delivering other supplies which they had ordered from the Union stores. On their previous visit, they had ordered that a number of children be sent to the Eye and Ear Hospital to have their eyes examined. Of the nine who attended the hospital, eight were found to be suffering from trachoma²⁴ and there was doubt about the ninth child. Treatment was prescribed and the children were to attend the hospital every week. 'They are being kept separate from the other children as far as possible, but it is not possible to have absolute isolation'.
- 13.69 The committee consulted the medical officer about several 'crippled' children living in Cabra.²⁵ Most were incurable invalids and nothing could be done to improve their physical condition. The committee recognised that a school like Cabra, which made provision for healthy children only, was not a suitable place for them. There had been a fire in the school a few months earlier. Repairs had not been carried out and the children were without heating for all of the winter.
- 13.70 The ladies committee visited Cabra and Pelletstown on 20 April 1923. They interviewed ten boys aged around eight years whose names had been sent to the committee as suitable for boarding out. They also recommend that all young children in Cabra be supplied with sandals instead of boots for the summer; it was

²⁴ Trachoma is defined by the World Health Organisation as "a disease of the eye caused by infection with the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*". It may cause blindness if untreated. <http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/trachoma>

²⁵ Such children were sometimes sent to what was then called the 'Cripples Home', Coole, Co Westmeath; this later became St Joseph's Orthopaedic Hospital for Children. Initially it catered for boys with physical disabilities and was one of the very few such institutions in existence in the 1920s. It was extended in the 1930s using Hospitals Sweepstake funds and was then available to both boys and girls. It closed in 1981. It was run by the Daughters of Charity.

decided that the master would get estimates for this. They reported that extensive infestation of rats was causing problems.

- 13.71 In May 1923, the mother of an 'adopted' child, aged 3 years and 9 months, died. The child was admitted to the Union; it was agreed that, when the father got employment, he should pay the usual maintenance for the child.
- 13.72 In June 1923, a boarded out child was charged with larceny and was sent to the Union by the District Court. The committee had sent her to the children's infirmary pending her re-appearance in the court and it recommend that the court be asked to commit her to High Park Convent, Drumcondra (an industrial school).
- 13.73 The inspector of schools inspected Cabra in June 1923. He was highly complimentary of the standards in the school; the equipment was up to date and '...the general surroundings; the cleanliness, manner and demeanour of the pupils cannot be excelled'. He spoke to the boys and noted that they had pride in the school and looked on the Sisters with great affection. He made some suggestions for classroom improvements and remarked: 'I cannot conclude without mentioning that the general work done by the good Sisters is beyond all praise. I have never seen better mannered or happier children'.²⁶
- 13.74 In July 1923, the governor of Mountjoy prison wrote to the Union to say that a prisoner who had been sentenced to six months imprisonment for neglecting and abandoning her infant child wanted to go to Pelletstown if released. The board recommended that the woman and child be admitted to Pelletstown.
- 13.75 The ladies committee continued to express concern about 'adoption' for lump sum. In August 1923, three such children died a short time after the 'adoption'. The lump sum involved was £10 in two cases and £16 in the third.²⁷ While it was not considered that these children had been neglected as they were delicate from birth, the committee considered that such 'adoptions' should be outlawed. They also noted that the law about registration was being evaded by having money provided as a present or for clothes.

²⁶ The inspector of schools was concerned only with education facilities and not with residential standards.

²⁷ Children were also nursed out for a weekly or monthly fee rather than a lump sum; in these cases, it seems that the mothers visited the children; the Board of Guardians minutes include the information that one mother was paying £1 4s a month.

- 13.76 On their visit to Cabra and Pelletstown, the ladies committee recorded that the children were on holiday.²⁸
- 13.77 In October 1923, a child crawled through the window of one of the upper rooms in Pelletstown and fell to the ground. The window had been six inches open. The Sister in charge was unable to find a doctor so she phoned the master and he hired a taxi to bring the child to a doctor. Unfortunately, the child was dead on arrival. An inquest was held. The jury found that the cause of death was purely accidental and there was no blame attached to the officers of the institution. Meantime the clerk of works was seeing to have the windows fixed to open only four inches.
- 13.78 The ladies committee visited Cabra and Pelletstown on 19 October. At Cabra, they interviewed the nine children who had no visitors and considered that they were all suitable for boarding out. They inspected the boys' paved playground which was in a very bad condition owing to the heavy coal lorries going in and out. They said that there was a great need for a ball alley and it should be put up immediately. The clerk of works was ordered to report on the cost of building one and to have repairs to the playground carried out at once. One hundred and forty seven pairs of boots had been received in October.
- 13.79 The medical officer reported that he had examined 11 children at Cabra and considered that only three were suitable for being boarded out owing to their health. The ladies committee had frequently considered the advisability of having a thorough medical examination of the children at Cabra, at stated intervals, but realised that under the present arrangements it would be impossible to have it carried out. They asked to meet the medical officer to discuss this.
- 13.80 The inspectors of boarded out children were directed to recommend the use of Glaxo milk formula for boarded out children whenever possible and to instruct foster mothers on its preparation. They were to supply the foster mothers with one pound packets of the product at 1s 6d a packet. 'In this way a check can be kept on the amount of nourishment given an infant. A special monthly report on the results was to be submitted. Later, the inspectors of boarded out children reported that the children who were being fed on Glaxo were doing very well.

²⁸ The minutes do not record where they went on holiday but describes it as their 'annual excursion'.

- 13.81 In February 1924, the Minister for Local Government and Public Health approved the appointment of a superintendent of Pelletstown on an annual salary of £90. The superintendent of Cabra Auxiliary was paid the same. In March a temporary superintendent was appointed to Pelletstown at a salary of £76. A temporary midwife (a lay person) was paid 45s a week for night duty in Pelletstown.²⁹
- 13.82 There was a severe outbreak of measles in Pelletstown in 1924. In April and May, the Board of Guardians received weekly reports on the number of deaths from measles and, in many cases, complications such as pneumonia. In one week in April, 19 children died. In May 1924, the doctor reported that the measles epidemic was dying out. The doctor's report to the Board of Guardians stated that the outbreak started on 27 March 1924. The Sister in charge reported that the total number of cases since the outbreak was 138; 23 children with mothers and 38 without mothers died. There were no new admissions during the period of the outbreak. The doctor's report said that the high mortality rate was due to three factors:
- The children had very little resistance to any acute illness;
 - The virulence of the outbreak was very great;
 - Many of the children are already affected with congenital diseases which become painfully evident when they are attacked by the fever.
- 13.83 The outbreak was apparently caused by a child coming to the institution whose brother already had measles and who developed signs of the disease soon after. Attempts were made at once to prevent the spread of the disease, for example, by isolation. This was, as usual, of no avail as measles is infectious for days before it manifests itself. 'Every possible care and attention were given to the children by the staff and extra nurses were immediately employed'. Fifteen deaths were due to borne pneumonia and 30 deaths occurred in children suffering from congenital diseases mainly tubercular both abdominal and pulmonary. Three of these children developed meningitis. Five deaths were due to Cancrum Oris. One child suffering from congenital paralysis of both legs died about a fortnight after being attacked 'from broncho pneumonia'. The youngest child attacked was ten months and the eldest was aged two years and seven months. 'I would suggest that all children should be kept for a fortnight under observation before they are sent out of the institution. I would also like to have the question of an open air veranda gone

²⁹ Minister for Local Government and Public Health, Sanction books, 1924.

into fully with the object of trying to raise the resistance of these children to disease’.

- 13.84 The Commission has not been able to find any detailed information about the diet in Pelletstown in the 1920s. In July 1924, there was correspondence between the Dublin Union and the minister about this - the minister stated that he had no objection to the Dublin Union proposals; unfortunately this letter does not say what the proposals were or what diet the children had or would have when the proposals were implemented. In October 1924, the minister agreed proposed expenditure on supplies of apples and bracks for the children at Halloween.
- 13.85 A report from the Dublin Union in July 1924 found that for the period from 1 April 1923 to 31 March 1924, infant deaths were far higher among children in Pelletstown who did not have their mother present to look after them. It found that out of 216 children admitted, 151 were accompanied by their mothers who nursed them, while the remaining 67 were admitted without any mother to nurse them. Thirty-two of the 151 children nursed by their mothers died in that period while 49 children (including 14 deserted children) died among the 67 that were not nursed.
- 13.86 In June 1924, the Sister in charge of the Cabra Auxiliary reported that a woman secretly removed one of her two children after a visit to them. The child was dressed in the workhouse uniform. The two children were ‘illegitimate’ and had been there since 1916. The master was instructed to report the condition under which visits were allowed and what supervision was exercised over the children during visiting hours.
- 13.87 The visiting days in Cabra were the first Sunday of every month between 2 and 5 pm. The Sister in charge of visitors was always present. Because of the ‘unusual circumstances’, the Board of Guardians had allowed this particular mother to visit outside of the usual hours. On the visit in question she had been accidentally left alone with the child while the Sister in charge was looking after the other child. The mother took the child through the grounds at the back of the institution which opened into the Phoenix Park and was inadequately protected.
- 13.88 In July 1924, a boarded out child who was placed in service was returned to the Union by her employer who found her ‘too difficult to control’. She was sent to

- Cabra to be further trained by the nuns who 'will again place her in service when more fit and steadier in manner'.
- 13.89 The doctor reported that some of the children in Pelletstown had summer diarrhoea and haemorrhage.
- 13.90 In November 1924, the doctor's report stated that there was severe bronchitis with a number of cases of pneumonia amongst children in Pelletstown. A night nurse was requested and sent there for duty.
- 13.91 In February 1925, the doctor reported that there was 'nearly always a case of Haemorrhagic dysentery in the house ... I am inclined to think that this serious disease may be caused by the want of light in the day room'. The board agreed to notify the DLGPH of the doctor's concerns.
- 13.92 In July 1925, the Board of Guardians was concerned about some of the practices of St Patrick's Guild of Rescue. (St Patrick's Guild was entirely separate from the Dublin Union and Pelletstown – see Chapters 2 and 27). Seven children who had been nursed out by the guild had been admitted to the Union since 1 April. No payment had been received in respect of them. The nurse mothers with children from the guild had recently been trying to have healthy children admitted to the Union as they pleaded poverty and stated that they could not maintain the children on the small adoption fee, sometimes as small as £5, paid to them by the guild. The attention of the minister was drawn to:
- the practice of this society accepting rewards for the care of children and then ridding themselves of all responsibility by dumping the children in the workhouse. We understand that this society is drawing a Government subsidy in respect of this work.
- 13.93 By the mid-1920s, Pelletstown catered for a large number of unmarried mothers and 'illegitimate', abandoned and deserted children. It was reported to the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor that, on 6 June 1925, there were 107 women present in Pelletstown and that all but three or four were unmarried mothers. In addition, there were 110 male and 91 female children in the institution. In Cabra, there were 31 women along with 28 male and 72 female children. Children were generally kept in Pelletstown until they reached the age of

four and were then supposed to be boarded-out. Following the birth of her child and their transfer from the Dublin Union to Pelletstown, the unmarried mother generally stayed there nursing and looking after her child for a period of twelve months.

13.94 Of the 201 children in Pelletstown in June 1925, it was reported that about 107 were the babies of the mothers housed there. The remainder were children who had been found deserted or abandoned and those who had been left behind after their mothers had left the institution to take up some outside employment arranged by the Daughters of Charity. Unlike most other mother and baby homes, no distinction was made in Pelletstown between unmarried mothers who had one, two, or more 'illegitimate' children.

13.95 In its 1925/26 report, the DLGPH reported that considerable improvements were being carried out in Pelletstown. The report stated that the average number of 'inmates' was 400 - about 120 mothers with children, the reminder being children without mothers. Although the accommodation was extensive it was entirely inadequate for the large numbers being sent to it.

In the day nurseries especially space and light were totally insufficient. Two large nurseries with verandas are being erected where delicate children can get all the sunshine available. It is intended in future, if the children are not claimed by parents or relatives, to keep them in this Institution until they reach school age, then to board them out with suitable foster parents.

13.96 The Board of Guardians admitted to the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor that the percentage of children dying in Pelletstown was 'very heavy' in the twelve months prior to June 1925. In response, members of the commission pointed out that this was to be expected when such a large number of infants, of similar age, were being housed together in the one building meaning there was little protection against the spread of numerous infectious diseases. The representative of the Board of Guardians said that it was the children being admitted from the street into Pelletstown, rather than those born to unmarried mothers in the Dublin Union who were then transferred, that accounted for such a high mortality rate. He estimated that such children made up 80% of those who died. In his opinion these children were often in a delicate state of health, suffering already from the likes of venereal disease and frequently close to death when

admitted. He added they 'come into the world severely handicapped and are not normal at all'.

13.97 In September, the Board of Guardians and the Daughters of Charity reached agreement about the new arrangements for Cabra. The board agreed to leave the Cabra Auxiliary to the Daughters of Charity for the purpose of carrying on a 'Home for Mentally Deficient Children and Imbeciles', at a nominal rent of £5 a year. The board agreed to spend £200 on painting work immediately. The Daughters of Charity agreed to accept up to a maximum of 60 children from the Dublin Union at a rate of £26 a year (10s a week); Dublin Union children above that number and children from other areas would attract a capitation rate of £39 a year (12s 6d a week). The medical officer of the Dublin Union would continue to act as the medical officer to Cabra and would be paid by the board. Cabra ceased to be an integral part of the Dublin Union at this stage although it remained very closely associated and it became a significant exit pathway for Pelletstown. The DLGPH reported that, in January 1924, there were 503 children in the Cabra Auxiliary; of these, 54 were 'mentally deficient' and remained with the Daughters of Charity; 149 were boarded out; 103 were sent to situations; 176 were taken by relatives; five died; 10 were sent to industrial schools and four to the Union infirmary.

13.98 The Minister for Local Government and Public Health wrote to each Board of Health and Public Assistance to tell them about the establishment of St Vincent's, Cabra - described as a home and school for the treatment and instruction of mentally deficient children:

Any adequate personal attention to these afflicted children has been proved to be most difficult in Homes or workhouses, and in many cases their presence has caused much inconvenience and discomfort to other cases. The teaching to be given, more especially in the matter of formation of habits, will largely improve the prospects in life of those children and minimise the extent of their dependence. This will, it is hoped, reduce substantially the contingent liability of public funds for their maintenance throughout life.

13.99 In January 1926, the doctor reported from Pelletstown that, while the general health continued to be satisfactory, there were three cases of bronchitis and one case of jaundice and pneumonia. Eight children had died in the previous week. The board recorded that it took a serious view of the number of deaths and wanted

a detailed report from the doctor. It had come to their attention that babies leaving Pelletstown to be placed at nurse often presented a delicate and even starved appearance.

13.100 In April 1926, the doctor said that he had to 'again' complain about the quality of the milk in Pelletstown; on three occasions in the past week it had been stale and sour. In August 1926, it was agreed that the dentist would be notified to give immediate attention to any boarded-out child brought to the infirmary for dental treatment so that the children's stay in the Union would be as short as possible.

13.101 In 1926, the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor was told that the full average cost of the children and mothers respectively worked out at about 15s a week at Pelletstown. There is no evidence about how this was calculated.

13.102 In February 1927, the solicitor to the board reported on events in the District Court. During applications to have children sent to industrial schools, it was reported that children were sent out from Pelletstown and subsequently found destitute. The solicitor repudiated this. The District Justice said that, about two months earlier, a boy who was brought before him on a criminal charge stated that he had been six years in Pelletstown and during that time he was working on the farm and was only taught lessons for one week. The Justice further stated that, when tested, the boy could neither read nor write or tell the time. The Justice asked the solicitor to bring this to the notice of the Board of Guardians. The board replied that the Justice had 'been grossly misinformed' as

- Pelletstown was for mothers and infants only.
- Cabra Schools had been closed for over one year.
- Cabra Schools when in being were under the National Education Board.

13.103 The *Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor including the Insane Poor* was published in 1927. It described Pelletstown as follows:

The school buildings at Pelletstown have already been adapted as a home for unmarried mothers and infant children. It is in charge of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. In the past year the Commissioners for Dublin Union have effected considerable improvements in the buildings and the whole place is now well suited for the purpose to which it has been allocated, and

appeared to us capably managed. It suffers, however, from the defect that women are not sent there until after the birth of the child, and up to that period are retained in the workhouse. As we have indicated in our previous recommendations (Para. 233) when dealing with the problem of the unmarried mother, we consider a Home of this class should have a probationary and maternity department, a recommendation which applies to the Pelletstown institution.

13.104 In 1928, the Board of Guardians, particularly Mrs Wyse Power, was concerned about the 'classification' of unmarried mothers.³⁰ Mrs Wyse Power had had consultations with the rescue societies and with Mr Frank Duff³¹: 'The former are most interested in the problem and have offered assistance as far as possible. The latter was not in a position to do anything other than make certain definite and useful suggestions'.

13.105 Mrs Wyse Power proposed that 'Pelletstown should be devoted entirely to the care of the First Offender and the children'. Second and subsequent 'offenders' should be brought to the workhouse and retained there for some time. 'This would give the advantage of time to develop the best ways and means of providing for them whether by selecting suitable residence for their reception and care or placing them in the charge of a community of nuns'. She said that the nuns attached to St John's Convent³² (that is, the Daughters of Charity) were prepared to 'take over the charge of this class'. She suggested that a portion of the North Dublin Union adjoining the convent and which was then occupied by 'healthy casuals' might be converted for this purpose. As an alternative, St John's could be taken over for 'first offenders' with the 'other classes being retained' in Pelletstown. In December 1928, the Dublin Union adopted the alternative proposal. The Daughters of Charity were asked to provide three Sisters to manage St John's which would accommodate 40 to 50 women. 'This would enable us to give first offenders a chance towards reform, and Mr Frank Duff has promised on behalf of his Society

³⁰ The correspondence in relation to this is inserted into the Board of Guardians minutes of April 1935.

³¹ Of Regina Coeli – see Chapter 21.

³² St John's Convent seems to have been owned by the Dublin Union. It was the residence of the Daughters of Charity while they ran the North Dublin Union workhouse in North Brunswick Street. It continued as their residence while they were involved in the infirmary there until 1 January 1929.

to help by getting his workers to keep in touch with the girls when they leave the Institution’.

13.106 It transpired that the Daughters of Charity were not favourably disposed to this proposal. In 1929, they wrote:

We would be adverse to taking over that class of work in St John’s - it does not admit of suitable arrangements for separation between the community and the work. Whether the locality is suitable is questionable also. Wherever the work would be, suitable provision should be made beforehand for the girls, also for accidents which are liable to occur.

The Sisters should have the freedom of management, and of the employment of suitable and necessary staff they would deem necessary to carry out the responsibility of the work. It is a big problem and wants a great deal of consideration on our part - we could never undertake it as proposed.

Another consideration is, we are not sure at present of having the necessary Sisters - it is not by any means every Sister would suit that work and be able for it.

A suitable agreement embodying the necessary control, etc, would also be needed.

13.107 The Daughters of Charity suggested that the Union provide a home elsewhere and give it over to them to operate. This suggestion was unacceptable to the Union because the ‘capital expenditure and commitments in respect of Pelletstown, Cabra, Casuals and Lunatics and Consumptives makes such a suggestion unacceptable’; if the Daughters of Charity were prepared to establish a home with their own funds, the Union would be prepared to enter into an agreement to board out first offenders provided ante-natal care was included.³³

13.108 The possibility of boarding out pregnant unmarried women had also been raised by Mrs Wyse Power. Mr Duff made the point that there would be no possibility of managing this unless ‘...Outdoor Relief was forthcoming, and in fact at a rate above the normal. It is doubtful if less than 15s per week would be accepted by any moderately respectable women to keep them’.

³³ Documents provided by the Daughters of Charity

13.109 The DLGPH reported that, at the end of 1928, there were 68 mothers of first born children in Pelletstown and 26 mothers of more than one child. In the late 1920s, there were about 100 mothers resident in Pelletstown at any one time.³⁴ On leaving, the majority went to 'situations' (about 80%) and the rest went to relatives.

13.110 The DLGPH reported on the death rate among children as follows:

Year	No in Pelletstown	No of deaths
1924	259	96
1925	240	119 (measles epidemic)
1926	271	94
1927	263	111
1928	294	95
1929	330	81
1930	336	66

The 1930s

13.111 The Board of Guardians/Board of Assistance minutes for the 1930s have considerably fewer references to Pelletstown than those in the 1920s.³⁵ They continue to list the children discharged from the Union (including Pelletstown) and where they went; generally they were boarded out or sent to other institutions. At each meeting, Children Act inspectors gave detailed reports on the children whom they inspected. The 'State of the House' report covered all residents of the Union by category including sick children, healthy children and mothers with infant children.³⁶

13.112 There were continuing discussions about how Pelletstown should be organised. In November 1930, the Minister for Local Government and Public Health wrote to the clerk of the Dublin Union about this. The minister's understanding of the proposals was that:

No one would be admitted to the nursery at Pelletstown or the maternity department attached except from the Dublin workhouse;

Classification would be made in the nursery by 'physical division';

³⁴ The institutional records analysed by the Commission show that average occupancy in the years 1927-29 inclusive was 134 women.

³⁵ The Board of Guardians was replaced by the Board of Assistance in 1931 by the *Local Government (Dublin) (Amendment) Act 1931*.

³⁶ Other categories included 'aged and infirm' and 'lunatics and idiots'.

'Troublesome cases' would be returned to the Dublin workhouse or dealt with under the disciplinary code provided in the workhouse rules;

A maternity hospital would be established in the nursery (Pelletstown); trained nurses would be appointed to it by the Dublin Union;

The Daughters of Charity would provide a school for the children of the nursery and from the workhouse; the Dublin Union would pay 12s 6d a week for every child transferred to that school; the Daughters of Charity would also admit other children whose parents were temporarily unable to look after them provided they were free from infection.

- 13.113 In March 1931, the Minister for Local Government and Public Health wrote to the Dublin Union approving the 'proposals for the reorganisation of the Home for mothers and children at Pelletstown'. The minister went on to say that people from outside the Dublin Union should be paid for by their local authority at a fixed weekly charge. The Union disagreed with this suggestion: 'We do not think boards of health would pay as girls are not sent here by boards of health but come here and become chargeable to this Union by one or more days of residence and we anticipate refusal of boards of health to pay'. In conveying these decisions to the Director of the Daughters of Charity, Fr O'Connell, (who was a Vincentian priest based in London) the clerk of the Union said that the 'publication involved would re-act against the recovery of the patients concerned'.
- 13.114 The DLGPH reported that the average number of women resident in Pelletstown in 1930/31 was 105; again, about four fifths were placed in employment and the rest were returned to relations.
- 13.115 An elected Board of Assistance was established in 1931 and it had a ladies committee. This was closely involved in decisions about where children in Pelletstown should go. For example, in 1933, the Sister in charge of Pelletstown recommended the transfer of a number of children to St Philomena's (which had been established by the Daughters of Charity in 1932 to take some of the older children from Pelletstown who were not being boarded out - see Chapter 2) but the ladies committee decided that they should be boarded out.
- 13.116 The board minutes include details about prosecutions of people for failing to register children at nurse. In one such case, the woman was fined £10. The Judge did not agree with the Dublin Union suggestion that the child in question

should be returned to a nursing home as he did not agree that the place was a place of safety. Instead, he ordered that the child be taken in to the Dublin Union.

- 13.117 In February 1933, Children Act inspectors reported that they were unable to trace the mother of a child who died recently in Dublin Union.
- 13.118 The ladies committee visited Pelletstown on 7 March 1933 and were told by the Sister in charge and the medical officer that there were no children fit for discharge.
- 13.119 The DLGPH reported that, in 1932/3, the average number of mothers at Pelletstown was 94; of those who left, 56 were placed in employment, 27 returned to their relatives and four were sent to homes.
- 13.120 In August 1934, plans were being made for works to be carried out at Pelletstown. An architect had had discussions with the medical officer and the Sister in charge about the plans. Plans were drawn up for the following additional buildings:
- A new children's room over the existing mothers wing;
 - Extension of laundry with new ironing room and linen store;
 - New isolation hospital and nurses quarters;
 - New baths and lavatories for small children and covered play shed.
- 13.121 The architect noted that all the plans were not complete but he was of the opinion that '... having regard to the increased accommodation asked for, the sum of £15,000 originally applied for will be greatly exceeded, probably doubled'.
- 13.122 The DLGPH reported that the average number of women in Pelletstown in 1933/4 was 92; of those who left, 58 were placed in employment and 33 returned to relatives. There were 124 women and 440 children there on 31 March 1935; 149 women were admitted during the year and 125 were discharged. Of those, 10 got married, 50 returned to their parent or relations, and 56 were sent to situations; 297 children were admitted during the year and 156 were discharged.

Proposed change of status

- 13.123 Attempts were made in the 1930s to change the status of Pelletstown from a directly supported public institution into an institution which would be financed on a capitation basis (like the Sacred Heart homes).
- 13.124 In February 1935, the Board of Assistance wanted to separate Pelletstown from James's Street maternity hospital. The board members were of the opinion that while the Institutions are combined even the short period of their presence here creates an influence on the patients' minds antagonistic to the promise of moral recovery. Furthermore, as long as Pelletstown is legally a part of the Dublin Union Infirmary even the most well-intentioned persons have no reluctance of instructing girls pregnant or who have babies to apply for admission here with a view to finally being sent out to Pelletstown under the Sisters.
- In addition the Sisters feel they are unduly restrained by the usual regulations in dealing with the very complex problem.
- 13.125 On 17 July 1935, the Dublin Board of Assistance adopted the following proposal:
- It would be highly desirable that St. Patrick's Nursery at Pelletstown would be conducted on the same lines as the Home for Mental Defectives at St. Vincent's, Cabra, i. e., that the Board of Assistance should leave the premises to the Sisters of Charity and that the Board should pay, say a sum of 12/6 per week, or a sum to be arranged, in respect of each mother and each infant. From the Sisters point of view this would give them a free hand in administration unhampered by regulations unsuitable to the very detailed problem in which they are engaged. From the Board of Assistance' point of view, they will be relieved, to a very great extent at least, of the large numbers coming to James's Street, with a view to being sent to Pelletstown direct.
- 13.126 The proposal went on to set out the problems in implementing this. The question arose as to what would happen to the lay staff who were then employed; the permanent staff would have to get 'abolition allowances'. The Sisters would need an undertaking that the board would allow the return of a mother or child whom they considered unsuitable by 'reason of conduct or otherwise'.

- 13.127 There was correspondence between the Dublin Union, the DLGPH and the solicitors for the Daughters of Charity about the proposal. The solicitors reported to the director of the Daughters of Charity, Fr O'Connell.
- 13.128 The Dublin Board of Assistance proposed to pay the Daughters of Charity 12s 6d a week for each mother and each child. The director regarded this as a minimum as it was the amount being paid for children attending industrial schools. The Minister for Local Government and Public Health considered it excessive as Bessborough was charging 21s for mother and child.
- 13.129 There were detailed discussions about the financing of the proposed arrangement. The Board of Assistance wanted the rent to be related to the loans which had been taken out to buy the premises; the outstanding charges or loans amounted to about £2,000 a year. There were also discussions about the staff generally and specifically the medical officer, the furniture and even the farm implements.³⁷
- 13.130 In September 1935, the director of the Daughters of Charity told the solicitors that they were very much in favour of taking over but they must get a capitation rate of 12s 6d for each person. They did not want a trial period as the superior 'would feel very harassed by the idea of a scrutiny'. He pointed out that the capitation rate for St Vincent's, Cabra (where children with disabilities lived - see above) was 15s for each child but they would accept 12s 6d for other work. They had a lease for 25 years on the Cabra premises for which they were paying £280 rent. By October 1935, the Daughters of Charity were agreeable to paying a rent of £190 a year but would not agree the most recent Board of Assistance proposal of a weekly payment of a maximum of 15s for adults, a maximum of 5s for children under seven and a maximum of 7s 6d for children over seven.
- 13.131 Draft leases for the transfer of the lands were drawn up and were ready for signature in March 1936. A draft agreement between the board and the Daughters of Charity was also ready for signing at that time.³⁸ The intention was that the transfer and agreement would take effect from April 1936.

³⁷ Correspondence between the Board of Assistance and the Daughters of Charity provided to the Commission by the Daughters of Charity.

³⁸ These documents are referenced in the minutes of the Board of Assistance but the Commission has not seen the actual documents. All had been submitted to the DLGPH.

- 13.132 The proposal did not go ahead; the Commission has been unable to establish exactly why but it seems likely that there was no agreement on the capitation rate that would be paid or there was an agreement between the Board of Assistance and the Daughters of Charity but it was not approved by the DLGPH.
- 13.133 In February 1935, the resident medical superintendent reported to the Board of Assistance on the immunisation of children in Pelletstown. The DLGPH had been inquiring about the matter. The medical superintendent said that the number of children who had been immunised varied because of the varying number of admissions and discharges and also because of the fact that some children might not be regarded as suitable for immunisation on account of their health.
- 13.134 He reported that there were 423 children in Pelletstown at that point - they ranged from infants up to eight years old. There were a further 21 children in the Pelletstown maternity department and 58 in the infirmary.
- 13.135 The maternity unit was opened in June 1935.³⁹ It had two eight bedded wards one ante-natal and one post-natal. In July 1935, the medical superintendent told the Board of Assistance that it was necessary to get 16 beds and 16 cots for Pelletstown.
- 13.136 He looked for an increase in salary because the amount of medical attention and care required in Pelletstown had increased greatly in recent years and the opening of the maternity hospital involved much more additional work.
- 13.137 In December 1935, architects provided the estimates of costs for new developments at Pelletstown:
- New isolation hospital - £12,500
 - New storey on mothers wing (children's playroom) - £5,500
 - New laundry and ironing room - £6,000
 - New sanitary block and children's shelter - £2,700
 - Laundry equipment including electric light and power wiring - £3,000
 - Equipment of isolation hospital - £1,000

³⁹ It was an annexe to the existing building and is sometimes referred to as a maternity hospital, a maternity ward or a maternity section.

- Approximate total cost - £30,700 (exclusive of architects and engineers fees).

13.138 The DLGPH reported that there were 145 women and 430 children in Pelletstown on 31 March 1936; 246 women were admitted during the year and 223 were discharged. Of those, six got married, 79 returned to their parent or relations, 89 were sent to situations and two to other homes. There were 374 children admitted during the year and 235 discharged.

13.139 As stated, the maternity hospital in Pelletstown had opened in June 1935. In June 1936, the medical officer reported to the Board of Assistance that the hospital had been in operation for a year. He said that work had been started there in a great hurry in June 1935 because of an outbreak of puerperal fever in the hospital at James's Street. He reported that there had been 139 confinements in the twelve months. One mother died from acute eclampsia and another woman died from pneumonia about a month before she was due to give birth. There were three cases of instrumental delivery and 66 mothers required surgical treatment after delivery. Thirty-three of the male children required to be circumcised and were operated on by the visiting medical officer himself.

13.140 In October 1936, the DLGPH inspector, Miss Alice Litster, reported that she was concerned about the general physical and mental condition of children boarded out from Pelletstown. She said that it was unfair to foster parents to place in their care children suffering from skin disease, addicted to extremely dirty habits⁴⁰ or almost bordering on mental defect. She said that every child leaving the institution to be placed at nurse should be medically examined and have a certificate of fitness signed by a medical officer. She had mentioned this to the Sister in charge who had agreed to have this done. She went on to suggest that prospective foster parents might be given some choice about the children they would take especially if it was their intention to 'adopt' in the future. The ladies committee noted and approved these suggestions and decided to tell the medical superintendent and the Sister in charge that they would be insisted on in future.⁴¹

⁴⁰ This seems to have been used as a euphemism for enuresis (bed wetting) and/or soiling oneself.

⁴¹ Miss Litster's report also expressed concern about formerly boarded out children who were hired out to employers; she was concerned that the foster parents were sometimes insisting that the child's wages be paid to them rather than to the child. She also addressed issues relating to children who at age 15 had to leave foster care and ended up in institutions and about the implementation of the Children Acts.

- 13.141 In September 1937, the medical superintendent reported that the numbers resident in Pelletstown were as follows:
- 18 September 1934: 526
 - 18 September 1935: 630
 - 18 September 1936: 573
 - 18 September 1937: 669.
- 13.142 He also reported that he had been told by the architect that all documents were ready and advertisements could be issued for tenders for works passed by the board and sanctioned by the department. The isolation hospital had not yet been sanctioned. It was noted that: 'Even with additional buildings proposed to be erected there would be insufficient physical accommodation for the present numbers, and in Resident Medical Superintendent opinion best results cannot be obtained with such large numbers in the institution'. The medical superintendent had retained an employee at £3 10s a week (plus 7s a week to cover bus fares) to report on each child in the nursery with a view to expediting discharge of as many as possible, for example, by returning to parents, boarding-out or sending to school. The employee would be required for at least two months. Because of this overcrowding, the Board of Assistance decided, in October 1937, that children should be transferred from Pelletstown to St Philomena's up to the maximum allowable and that this should happen immediately. The board also asked the Minister for Local Government and Public Health to make further provision for the transfer of children from Pelletstown to approved homes as the accommodation in Pelletstown was inadequate.
- 13.143 That same month, the medical superintendent reported that there was a ringworm epidemic at Pelletstown. He had examined 103 residents; 70 were free of ringworm and the remainder had varying degrees of infection. About 150 had not yet been examined.
- 13.144 In December 1937, Miss Litster complained that the Dublin Board of Assistance did not make sufficient use of its power to place children at nurse in rural homes and was more inclined towards putting children in institutional care. Miss Litster pointed out the advantages, including lower costs, of boarding out. She drew particular attention to the health advantages: there were 498 children in Pelletstown on 30 September 1937 and there were 1,502 children registered as

being at nurse; in the year to 30 September 1937, 102 children died in Pelletstown while 39 children at nurse died. She pointed out that six children who had been on the Children Act's lists during the year were admitted to Pelletstown and died there and she had included these six in the total of those who died at nurse. The number of children boarded out at 30 September 1937 was 160 and there were no deaths among boarded out children in the year to 30 September 1937.

- 13.145 Miss Litster again pointed out that placing children at nurse or boarding them out was likely to be much more successful if this happened at a very young age. She said that the special institutions for unmarried mothers notified the county Boards of Health and Public Assistance when children were nearing the age of two and if they were healthy, normal and fit for boarding out. Children were maintained in Pelletstown to school going age and did not settle down in their foster homes as rapidly and attach themselves as freely to their foster parents as if placed at nurse at an earlier age. She suggested that the Board of Assistance might require a statement from the superior in Pelletstown at reasonable intervals, say quarterly, showing the ages of children in the institution and stating their health and general fitness for boarding out. The board agreed to this.
- 13.146 In January 1938, the medical superintendent in Pelletstown reported that he had completed a register of all the woman and children in Pelletstown and at the same time investigated the possibility of decreasing the numbers by discharge, boarding out or sending to appropriate schools. He pointed out that, up to this point, there were no records kept in Pelletstown so '... a system of case cards has been started which, properly written up and filed in alphabetical order in a metal cabinet fitted with lock and key, was considered to be more suitable than a book type register'. The writing up of these case cards entailed the examination of approximately one thousand history sheets in the files of the Dublin Union. As described above, it had been the practice when transferring women and children from the Dublin Union to Pelletstown to regard them as 'on pass' by putting their names on the pass book and sending out the relevant admission and discharge docket. These dockets contained only the name, age and religion of the person concerned. The case card system allowed for more extensive personal information on mothers and children to be collected by the Sister in charge in Pelletstown; the information included records of admissions, discharges, transfers from and re-admissions to the institution.

13.147 The medical superintendent had investigated the boarding out of as many as possible of the children resident in Pelletstown. He provided the Board of Assistance with a list of those whom he considered suitable: 84 in total. Of the remaining children, there were about 130 under one year and classified as infants; a further 120 were children who had parents or relations or friends interested in them and the rest could not be classed as 'normal' and were not suitable for boarding out.

13.148 He did not see any point in preparing a list of the women in Pelletstown.

The reverend mother has always shown an admirable discretion in the treatment and ultimate disposal of these women and I am sure, will continue to do so in their very best interests. Though she is daily being approached for domestic servants, cooks and maids, her first thought is to ascertain will the mistress suit the maid - a reversal of the more usual commercial procedure. There are certain women whom she could not conscientiously release to service, and again, the environment of many of the prospective employers is such that she must consider them unsuitable for the women who might be available.

13.149 The medical superintendent addressed the various points made by Miss Litster in her report. He pointed out that the board's power to place children at nurse in rural homes was entirely dependent on demand and he clearly doubted that there would be much demand. He addressed the comparison of mortality among boarded out children and the children in Pelletstown to which Miss Litster had drawn attention; he regarded the comparison as misleading. He pointed out that, of the 102 deaths which occurred among the children in Pelletstown, 90% were under one year, 9% were between one and two years and 1% over two years. Boarded out children were generally over the age of two and they were carefully selected before being sent out to foster mothers.

The comparison here is hardly fair to the Sisters in Pelletstown. Another point which should not pass unnoted is the fact that in an institution such as Pelletstown the number of physical and mental defectives is, in the nature of things, bound to be high and that these children will never be selected for boarding out. In order to protect prospective foster parents from a very great disappointment long and constant study of every child is made by the Sisters. The fact that there were no deaths among boarded out children was proof of the Sisters' efforts.

- 13.150 He further pointed out that, as well as being a home for orphaned children, Pelletstown was also a children's hospital. 'All the sick children of the Dublin Area are sent there, all the foundlings, deserted children, and all the children who are discharged from other homes and hospitals find their way to the Union, and thence to Pelletstown'.
- 13.151 He also pointed out that, while there were 498 children in Pelletstown on 30 September 1937, there had been a total of 1,161 children resident there during the year. He asked the board to expedite the building of the isolation wing and to supply a refrigerator for the storing of serum. He had found the use of serum of great assistance in the last outbreak of measles but he had had to keep it at Cabra.
- 13.152 The DLGPH reported that there were 151 mothers and 451 children in Pelletstown on 31 March 1938; 238 mothers were admitted during the year and 256 were discharged. Of those, 107 returned to relatives and 77 were sent to situations; 210 children were admitted during the year and 248 discharged.
- 13.153 The DLGPH reported that there were 166 mothers and 407 children in Pelletstown on 31 March 1939; 289 mothers were admitted during the year and 274 were discharged. Of those, 71 returned to relatives and 86 went to situations. 362 children were admitted during the year and 321 discharged. In April 1939, there were no vacancies in St Philomena's. It was recommended that a number of girls from Pelletstown be sent to certified schools.
- 13.154 In June, the Sister in charge of Pelletstown asked that the Pelletstown telephone number be inserted in the telephone directory under St Patrick's Home, Navan Road, Cabra as people had difficulty finding it and did not think to look for the Pelletstown number under Dublin Union.
- 13.155 In July, the Board of Assistance was told that 31 children had been boarded out between 1 January and 30 June 1938; 27 were sent to schools and three were 'adopted'.
- 13.156 In August 1938, the Sister in charge of Cabra reported that she had been given permission to arrange the immunisation of the residents against diphtheria and

typhoid as they were then prevalent in Dublin. She asked would the Dublin Union bear the cost of this for its residents.

- 13.157 In November, a medical officer reported that he had visited Pelletstown and saw six cases of scarlet fever (five among children) and one of diphtheria. 'The infection seems to be pretty widely distributed through the Institution and it is possible that further cases will occur'. He suggested segregating the children with scarlet fever in a separate room and placing them under a separate nursing staff, preferably fever trained. He had the person with diphtheria admitted to Cork St Hospital and suggested that any further cases would also be admitted there. He said it was highly desirable that the children in Pelletstown should be systematically immunised against diphtheria when they reached the age of nine months.
- 13.158 In January 1939, the visiting doctor asked for the building of an isolation unit to be expedited as, when an epidemic occurred, the numbers likely to be affected were so large that the hospitals dealing with infectious diseases could not cope. He said he was having great difficulty in getting the fever hospitals to take in cases as they were. 'No hospital will take measles'.
- 13.159 The Sister in charge of St Philomena's told the board that they had five boys who were about to reach the upper age limit of 12 years. Three of the boys were in constant touch with their mothers who were not willing to have them sent to foster parents. Two others were not suitable for boarding out because they were delicate and very much below average intelligence. The board decided to send the first three boys to Clonmel.⁴²
- 13.160 In April 1939, the doctor reported that a child in Pelletstown had measles. He partly immunised the children who had been in contact with this particular child. He informed the board and asked it to pay the costs of the immune globulin (£4 2s 3d). In May, the doctor reported that the measles outbreak had spread: 'At present it is confined to the Isolation Building and it will possibly spread to other parts of the institution. There is a large room recently built in the institution which is not completed because it has no light, heat or water accommodation'. He complained that he had reported this matter before and, if he had this room available, he would

⁴² This was an industrial school, St Joseph's, Ferryhouse, Clonmel. See the Ryan Report: <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/02-03.php>

be better able to deal with the outbreak: 'I would be able to place many children in it and to some extent prevent the overcrowding which is the usual cause of high mortality from this disease'. He asked the board to have this room finished without delay. He also asked the board to have the question of the immunisation of the children against diphtheria dealt with. The board referred this report to the minister for his decision.

- 13.161 The issue of boarding out of children from Pelletstown was again on the agenda of the Board of Assistance in June/July 1939. The wider issue of the coordination of child care services was also discussed.
- 13.162 A DLGPH inspector, Miss Murray, gave the Board of Assistance a report on her inspection of the health of the boarded out children in its area. This covered a range of issues about boarding out and it specifically looked at Pelletstown. Her report in this respect echoes Miss Litster's earlier report. Miss Murray said that she had had many complaints about the methods in operation in Pelletstown when a foster mother called there to select a child; two or three children were brought forward and if the prospective foster mother was not satisfied with any of them, there was no further choice. Miss Murray considered that all eligible children should be brought forward. She said that there was a 'great tendency to delay' the boarding out of children until they were aged six, seven, or even older. Some of the assistance officers' reports (see Chapter 1) show that some children were kept until they were ten or 11. She pointed out the desirability of boarding out at a much earlier age and suggested that children reared in institutions were more likely to 'contract certain bad habits of which it is almost impossible to cure them afterwards'.
- 13.163 She argued that a more thorough medical examination of the children from Pelletstown should be carried out before they were boarded out. Each individual child should be examined by the medical officer and certified as fit in every respect for boarding out. 'Children suffering from defects which might yield to treatment should not be boarded-out until every effort has been made to remedy them. The greatest care should be taken that no mentally defective child is sent to a foster home'.

- 13.164 The medical officer in Pelletstown replied that no child was sent out who had not been medically examined and no child had been sent out who had any evidence of disease, mentally or physically. He had no recollection of any child from Pelletstown who was at or near the age of ten being boarded out. Children of that age were only occasionally in Pelletstown, for example, if the parents were evicted. He had never seen any evidence of 'bad habits' among the children being boarded out; he asked that details of these bad habits be given.
- 13.165 The Sister in charge in Pelletstown reported that 52 children had been boarded out in the year 1938. She was trying to get the children boarded out at as early an age as possible but prospective foster mothers would only look at children of the age that they require. Some children could not be boarded out because they were 'maintenance cases'⁴³ or their mothers did not consent to their being boarded out. She acknowledged that two years earlier the boarding out of children was delayed due to an outbreak of ringworm. She confirmed that no child was boarded out without being medically examined and made the point that the complete change of life and the bad conditions of the homes immediately had a bad effect on the child.
- 13.166 Miss Murray explained that the 'bad habits' were acquired by children in all institutions and not just Pelletstown. The chief 'bad habit' was bed-wetting.
- 13.167 Members of the board, acting as a visiting committee, visited Pelletstown in October 1939 and agreed that the Sister in charge would report monthly to the board on the children eligible for boarding out.
- 13.168 In October 1939, a member of the visiting committee of the Board of Assistance paid tribute to the care and attention paid to the children in Pelletstown 'resulting in every comfort in excellent surroundings. As a result of this comfort and the surroundings mothers of many of the young children were reluctant to let them go out to foster mothers'. He suggested that a committee meet once a month and have a report on the number of children boarded out in each group. He believed that a great deal might be done if the mothers who were reluctant to let their children out, were impressed with the fact that their children could not always be under the nuns of have such comfort. His recommendation was adopted.⁴⁴

⁴³ This presumably refers to children whose mothers/families were paying for their maintenance in Pelletstown.

⁴⁴ *Evening Herald*, 11 October 1939

13.169 The Sister in charge reported that, on 21 November 1939, there were 146 women, 93 infants (under 12 months), 108 children (aged between three and eight years) and 179 children (aged one to three years) giving a total of 526 resident in Pelletstown. During the month four children were boarded out; six were selected for boarding out and ten children were available.

The 1940s

13.170 In 1940, the *Irish Press* reported on a speech on public health services in Dublin given by Dr WRS Collis, the author of *Marrowbone Lane*, under the auspices of the Dublin Constituencies Council of the Labour Party. He was quoted as saying:

In Dublin, twice as many babies died under one year of age than died in the country districts and three times as many as in Swedish cities. As for the illegitimate babies - over 300 per 1,000 died before they reached the age of one year, and many more afterwards. The authorities had a place called Pelletstown, where a few devoted Sisters gave their lives looking after hundreds of these children. These children were often weakly and required special attention, but there was no resident medical officer and few trained nurses.⁴⁵

13.171 This statement gave rise to a heated debate about the facilities in Pelletstown. All participants were agreed that the Sisters provided a very good service but there was disagreement about the facilities available. While there was a doctor who visited, Dr Collis insisted that there was no resident medical officer. Dr Collis said that the reason so many 'illegitimate' children died was because of the people's attitude towards them. He believed that the children died because of neglect. He said that the majority of deaths from diphtheria could be prevented by inoculation, but this was not available even though there was compulsory inoculation against smallpox, a disease which he said was non-existent in Dublin. Subsequently Labour Party members were invited to visit Pelletstown.⁴⁶

13.172 The Dublin Constituencies Council of the Labour Party, when accepting the invitation, said that they shared Dr Collis's views.⁴⁷ The medical officer of Pelletstown, Dr GV Ryan, told the Board of Assistance that the views of Dr Collis, as reported in the *Irish Press*, were very misleading. He said the isolation hospital

⁴⁵ *Irish Press*, 11 January 1940

⁴⁶ *Irish Independent* 18 January 1940

⁴⁷ *Irish Press* 25 January 1940

consisted of two large rooms, one of which contained 15 cots, and the children in it were mostly healthy, awaiting discharge. The other contained children suffering from pulmonary and intestinal trouble, who were kept there because they were infectious. As soon as they were well, they were transferred to other parts of the house, where there were spacious, well ventilated rooms. All these children were seen and examined; their ages, weights and condition were noted by the medical officer as soon as they arrived. If they become ill they were seen and attended to medically. They were under the immediate care of one of the Sisters, who was a trained nurse. The plans for the new isolation hospital, which was nearly completed, were in the hands of the architects for over a year. There was no doubt that the institution, due to economic conditions, was over-crowded, but during the past ten years the Union authorities had done a lot to remedy that state of affairs, and they were continuing to do so far as they were permitted.

13.173 A Labour Party delegation accompanied by Dr Collis visited Pelletstown on 1 February 1940.⁴⁸ In a statement, the delegation paid tribute to the Sisters in charge and the nursing staff. However, they said that the staff had to carry out their work under conditions which restricted and, to some extent, circumvented their efforts. This was not their fault nor was it entirely the fault of the Dublin Board of Assistance. The outstanding defect was that there was no resident medical superintendent. A consultant children's specialist should also be available to the institution. They pointed out that the institution was not just a home but was also a hospital and their understanding was that any baby had to be admitted from the Union, legitimate or illegitimate, well or ill. Therefore, it should be staffed as a children's hospital. A new ward was being added to the institution but was not available for use due to an 18-month delay in providing heat, light and water. Until the new ward was made available, the conditions of acute overcrowding could not be solved. The same extraordinary delay seemed to be taking place with regard to the erection of the new isolation block. The existing facilities for isolation were hopelessly inadequate, and involved the placing of babies with different conditions, some of which may be infectious, in one small ward. Even in some of the occupied parts of the building the heating arrangements appeared to be entirely inadequate. The women members of the delegation were impressed with the general happiness and well-being of the children. They were, however, concerned with the life of the women in the institution, who were, for practical purposes, completely

⁴⁸ *Irish Press* 2 February 1940

confined to it for two years.⁴⁹ The delegation suggested that, if the women were to be able to resume normal life at the end of this period, facilities should be available for personal interests and recreations while they were resident at Pelletstown. These should include, at very least, a free recreation period each day, a general library and an adequate recreation room with a radio. In addition, some increase of personal privacy would be very desirable if it could in any way be provided.

13.174 The dispute rumbled on for a time; the Dublin Board of Assistance considered asking the Minister for Local Government and Public Health to appoint an independent commission to investigate Pelletstown in view of the attacks on it.⁵⁰ It is not clear if anything further was done.

13.175 The DLGPH reported that there were 135 women and 353 children in Pelletstown on 31 March 1940; 243 women were admitted during the year and 273 were discharged. Of those, 98 returned to relatives and 79 went to situations. There were 355 children admitted during the year and 335 discharged.

13.176 In April 1940, the Sister in charge told the Board of Assistance that there were 135 'girls' in Pelletstown and a total of 353 children; 87 children were under one year; 153 children were aged between one and three and 113 children were aged between three and eight. The doctor reported that the general health was good, except for an outbreak of diphtheria and a mild outbreak of whopping cough.

13.177 In July, St Philomena's reported that it now had 13 girls over the age of 14 who had completed primary education and it was not equipped to provide them with appropriate training. The Sister in charge had been in touch with some schools - probably industrial schools - who were willing to take the girls provided they received a maintenance payment of 12s 6d a week and that the travel expenses to the school would be paid by the board. The board approved this arrangement provided the minister agreed.

13.178 The Board of Assistance visiting committee visited Pelletstown in October 1940. They heard a report from the medical officer about the discharge of unmarried mothers from Pelletstown.

⁴⁹ It is not clear why the delegation was under this impression; a two year stay was never the norm in Pelletstown; the average length of stay for women admitted in the 1940s was 315 days.

⁵⁰ *Irish Press* 16 February 1940

The great majority of these women are domestic servants who on discharge from the Institution have no place in which they can mind and keep their children and also earn their own livelihood in the only occupation open to them. To refuse to discharge them without children consequently means permanently depriving these women of ordinary freedom. To discharge them without children would mean in many cases depriving the child for all time of care and interest of the mother, as on discharge the mother with a child is obviously unable to earn her own livelihood and that of her dependent. I suggest that she is entitled to outdoor relief⁵¹ and with such assistance she could take up a situation outside and provide for the child by placing it at nurse.

- 13.179 He went on to point out that the granting of outdoor relief would be dependent on the Board of Assistance approving the foster parents. Further, outdoor relief would be available only to women who had been resident in the Dublin Union area for at least two years. Women from outside Dublin would not qualify; they could be returned to their native areas.
- 13.180 In November 1940, the Sister in charge reported that she had lodged £33 11s to the credit of the Dublin Board of Assistance. This was the amount which she had received from mothers towards the maintenance of their children for the month of October. She reported that, on 31 October 1940, there were 137 'girls' and 347 children in Pelletstown. There were 75 infants, 168 between one and three years old and 105 aged between three and eight. During the month, five children were boarded out and there were a further 16 available for boarding out.
- 13.181 At a meeting of the Rathdown Board of Assistance, the boarding out of a Catholic child who had been born in Pelletstown with a foster-mother of a different denomination was described as 'a disgrace'. The child had been boarded out by the Irish Church Mission but the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society was willing to take over the child as soon as the mother could be traced. The board had made an order prohibiting the housing of children by foster-mothers of different denominations.⁵²

⁵¹ Under the *Poor Relief (Dublin) Act 1929*

⁵² *Irish Press* 14 November 1940

- 13.182 In January 1941, the Sister in charge lodged £37 5s which was the amount received from mothers towards the maintenance of their children for the month of December 1940. On 31 January, there were 140 women and 361 children in Pelletstown. The doctor reported that the general health of the residents was satisfactory and there were no infectious cases during the month.
- 13.183 In March, children aged three and four were transferred to St Vincent's Limerick, an industrial school. There were 22 deserted children in Pelletstown at this time.
- 13.184 The DLGPH reported that there were 282 women admitted to Pelletstown between 31 March 1940 and 31 March 1941; 265 were discharged. Of these, 70 went to employment, 92 to parents and four were married. There were no maternal deaths. There were 427 children admitted between 31 March 1940 and 31 March 1941; 345 children were discharged during the year and there were 393 remaining on 31 March 1941. There were 42 deaths during the year; 28 children were boarded out, 99 were taken by parents, 170 were sent to hospitals and 48 to schools.
- 13.185 In June 1941 there were 161 women and 402 children in Pelletstown. There were 135 infants, 167 aged between one and three and 100 aged between three and eight.
- 13.186 The Sister in charge had lodged £38 14s into the bank; this was the amount received from mothers towards the maintenance of their children in May.
- 13.187 It would appear that Archbishop McQuaid was concerned about the manner of women leaving Pelletstown. In July 1941, a member of the Daughters of Charity explained the position to him:

Further investigation into the organisation of Pelletstown reveals to me that I was left under a false impression regarding the discharge from the institution of unmarried mothers. The incident of a person waiting for a girl outside was an exceptional case and is not typical.

I find however, that the only girls to whom this can happen are those whose babies die. They are set free immediately. [The doctor] is most careful that all others who leave are either placed in situations, institutions, with relations, or take their babies home with them. There is one difficulty regarding those

placed in situations. They can accept the situation and, after a trial, leave it and return if they wish to their former surroundings. This is the cause of many relapses. As a rule those who fall a second and third time are not easily induced to return to the sisters and there is the danger that they may go to non-Catholic homes.

Besides the children born in Pelletstown, there are many others born in the union and other city hospitals. Some of these children are added to those born in Pelletstown and the over-crowding problem is mainly due to them at the moment.⁵³

13.188 In November 1941, the DLGPH was asked to approve of the transfer of a number of children to other institutions because of overcrowding in Pelletstown. Five children aged between two and three and a half were to go to the Convent of Mercy, Longford;⁵⁴ seven aged between three and a half and five and a half to Passage West industrial school; five aged between three and a half and four and a half years to Cappoquin industrial school⁵⁵ and three to St Philomena's.

13.189 The medical superintendent described Dublin's epidemic of gastro-enteritis in autumn 1941 as the dominating event of the year from the medical standpoint. It had been responsible for 40% of the deaths in the Cork Street fever hospital in 1941. It attacked babies, and, of the 167 patients, 116 were under five years old. There were 68 deaths. The abnormal prevalence of flies was considered to have been the cause of the disease. Bottle-fed children were the greatest sufferers. There is no reference to this epidemic in the minutes of the Board of Assistance for this period. The Minister for Local Government and Public Health had set up an advisory committee to deal with the problem. The lower death rate from measles - 2.73% compared with 9.24% in 1939 - was recorded.

13.190 In April 1942, the members of the Dublin Board of Assistance were removed from office by the Minister for Local Government and Public Health. They were replaced by three Commissioners.⁵⁶

⁵³ Dublin Diocesan Archives/AB8/b/LII/A/2/1/(1).

⁵⁴ As there was no industrial school in Longford town, this was probably the Newtownforbes Industrial School: Ryan Report Volume 11: <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL2-10.PDF>

⁵⁵ Ryan Report Volume 11: <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL2-08.PDF>

⁵⁶ The term 'Board of Assistance' is being retained.

- 13.191 The issue of inoculation against diphtheria arose again in 1942. The medical superintendent at Cork Street fever hospital stated that the death of a child from diphtheria 'carries with it some implications of neglect on the part of the parents'. 'If every infant in Dublin were inoculated against diphtheria between 9 and 12 months of age, Schick-tested before he went to school (if necessary re-inoculated), deaths would fall to negligible proportions. The authorities have provided the facilities. It is for the parents to use them'.⁵⁷
- 13.192 In 1943, the DLGPH decided to open a hospital to deal with gastro-enteritis after one of the worst epidemics that had struck the city for years. St Clare's hospital was established and many children were transferred to it from Pelletstown. (see Chapter 2)
- 13.193 The Dublin Board of Assistance was engaged in reducing expenditure while also replacing 'inmate labour' in the hospital (St Kevin's). The *Irish Press* reported in February 1944 that there was a decrease of £10,000 in the estimate of £446,389 adopted by the Board. This followed a decrease of £30,000 in the previous year.
- In addition to the decrease of £10,000, it is possible, by economies, to make provision of more than £10,000 for essential increases in the nursing staff and for paid ward attendants to replace inmate labour in the male and female chronic departments and the hospital.⁵⁸
- 13.194 In November 1944, new terms of employment for nurses in Pelletstown and in St Kevin's Institution were proposed by the Dublin Board of Assistance and approved by the Minister for Local Government and Public Health. From 1 January 1945, permanent, quasi-permanent and temporary elected nurses were paid £81 a year with annual increments of £3 to a maximum of £11 as well as the appropriate Emergency Bonus.⁵⁹ Rations were valued at £52 and residence at £25 a year. There was an additional allowance of £9 a year for uniforms.⁶⁰
- 13.195 In May 1945, the Assistant Master of Holles Street hospital was reported as telling the annual meeting of the Infant Aid Society that the infant and child death rate in Dublin compared very badly with other cities. He said that the society had realised the importance of pure milk supplies long before 'the medical people'. The

⁵⁷ *Irish Press* 6 June 1942.

⁵⁸ *Irish Press*, 10 February 1944

⁵⁹ This was an extra payment to take account of the rise in the cost of living during World War II.

⁶⁰ *Irish Press*, 30 November 1944

maternal mortality rate was very low. In 1944, there were 12,000 deliveries in the three city maternity hospitals; 600 mothers left the hospitals without their infants and 600 infants died within a month of being brought home. The home deaths were largely from gastro-enteritis, due mainly to a lack of breastfeeding.⁶¹

13.196 One member of the Dublin Board of Assistance had been agitating for the introduction of adoption in Ireland for about 25 years. She was quoted as approving the Northern Ireland adoption arrangements. She said that, in Ireland, people were reluctant to adopt children as, in the absence of a protecting law, parents or a parent might later turn up and claim the child and perhaps ruin its future chances in life, while the love and care the adopters had expended on the child would go for nought. Another drawback she cited was that the foster parents could not legally give the child their name. She had come across tragic cases where the adopters of children had had them baptised in their own name, but when the necessity for a birth certificate occurred, the child became aware that he or she had no legal parents. She said that it was quite common for solicitors to arrange 'adoptions', and for both parties to repudiate them afterwards. She held strong views on the 'evils of adoptions for lump sums'; this should be prohibited; 'where money is in question, the children are often dumped on public authorities when it is exhausted'.⁶²

13.197 In September 1945, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Local Government and Public Health, Dr Ward, spoke of the need for a complete overhaul of the infant welfare and public health services. He was quoted as saying that the high number of child deaths in Dublin was 'a blot on our public health record'. He appeared to support a suggestion that had been made that 'pre-natal and infant health services could, with advantage, be more intimately linked up with and, in fact, based upon, the three maternity hospitals'. He said he would take this up with the hospitals concerned and with Dublin Corporation.

Our experience has been that the death rate during the first year of life has been particularly high. If a reorganisation of our services should help to solve this problem it would seem prudent to plan for a comprehensive expansion of child health and school medical services so that we can build up a healthy young population.⁶³

⁶¹ *Irish Press*, 31 May 1945

⁶² *Irish Press*, 31 May 1945

⁶³ *Irish Independent*, 24 September 1945

13.198 On 14 December 1945, there were 219 mothers and 395 'illegitimate' children in St Kevin's institution and Pelletstown.⁶⁴

13.199 In May 1946, the *Irish Press* reported that Dublin Corporation Public Health Committee would be discussing a letter from the DLGPH, suggesting a scheme for a more effective supervision of the first year of child life, with a view to reducing the rate of infant mortality in Dublin. This was a follow up from Dr Ward's suggestions in 1945. The three maternity hospitals, in which 80% of Dublin births took place, were agreeable to the suggestion.

Although the infant mortality was low through the excellent services at present, the Parliamentary Secretary considers an elaboration of these services, to include care during the first year of life, would provide a comprehensive service which would give the necessary continuity and organisation likely to reduce infant mortality to a minimum. By the adoption of the proposals outlined, the Corporation would obtain for a relatively small additional expenditure a complete ante-natal, obstetric and infant welfare service. The services to be provided in the scheme include: (1) A domiciliary visiting service; (2) an emergency day and night service; (3) a clinic advisory and treatment service; (4) hospital accommodation.⁶⁵

13.200 In May 1946, the *Irish Press* interviewed gynaecologists, specialists in infant ailments and welfare workers about a statement by a doctor that babies under a year were dying in Dublin at a rate of four a day, in a city which claimed to have the best maternity service in the world. All those questioned agreed that Dublin had the best gynaecological service in the world.⁶⁶ They said it was the only city in the world in which 80% of the babies were either born in the lying-in maternity hospitals or in the mother's home, attended by doctors and nurses from these hospitals.

The result was that, in 1944, of 12,000 babies born, only 11 died in the hospitals. This gynaecological service costs Dublin citizens almost nothing. The money comes from the Hospitals Commission, patients' fees, and some old funds still available. In spite of Dublin's claim, however, over 100 in every 1,000 infants die before they are a year old. Comparable figures for the great cities of the world are far lower. Those for New York and London are less

⁶⁴ Department of Health file: HLTH/A8/61 BC

⁶⁵ *Irish Press*, 24 May 1946

⁶⁶ It is not clear what basis they had for this assertion.

than 40 per 1,000 births. Dublin's infant mortality rate is far higher than that in any part of Ireland.

During the ten days that mother and baby are in one of the Dublin lying-in hospitals - the Rotunda, National Maternity or the Coombe - they have at their disposal the greatest possible skill and attention'.⁶⁷

13.201 An isolation unit was opened in Pelletstown in 1946/7. It was to house children who had infectious diseases, children of mothers who had TB, babies with disabilities and 'legitimate' children whose parents were unable to cope with them.

13.202 A Department of Health inspection in September 1947 was critical of a number of aspects of Pelletstown. The following were the main criticisms:

- The institution was overcrowded, especially in the infants and toddlers division.
- Four nurses shared one poorly lighted, common bedroom in an annexe at the back of the hospital. Each nurse should be provided with a separate room.
- The cost of medicines amounted to £421 13s 2d which appeared to be high and no samples had been sent recently.
- Internal painting was required for the nursery and main isolation buildings required external painting.
- The number of births had fallen since 1945 with an average of little more than one a week in 1946. This was due to women being retained at St. Kevin's institution for delivery and then being sent onto Pelletstown. There was not sufficient work for the staff employed in the maternity hospital; only four of the 17 beds were occupied and the staff of four were looking after four patients. The maternity home had been built at great cost with the express intent of relieving pressure on St. Kevin's; conditions in St Kevin's were poor with no specialist obstetrician whereas Pelletstown's temporary medical officer was a specialist obstetrician.

13.203 The inspector argued that the modern maternity hospital in Pelletstown should be utilised to its full capacity, especially in view of the shortage of maternity beds in Dublin.

⁶⁷ *Irish Press*, 27 May 1946.

If it is the intention to continue deliveries of unmarried mothers in St Kevin's institution, it is suggested that consideration be given to utilising the maternity hospital at St Patrick's home for married as well as unmarried mothers. At present the retention period of patients in maternity hospitals in the city has been reduced to below the margin of safety to try and cope with the demand for accommodation.

- 13.204 The Dublin Board of Assistance was asked for its observations on this report and supplied these in November 1947. The board replied that it had been considering the over-crowding and was much concerned about it. It said that a large proportion of the unmarried mothers admitted to Pelletstown came from outside the Dublin Public Assistance District, had only brief or temporary residence in Dublin, (and had no home to which they could take their infants or very young children) and the Dublin Board of Assistance, consequently, had to bear to a large extent a responsibility that should be borne by other local authorities. Difficulty had been experienced in finding homes, private or institutional, for very young children.
- 13.205 The board said that the inadequacy of the accommodation for nurses had been under serious consideration for some time and proposals for a nurses home would be submitted to the minister as soon as possible.
- 13.206 The excessive cost of medicines during the year to March 1947 was being investigated. The cost to date for the current year was £132 12s 3d against an estimated cost of £400 for the year.
- 13.207 Tenders for the painting of St Mary's nursery and other internal areas had been invited twice in the previous six months, without success. A further tendering process was under way. The current year's estimates included provision for this. Other painting works would be considered in the context of the estimates for the year 1948/9.
- 13.208 The Board of Assistance had already given instructions for the ending of the practice of retaining pregnant women for delivery at St. Kevin's. The suggestion for using Pelletstown for married as well as unmarried mothers was not favoured. The maternity hospital at St Kevin's had a bed occupancy of 26: its equipment had been extended and was satisfactory and the attendance of a specialist obstetrician had been obtained when required.

13.209 In May 1949, the Department of Health made further inquiries about progress on overcrowding and on painting.

13.210 In March 1949 the Board of Assistance wrote to the Department of Health about the level of nursing staff in Pelletstown. The board said that there was constant change among the staff. There were 26 temporary nurses, three of whom were employed in connection with the Dublin Corporation BCG scheme. Of the remainder, there was only one State Registered General Trained Nurse (RGN), who was also a CMB (qualified midwife) and fever nurse; five State Registered Nursery Nurses (SRNN) and children's nurses (CN); four CMB nurses, one of whom was also a CN; and 15 qualified only as nursery nurses. The majority of the nurses had less than two years' service. The board wanted to appoint four nurses to the permanent staff without advertising.

1950s

13.211 The discussions about staffing which had been taking place in the late 1940s continued into the 1950s. Pelletstown was heavily reliant on temporary nursing staff. The Irish Nurses Organisation was trying to stop the practice of employing nurses on a temporary basis and not making them permanent; the organisation described this 'temporary-permanent' condition as the main defect of local authority nursing.

13.212 In April 1950, a Department of Health medical officer reported that he was impressed by the cleanliness of Pelletstown but there were a number of serious problems. The problems outlined were:

- Not enough lavatories; there were four for 140 mothers;
- Not enough accommodation for nurses;
- The floors in the mothers' dining room, the kitchen and the children's dormitory needed repair;
- Overcrowding in the No. 1 mothers' dormitory and woodworm in the floors in this dormitory;
- The fire escape arrangements appeared to be inadequate and should be investigated as soon as possible by an expert;
- The ward where the babies were sleeping was much too large and could be divided; there was too much noise for babies to sleep and there was a danger of infection spreading;

- The toddlers' wash room floor needed repair;
- Bathing accommodation in St. Bridget's ward could be improved;
- External walls of St. Mary's needed re-plastering;
- One mothers' ward was overcrowded as was the toddlers' ward;
- The boilerhouse was unsatisfactory. It needed to be ventilated, the flues needed to be renewed;
- A meat slicer could be provided for the kitchen; about 70 lbs of meat was carved daily and a large quantity of bread;
- There were no arrangements for sending samples of milk for examination.

13.213 In June 1950, the Department of Health approved the appointment of five temporary nurses until the end of the year when it would be reviewed. This was part of an effort to reduce nurses working hours to 96 hours a fortnight. The hours worked by the staff varied from 110.5 to 123 hours a fortnight and the medical superintendent had recommended that this be reduced to 96 a fortnight and five extra nurses be employed.

13.214 In February 1951, a DLGPH inspector, Miss Reidy, visited Pelletstown in order to assess the staffing situation. There were 129 women there. There was a total of 368 children of whom 160 were infants, 160 were aged between one and three and 48 were aged between three and four. There were six Sisters on the staff, two of whom were RGNs, one was a children's nurse and two were nursery nurses.

13.215 There were 24 cots in the isolation unit for sick children. These children required skilled nursing care; they included acutely ill children transferred from within Pelletstown and infants from other institutions.

13.216 The infirmary had 12 cots, three children's beds and two adult beds. The children in the infirmary were not acutely ill but were underdeveloped and physically below par. They were not all confined to their cots. The adult beds, which were in the same ward as the children's beds, were reserved for ill mothers who had to be kept under observation. A doctor's note from January 1951 stated that 104 of the 364 children who were then in residence were ill. There was a flu epidemic, and there were other ailments such as alimentary disturbances and ear infections.

13.217 The recommended number of State Certified Children's Nurses was one for every three or four children; in Pelletstown, there was one for every 17 children. There was a difficulty in recruiting SCCNs.

13.218 It had been assessed that 26 RSCNs were needed but the breakdown of staff was actually:

- RGN, SCM 2
- RGN, RSCN, 1
- SCM, 4
- RGN, 2
- RSCN, 5
- CN, 20

There was also a need for more CNs to look after the healthy children.

13.219 A former Sister in charge was reappointed in September 1951. She was a trained nurse and had previously been Sister in charge in the period June 1937 to August 1948.

13.220 The proposed salary was £175 a year which was the recommended rate for the matron of a county home of 500 beds or less; there were also rations of £50 a year plus milk and vegetables valued at £20 - all Sisters in the house got these; there was a uniform allowance of £12; residence was valued at £30 a year and laundry at £5; the World War II bonus was still being paid.

13.221 In October 1951, there were two RGNs with sick children's qualifications, three midwives, seven registered sick children's nurses and 17 nursery nurses. There were six non-nursing Sisters. The assistant catering superintendent, permanent wardmistress and three temporary wardmistresses were lay women.

13.222 Miss Litster visited Pelletstown in October 1951 but the report which the Commission has seen deals only with her inspection of the records of births, admissions and deaths of infants there. (It is not clear if any other aspects of Pelletstown were actually inspected by Miss Litster on this occasion.)

13.223 This report gives details of the births, admissions and deaths of infants in the period 1 April 1950 to 26 October 1951. It notes that the infant mortality rate was

rising. The report suggested that a factor in the rise of infant mortality may have been that mothers and babies admitted to St Kevin's were formerly not admitted to Pelletstown until the results for VD and TB were known and were not admitted unless there was a clean bill of health but that this was no longer the case. It acknowledged that there was provision for segregation before the newly admitted mixed with existing residents but suggested that a reversion to the former system might have a good effect.

13.224 In January 1952, having approved the establishment of a permanent nursing staff, the Minister for Health approved the staffing requirements for the sick departments of Pelletstown as follows:

- Isolation unit (28 beds): one Sister – General Trained; two Registered Sick Children's Nurses; two Children's Nurses
- Two infirmaries (37 beds): two Sisters – one a State Certified Midwife and one a Children's Nurse; three Children's Nurses

13.225 This meant that three additional nurses would be appointed to each of these departments. If there were difficulties recruiting qualified sick children's nurses, the vacancies could be filled temporarily by general trained nurses.

13.226 In March 1952, there were 35 lay permanent nursing staff and ten Sisters held nursing posts; the Department of Health expressed concern about a Sister on clinical duties who was not a qualified nurse.

13.227 In 1952, the question of the Sisters being made permanent was considered. It seems that the Board of Assistance argued that they should not be made permanent because they could be withdrawn 'at the will of the Mother General'. The Department of Health was not impressed by that argument and pointed out that 'nursing sisters hold permanent appointments in local authority institutions throughout the country and the difficulty referred to by the board does not arise'. The Minister for Health told the Board of Assistance that he had no objection to their being granted permanent status.

13.228 In 1953, the pay scales for the Sisters who worked in Pelletstown were as follows:

- Sisters who were general trained nurses: £310 rising by annual increments of £10 to £350 a year with two long service increments of £10 to £370 a year, with deductions of £41 for residence and £5 for laundry.
- Sisters who were registered sick children's nurses: £120 rising by increments of £10 to £140 a year plus appropriate temporary bonus with deductions of £30 for residence and £5 for laundry.
- Sisters who were state certified midwives: £60 rising by increments of £5 to £90 a year plus appropriate temporary bonus and similar deductions.
- Sisters who were performing the duties of children's nurses: £50 rising by increments of £5 to £85 a year plus appropriate temporary bonus and similar deductions.
- Sisters in charge of stores, laundry, kitchens, workrooms: Scale as for permanent wardmistresses - £130 rising by increments of £4 to £170 and then rising by increments of £5 to £175 a year plus temporary bonus, with deduction of £18 for residence and £5 for laundry

13.229 Miss Litster and Miss Reidy visited in June 1953. Miss Reidy reported that she felt that the sleeping quarters were congested. She was told that there was great difficulty in getting the mothers to breastfeed and, if they started, to persist with it. The position as to deaths of infants had greatly improved from Miss Litster's previous report which covered the period from 1 January 1950 to 30 September 1951; the situation now was 'comparatively satisfactory'.

13.230 In 1954, Miss Reidy and Miss Litster visited Pelletstown and St Kevin's. They discovered that they had made a minor error in their presentation of the infant mortality in Pelletstown - this arose because there was confusion about twins and where they were born.

13.231 After the introduction of adoption legislation and the consequent placement of a large number of children for adoption, women and children were remaining in Pelletstown for shorter periods. As a result, the occupancy rate fell. The numbers in Pelletstown had fallen from 525 (women and children) in 1949 to 229 in 1959. In 1959, the Department of Health suggested to the Board of Assistance that the unused accommodation in Pelletstown be used to accommodate some of the children with intellectual disabilities from St Vincent's, Cabra. The average daily cost of maintenance in Pelletstown was 9s 11d in 1958-60.

- 13.232 There was discussion between all the relevant parties - the Daughters of Charity, the Department of Health and the Dublin Board of Assistance - about the future roles of Pelletstown, St Philomena's and St Teresa's Blackrock (all run by the Daughters of Charity). It was decided to use St Teresa's exclusively for children with intellectual disabilities⁶⁸ and move existing residents to St Philomena's with no change at Pelletstown - see section dealing with St Philomena's.
- 13.233 The question was raised about keeping all 'mongols' (children with Down's Syndrome) in one institution, preferably Pelletstown. The medical officer said that:
 From a clinical point of view there would be no objection to bringing all mongols together in one institution for research purposes but it would be impracticable because of the present institutional arrangements.
- 13.234 Research was being conducted by the paediatrician, Dr Coffey, on behalf of the Medical Research Council.

1960s

- 13.235 The Dublin Health Authority (DHA) took over the functions of the Dublin Board of Assistance on 1 July 1960.⁶⁹ Virtually none of the records of the DHA have survived. There is evidence from other sources that it had a visiting committee which visited Pelletstown but the Commission has not seen any minutes or reports.
- 13.236 In 1960, the Director of the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau, Fr Barrett, told Archbishop McQuaid that, in the past year, the Dublin Board of Assistance had decided that women would not remain in Pelletstown for more than six months. This was in the context of concern that Irish pregnant unmarried women were increasingly likely to go to England. One of the perceived causes of this was that Bessborough, Castlepollard and Sean Ross insisted that women must remain for two years.⁷⁰
- 13.237 Miss Reidy inspected Pelletstown on 25 February 1960. She visited on three subsequent occasions to examine the registers and record statistical data. It had last been inspected by Miss Litster on 25 October 1951.

⁶⁸ This decision seems to have been largely driven by Archbishop McQuaid.

⁶⁹ *Health Authorities Act 1960* and SI 134/1960

⁷⁰ Dublin Diocesan files: LII/A/40/9/(1)-(3)

13.238 The report stated that on the day of the inspection there were 87 women and 124 children (inclusive of six neo-natal infants) resident in the institution. The well-being of women and children was excellent. There were, however, some 'puny' children in the under-one age group, some were delicate from birth, some had contracted pneumonia and were slow in development and some were 'coloured babies'. The report stated that the latter are difficult to rear and inclined to be bronchitic in the first year of life. The children's play-rooms were bright, colourfully decorated and adequately heated and ventilated. They had a plentiful supply of suitable toys and communal play material.

13.239 There was no heating in the bathroom attached to St Mary's nursery; this was a 45-cot unit of which 38 were occupied in February. During the three-week cold spell which lasted from the beginning of February until a few days before the inspection it had not been possible to use the bathroom and the children had to be washed in their cots. Infra-red heaters, however, had been provided, but were lying in the stores awaiting installation.

13.240 Miss Reidy commented that washing a large number of infants in their cots was time absorbing, arduous and unsatisfactory for the staff, and constituted a certain risk for the infants. The delay in heating the bathroom seemed quite unnecessary. Some windows in St Brigid's nursery needed repair to exclude draught; this should have received prompt attention as there were a number of young infants exposed to the draughts. Since the last inspection on 25 October 1951⁷¹ children were discharged as follows:

• Boarded-out	95
• Irish adoptions	184
• American adoptions	185
• Placed for adoption through society	137
• St. Philomena's school	326
• St. Vincent's Cabra	32
• Protestant Church Society	1
• Foster parents through parent	12
• Certified schools through the courts (accommodated here instead of St Kevin's)	87
• St. Patrick's Guild	9

⁷¹ The text of the report states 1960 but this is clearly a typographical error.

• Catholic Rescue and Protection Society	3
• Castlepollard for adoption	1
• I.S.P.C.C	1
• Other homes	4
• Lota Park ⁷²	4
• Orthopaedic, Baldoyle	2
• Stewart's hospital	2
• Total	1085

13.241 Between the 25 October 1951 inspection and 31 March 1960 there were 667 deliveries in the maternity unit; there were 17 stillbirths and 13 neo-natal infant deaths. The causes of the neo-natal deaths were recorded as: atelectasis (four); intra cranial haemorrhage (four); prematurity (three); congenital deformity (one) and inanition (one).

13.242 In that same period, 23 older children died in the institution; six had been born there and the others had been admitted to it. The age range was between six weeks and 16 months and the main causes of death were recorded as pneumonia and congenital debility or deformity.

13.243 Miss Reidy concluded that the 'standard of care in this institution is excellent'. There was an awareness of the needs of both parents and children. The two and a half to four year age group compared very favourably with children raised in normal homes in normal circumstances.

Indeed, standards generally are every bit as good as anything I have seen in Great Britain or the USA countries where capitation fees for mothers and children are far higher. In the event of St. Mary's Tuam being closed I would strongly recommend that mothers and children be given priority placing in this institution.

13.244 The Department of Health subsequently sent a note saying that it assumed that something has been done about the windows in the bathroom attached to St Mary's and that the windows of St Brigid's would be fixed before the winter.

⁷² This was a school for children with intellectual disabilities. See Ryan Report: <http://www.childabusecommission.ie/rpt/pdfs/CICA-VOL2-05.PDF>

- 13.245 In August 1961, the Department of Health recorded that there were 98 women and 150 children in Pelletstown. There was capacity for 150 women and 300 children.
- 13.246 There were further discussions about the organisation of services for children with disabilities and making places available for them in Pelletstown. In 1961, the Dublin Health Authority proposed to make accommodation available in Pelletstown for 60 or more children from Cabra mainly the most severely handicapped, bed ridden children. It had also been suggested that St. Philomena's (which was also run by the Daughters of Charity and to which children of school-going age went from Pelletstown - see Chapter 2) could cope with all unmarried mothers and children and Pelletstown could then be used exclusively for children with intellectual disabilities. The director of the Daughters of Charity, Fr Sheehy, discussed this with the Department of Health. He was opposed to the suggestion. Instead, he suggested that children from another of the Daughters of Charity institutions, St. Teresa's Orphanage, Blackrock, should be moved to St. Philomena's.
- 13.247 The Department of Health thought that Bessborough would be the geographically most suitable for conversion to a home for females with disabilities. The department proposed to discuss this with the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and with the Bishop of Cork, Dr Lucey. It was noted that Dr Lucey '...is most interested in the activities of the Cork Polio and General After-Care Association who have very ambitious plans for the care of the mentally handicapped children in the Cork area' (see Chapter 18).
- 13.248 There seemed to be a lack of awareness among county councils of the status of Pelletstown and about whether or not it was available to its residents. For example, in 1961, Waterford county council asked the Department of Health about the admission to Pelletstown of a named individual. The department, in reply, said that letters like this should be addressed personally to its inspector or initials only should be used. Similar letters were sent to Wexford and Cavan county councils. Other councils wrote to ask if Pelletstown was an approved institution.
- 13.249 In January 1962, Clare county council was told that the rate for Pelletstown was 10s a day which was the average daily cost of maintenance.

- Toddlers Montessori; 2 years to 4 years: 31
- Over fives: 2
- Special Unit; mental defectives and delicate Infants: 27
- Neo-natal Infants: 9

13.255 There were 45 women in St Mary's dormitory which had capacity for 50 and 32 in St Brigid's which had capacity for 33. There were 14 women in the maternity hospital which had capacity for 16. Miss Reidy noted that the general standard of care and appointments in the institution, with the exception of the women's dormitories, was satisfactory. Neither of the adult dormitories afforded privacy of any kind. 'The Sister-in-Charge considers, in this day and age, that this is retrograde and I agree with her wholeheartedly'.

13.256 The maternity unit was very clean and well kept. Records were available and properly posted. There were 787 deliveries (23 stillbirths) and 8 neo-natal infants' deaths.

13.257 Children were reported to have been discharged as follows since the last inspection.

- Boarded-out 51
- Irish Adoptions 380
- USA 73
- German 1
- Through other societies 271
- Foster parents per mothers 8
- Certified schools through court (in transit) 168
- Special schools certified through D.H.A. 60
- Discharged to hospitals 16
- Discharged to relatives 709⁷⁴
- Discharged to L.C.C. 7

13.258 Nine 'illegitimate' infants, of whom eight had been born in the institution, had died since 25 February 1960. The causes of death were congenital deformity (four),

⁷⁴ It seems highly likely that a significant number of these children were subsequently adopted as the vast majority of 'illegitimate' children born in the 1960s were adopted.

asphyxia and cardiac failure (two) cerebral haemorrhage (one), prematurity (one), lobar pneumonia (one).

13.259 In 1966, some of the Pelletstown lands were sold to Dublin County Council for housing.

13.260 In September 1966, the following description of 'other children' resident in Pelletstown was compiled:⁷⁵

- Children from hospitals and health centres for convalescence; generally undernourished and delicate; looked after by the paediatrician, Dr Coffey, who decided the length of their stay;
- Deserted children whose parents could not be traced;
- Children from broken homes; often short term admissions due to illness or economic pressures; eviction for non-payment of rent was another factor; frequently the child of a very young married couple; 'the child care officers of the Dublin Health Authority and a Sister Social Worker do valuable work so there are few long term admissions'.

13.261 There were 16 cots in a special unit for babies with severe deformities. There was accommodation for 100 unmarried mothers and there was 100% occupancy. In the year ended March 1966, 292 women were admitted; the age range was 14 to 40.

13.262 A member of the Daughters of Charity gave a talk about the history of Pelletstown in which she linked it back to the Foundling Hospital service for the unwanted children of Dublin. She said that there were few foundlings in the 1960s but there were rejected and deserted children. 'Some parents are never traced. Others, usually of the itinerant class, turn up months later and can't understand why we were looking for them'. They rarely returned for delicate or premature babies as they seem to reject them and be ashamed of them. She outlined other groups for whom Pelletstown catered: children from broken homes, children whose parents were ill (these were usually short-term), homeless children and children of very young couples who could not cope. She said that the 16 cots in a special unit for

⁷⁵ Document supplied by the Daughters of Charity.

babies born with severe inoperable deformities were reserved for babies from Dublin city and county.⁷⁶

13.263 She said that the dormitories were in the process of being replaced by single units. There were two Sisters who acted as counsellors to the 'girls' and there were 'two young ladies who act as Sisters' Deputy and also give training in household duties, crafts and needlework'. There was a library, radio, TV and record player. There was the odd party on occasions such as bank holidays and birthdays 'where being shut up is especially painful'. They got a dance band a few times a year and there was a weekly film show.

We do not believe in keeping a girl in the home indefinitely because she wishes to keep her baby or her baby is not suitable for adoption. In these circumstances we discharge the mother to a situation, encourage her to visit regularly and review the position with her at intervals. An unmarried mother needs sterling qualities of courage and devotion to bring up her child single-handed and unless her parents are willing to co-operate she will not succeed. The child will grow up without the affection and stability he needs. This must be pointed out to her.

We make every effort to place the babies who are unsuitable or unable to be placed for adoption in good Foster Homes. There is a shortage of suitable Foster Parents.... Our Adoption Society is in the happy position of having a waiting list for babies.

13.264 In February 1967, a Cavan woman who had been sent back from London was placed in Pelletstown by St Patrick's Guild. Pelletstown contacted Dunboyne as it catered for Cavan residents. She spent three nights in Pelletstown. Cavan County Council had to pay for her three night stay and needed Department of Health approval for this payment. Another Cavan woman wanted admission as she knew people in some of the other homes and her sister lived in Dublin; she was 15.

13.265 In December 1965, the Dublin Health Authority wrote to the Department of Health to tell them that it was proposed to provide cubicles in a number of the dormitories in 1966/7. The work was to be carried out by the maintenance staff in stages and completed over a number of years.

⁷⁶ Document supplied by the Daughters of Charity.

13.266 In February 1967, the Minister for Health wrote to the DHA giving approval for the payment of an allowance of not more than £1 a week to 'patients' who were engaged in performing useful tasks in the institution.

1967 survey of Pelletstown residents

13.267 In 1967, interviews were conducted with the residents of Pelletstown by a social scientist for a master's degree.⁷⁷ The objective was to obtain facts about the social background and characteristics of a group of unmarried mothers and to describe the type of situation that arose when a woman discovered she was pregnant.

13.268 By way of background, the thesis outlined the general situation of unmarried mothers and mother and baby homes. At this time, mother and baby homes were having financial problems. The proportion of unmarried mothers had not changed; it was between 1.5% and 3% since the beginning of the century. The main factor was that mothers were staying in the institutions for considerably shorter periods, mainly because the children were being placed for adoption when about eight weeks old. As a result, the institutions were not full.

13.269 At the time, Regina Coeli was the only facility providing hostel facilities for mothers and children in spite of the poor quality of the buildings.

13.270 There were 1,403 'illegitimate' births registered in 1965; 628 were registered in Dublin; large numbers were also registered in Cork (201), Westmeath (141), Tipperary (176) (reflecting the presence of mother and baby homes); Dunboyne residents gave birth in Dublin.

13.271 The author recognised that 'illegitimate' pregnancy was likely to be a source of great tension and emotional stress; no matter what plan was made, unmarried motherhood involved suffering for the mother. There was no equivalent organisation in Ireland to the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child which had been set up in the UK in 1918. It was noted that, in the previous year, Pelletstown had been allocated a full time social worker and a psychiatrist visited weekly.

⁷⁷ Mary Frances Creegan: *Unmarried mothers, An analysis and discussion of interviews conducted in an Irish Mother and Baby Home*; unpublished NUI M Soc Sc thesis.

- 13.272 This survey covered the 136 mothers in Pelletstown whose babies were born between 1 December 1966 and 1 July 1967.
- 13.273 The vast majority - 84.6% - of the Pelletstown residents surveyed were from Dublin; this was defined as where they lived for the year before admission; 10.2% were from other parts of Leinster and 1.5% each from Connaught and Ulster. At the same time, Dunboyne, which had a total of 32 women resident, had no residents from Dublin; 26.9% were from the rest of Leinster; 21.9% each from Munster and Connaught and 9.3% from Ulster.
- 13.274 About 300 women were admitted to Pelletstown each year. The length of stay varied from a few days to 12 months; some were admitted from hospital after the birth; some were admitted while pregnant but left before the birth. There were about 100 women resident at any one time.
- 13.275 The interviews were conducted after the birth. The author commented that some of those who gave birth in hospitals and were newly admitted to Pelletstown at the time of the interview were so bewildered and confused that they were unable to answer even the simplest questions. Those who had been there a number of weeks were much more relaxed and willing to talk about themselves and their experiences. Six refused to be interviewed and two more refused to answer questions about the putative father; a total of 100 were interviewed; they were in the home between mid February and the beginning of May 1967.
- 13.276 The author pointed out that women in mother and baby homes were not necessarily representative of all unmarried mothers as the mother and baby home was a shelter from society.
- 13.277 The following were the main findings of the survey:
Age: Of the 100, four were under 18 (one under 16); 25 were aged between 18 and 20; 61 were in their 20s and 10 were in their 30s. The age distribution was similar to the age distribution for unmarried mothers generally but different to that for all mothers: 2.7% of all mothers (in 1965) were aged under 20; 31.3% of unmarried mothers were aged under 20 (29% in the sample surveyed). This was complicated by the fact that 90% of 'illegitimate' births were first births and this was not true for the 'legitimate' births, nevertheless unmarried mothers tended to be

younger than married mothers. Mothers aged 15 and under were 1.6% of the total of unmarried mothers in Ireland in 1965.

Education: None of the mothers in this survey was school going. About one third had not progressed to secondary education (free secondary education was announced in 1966); 58 had primary education only; eight had primary education and two years of technical school; 16 had more than two years technical school; three had less than two years secondary schooling; five had more than two years secondary and ten had four or more years at secondary school. Six had left school before the then minimum school leaving age. About one third had received no explicit sex education.

Occupation: 39 were domestics in institutions or private homes; seven were on home duties; ten were waitresses/barmaids, there were nine shop assistants, seven factory workers and 11 clerical workers. This meant that 49% were employed in domestic work or as waitresses and barmaids; 15% of the general female population in the 1961 census were employed as shop assistants, barmaids, waitresses, cooks and maids. In 15 cases - nine private houses and six in institutions - the employer knew of the pregnancy and made arrangements for admission to Pelletstown.

Family circumstances: 70 were reared in two parent families; 57 were from families of six children or more; 42 were living at home with parents when they became pregnant; 42 were resident in their domestic jobs. The parent(s) knew of the pregnancy in 43 cases and the mother but not the father knew in 10 more; 36 parents did not know; the parents were dead or out of touch in the other cases. In 22 of the cases where a parent knew, they had been told by someone else; the parents were more likely to know if the woman was living at home. None of the parents who knew refused to take the woman back but it is not clear that they were prepared to take the baby as well.

On discovering that they were pregnant, 37 of the surveyed group moved away from their homes or jobs; 30 were already away from home and five had no homes; 18 went to England, four had gone to England not realising they were pregnant and nine were living in England when they became pregnant; 26 of the 31 women who came to Pelletstown from England had been repatriated, that is

they were advised by a welfare agency and in some cases financially assisted to do so. The author questioned the policy of repatriation - one woman had lived in England since the age of eight and knew no one in Ireland.

Of the 100 in this survey, 23 had had at least one other 'illegitimate' child (the majority of whom were born in Pelletstown); this was more than three times greater than the official statistics; it seems that unmarried mothers expecting a second or subsequent child made greater use of the mother and baby homes than first time mothers; almost all of them had been in a mother and baby home before; the tendency for unmarried mothers as a group to be less well educated than a cross section of the community was noted to be much stronger in women with more than one 'illegitimate' child.

Putative father: while the putative fathers tended to be older than the women, there was not a wide age disparity; it was noted that this did not confirm the view that unmarried mothers were frequently seduced by older and more experienced men. While all the women were Irish (some had been living in the UK), 84 of the fathers were Irish; the rest came from a range of other countries; five were foreign students in Ireland.

There was a great variety of occupations among the fathers. The vast majority (93) were single.

About half of the women had known the putative father for at least a year. Most had been in steady relationships with the fathers and the majority of fathers (62) were aware of the pregnancy; 38 women did not tell the father; a high proportion of the fathers offered no help. The author points out that the women in mother and baby homes would probably not have been there if help had been forthcoming. It was also noted that information about the putative father was affected by the mother's view of him and there was a need for objective research into unmarried fathers and their attitudes.

Referrals: It seems that many of the women had not been aware of the existence of services such as mother and baby homes; a few had heard rumours of prison like institutions where unmarried mothers were kept for a number of years. The largest number of referrals (31) were from a doctor or medical social worker; ten

were from an employer, 11 from a welfare agency in Ireland, 28 from a welfare agency in the UK, 11 were self referrals and there were three from a priest, three from friends and one from a parent.

Length of stay: 59 were admitted six weeks or more before the birth; 44 of these were there for at least two months before the birth; the practice in English mother and baby homes was not to admit until six weeks before the birth.

Infant mortality: In Ireland in 1965 the infant mortality for children under 1 was 25 per 1000 births but was 29 per thousand for 'illegitimate births'. In this survey, four of the 100 children were either stillborn or died within the first few weeks.

Plans for the baby: Preference for speedy adoption was given to mothers who did not already have a child; this meant that mothers of more than one child had to stay longer in the institution unless they could afford to pay for fostering; 67 of the mothers planned to have the baby adopted and not get married; nine planned to keep the baby and marry the putative father; two planned to have the baby adopted and marry the putative father; three intended to bring the baby to the parental home; eight intended to keep the baby but did not know how. Social pressures and practical difficulties were the main obstacles to keeping the baby.

13.278 The thesis concluded: 'The problem of the unmarried mother is the problem of society's attitude to her'.

13.279 In February 1968, the Dublin Health Authority (DHA) proposed to appoint a new Sister in charge to Pelletstown. The Department of Health refused to approve the appointment because she was not a qualified nurse. In September 1968, the department asked the DHA to appoint a person with suitable nursing qualifications and wanted a general review of staffing in Pelletstown. There does not seem to have been a formal reply from the DHA. The proposed appointee took up the position. It seems that the CEO of the DHA considered that, in general, the Sister in charge should be a qualified nurse but would make an exception in this instance; this appointee had extensive experience running a mother and baby home in England.

1969 inspection

- 13.280 Miss Reidy inspected on 3 September 1969. There were 119 children (including 24 'legitimate' children) and 68 adults (including 14 in the maternity hospital) in residence. The report provides a description of how the institution was organised.
- 13.281 St Michael's unit was generally known as the mother and baby unit. It housed 31 infants aged under 11 weeks and their mothers. Mothers and babies were sent to this unit from the maternity hospital. It was a large spacious area with two isolation cubicles for infants. The milk kitchen, which had facilities for bottle sterilisation by the Milton method, was equipped with a gas cooker and refrigerator. Adequate cupboard accommodation for infants' clothing was provided. The unit and all special areas were clean and well kept.
- 13.282 The Holy Angels unit, previously St Mary's infirmary, had 17 infants between the ages of six weeks and nine months. It catered mainly for healthy children. There were two 'legitimate' children there on the day of the visit. They were described as 'social cases'. One child was a member of the Traveller community (described at the time as 'itinerant'); both mothers were in psychiatric hospitals. The unit had a kitchenette, washing and ironing room and a bathroom with two baths. There were three infant toilets which, Miss Reidy remarked unsurprisingly, were seldom used because of the age of the children.
- 13.283 Our Lady's unit (was St Brigid's) housed 30 infants aged from one year to 18 months. This unit which had been 'tastefully decorated' in December 1968, was bright and cheerful. There was a kitchenette with a cooker, refrigerator and Milton sterilisation. There were units providing bathing facilities for nine, toilet facilities for five, a washing and ironing room as well as an office and stores for linen. Individual clothes lockers were also provided.
- 13.284 St Vincent's unit (which had previously been Sacred Heart) had 17 children of various ages ranging from 11 months to five years and three months. These children were in the care of a qualified Montessori teacher. They had adequate communal and individual play material including swings. There was a kitchenette equipped with a cooker and refrigerator. The children's play area, when weather prohibited the use of an outside verandah, was a large room in which the children could eat and sleep. It had 20 children's beds and five cots.

- 13.285 The Lourdes unit was, strictly speaking, a sick children's unit but it housed other children as well. Children who were admitted for custodial care were housed there until they were medically cleared to live in one of the other units. 'Severely mentally handicapped' children were also accommodated here.
- 13.286 St Mary's and St Brigid's dormitories were the adult accommodation. At this stage, 26 cubicles fitted with a bed, a chair, a wardrobe and general purpose cupboard with mirror and over bed light, had been provided. A bed area for the accommodation of 50 was awaiting reconstruction into cubicles.
- 13.287 There was a dining and sitting room for mothers. A reconstruction scheme to bring the dining room nearer the kitchen was in hand. Home crafts were encouraged. The 'girls' knit for their infants and themselves and made 'bath mats, etc. from nylon waste'.
- 13.288 Miss Reidy interviewed four mothers individually. One mother said that she had been 'most difficult and recalcitrant' for the first few weeks of her stay. She had no fault to find with the institution itself - 'food was excellent and the nuns kind and understanding'. Her complaint was with society and social taboos. She felt that every mother should be encouraged to keep her child. This mother was well educated and, while she had a good job in Ireland, was going to emigrate in order to keep her child.
- 13.289 Another mother had to sleep in the dormitory when first admitted. She was shocked by the 'types - they were so mixed'. After being a patient in St. Kevin's, she got cubicle accommodation on her return to Pelletstown and she was much happier about that. A friend of hers was admitted and they had, between them, to arrange visitors at different times. She felt that accommodation for visitors was wholly inadequate. 'The nuns were most kind'. She intended to keep her child.
- 13.290 Another mother thought that the 'rules were getting too lax'. The practice of encouraging visitors to come to the institution and encouraging relatives to come to take the girls out for drives, was making things very difficult for some. She lived in constant dread of running into someone she knew. She had no fault to find with the institution itself.

13.291 The fourth mother interviewed gave 'great praise' to the institution and the Sisters. She said that some girls were 'narkie' and 'one got fed up listening to their grouses and grumbles'. This mother had herself been raised by guardians both of whom were aware of where she was. In the other three cases only the mother was aware of her daughter's whereabouts.

13.292 Children had been discharged from Pelletstown between 1 May 1965 and 31 July 1969 as follows:

• Adopted	534
• Special schools	63
• Boarded-out	58
• Other homes	8
• Foster parents (per relatives)	10
• To relatives	581 ⁷⁸
• Certified schools through the courts	22

13.293 The report noted that children used to be placed in Pelletstown while awaiting a place in a certified school; this practice had ceased sometime between 1965 and 1969.

13.294 Miss Reidy concluded that she was generally satisfied with what she found. The conversion of the open dormitory accommodation to cubicles was very necessary but the matron and the Dublin Health Authority were very aware of this and every effort was being made to expedite completion of this work.

The 1970s

13.295 In 1970, a Department of Health official was surprised to discover that Pelletstown was not simply a home for unmarried mothers and their children. He noted that almost half of the children discharged in the five-year period 1965-69 were discharged to relatives. When Miss Reidy visited in September 1969, about 20% of the children resident in Pelletstown were 'legitimate'. The official wanted further information on why the legitimate children were there and how many 'illegitimate' children went home with their mothers. The Dublin Health Authority explained that the children who went home to relatives mainly went to parents; the 'legitimate' children were mainly there because of parental illness and those who were there

⁷⁸ Again, it is highly likely that a significant number of these children were subsequently adopted.

for a long stay were mainly the children of parents with a psychiatric illness. The DHA did not follow up the children after they left because they did not have the staff.

- 13.296 The Eastern Health Board (EHB) took over the functions of the Dublin Health Authority in 1970. It first met in November 1970.⁷⁹ At its meeting of 4 February 1971, it was agreed to establish visiting committees composed of board members. These committees were to visit the major hospitals once a month and the smaller centres at least once a year. Pelletstown (which was categorised as a hospital) was allocated to the No 1 visiting committee for 'periodic visits'. At least two committee members had to be involved in each visit and the committees would report to the board at each meeting. This seems to have been a continuation of the practice of the Dublin Health Authority but the Commission has no documentary evidence from the DHA. In practice, the EHB's Pelletstown visiting committee visited there about twice every year until it closed.
- 13.297 The EHB took over the administration of the health services within its functional area from 1 April 1971. On 30 March 1971, the Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford Health Authorities were dissolved.⁸⁰
- 13.298 At its meeting on 1 April 1971, the EHB decided to rename St Kevin's. St James' Hospital was established.⁸¹
- 13.299 In September 1971, there was one Senior Social Worker, three Children's Officers and six social workers in the Welfare Services Department of the EHB and the board was looking for approval for the appointment of five more social workers. There were also social workers in hospitals.⁸²
- 13.300 In November 1971, the estimates of expenditure for 1972/3 were discussed by the EHB. These showed that Pelletstown was being allocated £189,000. The allocation for the boarding out of children was £257,000.

⁷⁹ The minutes of the EHB meetings are available online at www.lenus.ie

⁸⁰ SI 117/1971

⁸¹ SI 187/1971

⁸² They were known as Almoners.

- 13.301 The minutes of the EHB meeting of 6 January 1972 include the report of the visiting committee to Pelletstown.⁸³ The visit had taken place on 25 October 1971; three members of the committee attended and four sent apologies. Dr Coffey, visiting paediatrician was in attendance (among others). The committee members were met by the Sister in charge and other members of the community.
- 13.302 The Sister in charge told the committee about the type of services provided. She said that unmarried mothers were usually admitted about six weeks before confinement and were 'encouraged to leave as soon as it was practicable for them to do so'. Approximately 50% were from outside the Dublin area. She said that, in her opinion, the standard of the service was unequalled by comparison with similar institutions elsewhere. The committee 'indicated that this should be particularly emphasised in view of the unfounded and adverse comments published regarding the adequacy of services available for unmarried mothers in the Country'.
- 13.303 The visiting committee was told that accommodation was available for 92 'girls' and 146 babies; there were 23 babies in isolation. Due to adaptation work in progress in St Vincent's nursery, the accommodation for babies was curtailed and there were actually 75 mothers and 112 babies in residence on the day of the visit; admissions had increased in recent years. Births at the home were:
- 183 in 1969/70
 - 211 in 1970/71
 - 141 in 1971 (half year)
- 13.304 Adoptions were arranged by St Louise's Adoption Society. Dr Coffey said that a considerable number of children could not be put up for adoption because of congenital abnormality. Some were placed with foster parents but there were problems placing children with long term disability. The visiting committee recommended that the allowances paid in respect of boarded out children should be substantially increased and special consideration was merited in the case of foster parents who took children with disabilities. The committee indicated that some of the provisions of the adoption legislation were inadequate or

⁸³ The minutes of the EHB included reports of visiting committees in its first few years of existence. The existence of visiting committee reports was referred to in subsequent EHB minutes and sometimes a discussion was held. The Daughters of Charity provided the Commission with some visiting committee reports. The HSE has not been able to provide the Commission with the other visiting committee reports.

unnecessarily restrictive and the views of the health board and its officers should be put forward while the legislation was being amended.

13.305 The visiting committee inspected Holy Angels' and Our Lady's nurseries and some of the dormitory and dining room accommodation. They commented favourably on the structural and mechanical maintenance of the accommodation and facilities and, in particular, on the decorative condition of the institution. The members praised the work and dedication of the community and expressed their appreciation of the assistance and hospitality they had received.

13.306 It is notable that virtually all visiting committee reports from other hospitals and institutions at this time record that the members of the committee spoke to some of the residents but there is no such suggestion in this report.

13.307 The visiting committee paid another visit to Pelletstown on 2 November 1972. Five members of the committee were present. They were met by the Sister in charge and four other members of the community, the medical administrator and architects and structural engineers. The members were informed that foster parents who took children with disabilities did get higher payments.

The Committee reviewed the service being provided at the Home and noted that the general public still seemed not fully aware of the kindness and solicitude of Health Boards for unmarried mothers. The public image of the service appeared to be drawn by those who did not avail of it while the confidential nature of the service precluded those who benefitted from publicising it.

13.308 It was noted that the services were provided free of charge while the mothers also retained their health and social welfare benefits '... this compared favourably with similar services in other countries'. There was liaison with two other similar institutions - Bessborough and Dunboyne. Accommodation in Pelletstown was sufficient to cover current needs. It was strictly non-sectarian and the staff were conscious that their duty was to help and advise. 'At all times the wishes of those availing of the service are respected particularly in regard to anonymity'.

13.309 The committee noted that staff were employed to carry out domestic duties; there was no rigid programme for the residents and 'they are free to go shopping etc.

and to have visitors if they wish'. The majority 'undertake light domestic work which is valuable therapy and also engage in occupational therapy'. Only a small percentage were employed and the majority return to work when discharged. Two social workers were employed to help the residents who could also avail of the health board social worker service; there were 14 social workers in the EHB children's section at this stage. The service included a visiting psychiatrist; most did not need a psychiatric service but some needed support to cope with bereft feelings following the adoption of the baby. The committee also noted that there was not a problem with drug addiction.

- 13.310 The Sister in charge told the committee that in her five years there she had come across only one instance where parents did not support their daughter. However, some residents did not want their parents to know of their admission and their view was respected.
- 13.311 In the year to 31 March 1972, there were 264 adoptions from the institution and 132 from 1 April to 30 September 1972. Children were not placed for adoption until at least six weeks after birth. This was to enable medical screening and to give the mothers sufficient time to consider carefully whether they wished to rear their children rather than have them adopted.
- 13.312 The visiting committee was told that there were 72 adults and 92 children in Pelletstown on 31 October 1972. In the 10 months to 31 October 1972, there were 884 admissions (including readmissions) and 234 births. The figures for 1971 were 1,071 admissions and 254 births and for 1970, there were 788 admissions and 179 births.
- 13.313 The medical administrator suggested that the committee might consider recommending legislation to require the putative father to contribute to the cost of the service; he mentioned that in Denmark and Sweden the courts had power to levy charges on more than one person if necessary.
- 13.314 The committee considered that adoption legislation would be improved by reducing the statutory period of placement before adoption from six months to three months and accepting a mother's general consent to adoption given three months after the

birth rather than requiring her final consent to a specific placement not earlier than six months after the birth.

- 13.315 The committee noted that, in the interest of the children, their stay in Pelletstown should be as short as possible. It also suggested that the fact that larger allowances were payable to foster parents who took children with disabilities should be more widely publicised. The chair asked the members to consider before the next meeting how greater public awareness of the need for good foster parents could be generated.
- 13.316 The fire officer reported that he had completed a course of lectures in June on fire precautions in Pelletstown; with the movement of patients, refresher courses were necessary. A consulting engineer submitted plans for a new 30 point automatic telephone system with break-glass fire alarms sited at strategic points. The existing telephone system was a weak link in fire prevention and control and general communications within the institution needed improvement.
- 13.317 Plans for re-siting the altar in accordance with liturgical requirements had been prepared and awaited the approval of the Department of Health.
- 13.318 The committee praised the unselfish work of all the staff and paid particular tribute to the Senior Administrative Officer, Welfare Department, for his great personal interest and dedication in all matters relating to Pelletstown. The report of the Sister in charge on the very satisfactory maintenance service which had been provided was noted and the members complimented the engineering staff.
- 13.319 The estimates for 1973/4 included a proposal for an extra £5,000 to cover an administrator, upgrade of staff of religious sisters and a part time paediatrician.
- 13.320 In February 1973, the EHB approved a capital grant of £2,700 for kitchen equipment and rewiring. The visiting committee visited in May. There were five members present. Also present were the medical officer, the Sister in charge and four members of the community as well as EHB staff including engineering staff.
- 13.321 The report of the visiting committee shows that there were 83 women and 105 children resident on 1 April 1972 and 83 women and 97 children on 31 March

1973. During the year ended 31 March 1973, there were 391 women admitted and 399 children of whom 255 were born in the home. Of the women discharged, six left to marry, 255 went to parents or relatives, 20 to friends, 21 to flat accommodation, four to hostels, 84 to situations, nine to other homes, 75 to hospitals; 94 were described as 'temporary discharges' and four left without notice.
- 13.322 Of the children, 274 were adopted, 59 went to mothers, seven went to parents, 18 were boarded out by health boards, 34 went to schools or other institutions, one went on holiday and 75 went to hospitals. St Louise Adoption Society arranged 103 of the adoptions; 92 were arranged through CPRS with smaller numbers through other adoption societies.
- 13.323 Two children died as a result of congenital ailments. The medical officer said that they had epidemics of diseases such as gastroenteritis from time to time but they had the facilities to deal with these; alternatively, the children could be sent to Cherry Orchard Hospital if necessary. They also had the services of Dr Coffey, the visiting paediatrician to advise as required.
- 13.324 The committee members expressed the view that all steps possible should be taken to ensure that any mother who wanted to keep her baby would not be prevented from doing so through lack of financial assistance. It was noted that the tendency to exclude the putative father from all arrangements concerning the mother and the child may be unfair to some of the fathers and also to the mother and the baby; the committee thought that, if it were possible, the fathers should be encouraged to take an active interest in the babies' future and in the mothers' general welfare. It was explained that where an unmarried mother could return to her family there appeared to be a reasonable hope of her rearing her baby, but where she had to fend for herself in flat accommodation there were many problems not the least of which was her own loneliness and isolation. The medical officer told the committee that recently she had visited the community care centre in Crumlin and she was impressed by their approach and hoped to arrange close liaison with the centre in any future cases (from the Crumlin area) where an unmarried mother wished to rear her baby.
- 13.325 It was noted that the contract documents for the new telephone installation and fire alarm system, to which reference had been made at the last visiting committee

meeting, were being prepared and would be processed through the Department of Health as speedily as possible.

13.326 The chief executive officers of the other health boards who maintained women in Pelletstown had been circularised about the importance of preserving anonymity. The women were now given a code number on admission and this code number, rather than the name, was used in any further correspondence.

13.327 The medical officer told the committee that all babies adopted from Pelletstown received any necessary medical care there during the first month of adoption and that they were then referred to the child welfare clinic in their district or to the family doctor.

13.328 The committee noted that there were six beds for babies born in the institution who required long-term care. This number had been sufficient in the past but there was currently pressure on space because there were no alternative places for children who could no longer be helped in Pelletstown, for example 'spastics'.

13.329 The committee members complimented all the staff 'on their excellent work'. The chairman said that he appreciated all that the community in the home was doing for unmarried mothers and he was sure the EHB would make available adequate supporting staff as required. 'It was known that many members of the Community devote their off-duty time to helping the many cases of hardship which come their way'. The committee also paid special tribute to the doctors who provided the maternity and paediatric services and the visiting psychiatrist from St. Loman's Hospital who visited once each week or on request.

13.330 The committee inspected the following units:

- Holy Angels (babies from six weeks to one year old);
- Our Lady's nursery (babies up to one year);
- St Michael's nursery (babies under two months);
- St Vincent's nursery with playing area (for children up to four years);
- Cubicle accommodation for 'girls';
- Sitting room and dining room accommodation.

- 13.331 The committee members were very favourably impressed by the very high standard of maintenance and equipment in the units they visited. They spoke with members of the staff in the units and the doctor gave a brief history of several of the babies and spoke on some of the problems that arose. The members were most appreciative of the way the doctor assisted them on their inspections.
- 13.332 In August 1973, there were 14 social workers and one senior social worker employed by the EHB in the Children's Section. They were responsible for care and counselling of unmarried mothers; assessment of prospective adopters and foster parents; supervision of boarded out children, children at nurse and children placed for adoption; and pre-placement assessment and follow up of children in residential care. There were four social workers in Ballyfermot, Killester, Rathmines and Bray/Wicklow. There was approval for a senior social worker for Wicklow but no appointment had yet been made. There were one senior social worker and 15 psychiatric social workers and the EHB was providing assistance to voluntary bodies who employed 22 social workers in the community. The board wanted to expand the numbers with a senior social worker in each community care area (there were ten such areas within the EHB which covered Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow) and it proposed to create nine new senior posts and ten social worker posts.
- 13.333 Sometime in the 1970s, a list of rules about admission to Pelletstown was drawn up.⁸⁴ Admissions were to be arranged with the matron, not the social worker. No pregnant girl should be refused admission except for some specific reason; they could be from any of the 32 counties. All 'illegitimate' children from the EHB area were to be admitted (accompanied by mothers, if possible); those from other counties were to be admitted only if accompanied by the mother; these children must have a negative stool test report (in writing); if not, the baby must be isolated until this had been obtained.
- 13.334 The admission of 'legitimate' handicapped babies was to be arranged through the consultant paediatrician, Dr Coffey, or the resident medical superintendent.
- 13.335 The social worker's job was to interview all 'girls' after admission except for those sent by the CPRSI and the Rotunda Girls Aid Society as they were interviewed

⁸⁴ Undated document supplied by the Daughters of Charity.

weekly by their own social workers. Those from the country or other societies were to be interviewed once and then on demand. The St Louise's Adoption Society 'girls' were to be interviewed regularly.

- 13.336 There was quite a bit of interaction between the EHB and the Department of Health about staffing in Pelletstown. In February 1974, following a review of staffing, the EHB sought approval from the Minister for Health for the creation of one additional post of ward sister and two extra night superintendents. The department's chief medical officer visited in April 1974 to discuss this with the matron. He had no objection to the proposed increase. At that stage, there were nine Sisters, 49 nurses, 28 attendants, two domestics and one teacher employed in Pelletstown.
- 13.337 The need for more social workers throughout the EHB was also recognised and, in May 1974, it was noted that recruitment was proceeding. A number of the social workers employed by the voluntary agencies were applying for the posts and the EHB thought it unlikely that they would then be replaced so they wanted to recruit a further 16 social workers to ensure that there was a net increase.
- 13.338 In March 1975, the estimated cost of the proposed capital expenditure on a fire alarm and telephone system for Pelletstown was £25,000.
- 13.339 In April 1975, the visiting committee discussed aspects of the adoption legislation, the position of children with disabilities and the question of hostels for single mothers and their babies. There were difficulties in getting foster parents for children with disabilities and there were not enough suitable places for them. It was suggested that this was a housing issue and not a health board issue.
- 13.340 In 1976, the general hospital services division of the Department of Health rang the Sister in charge of Pelletstown to find out what they did. The department was told that there were 16 maternity beds, ten cots, 130 beds for babies; the babies included the children of the residents, abandoned babies and babies awaiting adoption. They had accommodation for 100 women but generally there were only about 60 at any one time. The Sisters provided care for these babies until they were adopted but they also had many babies who could not be adopted, for example, some hydrocephalic children, some 'spastics', some who were 'mentally handicapped', some who were the children of mothers with a record of psychiatric

illness and some whose mothers have left them in the institution promising to return for them. The oldest toddlers for whom they were caring at this time were a mentally-handicapped boy of four whom they hoped to get into a home for children with mental disabilities in a few months and a five-year-old girl who had a congenital heart problem; the Sisters hoped that she would be admitted soon to one of their other institutions. The Sisters also looked after some toddlers who were sent to them by the EHB when they required a spell of convalescence and they also received some very sick children from St James's who required to be placed in isolation. They also looked after some young 'itinerant' children who, because of their home environment, regularly developed chest infections in winter time.

- 13.341 They had four Sisters, 49 nurses, 13 attendants and one domestic staff. The number of births was 240 in 1973; 236 in 1974 and 213 in 1975.
- 13.342 The visiting committee visited again in November 1976. They were told that there had been 186 confinements in Pelletstown in the period 1 January - 31 October 1975 and 49 women had been sent to St James's: a total of 235. In the same period in 1976 there had been 152 confinements in Pelletstown and 93 in St James's: a total of 245.
- 13.343 The staff consisted of the Sister in charge, two night superintendents, one ward sister, 48 nurses and 22 attendants.⁸⁵ The Daughters of Charity expressed their disappointment that they had not been given extra nurses for feeding the babies. The mothers were leaving earlier than before and extra help was needed. The Sisters were not keen on asking expectant mothers to feed the unaccompanied babies. The visiting committee had recommended extra staff at previous meetings; the EHB said there was a bar on increasing staff over the numbers employed in December 1975. The Sister in charge wanted St Michael's ward converted to cubicles. The visiting committee inspected the maternity unit and the grounds.
- 13.344 The Pelletstown physician raised the issue of putting cubicles into one of the babies' wards to cut down on cross infection. A proposal to put 25 cubicles at a

⁸⁵ The list does not include the domestic and catering staff

cost of £3,500 had been agreed the previous year by the EHB but had not been carried out.

- 13.345 A new telephone and alarm system was completed in October 1977. The cost was £29,660; £4,660 was paid by the Hospitals Trust Fund; £25,000 was a loan from the local loans fund, repayable over 35 years.
- 13.346 A social worker report compiled in September 1978 said there were approximately 400 admissions of pregnant women annually with 40–60 resident at any one time.⁸⁶ There was one social worker there and one who divided her time between Pelletstown and the community. All the residents were interviewed and some were worked with more intensively than others, depending on their individual needs and whether or not they had had contact with a social worker from their local area. There were approximately 100 children in the nurseries. These included children awaiting adoption, foster care or residential care and children whose mothers were 'not yet in a position to provide a home for them'. The high number of mothers and children created a lot of administrative work for the social work department with endless queries coming from all health board areas.
- 13.347 The Department of Health inspector, Miss Clandillon, visited Pelletstown in December 1978. She reported that the reasons for the retention of the children were valid - they were children with disabilities. The standard of care and accommodation was high; cubicles for new born infants were being introduced into one ward; these included a work table with infant bath.
- 13.348 In December 1978, the EHB heard that the work on cubicles and installation of baths was complete except for the connection of the baths. In May 1979, it was noted that work on the cubicles and bathrooms should be completed by the end of June. In December it was noted that work was almost complete on the provision of cubicles.
- 13.349 In 1979, the EHB agreed to sell⁸⁷ 3.6 acres of land at Pelletstown to Dublin County Council for use as playing facilities subject to the provision of adequate boundary walls and restricted access to preserve the privacy of the institution.

⁸⁶ This report was about a social worker who did a placement in Pelletstown in 1978 and was compiled by her supervisor who worked there.

⁸⁷ The sale was subject to the approval of the Department of Health.

Closure of maternity unit

- 13.350 The closure of the maternity unit was being considered in the early to mid-1970s. It was on the agenda of the EHB's visiting committee, for example, in October 1975. The matron told the committee that, in the year to 31 August 1975, there were 1,128 births to unmarried mothers in the four Dublin maternity hospitals⁸⁸ plus St Colmcille's (24,000 births in total); there were 200 births in Pelletstown (140 from outside the EHB area) so it was catering for one sixth of the total births to unmarried mothers. There was a GP service in conjunction with the obstetrician/gynaecologist in St James's.
- 13.351 At the time, the Eastern Health Board was keen to get hospital/institutional space for other groups, in particular for long stay geriatric patients, people in need of terminal care and people with intellectual disabilities. It was pointed out that the Daughters of Charity were already catering for 1,000 handicapped children in four centres.
- 13.352 Pelletstown was inspected by a Department of Health doctor in 1976. In his report to the chief medical officer, he said that it consisted of a home for unmarried mothers who usually came in about two months before delivery and left when their babies were at least a fortnight old. The average number of 'girls' was about 60. There were also about 60 babies, most of whom were awaiting adoption. The institution was used by a number of adoption societies some of which took the babies at two weeks but St Louise's Adoption Society insisted that the baby was examined at six weeks before adoption was permitted. The institution was 'inclined to collect infants for various reasons unsuitable for adoption e.g. children with Spina Bifida, Hydrocephalus, Tumors, etc.' It also provided a 'sanctuary for some chronically ill or congenitally abnormal legitimate infants' who would otherwise have to be kept in the children's hospitals.
- 13.353 On the day of his visit, there were eight patients in the ante-natal ward but only two in the post-natal ward and two babies in the nursery. The unit had 215 deliveries and had two early neo-natal deaths in the previous year. A GP provided ante-natal care and was available if required at delivery.

⁸⁸ St James's, Holles Street, the Coombe, the Rotunda.

- 13.354 The inspecting doctor was of the view that the women in Pelletstown were at greater risk than the average obstetrical patient because:
- they were mostly first time mothers;
 - they often had not had ante-natal care;
 - they were more likely to come from deprived homes;
 - they may feel antagonistic to the establishment in their circumstances.
- 13.355 As a result, they needed greater than usual care. He had inspected the delivery room records and noted that about 10% had a forceps delivery; there were also some breach deliveries. The institution did not keep a supply of blood and the usual anaesthetic was chloroform. The nursing staff required was nine nurses with midwifery qualifications; two nurses were on duty each night although there was a mean of four deliveries a week.
- 13.356 He agreed with the Eastern Health Board that they would be better off delivered in St James's. He suggested that the GP continue to provide ante-natal care in Pelletstown but that the women should attend at St James's Hospital at least on one occasion before delivery.
- 13.357 He did not think the maternity unit was suitable for geriatric care. It was too small and the location in close proximity to where there were 60 infants including some sick infants might be a source of infection. In March 1976, the EHB decided to keep the maternity unit open mainly because of the confidentiality it provided to the mothers.
- 13.358 In May 1976, Comhairle na n-Ospidéal issued a discussion document on the *Development of Hospital Maternity Services*.⁸⁹ This recommended that in-patient maternity services should be concentrated in hospitals catering for 1,500 to 2,000 deliveries a year. This meant that there should be no more births in Pelletstown.⁹⁰
- 13.359 The issue of closure was raised a number of times by the medical members of the EHB and by the deputy CEO. The deputy CEO pointed out that 'the retention of the costly staff-intensive, under-used unit' meant that £30,000 would have to be cut from some other service. The deputy CEO suggested that the members should re-

⁸⁹ www.lenus.ie

⁹⁰ The report also recommended the closure of St James's maternity unit. It was considered entirely satisfactory from a medical point of view but the Coombe had the capacity to provide the service.

examine their decision of March 1976 to keep the maternity unit open. A doctor member of the board welcomed the fact that more women were opting to have their babies in St James's; he thought it was vitally important that the delivery take place in a first class maternity unit; some members agreed while others thought that confidentiality remained a major consideration.

- 13.360 At this time, the EHB was considering building a welfare home⁹¹ in the grounds of Pelletstown and making the maternity unit available for a 25 bed geriatric unit.
- 13.361 The CPRSI, which was responsible for approximately 40% of the admissions to Pelletstown, was not happy with the proposal to turn the maternity unit into a welfare home because of concerns about confidentiality, the need for medical treatment in some cases and the need not to reduce facilities for unmarried mothers in light of the abortion situation. It was also concerned that a welfare home would be a return to the old county home image.
- 13.362 In November 1976, a meeting was held between Pelletstown staff, the EHB, the Department of Health and St James's obstetrician/gynaecologist about the closure of the maternity ward. The EHB said there were nine nurses for a total of about 200 births, each cost £150 in nurse cover alone; a substantial number were going to St James's already. The department wanted to close it for safety reasons if arrangements for preservation of privacy could be made in the main maternity hospitals. The obstetrician said facilities were available in St James's; over half had gone there in the past year anyway; a six-bed ward could be set aside for women from Pelletstown and a single room made available when necessary.
- 13.363 In July 1977, a member of the visiting committee objected to meetings with representatives of Department of Health about Pelletstown being held without members of the visiting committee present. He argued that babies should continue to be delivered there in order to preserve confidentiality; there should be no policy change. In November a doctor member wanted deliveries to cease because of the risks. In general, the medical members of the EHB wanted to close the maternity ward and the other members did not.

⁹¹ Public nursing home for older people.

- 13.364 The question of using the maternity unit for the young chronic sick was raised. The EHB had no beds for young chronic sick in its own institutions. The department was opposed to using the maternity unit for the young chronic sick for a number of reasons including the undesirability of having young chronic sick and unmarried mothers sharing the same campus.
- 13.365 In December 1978, the EHB had a lengthy discussion about the decision not to close the maternity unit despite medical objections. In February 1979, the visiting committee finally agreed that medical opinion must be accepted and the maternity unit should close as soon as practicable.
- 13.366 The issue was raised again at the EHB meeting in May 1979. It was argued that considerations of anonymity and confidentiality were as important as the medical considerations but it was decided to close. The CEO agreed to notify the various referral agencies. It was noted that the obstetrician/gynaecologist from St James's Hospital had given assurances about confidentiality there - including the provision of a private room if required; it was also noted that the Daughters of Charity were happy with the proposed change. The maternity unit closed in May 1980.

1980s

- 13.367 Discussions about the future of Pelletstown began in earnest in about 1980. The Daughters of Charity had been making representations about its unsuitability. There were problems because of costs and the shortage of Sisters to provide the services. It was estimated that it would cost £750,000 to maintain in 1981; this was between £6,000 and £7,000 for each mother and child maintained; about 90 staff were allocated to it and it was very difficult to make any staffing changes.
- 13.368 The Department of Health was closely involved in the decision making about the future of mother and baby homes generally. It is clear from the files seen by the Commission that the department's knowledge of the various institutions was quite limited even though it was responsible for approving many of them. In particular, it seems that there was no clarity about what section of the department should be involved with these institutions. The lack of knowledge extended to children's homes for which the department was directly responsible. There was also uncertainty within the EHB about which section should be responsible for Pelletstown. It came under the hospitals section and the issue arose as to whether

or not the community care section should have been involved in the discussions about its future.

- 13.369 In August 1980, a social worker member of the EHB noted that a number of children were over a year in Pelletstown and that they were reported to be unsuitable for placement. She said that professional opinion indicated that any child was suitable for placement if the proper foster parents could be found. She also commented on the lack of activities for the children and on the apparently high nursing staffing in the home although there were normally no ill patients there.⁹² She referred to the alternative of accommodating mothers and children in small group homes.
- 13.370 In October 1980, the Sister in charge reported to the St Louise Adoption Society that 280 mothers had been admitted to Pelletstown in 1979 and 282 in the nine months to September 1980; about a quarter of the mothers came from the EHB area. There was a discussion about the 'general unsuitability' of Pelletstown for accommodating unmarried mothers.
- 13.371 In November 1980, officials from the Department of Health visited Pelletstown to consider its possible future use. The officials noted that it had a total of 98 staff. It was difficult to heat and costly to run; the estimated running costs for 1981 were £750,000.
- 13.372 In November 1980, there was a meeting between the EHB, the Department of Health and the Daughters of Charity. The Daughters of Charity and the EHB were keen to continue a service for unmarried mothers but not in the existing building. The health board wanted to provide a purpose built unit for unmarried mothers and babies in self-contained units.
- 13.373 In December 1980, the EHB was in touch with the Daughters of Charity about setting up one or more mother and baby homes where the mother would be more involved in looking after the baby. The EHB wanted small units which would be under the control of one or two Sisters with the mother taking a very active part in looking after the baby and in the running of the unit. The length of stay was to be

⁹² It is not clear to the Commission that the social worker was correct. It may have been that there were no children there with acute illnesses but there were a number of severely disabled children and children with chronic conditions.

limited but should be of such duration as to provide for the rehabilitation of the mother. It would also afford the mother the opportunity to find out whether she would be in a position to care for the baby or to consider the alternative - adoption or otherwise. The mother would also be expected to contribute towards her own and the baby's maintenance in the institution.

13.374 After the closure of the maternity unit in May 1980, deliveries were mostly in St James's but some were in the main maternity hospitals. Some women stayed about five days in hospital while others came back to Pelletstown within 24 hours.⁹³

13.375 In January 1981, the matron wrote to the EHB outlining what would be required if the institution was phased out. She wanted a purpose built building for 35-40 women in single rooms; ten of these rooms should be large enough to have a cot for those who intended to keep the baby; the women should also have separate cooking and laundry facilities. Facilities for 30-40 babies in two nurseries would be required together with nursing staff to look after the babies. There would also be a need for some ante-natal and post-natal facilities in order to preserve confidentiality. In her letter she mentioned that they were running a 'Personal and Clerical Development' course for the residents.

13.376 In February 1981, a meeting of all the Daughters of Charity members working in Pelletstown was held in Crumlin Children's Hospital.⁹⁴ The Sisters were concerned about the future as rumours were circulating and there were frequent visits from the department without much explanation. They had been told that the cost of running Pelletstown was £90 a week for each girl.

13.377 The Sisters made the following observations:

- Pelletstown provided a national service with a certain degree of anonymity; if babies were transferred back to the mother's home place, anonymity would be lost and this could result in more abortions
- Many of the girls were disadvantaged and inadequate; the type of system proposed would not be suitable for mentally handicapped girls and psychiatric patients.

⁹³ Minutes of St Louise Adoption Society 10 April 1981. St Louise's Adoption Society met in Pelletstown. Its chair was the CEO of the EHB. The other members were health board employees, including social workers, and members of the Daughters of Charity.

⁹⁴ Document provided by the Daughters of Charity.

- 13.378 St Louise's Adoption Society was also discussing a replacement premises. In April 1981, about one quarter of the mothers were from the EHB area. The numbers had gone up again. It was noted that there was a general improvement in the health quality of babies and 'there is no waiting list at present for the admission of deformed babies'.⁹⁵
- 13.379 The adoption society was concerned about the care for 'inadequate girls'; it was considered that sheltered accommodation was not always best for the child; foster care might be preferable. It was noted that unmarried women were being housed in Ballymun and 'so received little support from the settled community'. The 'girls' in the hostel in Belmont Avenue (see Chapter 14) 'are moving on to alternative accommodation. They are not being rehoused'.
- 13.380 In May 1981, there was a meeting in the Department of Health to decide which division of the department should take responsibility for the four mother and baby homes then in existence - Pelletstown, Bessborough, Denny House and Dunboyne. In June 1981, there was a meeting in the department to consider alternative accommodation for babies and children in Pelletstown. Information about the conditions in Pelletstown was provided at both meetings.
- 13.381 The main building at Pelletstown was described as 'an old 3 story (sic) building, without a lift, difficult to heat and considered a fire hazard'. It was an old rambling building with accommodation for about 100 mothers. It was considered to be too big for the then current needs - there were only 37 mothers in residence in November 1980. There were 74 children resident at the time, 40 of whom were considered suitable for adoption.
- 13.382 The isolation unit was separate from the main building and was described as 'a fairly modern building in good condition with accommodation for 20 chronically ill children'. The separate maternity unit (which was not being used for confinements at this stage) was described as being 'in good order' and had accommodation for 18 people.
- 13.383 The EHB had proposed that the vacated maternity unit be adapted to accommodate 18 'young chronic sick' but the Department of Health did not agree

⁹⁵ Minutes of St Louise Adoption Society, 10 April 1981

as it did not have appropriate ancillary services. The board also proposed that the isolation unit could be vacated by placing the children in it elsewhere and the building then used for older people.

- 13.384 The EHB proposed replacing the main Pelletstown building with a 40-bed purpose built unit on the same site but a departmental official questioned the need for such a building. It was pointed out that none of the existing buildings at Pelletstown - the main building, isolation unit or maternity unit - was considered suitable for the accommodation of either geriatric or young chronic sick/incapacitated patients. A further problem in relation to this institution was 'the numbers of physically, mentally and multiply handicapped children being maintained there'. They included about six with physical handicap such as hydrocephalus and spina bifida, fibro cystic disease or heart condition and about 18 with intellectual disabilities ranging from mild to severe.
- 13.385 Children with intellectual disabilities were not accepted into the homes for the intellectually disabled until they were at least four years old and the Daughters of Charity had been pressurised into keeping them in Pelletstown until they were accepted elsewhere.
- 13.386 It had been suggested that, as Bessborough (see Chapter 18) was also underutilised, people who would normally go to Pelletstown could go to Bessborough instead. Other possibilities for the housing of the children with disabilities were discussed. This discussion showed that there was very limited knowledge in the department about the services provided in Temple Hill (see Chapter 2).
- 13.387 In 1982, the EHB established a board committee on support services for unwanted pregnancies. The board had allocated £23,000 in 1981 to extern institutions for unmarried mothers and proposed to allocate £28,000 for 1982. The extern institutions in existence at the time were Bessborough, Dunboyne and Denny House.
- 13.388 In January 1983, the Daughters of Charity met the EHB to discuss the future. At this stage, the numbers had dropped dramatically - there were only 25 women in residence. The Daughters of Charity were prepared to withdraw as they regarded

the service as 'too institutionalised'. They asked if the EHB could provide one or two houses for the 'inadequate girls'. They said that about five of the women in the institution at the time would be regarded as inadequate. The EHB asked if the Daughters of Charity could provide the accommodation but they said that they had already bought two houses on Belmont Avenue (see Chapter 14) and could not afford any more. They also pointed out the difficulties of finding places for the disabled babies as St Vincent's was full and no existing institution would take babies. It was agreed that there would be further analysis of the current residents and how closure would affect Dunboyne. It was also agreed to consult CURA and Ally.

13.389 In February 1984, the EHB looked again at support systems for unwanted pregnancies. It was noted that there had been an increase in the numbers of 'illegitimate' births.

13.390 A survey of single pregnant women attending St James's hospital had been conducted. This showed that:

- large numbers did not present for ante-natal services until very late in pregnancy;
- there was a considerable lack of knowledge regarding contraception, menstrual cycle and sex education in general;
- infant mortality figures were high for young mothers.

13.391 One member of the board drew attention to the need to ensure that the provision of services for unmarried mothers and their children did not create anomalies for other parents and their children in similar circumstances.

13.392 During 1984 there were further discussions about the closure of Pelletstown, in particular about what was to happen to the staff.

13.393 In August 1984, the consultant paediatrician at Pelletstown, Dr Coffey, wrote to the Minister for Health about the proposed closure. She said she had been a consultant there for some 50 years; she wanted the isolation unit maintained as a children's hospice which was sorely needed. She made reference to such hospices in the UK and the US.

13.394 Pelletstown was closed in 1985.

Eglinton House

13.395 In October 1985, the EHB bought a large house at 75 Eglinton Road⁹⁶ in which to provide a service for a small number of unmarried mothers as an alternative to Pelletstown. The plan was that it would be run by two of the three Sisters who were then in Pelletstown. The Sisters would provide day care but would not live in the house; instead, lay nurses would provide the night services. Eglinton House opened in January 1986 as a mother and baby home but it was a very different institution than Pelletstown. It provided places for up to 13 expectant and new mothers and five nursery places for unaccompanied babies. It was owned by the Eastern Health Board and managed by the Daughters of Charity until 1997. It was a three-storey semi-detached house on a road of expensive houses in what was then and remains an upmarket suburb. It seems there was some initial concern among the neighbours about its use as a mother and baby home but this does not seem to have lasted. A subsequent review noted that the entrance was not particularly suitable for prams and buggies.

13.396 In April 1986, the EHB told one of its members that:

As a result of careful planning, the co-operation of staff and staff representatives and the sisters in charge, the transfer of our service for unmarried mothers from the large institutional setting in St Patrick's to a community base on the south side of the city has been quietly achieved taking account of all of the interests involved. The new service is 'settling in' at present and arrangements, some of which involve a consideration of the residents and others and our obligations to staff, are in a transition phase.

The position at present is that a total of eleven staff plus a sister-in-charge and her assistant are employed. They include general trained nurses, midwives, nursery nurses and unqualified but experienced attendant staff.

The service can cater for up to 15 mothers, expectant and with babies. At present an additional number of babies are being cared for without their mothers pending placement although it is not intended that this service will continue.

The estimated running cost of the service for 1986 is £80,000 and the pay costs an additional £130,000 for the initial year'.

⁹⁶ The house had once been the residence of the then Taoiseach, Dr Garret Fitzgerald.

- 13.397 It was decided to pay £10 a week to residents who had no other income. Effectively this was a payment to expectant women and probably mainly to younger expectant women. All mothers would have been eligible for the Unmarried Mother's Allowance and expectant women who had been at work would likely have been entitled to a social insurance payment such as Disability Benefit (which was a short-term payment and which is now called Illness Benefit) or Maternity Benefit.
- 13.398 Unlike Pelletstown, Eglinton House was not regarded as a hospital but was within the remit of the community care section of the EHB.
- 13.399 In 1987, the EHB told one of its members that Eglinton House catered for up to 15 mothers, expectant and with babies. It also had a small number of babies without their mothers. It provided sheltered emergency accommodation for inadequate mothers of young infants until they could be accommodated satisfactorily with their children or until they had made decisions otherwise regarding the future placement of their children. Its residents included mothers who were 'mentally handicapped' or who had severe mental or physical ailments. It was frequently full and at the time concerned, there were seven people waiting admission, including two with severe psychiatric problems.
- 13.400 As already stated, the staff who transferred from Pelletstown to Eglinton House in January 1986 included general trained nurses, nursery nurses, midwives and untrained but experienced attendants. There were 12 staff plus the Sister-in-charge and her assistant who were both members of the Daughters of Charity. The service cost £194,000 in 1986; £171,000 of this was pay costs. It was expected that the costs would reduce in 1987 as it was not proposed to replace a retiring member of staff.
- 13.401 The EHB said that practical training, including training in domestic economy, was provided for mothers resident in the home. Those with no income of their own were paid pocket money of £10 per week.
- 13.402 A review of Eglinton House was carried out in late 1998/1999 on behalf of the Eastern Health Board.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Michèle Clarke, *Eglinton House Report on A Review of Service*, unpublished 1999

- 13.403 The review stated that the idea behind its establishment was to accommodate a small number of mothers and babies in a community based setting where the residents and staff shared the running of the house. When the review was carried out it was noted that the requirements of the residents had changed over the years. Only a minority wanted to conceal the pregnancy while a majority had serious social difficulties and/or psychiatric and addiction problems.
- 13.404 The mothers came to Eglinton House in the final three months of pregnancy and then generally stayed for about six weeks after the birth although there were exceptions to this. They cared for their own babies.
- 13.405 Eglinton House received state funding of £190,000 in 1986.
- 13.406 The records from Pelletstown were stored in Eglinton House and a tracing service was operated from there on behalf of the Eastern Health Board. A service was also provided for the Archbishop of Dublin in respect of children born in Pelletstown and subsequently adopted who needed baptismal certificates prior to marrying in a Roman Catholic church.
- 13.407 The reviewer considered that there were security risks in this and it was not suitable work for the staff involved. She recommended that the records be removed to a secure place and work on the records should be carried out by dedicated trained staff.
- 13.408 Records of the residents were kept in Eglinton Road. All staff recorded their observations of the mothers and babies before they finished their shift. The reviewer noted that these records reflected the training and background of the staff - they were mainly nursing notes. There was little information on the reasons for referral or the planned purpose of the stay. The records on the unaccompanied babies were also mainly nursing notes. The reviewer noted that the records did not include photographs or any other mementos of the baby.
- 13.409 The residents were not all unmarried mothers. Some were homeless married women and some were deserted or separated wives. The reviewer considered that there were issues about doing too much for the mothers but had little doubt that it was a 'kind place'.

- 13.410 The reviewer concluded that there was a continuing need for a service such as that provided in Eglinton House as the majority using the service had serious social and health difficulties. Nevertheless, it was closed in the early 2000s.
- 13.411 The review includes vignettes of some of the residents. It is clear that the mothers had particular needs; some had had other children for whom they were unable to care and they were trying to ensure that they could care for the latest child. Some of the unaccompanied babies had special needs and the reviewer was concerned about their future.
- 13.412 In 1998, six women lived in Eglinton House because they wanted to conceal their pregnancies; seven wanted accommodation and the other 36 women had serious social or health problems.
- 13.413 It could not accommodate women who already had a child as the house was not suitable. There were no statistics kept of the number of requests for admission or the reasons for referrals or on why one person rather than another was admitted. There was generally a waiting list of four to five referrals.
- 13.414 The reviewer concluded, having interviewed residents and staff and other people involved in the area, that there was an ethos of kindness, acceptance and care in Eglinton House. Some, including former residents, expressed concern that the high level of care could generate a high level of dependence.
- 13.415 Residents paid a small contribution towards their keep in Eglinton Road. This was £13 a week in 1999 at a time when the One Parent Family Payment was £73.50 plus £15.20 for each child. Expectant women also had to pay £13 a week.

Evidence from former residents and workers

There were no surviving Daughters of Charity members who had worked in Pelletstown. Former residents, a nurse and a number of social workers gave evidence to the Commission about their experiences of Pelletstown. The accounts given below are largely in the words of the former residents and workers but the Commission has not included information which might cause the individuals concerned to be identified; this is particularly the case for recent residents.

13.416 The main complaints of the mothers who had been residents were:

- Pelletstown was highly institutionalised and there was no privacy;
- The Sisters were emotionally cold especially during the births and there was no or inadequate pain relief available;
- They had no choice but to place their children for adoption

13.417 There were a few complaints about the food and about having to work in Pelletstown. There were also mothers who expressed the view that the food was good. The main complaint of the children who had been residents related to inadequate tracing services. A small number of mixed race residents complained of what they considered to be institutional racism - see Chapter 31. The social workers also talked about the institutional nature of Pelletstown and about the cold atmosphere.

Mother, early 1950s

13.418 This woman was first in Regina Coeli which she described as 'a dirty smelly place with about 40 women'. She described Pelletstown as a workhouse where she had to work. After the birth, she said she was sent to work in a Donnybrook laundry for three days a week and to doctors' houses on the other two days. She was not paid; she thinks that the nuns in Pelletstown were paid and this went towards the upkeep of the baby.

Mother, early 1960s

13.419 This woman's abiding memory was the unkindness during the birth. She said there was no pain relief and no doctor. 'There was no compassion. A nun would be walking around your bed with the rosary beads praying'.

13.420 She herself had been born in Pelletstown and spent three years there before spending the rest of her childhood in institutional care. She then had a baby there when she was about 18. She said it had not changed between the time her mother was there and her time. She spent the day knitting or sewing or making rugs; she acknowledged that she did learn some skills but had very little memory of the routine.

13.421 Her baby was adopted; she had no choice, she did not remember much about her time there and did not remember signing the adoption papers.

Mother, late 1960s

13.422 This woman told the Commission that she was 18 years old and a third level student when she became pregnant. She was terrified. She expected to be disowned by her family because that is what she heard happened in other families. She went to the family doctor. He suggested adoption and she thought that:

the only thing you could do, if you had a baby, was to have them adopted. It never occurred to me I could keep the baby because I thought I committed a terrible sin and I had to be punished for it and the punishment was adoption.

The doctor also suggested that she go to the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society. She did and they also suggested adoption. They did not suggest any other options. They also suggested a mother and baby home. When she was six months pregnant, the doctor told her parents (it is not clear if this was on her instructions). Her mother nearly died of shock and her father was much better than she thought he would be. She thought she would 'save them the awful shame of having neighbours know about me and the stress of looking at me pregnant...' so she went into Pelletstown. She made the decision; there was no discussion about it. They were met by a nun '...she didn't seem the warmest person in the world'. She had been so terrified that she was actually relieved when she went there. 'It's only now looking back I realise it was a very unattractive place. I don't remember any much interaction with nuns, they were kind of just there'.

She said the food was very good but the sleeping place was very basic. It was a dormitory with very little privacy. Her parents came to visit. She did not make any friends there. When she was first there she cleaned the chapel every day. This did not take long because it was a small chapel and it was spotless. After the baby was born, she worked in the nursery and she loved that.

She said that she gave birth in the little annex hospital. A lay nurse attended and she '...was perfunctory and definitely not like they were in Holles Street for my subsequent children'. She stayed for seven weeks. Her mother came to see the child but her father could not face it. Her mother then suggested to her father that they keep the baby but he refused. The adoption was arranged by the CPRSI. She met the priest in charge, Fr Colleran. He spoke to her 'like he was giving a public lecture'.

She met her son. He has had a good life but she feels that being adopted has had an effect on him even if he does not recognise it himself.

She said that she had been brought up to believe that people who adopted children had some kind of extra love or extra saintliness.

There was no overt abuse. I didn't have a bad experience except with the nurse I think when I was giving birth was a bit off. But there was no actual humanity that I remember, or anyone talking to us. In fact, I remember very little interaction with nuns, or mention of why we were there. I don't think it was much mentioned why we were there.

She was not working in the nursery where her son was but in the nursery for children who were left behind, some with disabilities; there were 15 or 20 cots in that nursery.

Child resident, 1950s

13.423 This witness spent the first four years of her life in Pelletstown and then spent the rest of her childhood in institutional care. Her mother was in Pelletstown with her. Her mother worked in the kitchen and was paid. The witness spent her time in the kitchen with her mother:

I was just this perfect nuisance. I was in and out of everything but it was very happy for my mother. There I was with her. Then the decision to remove me was very shocking in the way in which it was done. It was like overnight this little four year old who was with my mother for the whole time gets to be just removed but, trying to be fair to the people who cared for me, yes, they did do it and it was very shocking to have done it overnight and not give her any notice but they did every year, there was a transfer of children every year from St. Patrick's to St. Philomena's and for them it was probably routine. It was probably something they did every year ...

She said that her mother shared a room with other long term mothers; four mothers to each room. Her mother described how cruel the mothers were to each other and how spiteful and awful they were to each other.

Mixed race child resident, 1960s

13.424 This resident's father was African. He complained that his mother had put him up for adoption after about six months but he was never adopted. His mother was discharged the day after signing the consent to adoption. Four years later he was discharged to an industrial school which was also run by the Daughters of Charity. The witness considers that the health board was negligent in not arranging an adoption; this resulted in his being in institutions for 18 years. He considers that racial prejudice was a factor in his case.

13.425 He got some documentation from the Daughters of Charity; he remarked that they were more forthcoming with information than he had expected. Some was redacted but it did include various references to his mixed race parentage. His foster mother had also collected some information for him. The psychiatric report referred to him as 'coloured' and 'dark skinned'; he suggested that this indicated an attitude to his ethnicity that warranted noting as if it were an insurmountable problem. Other records described him as 'illegitimate', 'half caste'.

13.426 It seems that the consent to adoption form was set aside. The form is among his records but he became aware of this only when he sought those records. His foster mother was told that he was not available for adoption. The foster mother told the Commission that she wanted to adopt him but she had been told that his mother had not consented.

13.427 There were three other mixed race boys in the industrial school. He was separated from another boy from Pelletstown who went with him (a white boy). While in Pelletstown, he went on holidays to three different families. One family had a mixed race girl. He argued that there was no strategy to organise adoption for the mixed race children.

Adoptive parents and mixed race child, 1970s

13.428 A woman told the Commission that she was rejected as a prospective adoptive mother by a Catholic adoption agency in the early 1970s because she already had children and she told the agency that she was using contraception. She then discovered that it might be possible to adopt a mixed race child as there were advertisements in the papers looking for people to adopt mixed race children. She did adopt a mixed race child from Pelletstown. She, her husband and their

adopted daughter all gave evidence to the Commission. The adoptive parents said that the social workers were very keen to find adoptive parents for mixed race children.

Child resident, late 1950s/early 1960s

- 13.429 A former resident told the Commission that he vaguely remembers putting his hands through railings in a cot asking to be picked up - he was about two at the time. He alleges that he suffered various forms of abuse including systematic neglect leading to malnutrition and severe emotional damage. He described a collection of symptoms unique to adoptees: the primal wound. He was anointed four days after he got the BCG vaccine (he thinks he should not have been vaccinated because he was sick). He was adopted at age four; he said Dr Coffey came to visit him in his adopted parents' home where she administered additional medical tests and treatment.
- 13.430 His mother had been with him in Pelletstown for two years. He had been convinced that he was part of a vaccine trial but was told by the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Commission) that he was not.

Staff nurse 1969-1981

- 13.431 A former staff nurse in Pelletstown gave evidence to the Commission. She had been interviewed on the Pat Kenny Show on RTE in 1992. At the time, she had contacted RTE to object to the portrayal of Pelletstown given by a former resident. In her radio interview, she said that the account was 'riddled with inaccuracies'.
- 13.432 She described the conditions in the home as 'absolutely superior'. She said they could not have been better. The first thing she noticed was that the nursery was a big bright ward, daffodil coloured walls with green lino: 'Not black and white tiles' as portrayed in the account of the former resident.
- 13.433 There were about 50 cots in the ward; there was a happy atmosphere, friendlier than in a maternity hospital. There were four nurseries. There were two wards - one for the pregnant women and one for the women who had given birth. The witness denied that the women were doing tough manual work. There were attendants paid by the EHB to clean the floors. The women did some light work, for example, dusting; some were allocated to the baby nursery, washing bottles

and preparing them for the sterilising unit. This was done in the mornings. In the afternoons, they had access to the craft room where there were two qualified people teaching them the different arts of rug making, embroidery, knitting, sewing, the use of sewing machines. She named a number of well-known entertainers, (including the Garda Band) who gave concerts in the home.

- 13.434 She said that there was no pressure to place the babies for adoption. The nuns would put all the pros and cons very gently. There were about 120 women there when she started there and about 40 when she left.
- 13.435 The witness told the Commission that doctors were in Pelletstown every morning; Dr Coffey came one morning a week. Some of the women did AnCo courses outside and got a training allowance for this. The women had cubicles; they were not allowed smoke in the cubicles but they could in the bathrooms. There was a small number of mixed race children; she remembered one in particular. There were quite a few children with disabilities there; the prisoners from Mountjoy built an indoor swing for them.
- 13.436 If the mother was taking the baby home, she would be given a supply of food, baby formula and bedding for the cot and baby clothes. She remembered one mother who had a number of children. Her boyfriend would not allow her keep the children so they all went for adoption.
- 13.437 The food was good although the women did complain; it seems the complaints were more about the monotony of the food rather than its quality.
- 13.438 There were two trained nurses in all departments. Pain relief was provided during labour - Pethidine and gas and air. The witness was not generally assigned to the maternity ward. There were 30 cots in the ward she was in. Two rows of small cots and two rows of big cots. They had colourful counterpanes. Everything was gleaming. The bathroom was shining.
- 13.439 Pressure for adoption came from the parents. She described how three women decided to set up in a flat together; two went out to work and the third cared for all the babies. The nuns helped them set up but then the neighbours complained and they were evicted by the landlord.

Social workers

- 13.440 One social worker described the residents of Pelletstown in the 1960s as abandoned by their families. She considered that they were extremely lonely and isolated. She worked in St Kevin's. Most of the unmarried mothers from Dublin went home to their families. She visited those who went to Pelletstown. She never saw their living areas; she met them in the parlour. The building was huge and, she felt, oppressive.
- 13.441 In relation to false registration of births, one social worker described how a woman would explain that her husband was serving abroad with the Irish army and could not visit her; the baby would then be registered as the child of the adoptive parents.
- 13.442 The 1983 referendum raised awareness of abortion so women spoke of three options after that - have an abortion, keep the baby or place for adoption. Previously there were only two options.
- 13.443 A social worker who worked in Pelletstown in the 1970s told the Commission that the Sister in charge at the time was kindly but was very concerned to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the residents. She said that most of the women had already decided on adoption; they may have decided to go to a mother and baby home because they did not want their pregnancy known and adoption was the solution. Her recollection was that the place smelled of cabbage. There was a lot of sitting around but she did not witness any mother being forced to work. It was highly institutionalised. The Sisters were not warm but she did not witness any harshness.
- 13.444 She said that the medical threshold for adoption was very high. The paediatrician, Dr Coffey, would allow only perfect babies to be placed for adoption.
- 13.445 This social worker subsequently worked in a rural county in the early 1980s. She described how she was the only person who knew the mother's name; the mother was assigned a number so that when the county council staff were paying the bills for Pelletstown or the other institutions, the mother's name would not be known to them. She described other subterfuges she used to facilitate pregnant unmarried

women get away to Dublin for a week or so without families being aware of the situation.

- 13.446 A social worker who worked in Pelletstown in the 1980s told the Commission that, in her opinion, the mothers who kept their babies were the stronger, more able women. There was a sort of assumption that, if a woman was in Pelletstown, she was going to have the baby adopted.
- 13.447 She said that the address used by the women was 381 Navan Road; St Patrick's or Pelletstown was not mentioned.
- 13.448 The social workers were not involved with the living arrangements. Their office was separate from the main living areas.
- 13.449 They tried to arrange alternative places for some of the children with disabilities who were regarded as unsuitable for adoption. In a number of cases they found suitable foster or adoptive parents.
- 13.450 Two social workers said that they had learned nothing about unmarried mothers during their training and that they were too young and inexperienced for the job. Their main role was to help the women make their plans including discussions about adoption. The prevailing view was that adoption was the best option for the baby and probably for the mother as well. The adoptions were not 'forced' but the whole ethos supported adoption. One social worker said that 'while I wouldn't have any experience or direct evidence of what I would call enforced or forced adoption, I think the whole ethos and everything around it supported it'.
- 13.451 They commented on the 'huge role of secrecy' in dealing with unmarried mothers in the 1970s.
- 13.452 The social workers said that it was very 'institutional' and a 'very unstimulating environment'. There was little privacy. The mothers engaged in what the social workers called occupational therapy, for example, knitting.
- 13.453 The social workers said that some mothers were glad to be there because they had nowhere else to go while others did not want to be there. Some wanted to

move on quickly while others were very sad about giving up the baby for adoption. Some did not want to see the baby; one social worker said she was very concerned about them. She visited the women who gave birth in St James's. They were not treated any differently there from other mothers.

13.454 The social workers said that there was a lack of warmth on the part of many of the staff but the Sister in charge in the 1970s was a kind and compassionate person. Some of the staff resented the social workers but this was not true of the Sister in charge.

13.455 Very minor ailments resulted in the children being regarded as 'not fit for adoption'. The assessment of fitness for adoption was carried out by the paediatrician, Dr Coffey.

Affidavits received by the Commission

The Commission received a number of affidavits from former residents. These are sworn statements and are reported largely in the words used by the former residents. Unlike those who gave direct evidence, the Commission did not ask any questions of these former residents.

Mother, mid 1950s

13.456 This woman was born in a workhouse. She then lived in industrial schools and a Magdalen laundry. She was raped by a priest. Her baby was born in Pelletstown in 1956 when she was aged 25. She said that she was fed properly but there was not much of it. She did not have to do physical work but did do sewing. She had monthly medical examinations. The regime was nothing like it had been in the Magdalen laundry. She fed the baby until she was 9 months old and was then told that the baby was leaving; a nurse took a photo of the two which she has. She was not told where the baby went; she then was sent back to the laundry and she stayed there for about five more years. She went to Pelletstown to enquire about the baby. She was told that she had signed adoption papers but she says she had not. She subsequently gave birth to twins in Holles Street - they were taken away immediately and she assumed they were dead; she has no records of their births. All three children subsequently found her.

Mother, mid 1970s

- 13.457 This woman only recently told her family about the baby. She subsequently married the child's father but the marriage did not last. She described life in Pelletstown as very disciplined; the whole institution was spotless; everyone had different jobs to do and there was no opportunity to engage in any recreation, exercise or education. She was allocated work in the nursery looking after babies and feeding them a few times a day; there were six women working in the nursery and about 20 babies and the nuns also helped. The oldest child she remembers was eight or nine months. Mass every day was compulsory. She remembers being very cold. All the women lived in cubicles which were just big enough to dry their clothes. They were given just about enough basic food; there was a shop where you could buy things but she did not have any money. Washing facilities were very poor; clothes were handwashed; there was no laundry equipment except for a very small spinner. She did not feel free to come and go but does remember going to the city centre with other residents. The doors were locked day and night; the windows in the cubicles were so high up that they could not see out. Some had family visits but she did not.
- 13.458 She said that she received very little ante-natal care. Her blood pressure was not monitored. She saw a doctor once a month. She was told nothing about giving birth. Labour was 'horrendous'; she was left alone for most of the time. She was not given any pain relief or medical treatment. Eventually a doctor from another hospital was brought in and gave her an anaesthetic. She said she had a symphysiotomy but did not know this at the time.⁹⁸ She bottle-fed the baby every four hours but not during the night; she left five days after the baby was born.
- 13.459 She said that no one ever discussed the adoption process with her. (The records show that there is a social report of a discussion of the pros and cons of adoption and of a discussion of adoption and keeping the baby; this notes that the social worker thinks she had made up her mind even though she felt distress at parting with the child.)

Children

- 13.460 A woman born in 1974 was very unhappy about the tracing service provided by the HSE when she went searching in 2006. Another woman who was mixed race was

⁹⁸ This is highly unlikely; she may have had an episiotomy.

born in the early 1970s. Her adoptive parents were told the wrong country of origin of her father and her parents taught her about the country they thought he was from. She also was very critical of the tracing process.

13.461 A man who was in Pelletstown in 1969 was adopted but did not find out about this until 1988. He asked the adoption society for information in the 1990s but they said they could not examine all the paper files.

13.462 One woman said that her mother told her that the food was terrible and the mothers were starving; her mother had to work in order to pay the £100 to allow her to leave.⁹⁹ After her adoption, she said that she was inspected by people claiming to be nurses from Pelletstown until she was about eight. They took blood tests on each visit; she presumes this was part of vaccine trials.

13.463 One woman who was born in Pelletstown in 1962 and lived there for two years was adopted to the USA. She said that her parents made donations to the nuns but does not know how much. She said that she spoke only Gaelic when she arrived in the USA but quickly picked up English.

Workman

13.464 A man who visited Pelletstown to fix a telephone around 1974 when he was aged 20 remembers hearing blood curdling screaming. He saw young women with their heads down and not looking happy.

A foster mother

13.465 A woman who fostered a boy from Pelletstown said that the nun described him as being from the 'reject' ward. A pregnant girl was polishing the floor when she visited. The boy was two years and two months when she first met him and he was still in his cot; he was very sickly. It transpired that he was an undiagnosed coeliac; she felt he was being left to die in the reject ward.

⁹⁹ This is the only reference the Commission has seen to the payment of money to leave.