

Chapter 24: Dunboyne (Árd Mhuire)

Introduction

- 24.1 The Mother and Baby Home in Dunboyne Castle was opened in 1955 and closed in 1991. It was operated by the Good Shepherd Sisters. It was generally known simply as Dunboyne mother and baby home even though the Good Shepherd Sisters gave it the name Árd Mhuire. The first use of this name in the documentation is on 8 March 1956. Earlier (June 1955), it was recorded that an agreement had been reached between the Good Shepherd Sisters and Meath County Council to call it 'Marianville' but there is no further mention of this name.¹ The institutional records analysed by the Commission show that a total of 3,156 mothers were resident there over the period.² It was not intended that there would be any births in Dunboyne; in fact, eight are recorded as being born there (they were probably emergency births) but 1,148 of the children born to Dunboyne resident mothers spent some time in Dunboyne.

Origins

- 24.2 The decision to set up a mother and baby home in the north east seems to have been made around 1953. The impetus to establish it was provided by the 1951 *White Paper on the Reconstruction and Improvement of County Homes*.³ This restated the policy which had been in existence since the early 1920s (but not fully implemented⁴) of not maintaining unmarried mothers and children in county homes. Among other things, it provided that the Minister for Health would invite local authorities to submit proposals about how they proposed to 'deal with the classes no longer to be provided for in the County Home'.⁵ Significantly, it provided that grants would be available to local authorities for the provision of new homes for unmarried mothers and children and to 'voluntary agencies willing to provide a portion of the cost of new homes for unmarried mothers and children'. These grants were to be:

¹ The Good Shepherd Sisters had two mother and baby homes in Northern Ireland; Marianville was the name of one in Belfast; Marianvale was the name of the one in Newry.

² As some institutional records were not available, this may be lower than the actual number - See Statistical Analysis.

³ <https://www.lenus.ie/handle/10147/574552>

⁴ The White Paper shows that there were 450 unmarried mothers and 829 children in County Homes on 31 March 1950.

⁵ It was proposed that the county homes would be used only for aged and infirm persons and the chronic sick; unmarried mothers and children, mental defectives, the blind, deaf and dumb would no longer be housed there but in specialist institutions.

by way of contribution to loan charges on moneys borrowed for the purpose of carrying out the works now recommended. The grant will be at the rate of 50 per cent of the loan charges, subject to the provision that the maximum capital outlay per bed in each institution on which such contribution will be paid will be £500.

24.3 In January 1952, the Department of Health issued a circular to each city and county manager and each public assistance authority (see Chapter 1) detailing how the White Paper was to be implemented.⁶ This stated: 'The removal of children from the county homes is a fundamental part of the scheme of improvement.' It then outlined suggestions for the improvement of the boarding out system. In relation to unmarried mothers, it noted that there were 450 unmarried mothers in county homes on 31 March 1950 and that a proportion of these were mothers of more than one child. 'As there may be difficulty in securing accommodation for such mothers in existing homes it may be necessary to provide new accommodation for them.' The minister suggested that public assistance authorities whose areas were contiguous should combine to provide such accommodation. It is notable that Dunboyne was the only new institution for unmarried mothers which was established under this provision.

24.4 The department's circular was quite specific about the role of any such institution for unmarried mothers:

For the proper rehabilitation of the unmarried mothers it is essential that every effort be made to provide training designed to fit them for employment e.g. in private houses or in institutions. The Minister is aware that training is provided in some existing institutions, but he suggests that arrangements might be made with County Vocational Education Authorities to provide instruction for the unmarried mothers in the special homes, in such subjects as cookery, laundry work and domestic duties generally. In this way the unmarried mothers would acquire the knowledge and training which they would need for employment in district institutions or elsewhere.

It is suggested that unmarried mothers trained in domestic duties might be given the option of employment in a district institution, preferably elsewhere than in their home counties. They should receive the appropriate remuneration applicable to the office in which they are appointed. While so

⁶ Department of Health Circular 7/52.

employed they should be obliged to contribute towards the support of their children in the special homes.

- 24.5 It seems that six county councils - Cavan, Longford, Louth, Meath, Monaghan⁷ and Westmeath - got together to try to establish a mother and baby home in their area. The Commission has not seen any local authority documentation about how this initiative started but it is clear from documentation provided to the Commission by the Good Shepherd Sisters that Meath County Council took the lead. The relevant county councils were inspecting various properties in the area in 1953. Meath County Council told the Department of Health, in April 1954, that intensive efforts had been made to find a suitable premises but ‘...it would appear that most houses now available are too remote for this purpose as the Religious Orders generally are of the opinion that such Homes should be near transport facilities and relatively near towns or villages’. Dunboyne Castle was inspected in 1954. In early 1954, the Good Shepherd Sisters were approached by the county managers of the six counties concerned to discuss the possibility of establishing a mother and baby home in their area. (There seems to have been an informal approach at an earlier stage). The negotiations were conducted mainly by the chief officer in the health and assistance sections of Meath County Council who was based in Navan. He together with the Meath county manager and the Longford and Westmeath county manager inspected Dunboyne Castle with two representatives of the Good Shepherd Sisters in April 1954. The asking price was in ‘the region of £30,000’.
- 24.6 The actual asking price was £35,000. Negotiations with the vendors were conducted by the Meath county solicitor, who reported on the matter to the Good Shepherd Sisters; he was the county solicitor for Meath so, while he was acting on behalf of Meath County Council, he seems to have treated the Good Shepherd Sisters as his client.
- 24.7 In June 1954, the Meath county manager reported to the Good Shepherd Sisters that the councils had generally agreed the proposals in relation to Dunboyne Castle. Westmeath County Council’s deliberations on the issue had been reported in the *Irish Times*. This quoted the Westmeath county manager as saying that the cost would be £60,000 which included the cost of the building plus the necessary extension. A £25,000 grant would be available (presumably from the Department

⁷ Monaghan ceased to be involved in the project within the first year or so; the Commission has not seen any documents which explain this.

of Health) leaving the six councils to provide £35,000 between them. The Meath county manager, not surprisingly, regarded the publication of this information as unfortunate and pointed out to the Good Shepherd Sisters that departmental approval had not yet been granted and the purchase price had not been agreed.

- 24.8 Other locations were examined but Dunboyne was considered to be the only suitable option. The chief officer in the health and assistance sections of Meath County Council wrote to the Department of Health in October 1954 outlining the proposals of the six counties in relation to Dunboyne Castle. He pointed out that it was well served by public transport. The Good Shepherd Sisters had wanted a location which could be easily visited by relatives and from which the mothers could get out and about. He also noted that the Bishop of Meath had agreed in principle.
- 24.9 A draft agreement between Meath County Council and the Good Shepherd Sisters was drawn up. The agreement contains details of the proposed payment arrangements - how the payments would be decided but not the actual amounts. The payments were to be based on the previous year's expenditure. The draft contained a clear right of inspection by the various health authorities and the Department of Health. The agreement was not signed until 1959.
- 24.10 It would appear that Meath County Council bought Dunboyne Castle and the Good Shepherd Sisters took possession on 1 June 1955. It was blessed by the Bishop of Meath on the day.
- 24.11 On 11 October 1955, the first women and babies arrived. An internal history of Dunboyne Castle compiled by the Good Shepherd Sisters points out that this was the Feast of the Maternity of Our Lady.⁸ Four mothers and five children (all aged under nine months) are listed in the Department of Health inspector's report of August 1955 on the Trim county home as being due to be transferred to Dunboyne.⁹ In fact, only two of these children and their mothers transferred.¹⁰

⁸ The Good Shepherd Sisters gave the Commission copies of 'histories' of Dunboyne whose authors are not named but clearly were members of the order. These contain interesting snippets of information but the dates of compilation are unclear and they cannot be regarded as totally reliable.

⁹ There were 6 unmarried mothers and 13 children resident in the Trim County Home in August 1955. The other two children resident with their mothers were older and arrangements had been made for adoption and boarding out. There had been 11 unmarried mothers and 33 children resident in the county home in April 1954.

¹⁰ It is not known what happened to the other three children.

Sources

Dunboyne institutional records

24.12 The records of admissions, departures, births and entry and exit pathways which were compiled in Dunboyne were handed over to the North Eastern Health Board when Dunboyne closed in 1991. They are now in the possession of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla). These records provide details of the women admitted to Dunboyne. The details are not exactly the same in all cases but, in general, the information that is available about the mother includes:

- Name, address, date of birth, date of admission, expected date of delivery, date of admission to maternity hospital, date of discharge from maternity hospital and date of discharge from Dunboyne;
- Name of next of kin, by whom recommended or referred;
- Some information on background, for example, level of education, relationship with parents, employment experience;
- In some cases, information about the putative father is included and names are given in 437 cases - 13.85% of the total admissions;
- Address to which discharged.

24.13 There is some very limited health information available about the women. The visiting GP and the maternity hospital held the health records of the pregnancy and birth.

24.14 Information about the baby includes name, date of birth, vaccinations (if any in Dunboyne), date and place of baptism, date of discharge and to whom discharged. In many cases, particularly in the later 1970s and 1980s, the babies did not go to Dunboyne but were discharged from the maternity hospital; in these cases, the destination of the baby is recorded if known.

Discovery from the Good Shepherd Sisters

24.15 The Good Shepherd Sisters provided extensive documentation to the Commission. This included information about:

- The setting up of the home, the involvement of the local authorities concerned;
- The involvement of the local authorities and the Department of Health in the running of the home;

- The arrangements for closing down including material on the assessment of the need for the service in the late 1980s;
- Financial arrangements: there is extensive financial information including audited accounts for nearly all the years of its operation. There are some cashbooks and some lists of cheques issued but these are only available for a small number of years. Much of the correspondence between the Good Shepherd Sisters and the health authorities concerned financial matters;
- Some documentation about referring girls and women to the institution and about individual local authorities taking responsibility for the payments involved;
- The names of the various Sisters and lay staff who were in the institution; the dates involved and who was responsible for what;
- Various internal Good Shepherd Sisters documentation such as Chapter Books, Annals of the Convent, Book of Benefactors and reports of council meetings. The Chapter Books were required to be kept in all of the Good Shepherd Sisters' locations. They contain the Acts of the Chapter, that is, the elections of the Superior General for the Mother House and, in local and provincial houses, the elections of the delegates and deputies to the Provincial and General Chapters. The books also list canonical visitations by the Superior General, the Visitor, the Provincial Superior or the Bishop and an account of such visitations. The Dunboyne Chapter Book provided to the Commission has entries from 1972. The entries are all handwritten but it is not clear if they were made contemporaneously; The 'Book of Benefactors' records donations received from 1969; these are mostly modest amounts, for example, a total of £240 was received in 1969. It is not possible to clearly identify the names of the donors. The reports from council meetings are from 1986 onwards; the discussions were mainly about maintenance issues;
- Various accounts of the history of the institution: the authors are clearly members of the Good Shepherd Order; some accounts are contemporaneous and some were written after the institution was closed.

Department of Health

24.16 The Department of Health provided a range of documentation. The main files used for this chapter were:

NATARCH/ARC/0/408587

MHS/INA/0/490104

INACT/INA/0/450360

FIN2-EST-0-543210

INACT/INA/0/444981

INACT/INA/0/442989

FIN2/EST/0/543212

FIN2/EST/0/543373

Local authorities/North Eastern Health Board/HSE

- 24.17 In spite of extensive enquiries and searches the Commission has been unable to find any records from these sources relevant to Dunboyne. These records should now be held by the HSE but it was unable to find any.

Governance

- 24.18 In October 1955, the Meath County Council official wrote to each district medical officer employed by the council telling them that:

- Dunboyne had been acquired as a regional home for unmarried mothers and their children, other than first confinements;
- First confinements were to be accommodated in Castlepollard as heretofore;
- Dunboyne was not a hospital and confinements would take place in maternity hospitals in Mullingar, Trim and Dublin;
- It was established primarily for the purpose of replacing the county home as a place for single mothers; single mothers were not to be sent to county homes in future;
- It was being administered by Meath County Council on behalf of the participating councils and was under the care of the Good Shepherd Sisters.

- 24.19 The county council was involved in arranging doctor's services but not chaplaincy services. The Good Shepherd Sisters were told that they could order medical and other supplies required by the doctor and charge them under the capitation charge. The doctor's services were to be supplied by the local doctor; his pay was a matter between him and the Good Shepherd Sisters.

- 24.20 The lease arrangements between the local authorities and the Good Shepherd Sisters gave the local authorities and the Department of Health the right to inspect the premises. This right seems to have been very rarely, if ever, exercised. Meath County Council officials frequently visited, especially in the 1950s, but the visits do not seem to have involved any element of inspection. They seem to have been mainly concerned with maintenance of the premises and possible further development. There was also a social element to the visits, for example, the Meath county manager and the chief officer in the health and assistance sections of Meath County Council visited on Christmas Day 1955. The Commission has not seen any evidence that the other county councils involved took an active part in decisions about Dunboyne - the practical arrangements seem to have all been dealt with by Meath County Council officials.
- 24.21 Meath County Council was very involved in the practical arrangements - there are letters between the council and the Good Shepherd Sisters about a wide range of practical issues, for example, the felling of trees, buying lawnmowers, rates of pay for the gardener, buying a new tumbler (dryer) and the cost of transport to maternity hospitals.¹¹
- 24.22 The county council also seems to have been involved in adoption arrangements. In 1958, the head of the public assistance section spoke to the authorities in St Clare's, Stamullen (see Chapter 2) about adoptions direct from Dunboyne. The county council as the public assistance authority was entitled to place children for adoption in Ireland but not for adoption abroad - see Chapter 32.
- 24.23 Dunboyne was not registered under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934* until 1982. Meath County Council, and subsequently the North Eastern Health Board, should have ensured that it was registered. Initially, it may have been assumed, wrongly, that registration was not needed because there were no births in Dunboyne. However, in 1963, there is evidence that Meath County Council officials thought that the babies were generally born in Dunboyne. This arose when the Department of Health received the annual statistical return from Dunboyne and noted that there were no births there. The department contacted Meath County Council and was told that there was normally 'no break in the period for which they pay for patients in the institution except on an odd occasion when a

¹¹ The bills for transport were to be sent directly to the local authority involved.

patient might be sent to Holles Street.¹² The Meath official presumed from that that the children were born in the institution. The department official noted that Dunboyne was not registered under the Act but neither the department official nor the Meath official seems to have done anything about this. Inspections under this Act were carried out regularly by the Department of Health. The fact that it was not registered probably contributed to that department's general lack of awareness or knowledge of the institution.

- 24.24 Apart from the annual consideration of the capitation rate and other financial matters, the Department of Health seems to have had a minimal involvement with Dunboyne. It is clear that the policy makers in the department, as distinct from the financial sections, were largely unaware of what happened there. The annual statistical returns were noted but there were no departmental inspections. The first time it was visited by a department staff member seems to have been in 1981. This visit was undertaken in the context of the review which the department was then conducting into the future of mother and baby homes. While the report of the visit (see below) described the institutional arrangements, it seems to have been conducted for information rather than inspection purposes.

Physical conditions

1954 description

- 24.25 The representatives of the county councils and the Good Shepherd Sisters inspected Dunboyne in April 1954. The inspection report shows that the premises consisted of a reception room, drawing room, dining room, eight bathrooms, bedrooms with minimum and maximum bedroom accommodation as follows:
- 1st floor: 4 (6); 4 (6), 4 (6), 10 (16)
 - 2nd floor: 4 (6); 6 (8), 3 (4), 2 (3), 1 (2) 1 (1) 1 (1)
- 24.26 There was also a pantry, staff dining room, kitchen, scullery, larder, brushroom, two servant's bedrooms, coal cellars and boiler house. It had independent oil-fueled arrangements for central heating and water heating; a tank to hold 1,020 gallons was installed.

¹² This practice seems to have changed some time later as in was noted in correspondence in 1973 that payments were not made during such absences.

- 24.27 After Meath County Council bought the premises, there were continuing discussions between the Sisters and the council about the details of how the institution would be run. For example, it was agreed in June 1955 that the Sisters would continue to employ the gardeners who were already working there. Two gardeners were being paid £5 a week each; the county manager thought this was a reasonable rate. Also in June 1955, the county manager and other officials met the Good Shepherd Sisters at Dunboyne. There were detailed discussions about wallpaper, floor coverings, how the rooms would be used and a range of other matters. For example, it was agreed that the library would be used as a reception room and the drawing room would be the oratory. It was agreed that there would be accommodation for 22 'adult patients' with a possible maximum of 25 and the same number of children. There was sleeping accommodation for five or six Sisters. The Sisters agreed to supply lists of required equipment such as beds, bedding, cots, lockers and crockery and this equipment would be bought by the county council. The county council carried out some structural and maintenance work and advanced £1,000 for maintenance.
- 24.28 In August 1955, Meath County Council sent the Good Shepherd Sisters in Dunboyne a list of the equipment it had ordered from various suppliers following the Sisters' request. This list is extensive and covers everything from beds to forks, eggcups and bedpans; later lists show that items such as a cakemixer, a potato peeler (costing £57), radiogram and records were bought by Meath County Council and delivered to Dunboyne. There can be no doubt that the institution was very well equipped. In one of the Good Shepherd Sisters' histories of Dunboyne, it is stated that the Superiors of the Province 'very generously' provided the new foundation with 'all requirements from Altar, Sacred Vessels, down to the smallest details'. This presumably relates to all the religious requirements as all the practical requirements were provided by Meath County Council.
- 24.29 In October 1955, Meath County Council arranged for the laundry from Dunboyne to be carried out by the firm that provided the service for the hospital in Navan. The cost of each item was listed and included the 'alter (sic) linen'.
- 24.30 One of the internal histories of Dunboyne described the property as being in excellent condition when the Good Shepherd Sisters arrived, with four reception rooms, ten bedrooms, all modern conveniences and central heating already installed; the extensive grounds included a hard tennis court and many beautiful

trees. The 'largest and best' of the reception rooms was chosen as the oratory. This history credits St Joseph with 'having a hand' in getting them the premises and in getting them a new car.

1981 description

- 24.31 An extension to the premises was built in 1963. Planning permission had been granted in October 1960; according to one of the internal histories of Dunboyne, building was delayed by strikes. The extension was a two-storey building of 5,000 square feet with five reception rooms, two domestic offices, six double bedrooms with wash hand basins and two single bedrooms. This cost £28,000 and was paid for by the Good Shepherd Sisters.
- 24.32 Repairs had to be carried out to the roof of the original building in 1980. In February 1981, the Good Shepherd Sisters applied to the Department of Health for assistance with the cost of roof repairs. They said that the repairs which they had carried out in 1980 had left them heavily in debt.
- 24.33 In response to this application, the department's architect visited Dunboyne in June 1981. He described the building as being set in about 45 acres of farm land. It consisted of three parts built at different times. The original 18th century Georgian mansion was a three-storey house with some very fine Georgian plasterwork and fireplaces. It had a double roof with a very wide valley gutter. A lot of the roof timbers had been replaced and the remaining ones had been treated with an epoxy resin treatment. The original natural slates and lead had been replaced with asbestos slates and copper flashings. All the chimneys had been demolished and rebuilt in brickwork. Several ceilings and walls of rooms on the top floor had been re-plastered and decorated. The roof was now in excellent condition and had an expected life of 50–60 years. The architect noted a musty odour in one room which he thought may have indicated timber rot. He was unable to confirm this.
- 24.34 A single-storey extension had been built 50 to 80 years earlier. It was built in the style of the original house with a flat asphalt roof. This roof was leaking in several places. It was planned to renew the flashings to the parapets but if this did not cure the water penetration the whole of the roof might have to be replaced at a cost of between £4,000 and £5,000.

- 24.35 A modern two-storey extension had been built in 1963. This building was 'institutional' in appearance and contained most of the sleeping accommodation for the unmarried mothers. It had a flat concrete roof with asphalt. There were lines of discoloration and mildew on the 1st floor ceiling at regular intervals which could be caused by condensation due to cold bridging from the electrical conduits buried in the plaster soffit. It was noted that the addition of insulation slabs on top of the existing asphalt (an upside down roof) might have been a feasible solution to the problem.
- 24.36 The builder's final account for the roof repairs was for just over £58,000 including VAT. The architect considered this to be excessive; the builder's original estimate had been £30,000. The architect concluded that the building was in a very good state of repair but given its age and style, a continuing high level of maintenance costs was to be expected.
- 24.37 In July 1981, a department memo noted that the activity in Dunboyne is one 'towards which everyone is sympathetic'. The writer suggested a grant of £30,000 to meet some of the cost of the roof works. It was also noted that the roof was likely to need further work and the department ought not be seen as a likely source for these further costs. The memo suggested that the general hospital services division should inform the Good Shepherd Sisters that the grant was being made from the limited funds at the Minister's disposal and as a most exceptional measure as it was not the practice to provide finance for schemes without prior departmental approval.

Financial arrangements

- 24.38 The Commission has been provided with extensive information about the financial arrangements in Dunboyne. The Good Shepherd Sisters provided the audited accounts for virtually every year of its existence. These accounts were submitted to the Department of Health every year and the capitation rate was decided on the basis of the expenditure in the previous year. This was a reasonably satisfactory arrangement when there was little or no inflation but it gave rise to problems when there was high inflation, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s.
- 24.39 As already stated, the local authorities and the Department of Health do not seem to have paid a lot of attention to what was happening in Dunboyne. The bulk of the

correspondence between the authorities and Dunboyne was about the financial arrangements.

24.40 Soon after it had bought the premises, it seems that Meath County Council suggested that the Good Shepherd Sisters should buy it from them. However, the Department of Health preferred a leasing arrangement. The issue of leasing versus buying remained a topic for discussion until the lease was finally signed in 1959.

24.41 In October 1955, the lands belonging to the Castle (approximately 55 Irish acres¹³) were let for grazing at £12 10s an acre. In accordance with the terms of the lease arrangement, this income was paid to the Good Shepherd Sisters. The rate increased over the years and the income was paid to the Good Shepherd Sisters for the duration of their stay. This income was taken into account when the capitation rate was set each year.

24.42 In August 1956, Meath County Council wrote to the Department of Health looking for approval for:

- A per capita weekly charge of £4 16s10d for the woman and £2 8s 5d for a child for the period 1 June 1955 to 31 March 1956;
- The same for the period ending 31 March 1957 pending revision when the actual costs were available plus interest costs.

24.43 In September 1956, there were discussions between the Good Shepherd Sisters and their solicitor about the lease. The Good Shepherd Sisters seem to have been concerned about security of tenure; no lease had been signed at this stage but they did seem to have a caretaker's agreement.¹⁴ The issue of the Good Shepherd Sisters buying Dunboyne was discussed.

24.44 In March 1957, the Good Shepherd Sisters wrote to the Meath county manager about buying Dunboyne Castle. They pointed out that additional building was needed and they could not build on a property which was not theirs. They further

¹³ Different estimates of the total acreage around Dunboyne Castle are given in different documents and, to add to the confusion, the acreage is sometimes given in Irish acres and sometimes in statute acres. An Irish acre is approximately 1.6 times a statute acre. This means that about 88 statute acres were let and the rest was available for the use of the Good Shepherd Sisters and the residents. The Land Registry deeds relating to the 1959 lease show that the total acreage was 112 statute acres.

¹⁴ The Commission has not seen a copy but other documents refer to such an agreement.

pointed out that it was a rule of their order that members of the community live apart from the 'patients' and it had not been possible for them to conform to this rule.

- 24.45 In April 1957, Meath County Council told the Good Shepherd Sisters that accounts for the maintenance of patients should be sent directly to each county council concerned and Meath County Council would deal only with residents from Meath.
- 24.46 In May 1957, Meath County Council wrote to the Good Shepherd Sisters to tell them that the county manager had discussed the ownership issue with the Bishop of Meath and he (the bishop) wanted to talk to them. It seems that they had a satisfactory meeting with the bishop. The councils were planning to put proposals to the Department of Health about ownership. The Good Shepherd Sisters' solicitor was concerned about the exact nature of the proposal.
- 24.47 In June 1957, the Good Shepherd Sisters appointed auditors. The appointed auditors wrote to them in July 1957 about the Sisters' salaries. It was 'tentatively decided' to charge £500 for the period to 31 March 1956 and £600 for the subsequent year.
- 24.48 In August 1957, Meath County Council wrote to the Department of Health and stated that:
- The Good Shepherd Sisters were anxious to enlarge the institution and build a convent;
 - The counties could not provide for this;
 - A loan of £2,372 had been approved by each of the counties in addition to the loan of £40,000 already obtained for the purchase and fit out;
 - The councils had agreed, subject to the approval of the Minister for Health, that the interest in the property be transferred to the Good Shepherd Sisters;
 - Capital expenditure would be met one third by the councils, one third by the State and one third by the Good Shepherd Sisters;
 - The institution would be run on a capitation basis and the five counties would have priority in accessing places.
- 24.49 In August 1957, the solicitor for the Good Shepherd Sisters wrote a letter summarising the position: they were prepared to pay £14,184 for the property as it

stood and accept responsibility for any future developments or extensions. The solicitor also wrote to the Good Shepherd Sisters recommending they see some 'high official' in the Department of Health. This letter suggests that what the Good Shepherd Sisters were offering was to repay the interest on the loan of £14,124;¹⁵ the capitation charge would take account of this interest charge and the interest on loans for future development.

24.50 In December 1957, there was a meeting between the Department of Health, the managers of the five counties and the Good Shepherd Sisters in relation to arrangements for Dunboyne. The 'most recent' proposal was discussed:

- The charges on the loan - total £42,372¹⁶ would be met half by the State and half by the five participating counties (under the County Home Improvement scheme);
- The existing premises would be leased to the Good Shepherd Sisters for as long a lease as possible - upwards of 35 years;
- The Good Shepherd Sisters would build a convent;
- There would be arrangements to compensate the Good Shepherd Sisters for additional buildings if they vacated the institution.

24.51 The Department had written to the county councils in April 1956 with other conditions; the Commission has not seen this letter but it seems that these other conditions included the term in respect of new buildings and that the lease could be for 99 years at a rent of £1. It was agreed that there would be compensation for new building only if the county council terminated the services of the Good Shepherd Sisters; the loan charges would be dealt with separately to the capitation charges and other local authorities who used the institution would be required to contribute to the loan charges.

24.52 In February 1958, Meath County Council wrote to Offaly County Council (which was not one of the participating councils) agreeing to take a patient at a capitation rate of 69s 8d a week for a woman and 34s 10d for a child plus an amount (unspecified) to cover a proportion of the loan charges.

24.53 On 13 May 1958, the question of buying the property was in issue again; the agreed lease had still not been signed. In May 1958, the draft lease was sent to

¹⁵ This probably should be £14,184.

¹⁶ This seems to be the original £40,000 plus one county's contribution as mentioned above

the Good Shepherd Sisters solicitor by the Meath county solicitor. The accompanying letter suggests that the level of capitation charge was to be agreed between the Good Shepherd Sisters and the Department of Health with the county councils having no say in the matter.

- 24.54 The arguments about money and ownership continued for some time. Meath County Council gave an advance to the Good Shepherd Sisters as the Minister for Health had not yet decided what the appropriate capitation payment would be even though audited accounts had been submitted.
- 24.55 In January 1959, Meath County Council sent a bill to the Good Shepherd Sisters for two years rent of £100 a year plus other items supplied. It is not clear what the basis for this was but it may have been the caretaker's agreement. The county council proposed to hold a conference in Dunboyne to deal with the issue of whether repairs were capital or revenue, and how salaries should be dealt with.
- 24.56 In May 1959, Meath County Council told Waterford County Council that the capitation rate was 96s 10d for adults and 48s 5d for children plus a contribution to interest charges (on the loan to buy and fit out the premises).
- 24.57 In August 1959, the superior in Dunboyne wrote to the Mother Provincial of the Good Shepherd Sisters about the financial discussions. She said that 'four men' had spent several hours with them (they are likely to have been from the auditors), the Sisters were 'glad to see them depart'. The discussions had been mainly about what constituted capital and what revenue; the calculation worked out that the capitation should be £3 10s for the mother and £1 15s for the child. The councils were comparing charges in the different institutions; Castlepollard's charges were lower and the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary there were looking for salaries. The Dunboyne superior lamented the absence of co-ordination between the institutions and said that the same problem existed in the industrial schools before they formed an association.
- 24.58 In September 1959, the auditors wrote to the Good Shepherd Sisters giving an account of a meeting between them and representatives of Meath County Council. The accounts for the years ended 31 March 1958 and 31 March 1959 were discussed and it was proposed that the following adjustments be made:

- Miscellaneous receipts, for example, grazing rents should be deducted from the gross expenditure figure to arrive at the figure on which the capitation charges would be based;
- Abnormal repairs should be excluded (£1249 11s 5d in year ending 31 March 1958 and £284 8s 9d in year ending 31 March 1959); however, the cost of these abnormal charges would be recovered over a period of 10 years (in effect they were being treated as capital costs).

24.59 These changes meant that the Good Shepherd Sisters had been paid too much for the years in question. The capitation rate should have been 4s 9d a day for each child for the year ending 1958 and 5s 2½d for the year ending 1959. The actual rate paid was 6s 11d for both years. There was a total overpayment of £3836 18s 2d for the two years; a breakdown between the counties was provided and it was suggested that repayment should be made partly in cash.

24.60 The meeting also discussed salaries. It was agreed that prior consultation with the Meath county manager would be held before any changes were made to establishment and/or salaries. The financing of any future abnormal repairs would be discussed in advance with the Meath county manager.

24.61 In October 1959, the solicitors for the Good Shepherd Sisters replied to the auditors' letter. They were unhappy with the outcome of the meeting. They pointed out that there was no mention of the capitation rate for mothers or what the capitation rate for the subsequent year would be. They also said that there was a conflict with the letter which they had received from the county solicitor which stated that they would not have to repay any overpayment. They objected to the deduction of the abnormal repairs amounts and noted that the abnormal repairs and the grazing income (£1318 19s 11d for the two years) constituted a large sum. They pointed out that the Good Shepherd Sisters had recently signed a lease and should not be involved in making other agreements outside the lease (it seems that the lease had been signed by the Good Shepherd Sisters in July 1959 and the minister was expected to sign on the day this letter was written, that is, 8 October 1959).

24.62 In reply, the auditors said that there was no conflict except that the county solicitor said that no repayment would be required in cash. The suggestion of repaying partly in cash had been made because the Good Shepherd Sisters in Dunboyne

had over £3,000 on hands in March 1959. The auditors explained that the capitation rate for mothers was double that for children so was 9s 6d a day for the year ended 1958; 10s 5d a day for the year ended 1959 and capitation rates for the year ended 1960 would be the same. In all subsequent years, the rate would be settled by reference to the previous year's accounts. The arrangements had been discussed at a meeting with the Good Shepherd Sisters before the meeting with the county council and the auditors understood that the Good Shepherd Sisters were in agreement. The letter noted also that the capitation rate should not be significantly greater than Castlepollard or councils would not send women there.

24.63 In November 1959, a letter from the solicitors noted that the lease had been signed by the minister. In January 1960, the solicitors reported to the Good Shepherd Sisters on a meeting which was held before Christmas between them, the auditors and Meath County Council. The meeting was 'slightly unpleasant' at times. The meeting agreed a reduction in the amount of the repayment (the amount is illegible). The letter also pointed out that staff salaries were a matter for the Good Shepherd Sisters but advised that consultation should take place, otherwise the costs might not be accepted for capitation purposes.

24.64 In February 1960, the superior in Dunboyne wrote to the Mother Provincial. She commented on how cold the weather had been but how good the central heating was so there were no colds among the residents. The letter was mainly about the money situation. The superior had not known that the solicitor had looked for a reduction on the amount owed and did not like his suggestion that repairs be agreed at the start of the year 'as it would tie us down'. With regard to salaries 'it would be better not to question it again, unless they do, as there was nothing definite about it'. She also mentioned the need to discuss plans; 'I would also like to be sure about the private people before we do anything' and 'I recommended the Clare patient to Newry as she would be private'. Dunboyne had a small number of private patients. The institutional records show that there were 21 private patients admitted in the 1960s and 1970s. The lease provided that all the beds had to be available to the county council and no one could be admitted without council approval. It is not clear if this approval was sought or received for the admission of private patients.

24.65 In March 1960, the Meath county solicitor wrote to the Good Shepherd Sisters' solicitors to say that the Minister for Health had approved:

- An arbitrary rate of 6s 11d a day for each child until 31 March 1958;
- An audited rate of 5s 2¼d for periods 1958/59 and 1959/60;
- Rate for subsequent years to be the audited rates for previous year.

24.66 This meant that there were some overpayments by councils and gave rise to arguments about repayment which were eventually resolved.

24.67 The financial situation does not seem to have generated much correspondence in the 1960s even though the annual accounts showed a deficit in 1962. Meath County Council's applications for changes in the capitation rate were generally approved by the Department of Health without much commentary. It did become a significant issue in the 1970s. The North-Eastern Health Board (NEHB) took over from Meath County Council as the relevant health authority when it was established in 1970 (see Chapter 1). The original five counties involved in establishing Dunboyne were not all in the NEHB area so this gave rise to some problems about repaying the original loan.

24.68 The capitation rate for 1967/8 was 6s 5d a day for children and 12s 10d a day for women. This went down to 6s 2d and 12s 4d for 1968/9 and back up again for 1969/70. In 1970/71 the rates were 3s 6½d and 7s 9d. In 1972/3 the rates were £0.60 and £1.20.¹⁷

24.69 In June 1972, the Good Shepherd Sisters' auditors wrote to the Department of Health and outlined the financial difficulties they faced. Increasing costs of food and transport and the fact that the capitation rate was set retrospectively were the major problems but there were others. For example, the doctor attached to Dunboyne had advised against the use of non-pasteurised milk. Dairies would not deliver to Dunboyne in large quantities so the Sisters were obliged to use patent foods for the children. The auditors argued that the overdraft had arisen because of significant capital costs and then outlined the further costs which had arisen and were likely to arise. They asked about the possibility of a capital grant to meet these costs.

¹⁷ The changeover to decimal currency happened on 15 February 1971.

24.70 The Chief Executive Officer of the North Eastern Health Board (NEHB) visited Dunboyne to discuss the matter. In a letter to the department, the NEHB outlined the work for which this grant was requested:

- Replacing the boilerhouse: £600;
- New incinerator: £350 (this had already been bought);
- Replacing fire extinguishers: £150;
- Replacing existing bedding 'which is very bad': £600;
- Roof repairs and maintenance; £900;
- Reconstruction and equipping of milk kitchen (no price given).

24.71 In January 1973, an accountant who was a relative of the superior wrote to the Good Shepherd Sisters' accountants about what he regarded as the very bad financial situation in Dunboyne. He said that the 'financial position is going from bad to worse and the Health Board do not realise what is involved'. He outlined the problems:

- Overdraft was now over £5,000;
- The 1959 lease was a very bad deal;
- Accumulated losses in the years ending 31 March 1967 to 31 March 1972 were in excess of £9,000;
- The Sisters' salaries were £1,500 for many years, then £1,750, then £2,800 recently; the staff were the Mother Superior, a Sister who was a qualified social worker, a Sister who was a qualified State Registered Nurse, a qualified nursery sister, a cook, telephonist and a female porter.

24.72 The Mother Superior replied thanking him for his help and outlined options:

- Buy the property;
- Refuse consent to sale of land and leave things as they are (the Good Shepherd Sisters had been in discussions with the Meath County Manager about the sale of land);
- Give consent to sale of lands and make a new deal;
- Leave the institution.

24.73 She noted that the house was in good condition except for the roof. She also referred to the incinerator and a legacy from the USA for the 'old nun'.

- 24.74 In January 1973, the Meath county manager offered to pay £15,000 for 46 acres of land; this was calculated on the basis that it was the amount which would yield the approximately £1,000 a year which was then being earned from the land. This offer seems to have been rejected as the county manager wrote to the superior in June 1973 asking on what basis she would consider selling the lands.
- 24.75 The superior was in discussions with the bank manager about the financial situation. He wrote to her in February 1973 about the overdraft which now stood at £5,250; he said that the overdraft used to be temporary and he could not see how it would be addressed. Further correspondence ensued without any resolution. In January 1974, the superior's accountant relative said that he, the Good Shepherd Sisters' auditors and solicitor were in 'full battle array in the front line' on behalf of the Good Shepherd Sisters when dealing with the health authorities. The issue seems to have remained in abeyance until the 1980s.
- 24.76 The capitation rates were £2.10 for mothers and £1.05 for children in 1973/4 and £1.58 and £3.15 respectively from January 1975.
- 24.77 In October 1983, the Provincial Superior granted a request from the superior in Dunboyne to spend £13,241 on a new asphalt covering for the flat roof of the convent. It was noted that 'The house is able to meet this expense without contracting a debt'. Similarly, in July 1984, a request from the Dunboyne superior, to spend £10,000 for the installation of fire prevention was granted by the Provincial Superior. Again, in January 1986, a similar permission was granted to spend £10,000 on a minibus.
- 24.78 The Good Shepherd Sisters applied for an increase in the capitation rate in 1984. The capitation rate from July 1983 was £9.75 a day for women and £5 a day for babies; the auditors proposed an increase to £10.32 and £5.16. They were granted £10.70 and £5.50. The Department of Health said that no additional funds were required to fund the proposed fire system as, having examined the audited accounts, they noted a surplus of over £10,000 on the income and expenditure accounts for 1982 and again in 1983. The Department wanted the NEHB to take over funding and budgeting responsibilities for Dunboyne. The NEHB was concerned about the absence of a basic fire warning system in the building and was looking for about £8,000 to provide for this.

- 24.79 In 1984, the Department of Health wanted to change the financial arrangements for Dunboyne to a budgeting basis. The department understood that the following staff were in Dunboyne: one each of midwife, social worker, nursery nurse, receptionist (part time), domestic, administrator, gardener and two cooks. The department considered that the teaching staff should be paid by the Department of Education.
- 24.80 In 1986, the child care division of the Department of Health drew up a proposed rationalisation programme for mother and baby homes and infant nursing homes. This envisaged the continued use of Dunboyne and noted that it had received £70,000 in capitation in 1984.
- 24.81 The daily capitation rates for mothers and children during the 1980s were:
- 1 July 1981 - £7.30 and £3.65
 - 1 July 1982 - £8.50 and £4.25
 - 1 July 1984 - £10.70 and £5.50
 - 1 July 1985 - £11.30 and £5.80
 - 1 July 1986 - £11.75 and £6
 - 1 July 1987 - £12.10 and £6.20.

Residents in Dunboyne 1956-1959

- 24.82 In March 1956, the Meath County Council official wrote to the Good Shepherd Sisters about the proposal to send women to St Kevin's Hospital for confinement. He said that the Dublin Board of Assistance wanted each mother to have at least one visit to an antenatal clinic before confinement and that a medical report should be furnished to the hospital.
- 24.83 It seems that, from the start, admission to Dunboyne was not confined to women from the five counties involved nor was it confined to women on second or subsequent pregnancies. In March 1956, Meath County Council wrote to the Department of Health inspector, Miss Litster, about the 'repatriation' of a woman from Dublin who could have a place in Dunboyne if the Dublin Board of Assistance would get permission from the Department of Health to pay the capitation fee; this was £3 3s a week at the time. However, in June 1956, Meath County Council told the Good Shepherd Sisters that it had been decided the previous April not to admit mothers from outside the region unless the numbers should drop below 75% occupancy which 'would be about 15 adults and 15 children'. The lease which had

been agreed between the Good Shepherd Sisters and Meath County Council said there was accommodation for 22 adults and 22 children.

- 24.84 By December 1956, there were concerns that too many women were being referred to Dunboyne. There is evidence that Miss Litster was involved in placing mothers there. It seems that Meath County Council wrote to the Department of Health suggesting that women who could not be accommodated in Dunboyne would be sent to a similar institution in Newry, which was also run by the Good Shepherd Sisters.¹⁸ The department did not agree to this. The department replied in January 1957 stating that unmarried mothers on their second pregnancy could be sent to Castlepollard, Sean Ross or Bessborough provided the first baby had not been born in the particular institution.
- 24.85 In January 1957, Meath County Council wrote to the Good Shepherd Sisters about overcrowding. The county manager had directed that, when there was pressure on space, arrangements should be made to discharge mothers who were there without children but the discharge should not take place without informing the local authority concerned. The letter went on to say that if arrangements are being made ‘whereby the patients would enter one of your houses¹⁹, the patients would in those circumstances take their discharge rather than be discharged’.
- 24.86 The institutional records show that the maximum number of mothers resident in Dunboyne at any one time in the period 1955–59 was 24. So, while there was concern about overcrowding, its level was never as bad as in other mother and baby homes.
- 24.87 The institutional records do not always record whether or not the woman had a previous pregnancy. They show that 10 women were admitted in 1955; four of these had a previous pregnancy (one a multiple) but there is no information about the other six. In 1956, 20 were admitted; 15 are recorded as having had had a

¹⁸ The Good Shepherd Sisters had a mother and baby home, a children’s home and a Magdalen laundry in Newry. All are mentioned in the report of the Northern Ireland Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (the Hart Inquiry) and the children’s home was part of that investigation. The report states that the Newry mother and baby home opened in the 1950s and closed in 1984. The Good Shepherd Sisters also had institutions in Derry and Belfast including a mother and baby home in Belfast which operated from 1950 to 1990. There is quite extensive information about all the Good Shepherd Sisters activities in Ireland on the website of the inquiry: <https://www.hiainquiry.org/historical-institutional-abuse-inquiry-report-chapters>

¹⁹ Presumably an industrial school or a Magdalen laundry; the Good Shepherd Sisters had 4 campuses in Ireland on each of which there was a Magdalen laundry and an industrial school – in Limerick, New Ross, Sunday’s Well (Cork) and Waterford.

previous pregnancy (five multiples). In 1957, 14 were admitted; nine are recorded as having a previous pregnancy (two multiples).

- 24.88 Statistical returns made by the Good Shepherd Sisters to the Department of Health show that there were 20 women and 16 children in residence on 31 March 1957; 14 women and 16 children had been admitted in the year ending 31 March 1958. On 31 March 1958, there were 16 women and 14 children resident.
- 24.89 According to a Good Shepherd Sisters history of Dunboyne, a projector for showing films was acquired at Easter 1957 and a television set at Christmas 1957. Very few people in Ireland had TV sets at this time; RTE had not yet started its TV station. A Volkswagen car which could carry eight people was bought in May 1959; this was used for transporting the residents to Holles Street.²⁰

1960–1979

- 24.90 There is very little documentation available about the 1960s and 1970s apart from the statistical returns made to the Department of Health and documentation about the financial situation.
- 24.91 According to the statistical returns to the Department of Health, on 31 March 1960 there were 17 women and 15 children resident. In a note on these returns, the superior in Dunboyne said that ‘The average duration of the stay of mothers and children vary according to circumstances, usually until children can be provided for. The maximum is two years.’ The institutional records show that the average length of stay was always less than two years; from 1962 onwards, the average length of stay was less than a year.
- 24.92 The Cavan children’s officer wrote to the Good Shepherd Sisters in October 1961. The letter said that when the ‘girls’ gave birth in Holles Street, they were giving their home address when registering the births. This had caused problems with American adoptions when the birth certificate was issued and the adopters contacted the mothers at their home address.

²⁰ The projector and the TV were bought by Meath County Council; it is not clear who bought the car.

Complaint about being pressured into adoption

24.93 In 1966 a woman made a complaint to the Department of Justice about the adoption of her child from St Clare's, Stamullen and about the involvement of the Good Shepherd Sisters in Dunboyne in that adoption. The matter was referred to the Gardaí. The Gardaí called to Dunboyne in January 1966 to discuss the matter with the Good Shepherd Sisters. The Garda report states that the woman, who was aged about 16 at the time, had been moved from an industrial school to Dunboyne when she became pregnant in 1961. She was recorded as having no living relatives and the Good Shepherd Sisters told the Gardaí that no one visited her while she was there.

24.94 The following is a passage from the Garda report of the visit to the Good Shepherd Sisters:

In accordance with normal practice she was due for release²¹ in January 1963. The matter of adoption of the child was discussed on a number of occasions and was recommended to her. She was informed of the consequences of adoption in so far as she was concerned and was fully instructed in all aspects of it. She was told that an illegitimate child grew up to hate its parents and in her case it would be the mother. Other than that point no pressure was placed on her to part with the child and she was quite agreeable to hand over the child for adoption.

24.95 The statement goes on to say that she was brought to a solicitor in Dublin and completed the adoption papers before him. (The Good Shepherd Sisters have pointed out to the Commission that they were not directly involved in arrangements for adoption and the Commission accepts that they were not. The arrangements would have been made by the adoption society involved.) The baby was taken to Stamullen where 'the transaction was completed'. The mother left Dunboyne on one of the two days after the baby went to Stamullen. 'She was quite happy leaving and gave no indication of objection to the procedure.' The Good Shepherd Sisters got her a position in a hospital and 'she appeared happy to restart life again'. In December 1965, she called to Dunboyne accompanied by two men and inquired about the whereabouts of her child. The Reverend Mother said she could not supply that information. 'They discussed the matter at length and [the mother] appeared satisfied with the position as it stood.'

²¹ The use of the word 'release' suggests that the Garda thought the woman was incarcerated.

- 24.96 The Garda read out the allegations made by the woman regarding duress and threats applied, for example, that she would never get her freedom. The Good Shepherd Sisters denied that any such threats were ever used towards any unmarried mother. They said that the women were encouraged to part with their babies for the reasons set out earlier and nothing irregular occurred in this instance.
- 24.97 The baby had been adopted to the USA. The mother had signed the consent to placement for adoption in December 1961. The child was placed with the American adoptive parents in 1963.
- 24.98 In 1965, a man who described himself as the mother's brother contacted Dunboyne to say that the mother was getting married and she wanted her child back. He was told that this was not possible as the child had been adopted.
- 24.99 In November 1965, the mother wrote to Stamullen inquiring about the child. She said that she expected that the Sisters in Dunboyne had not told Stamullen that her father and brother had not been aware of the adoption. They had each died recently and she was now all alone in the world and she wanted her child back. (The Dunboyne institutional records state that her parents had been dead when she went into Dunboyne and she had never had any visitors while there.) She said that the Sisters in Dunboyne had persuaded her to give him up for adoption and she had not done so of her own free will.
- 24.100 In May 1971 the Salvation Army wrote to Stamullen looking for help in finding the child.

Numbers

- 24.101 During the 1960s and early 1970s, the Good Shepherd Sisters made annual statistical returns to the Department of Health in the same way as other mother and baby homes did. These show that the numbers of mothers in residence increased after the extension was built in 1963. For example, there were 20 mothers and 18 children resident on 31 March 1964; of the 21 children discharged, 15 were adopted. The numbers of mothers admitted increased significantly as they were staying for shorter periods. The numbers of children in residence decreased as the practice developed of not taking the babies to Dunboyne but placing them directly from the maternity hospital into foster care pending decisions

about their future. In the year ending 31 March 1973, there were 31 mothers resident in Dunboyne but a total of 131 had been admitted during the year.

Private patients

- 24.102 The institutional records show that there were 11 private patients admitted in the period 1965-68. Most stayed for short periods; five stayed for less than three months, two stayed for just over three months, one stayed five and a half months and one stayed for just over a year; no information is available about the length of stay of the other two. The statistical returns do not record that there were private patients there in the years 1965-67 but do record that there were private patients resident in the period 1968-1973. The institutional records show that the private patients who were there in 1965-68 paid between £5 and £6 a week for their stay.
- 24.103 One of the internal histories of Dunboyne records that, in the 1970s, there was less 'institutional life' there; boyfriends started visiting and the 'girls' went off for weekends. The numbers continued to remain steady: 130-140 annually. (The numbers are largely consistent with the institutional records.)

1980 - 1991

- 24.104 In May 1981, when the Department of Health was discussing which section should be responsible for the mother and baby homes, Dunboyne was described as follows:
- This home (29 beds) accommodates mainly very young unmarried mothers - many of them school-girls. The occupancy rate is very high. The girls stay on average 3 months, are delivered in one of the Dublin Maternity Hospitals and, in most cases, are discharged directly from the hospital. Seldom do they or their babies return to Ard Mhuire.
- 24.105 The department suggested that any babies not kept by their mothers and not adopted probably went to St Clare's, Stamullen. The Good Shepherd Sisters have told the Commission that the babies usually went into foster care in the area where the agency dealing with the mother was based.
- 24.106 The fact that Dunboyne was not registered under the *Registration of Maternity Homes Act 1934* was noted and 'This is to be looked into'. Dunboyne did register in 1982.

24.107 The capitation rates at the time were £6.30 a day for mothers and £3.15 a day for babies. It was noted that an extension had been built at the expense of the Good Shepherd Sisters in 1963. The roof of the original building had to be replaced in 1980 at 'a heavy cost' (amount not stated) and the Good Shepherd Sisters were looking for a grant of 75% of this cost from the Department of Health.

24.108 It was also noted that the department's inspector, Miss Reidy, had inspected Dunboyne and reported that it was comfortable and well run and that she was much impressed with the work carried out there.

1981 visit/inspection

24.109 Miss Reidy visited Dunboyne in 1981. It would appear that the visit was arranged because the Department of Health needed to know more about Dunboyne in the context of its general review of mother and baby homes. In her report, Miss Reidy reported that she visited the institution, looked at and listed the available accommodation and had discussions with the superior, a social worker, a midwife (all three were members of the Good Shepherd Sisters) and the visiting medical officer. She also had discussions with the NEHB's Director of Community Care.

24.110 Her report described the sleeping accommodation available and noted that the nursery was seldom occupied by infants. The other accommodation included a residents' TV room, a smoke room, a record (music) room, a dining room, two parlours for girls' visitors, a surgery which was used once weekly by the dispensary doctor and more often by the public health nurse, an office for the social worker, a kitchen with scullery area, store cupboard and cold room, a milk kitchen (which was seldom used), three staff bedrooms with bathroom facilities, a launderette for the residents' personal clothes, and an occupational therapy room. There were five bathrooms, nine toilets and a toilet for visitors.

24.111 There were two cooks (one for weekdays and one for weekends), one domestic, a full time and a part time (summer only) gardener. These were all secular staff. There were five members of the Good Shepherd Sisters, an administrator, a midwife, a social worker, a nursery nurse and a receptionist. There were six part time paid teachers and a part time voluntary worker who supervised studies.

24.112 She made the following observations: residents were first admitted in 1955 and 'in more recent years the number of school girls is increasing annually'. In 1980, the

Department of Education had agreed to recognise the institution as an examination centre to accommodate 14 entrants for the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations. The Director of Community Care considered that occupational therapy was necessary. 'Card packing for Union greetings, Greenmount estate and Harolds Cross is undertaken, knitting and sewing and a weekly lecture from the Board's consultant dietitian on appropriate subjects is given.'

24.113 Miss Reidy said that most mothers were discharged directly from Holles Street; the few who returned to Dunboyne stayed for only two to three days on average. Infants were seldom brought back. Dunboyne was primarily, therefore an ante-natal centre. Miss Reidy concluded that it was 'comfortable, well run and a relaxed homely atmosphere prevails. All accommodation is clean and well kept and all day living-units are nicely appointed. I am much impressed with the work carried out here.'

Closing

24.114 The 1981 Department of Health review of mother and baby homes and the 1986 proposed rationalisation programme for mother and baby homes and infant nursing homes did not propose any changes in the status or work of Dunboyne. This was mainly because it was a relatively small institution and because it catered for young women who were school going.

24.115 However, the Good Shepherd Sisters were considering its future. This was partly because they were having difficulties with the finances. It was also because their own numbers were declining (which, of course, further affected the finances) and their members were becoming more involved in community work and in the organisation, CURA. They also recognised that several aspects of Dunboyne, for example, its rural setting and the absence of single rooms for all residents, meant that it was not meeting the needs of unmarried mothers at this time.

24.116 In April 1989, a representative of the Department of Health met the Good Shepherd Sisters and their accountant in Dunboyne to consider the financial position. The capitation rate from 1 July 1988 was £12.34 a day. The department's note of the meeting records that 'The income is insufficient to provide any real contribution towards Sisters salaries. There is no funding for minor capital projects.' The description of Dunboyne in the note was presumably provided by

the Sisters who attended. Dunboyne was described as having 30 places and, according to the Sisters, was almost always near capacity. The residents were referred by CURA, adoption societies or Good Shepherd Sisters and not by health board social workers.²² 'It would seem that Health Boards are often not informed of placements until after arrangements are made, hence some Boards are slow to pay.' The length of stay varied from one to six months; about half the residents were aged between 14 and 18. School going girls tended to arrive early in their pregnancy. The Sisters received grant assistance from Dundalk Vocational Education Committee with which they funded ten part-time teachers. Fourteen sat the Inter or Leaving Certificate in 1988. There were no activities for the older girls - the Sisters said that they often did not arrive until near delivery. They were trying to get a grant from the Department of Social Welfare to buy typewriters for this group.

24.117 About 40% of the babies were placed for adoption. Most of the mothers returned to Dunboyne for about a week after the birth.²³ Babies not being placed for adoption were placed in foster homes 'near to where the girls live until they return home to care for them'.

24.118 The staffing was five Sisters and lay staff. The Good Shepherd Sisters were concerned that there was insufficient cover for Sisters who needed a break; there were insufficient resources to recruit lay staff to replace any of the Sisters and the current level of staffing was inadequate. There was a need for counselling and advice on personal development - this was being provided by volunteers from Maynooth.²⁴ There were three items needing capital funding: installation of smoke detectors as stipulated by the Fire Officer (£3,000); felling of dangerous trees at front entrance (£3,500) and purchase of typewriters (£3,000). The premises also would also soon need rewiring and this would cost at least £10,000.

The 1989 review and proposals

24.119 In May 1989, the Good Shepherd Sisters started an evaluation and review of Dunboyne's services. This was completed by October 1989. They sent

²² This was not correct as is clear from the later analysis of the figures for the period 1987–89.

²³ The Good Shepherd Sisters told the Commission that those who did return to Dunboyne stayed only for three or four days. The institutional records show that 116 women entered Dunboyne in 1989; 69 of them returned there after the birth and they stayed an average of 12 days after the birth.

²⁴ The Good Shepherd Sisters told the Commission that this was not correct. The Sisters did believe that there was a need for counselling but it was not provided by volunteers from Maynooth; they visited socially to provide music and entertainment but not counselling.

questionnaires to social workers, CURA personnel, school principals and counsellors involved with pregnant girls. They tabulated the information they had about the residents from 1987 onwards and they conducted exit interviews with the residents when they were leaving.

24.120 In October 1989, the Good Shepherd Sisters discussed the evaluation process. They were all agreed on the need for smaller units, more activities for the girls, 'a greater insertion into the reality of today's world, a less remote setting and the points made by the girls in their exit interviews'. They defined their philosophy:

The purpose of our work here is to give loving and compassionate care to girls at a particularly vulnerable time in their lives. We also enable younger girls to continue their studies ... Our hope is to help the girls develop and mature personally so that they can make responsible decisions about their own and their babies' futures and cope with the consequences of their decisions.

24.121 The review included an analysis of the numbers who used the service in the period January 1987 to June 1989 (a total of 298). In 1987 there were 114 residents of whom 31 were students; 33 were non-students aged 15-19 and 50 were aged 20 or over. The divide was similar in the later years. Overall, one in four were students; 58% of admissions were under the age of 20.

24.122 Of the 298, four stayed for less than two weeks, 138 stayed for between two and 10 weeks; 118 stayed for 11-19 weeks and 38 stayed for 20 weeks or more.

24.123 On admission, 187 said they planned to place the baby for adoption; 53 planned to keep the baby and 58 were undecided. In fact, 149 placed the baby for adoption, 143 kept the baby.²⁵ Three babies died and three mothers left before the birth so it is not known what happened to them or their babies. It is notable that 25% of those who initially planned on adoption actually kept the baby and 76% of those who were undecided also kept the baby.

24.124 The major referral agencies were the CPRSI, social workers and CURA; between them, they referred 236 of the mothers.

²⁵ Research carried out by UCD and Holles Street hospital in the late 1980s shows that mothers who were in Dunboyne were much more likely to place their babies for adoption than other unmarried mothers who gave birth in Holles St: Valerie Richardson and Others *Unmarried Mothers delivered in National Maternity Hospital, 1986*; <https://www.lenus.ie/handle/10147/624070> ditto 1987; 1988

24.125 The consultation process which was conducted showed that former residents and the referral agencies expressed a high level of appreciation of the service. They highlighted two aspects in particular:

- The opportunity for girls to continue their education and sit for State examinations;
- The importance of group support experienced in Dunboyne; the former residents saw this as an advantage over what they perceived as the isolation of a family placement.

24.126 There were four issues raised which impinged on the quality of the service and had implications for future policy:

- 48% of the mothers decided to keep their babies: referral agencies and the former residents emphasised the need for a place to go during the pregnancy even if it was intended to keep the baby. This was related to the difficulty of being publicly pregnant in their own neighbourhoods.
- 75% were not involved in an organised educational programme: they had some occupational therapy (packing cards) but the former residents and the staff considered that this was unstimulating; it was difficult to find challenging opportunities for young women and girls in a rural village setting; a better service could be delivered in an urban setting where they could avail of opportunities in the community for developing skills.
- The institutional character of the service: accommodation was provided in rooms with three or four beds in each. There were only five single rooms. Meals were prepared for the residents and eaten in a common dining room. A minibus provided transport to Holles Street every week. 'The girls become more dependent on the institution' and 'a certain laziness' pervades. The service needed to be redesigned to allow the residents to live in a bedsit type setting, budgeting, shopping, cooking and making their own medical appointments.
- An unrealistic and inadequate financing system: the Good Shepherd Sisters had been working in Dunboyne for 34 years. The annual payment being made in respect of their service was a total of £12,000. The capitation rate of £12.70 a day would meet current costs only if the service was at full bed capacity (31) all the time. The total number of residents annually remained fairly constant but they were staying for shorter periods.

The capitation system failed to deal with the cost problems which arose from fluctuating numbers and fixed overheads.

24.127 The review put forward the following vision for a redesigned service for pregnant women and girls who had to leave home during the pregnancy. It proposed that there would be two types of premises in an urban setting:

- One should be self-catering flats grouped together, for example eight to 12 in one building for non-students and those aged 18 and over. This would have some communal space to facilitate group support and counselling and would have a housemother's flat.
- The other should be bed-sits for students and girls under 18. It would have a study room and a communal room. One cooked meal would be provided each day and there would be closer supervision than in the self-catering flats. There would also be a housemother's flat.
- The residents could avail of existing educational opportunities in the community and other social opportunities.
- There would be three full time staff for each house giving 24 hour cover. The directress would have overall responsibility, deal with staff issues, arrange community liaison, social arrangements and contact with funding agencies. There would be two housemothers for each house. They would supervise the residents, provide counselling when required, organise individual plans and programmes with each resident and ensure that these take place, deal with maintenance, and liaise with social workers, referral agencies and families.
- Volunteers would be recruited to share skills such as budgeting and parenting skills and act as a befriending network and aftercare support group.
- The total annual cost of these proposed arrangements was assessed at just under £150,000 a year.

24.128 In July 1989, while this evaluation was going on, the Good Shepherd Sisters met representatives of the North Eastern Health Board (NEHB) including its Chief Executive Officer. The Good Shepherd Sisters explained that it was not financially viable to maintain Dunboyne because of the reduction in the number of residents; they noted that when the CEO saw the bank statements, he agreed. It seems that the decision to close Dunboyne was made around this time. The Bishop of Meath

was told that it would be closed within a year. In August and September 1989, meetings were held between the Good Shepherd Sisters, their auditors, their legal advisors and the NEHB in which the terms of the Good Shepherd Sisters' departure were discussed. In October, according to the Good Shepherd Sisters, the CEO refused to pay them the amount they asked for and the meeting ended 'rather abruptly'.

24.129 The Good Shepherd Sisters were also in contact with the Department of Health. A letter from their accountants to the Department of Health in August 1989 argued that they were entitled to support to maintain the property. It mentioned the £28,000 spent by them in 1962.

24.130 This letter also raised concerns about the social welfare payments which were paid to the residents. It said that 'as a result of individual interviews held in the centre with Social Welfare Personnel some receive the Dole, others £10 weekly pocket money'. 'While all those in receipt of the Dole should sign weekly at the Local Garda Station, in fact one might attend on behalf of 5 or 6 and this appears to be acceptable.' The letter argued that because of the non-requirement to sign individually the opportunity exists for people who have been discharged from the centre to continue to draw the dole. 'The Sisters would like to see proper procedures being implemented by Social Welfare'.

24.131 It is not clear where the accountants got this information or if it was accurate. At the time, the word 'dole' was used in relation to both Unemployment Benefit (UB) and Unemployment Assistance (UA). UB was payable on the basis of social insurance contributions; the earliest age at which it could be paid at the time was 16½. UA was payable on the basis of a means test from age 18. In both cases there was a requirement that the applicant be available for and actively seeking work. It is difficult to see how residents in Dunboyne could have met this criterion. The Good Shepherd Sisters told the Commission that the Community Welfare Officer (see Chapter 1) gave financial assistance to those who were not eligible for UB or UA.

24.132 In August 1989, the NEHB programme manager for community care wrote to the Department of Health to say that he had considered the future of Dunboyne with the CEO and the community care staff in Navan. 'We have no doubt whatever that the service should be continued for the foreseeable future.' The Southern Health

Board (which covered counties Cork and Kerry) told the department that it referred 10 to 12 girls to Dunboyne on average each year. Very few girls from Cork city and county chose to go to Bessborough for reasons of anonymity and privacy; conversely, girls from Kerry did choose Bessborough 'where they can keep in contact with friends and family'. The atmosphere in Dunboyne was described as warm, homely and emotional. 'Psychological and educational needs are taken into consideration by the staff who are approachable, caring and supportive.'

- 24.133 In November 1989, the Good Shepherd Sisters wrote to the CEO of each of the eight health boards seeking information about the likely future use of Dunboyne. This letter pointed out that the capitation rate was £12.70 a day. This was not enough to meet running costs due to a reduction in the number of referrals and the reduction in the length of stay. The Good Shepherd Sisters were examining the feasibility of setting up two small units, in an urban setting and preferably close to a hospital, with one unit catering for students and girls aged up to 18 and the other catering for non-students. The Good Shepherd Sisters wanted to know what the likely demand for such places would be over the following four or five years. They also asked if the boards would be willing to pay the economic cost which they assessed at £22.75 a day.
- 24.134 In June 1990, the superior in Dunboyne wrote to Dublin Corporation seeking to be relocated. She said that due to financial difficulties, inadequate fire precautions and the present needs of single pregnant girls, they had decided to leave Dunboyne. They proposed to offer services to two groups: school age girls and homeless older girls; eight to ten in each category; they wanted to move to the city to be closer to maternity hospitals, courses and means of socialising; they had approached a reputable voluntary organisation about this.
- 24.135 Further meetings were held between the Good Shepherd Sisters, their financial and legal advisors and the NEHB and about the terms of their departure from Dunboyne. The Good Shepherd Sisters wanted money from the NEHB to cover the following:
- Money for a house to live in;
 - Compensation for structures (building of home, laundry and two garages) and maintenance (new roof, flat roof, boiler, painting and decorating, plumbing, work in basement, central heating); personnel (salaries unpaid for four Sisters);

- Redundancy money for lay staff;
- Fire installation equipment, smoke detectors, alarm system;
- Teachers' salaries plus nurses;
- Felling of dangerous trees;
- Retraining courses;
- £20,000 owed to Provincial funds;
- Compensation for lodge which Meath County Council promised to build when they took back some land for housing.

24.136 In November 1990, the Good Shepherd Sisters and the NEHB agreed that Dunboyne would close in June 1991. The NEHB agreed to pay the Good Shepherd Sisters £150,000 when they left the premises; the furniture was considered the property of the Good Shepherd Sisters. Shortly afterwards, the Good Shepherd Sisters made arrangements with an archivist to sort out what records should be archived.

24.137 In February 1991, the last two residents left. In June, the people of Dunboyne village arranged a thanksgiving Mass and party. All remaining Good Shepherd Sisters members and staff left on 1 July 1991.

Financial arrangements at the closure

24.138 In November 1990, the CEO of the NEHB wrote to the Good Shepherd Sisters confirming the agreed arrangements:

- The NEHB would pay the Sisters £150,000 in recognition of ceasing occupancy of the convent in Dunboyne around June 1991 (the date was flexible and there was no pressure);
- The furniture belonged to the Good Shepherd Sisters and they could do what they liked with it;
- The CEO would write to his colleagues to have outstanding bills paid; the NEHB would pay the outstanding amounts from Cavan, Louth, Meath and Monaghan at the earliest possible date - probably January;
- The CEO expressed 'extreme gratitude' to the Good Shepherd Sisters.

24.139 The CEO explained to the Department of Health in December 1990 that he had been approached by the Good Shepherd Sisters as they were finding it increasingly difficult to provide a service. They had 45 places available and the

average number of residents was about 20. The service was therefore not viable. The Good Shepherd Sisters had a debt of about £60,000 and no way of repaying it. They wanted out of the agreement with the NEHB. He had agreed a closure date of June 1991 with them. He also agreed to pay the £150,000.

This figure is in respect of all outgoings which our Board would be responsible for, and in addition, is a sum in settlement of the Sisters relinquishing their lease which ran to the house and lands of 110 acres and for which the Sisters were entitled to the proceeds when this land was let. This is a fair figure in all the circumstances and has been accepted by the Provincial on behalf of the Order.

24.140 The CEO went on to say that institutions such as Dunboyne were no longer required.

Certain small individual splinter groups will contest this issue, but by and large, we are able to make arrangements for anybody who wishes them on a satisfactory basis. It is no longer feasible to provide accommodation for months on end for anybody without charging an appropriate rate. The appropriate rate in Dunboyne would be a number of pounds per week and this would be obviously impossible.

24.141 The NEHB asked the department to approve an overdraft of £200,000 to allow for the purchase of the lease. Department of Health²⁶ officials were perplexed about the exact arrangements that had been entered into; they asked what exactly the NEHB was getting. The CEO gave a detailed reply to the department. He said that the potential loss to the Good Shepherd Sisters of future letting of the remaining 67 years of the lease was £505,900. The Sisters were entitled to compensation for any outlay by them on additions and improvements to the property. They had asked for £400,000; he refused this but his offer of £150,000 was accepted.

24.142 There were further enquiries made by the Department of Health about the exact acreage involved. The department established that no consideration had been paid by the Good Shepherd Sisters when the lease was agreed and that they had surrendered about eight acres to Meath County Council in 1975 for house building;

²⁶ The consent of the Minister for Health was required for the transaction (under Section 89 of *Health Act 1947*)

they received consideration of £1,762 for this. The department approved the arrangements.

- 24.143 A departmental memorandum in May 1991 explained that the property and about 70-80 acres of land had been bought by Meath County Council in the 1950s. It was leased to the Good Shepherd Sisters for 99 years from 6 July 1959 on condition that they would carry on a home for unmarried mothers. There was a subsequent agreement that, if the sisters were asked to vacate before the termination of the lease, they would be compensated in respect of an extension they built in 1962 from their own funds at a cost of £28,000. A handwritten note commented that compensation of £100,000 would be excessive.
- 24.144 The memorandum stated that the department had been in touch with the other health boards to determine what impact, if any, the closure of Dunboyne would have. Three boards, the Eastern Health Board, the Southern Health Board and the North Western Health Board, all had other facilities available and were not affected. The other boards indicated that the closure had not created any particular difficulties for them and they intended to provide support for expectant women on a community basis. The department noted that one of the arguments put forward by CURA was that the health boards did not see the full demand for this type of service because many of the women involved preferred to seek support from Church based services.
- 24.145 The department had met CURA in May 1991 to discuss the closure. CURA was very concerned about the closure of Dunboyne as it had been used by CURA very extensively over the years. There were suggestions at the meeting that the closure was not initiated by the Sisters but had been forced on them by the decision of the NEHB CEO to reclaim the premises. The department noted that it was clear that the closure of Dunboyne had left a gap in the facilities available for young pregnant girls, particularly younger girls who wanted to continue their studies. CURA accepted that Dunboyne was too big for the then current needs but stressed that an alternative facility to cater for up to 20 pregnant girls would have to be provided, preferably in Dublin.
- 24.146 A social worker in Cork told the SHB director of community care that the closure was a big loss for girls from Cork. It meant that Bessborough was the only facility of its kind left in the country and it could not guarantee anonymity and privacy for

Cork girls who usually opted to go to Dunboyne. She described the services in Dunboyne as ‘welcoming, reassuring and professional’ and particularly appropriate for girls who wanted to continue their education. She said it was regrettable that the Department of Health did not prevent its closure by providing adequate financing. She further remarked that ‘Consultation also would have been more helpful if sought prior to closure and not after’.

24.147 The Board of Holles Street hospital also expressed concern about the closure.

Evidence from former residents

The experiences described by the former residents who gave evidence to the Commission are largely set out in their own words. In some cases, particular information which might identify the witnesses has not been included.

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.

24.148 The Commission has received very few complaints about the conditions in Dunboyne or the physical treatment of the mothers there. All the evidence seen by the Commission and the evidence of the vast majority of former residents who spoke to the Commission suggests that Dunboyne provided comfortable, warm accommodation and the residents were well looked after physically. The younger residents were provided with educational opportunities from the 1980s. There are a number of letters in the Dunboyne institutional files from former residents expressing gratitude for the kindness shown to them. A letter, written in the 1990s by a woman who was in Dunboyne in the 1970s and who kept her baby, stated that she was very grateful for the time spent in Dunboyne; she described it as ‘a refuge, a sanctuary, a place of tranquillity, stability, rest and safety’.

24.149 Former residents did make complaints about the adoption process. In general, the adoptions were arranged by adoption societies and not directly by Dunboyne. However, the Sisters in Dunboyne did talk to the residents about adoption and clearly did encourage them to place the babies for adoption. Many of the mothers

clearly felt that they had no choice about adoption but it must be recognised that the pressure for adoption was also coming from their families.

24.150 A small number of former residents did make other complaints. These complaints are all firmly rejected by the Good Shepherd Sisters.

24.151 One former resident said that, from when she arrived in Dunboyne, the nuns in Dunboyne and the health board social worker 'persistently' talked to her about adoption. She said she was called into the nuns' office once a week to sign the papers for adoption but she refused. (As already pointed out, the Good Shepherd Sisters were not directly involved in the adoption process; this was arranged by the relevant adoption agency.) She said that she was given tough jobs to do such as cleaning windows, tidying the nuns' bedrooms and cleaning the bedrooms and the en-suites; the other girls who were 'compliant with the nuns and agreed to adoptions' were not asked to do these jobs. The Good Shepherd sisters have pointed out that the residents were expected to carry out light household chores but not heavy cleaning. This was carried out by paid staff members. The resident did not clean or tidy the Sisters' bedrooms; they were not allowed into these rooms.

24.152 This former resident said that, in general, there were good opportunities for recreation and socialising. However, there was limited opportunity for education.²⁷ She said there was a strict rule that first names and surnames were not to be mentioned as, according to the nuns, many residents did not want to be identified. She said that the doors of the institution were not locked and that the residents were allowed into the village at weekends and even managed to go to Dublin one day over the weekend.

24.153 She said that she did not want to give her baby up for adoption. After the birth in Holles Street, she and the baby went to Dunboyne. She said he was the only baby she saw in Dunboyne and she actually only saw him in order to feed him as he was kept in the nursery. She was told she would spend two weeks there but he was removed after a few days. She was not told he was being removed or where he was going. She left Dunboyne immediately and eventually found out from the health board social worker that he had been sent to St Clare's, Stamullen. She

²⁷ It should be noted that she went into Dunboyne almost at the end of the school year and had not been attending school prior to her going in.

said that the health board social worker had sent a letter to the priest who was involved with St Clare's stating that she wanted the baby placed for adoption and that Dunboyne proposed to do a 'direct placement'. The letter asked that the baby be kept for two months in Stamullen. She says that, contrary to what was stated in the letter, she had never agreed to any of these arrangements. She visited Stamullen and was initially not allowed to see her son. She says she created a lot of commotion and was eventually allowed to see him. After three months she managed to take him home.

24.154 Another woman who was in Dunboyne in 1980 said that the arrangements for her to go there were made by family members. She was there for three months which included the Christmas period. She shared a bedroom with three others. It was a large room with four beds and a large bathroom. She was given a different name. She says this was to protect anonymity but she thinks it was psychologically damaging.

24.155 She was 16 at the time but she said that she did not go to school while there. She said that everyone had jobs to do. She had to fill the salt and pepper shakers, make sure there was cutlery and do other domestic duties. Others had to mop floors or do other cleaning or domestic duties. She felt that she had the easier jobs and that the jobs were allocated depending on the social status of the women. She believed that some worked in the laundry but she never saw the laundry. She said they did domestic duties in the morning. In the afternoon they packed greeting cards. She believes the Good Shepherd Sisters had a contract to take boxes of greeting cards and put them in cellophane; she did this job but others did typing or other jobs. 'You could choose what jobs you wanted to do in the afternoon, and in fact a few of the girls did nothing.' There was a cook, a gardener and a minibus driver.

24.156 She said that the regime was very much that the women were 'all sinners' and had brought shame on themselves and most especially on their families. She was visited by her mother and other family members but the visits were not easy as they were trying to persuade her not to see the baby's father and to give the baby up for adoption. Her father did not visit. The baby's father visited but could not come into Dunboyne; they had to meet at the shops. Although the doors were not locked, it felt like incarceration. They were technically free to leave but they had

nowhere to go. She said there was a great sense of camaraderie among the 'girls'.

- 24.157 The Sister in charge of blood pressure and weight checks was dutiful but always seemed a bit stressed. They got ante-natal care at Holles Street where she alleges they were treated differently by the nurses. She overheard the nurses refer to 'that lot' with a 'bad connotation'. She says that they were not given any education about giving birth. She did not take the baby from Holles Street. She believes that she had no choice about adoption. Her family, the nuns etc all believed that adoption was the only answer.
- 24.158 Another former resident provided an affidavit. She was in Dunboyne for six months in the early 1980s. She was aged 15. She said they were told to go by first names and that second names were not mentioned. She said that she was pressurised into adoption. (There is a thank you letter from her in the Dunboyne institutional records.)
- 24.159 She said that there were no formal rules and regulations but they were 'made to go to Mass and confession on a regular basis'. She described packing greeting cards and 'doing cleaning and washing jobs that needed to be done around the house and for ourselves, sometimes a bit of gardening'.
- 24.160 She said that they were made to watch videos showing abortions which were sickening. She complained that the father of her child, who was considerably older than she, was not prosecuted.
- 24.161 Another former resident who filed an affidavit was in Dunboyne in the mid 1980s. She was 16 and she travelled there alone. She described doing chores and packing cards. She said that the timetable and the rules were fairly strict but they were never treated badly. 'We were fed and we were warm.' She said that there were no opportunities for education.

Evidence of former staff heard before the Commission of Investigation

- 24.162 A Sister who was in Dunboyne from 1964 to 1971 told the Commission that it was a very busy place at that time as the new extension had opened two years before

she arrived and there was a high demand for the service. Initially, there was accommodation for 15 mothers but the extension meant they could accommodate 30 residents - or 32 'at a squeeze'. She said the accommodation for the women and girls was on the ground floor. There was a kitchen, a dining room, a recreation room, a 'famous smoke room', and a small laundry for the use of the residents to deal with their personal belongings. Later a small building housing a small launderette was built.

24.163 The nursery was on the second floor 'because, at that time, the mothers came back with their babies to Dunboyne'. There was a childcare nurse. There were two bedrooms with four beds in each room. The bathrooms were at the end of the corridor. She slept in a room off this corridor. There was a backstairs up to the old building. There were three four-bed rooms there and a bathroom.

24.164 This Sister was a midwife but she also did the administration. Later on, social workers took over the administration role. At that time, there were three staff - herself, a nursery nurse and a cook; there were no lay staff.

24.165 In the convent 'which was really the old building', there was the superior, her assistant and another Sister.

24.166 The residents did not go out to the village or generally at this time. Boyfriends did not visit. She remarked on how much things changed in these respects after she left in 1971.

24.167 The women went to Holles Street to give birth. (This Sister said it was exclusively Holles Street; they did not use St Kevin's). A local GP visited on a weekly basis. The women were driven to Holles Street for ante-natal care and then taken back to Dunboyne. The Sisters had a minibus for this purpose. This Sister drove women to Holles Street as required when birth was imminent. The mothers came back to Dunboyne about seven days later and cared for the baby while there. Initially, the mothers stayed for two years but this was no longer the practice by the late 1960s. Mostly they stayed for about six weeks but some stayed longer because they could not come to a decision or maybe hoped that their parents would facilitate their return with their babies to the family home. Some women were visited by their parents but some did not want their parents to know they were there. The Sister said it 'was very tough' on them.

- 24.168 Babies were generally brought to St Clare's, Stamullen for adoption. Some went to the CPRSI - mainly those who had been referred by this Society in the first place (these were mainly PFIs - see Chapter 7). This Sister had never been in St Clare's. The Good Shepherd Sisters had nothing to do with adoptions.
- 24.169 Another Sister was in Dunboyne from 1975 to 1985. She was a midwife and had childcare experience. Her main responsibility in Dunboyne was to provide ante-natal care. When the women were admitted she took a medical history and recorded it on their chart. She conducted ante-natal classes twice a week. The local doctor visited once a week. She took blood pressures and did other routine tests before he arrived.
- 24.170 It was during her time there that educational facilities began to be made available. The girls who were preparing for exams studied in the mornings as the teachers came in the afternoons. Initially, the girls had to go to a centre in Dublin to do exams but then they got a designated centre in Dunboyne.
- 24.171 She described the atmosphere as lovely and relaxed. The grounds were lovely and facilitated the girls taking walks without being seen.
- 24.172 While she was there, there were never more than five or six babies; generally they went straight to foster care.
- 24.173 They grew some of their own vegetables; they were not self-sufficient but they did have potatoes, carrots, strawberries, blackberries and gooseberries.
- 24.174 Another Sister who gave evidence had worked in Dunboyne from 1982 to 1987. She was a qualified social worker. She considered Dunboyne a very happy place, effectively a refuge for the residents. The residents supported each other; they would come in tense and anxious. Confidentiality was a huge issue for them.
- 24.175 They had a full time housekeeper/cleaner at this stage. The residents did routine tasks.
- 24.176 When asked by the Commission, she said that they probably would not have taken mothers with mental health issues because they did not have the capacity to deal with them. She remembered one mother who was a member of the traveller

community. She said that this young woman found it difficult to settle; she left because she could not cope.

24.177 There was Mass every day but the residents were not obliged to go.

24.178 Even though a significant number of their residents were underage, the Sisters did not make any reports to the Gardaí. The Good Shepherd Sisters have pointed out that they regarded their role as providing care and support and that any criminal justice issues would have been a matter for the social workers dealing with the mothers. Mandatory reporting was not required at the time.

24.179 They had a lot of contact with CURA. A number of the Sisters were volunteers with CURA.

24.180 The mothers wanted to do what was best for the babies and the perceived wisdom at the time was that adoption was best. This perceived wisdom was not necessarily correct either then or now.

24.181 In an affidavit for the Commission another Good Shepherd Sister said she had worked in Dunboyne from 1971 to 1975 and again from 1985 until its closure in 1991. She was a qualified nurse and midwife. She had shared responsibility for pre-and post-natal care of the women. She drove them to Holles Street for check-ups and medical care and when they were ready to give birth.

24.182 She said that the Sisters had daily Mass in the convent but there was no obligation on the women to attend and, in general, they did not attend daily Mass. She said that nutritious and healthy food was prepared by the Sister in charge of the kitchen with help from some of the residents. The kitchen garden provided fresh fruit and vegetables.

24.183 Each resident usually had some light cleaning to do each day (provided there were no medical contra-indications); the heavy housework was carried out by a lay staff member. The residents did not do any outside work; this was done by a gardener/general handyman. The large laundry items (bed linen, towels) were sent weekly to a commercial laundry. There was a household launderette for the women's personal washing.

- 24.184 When she was first in Dunboyne, there was a nursery with a qualified nursery nurse in charge. This closed at some stage - she could not remember the precise date - when the babies went straight to foster care from the maternity hospital.
- 24.185 She described the atmosphere in Dunboyne as 'very free'. The women were encouraged to go to the village and to meet friends, including boyfriends. Family, friends and boyfriends were welcome to visit on the premises. There were no standard visiting hours: 'people came and went frequently'.
- 24.186 She said that there was no set getting up time or going to bed time. The residents decided for themselves; bedtime was significantly related to the TV schedule. There was a pay phone and the residents were free to use it. There was no question of anyone opening someone else's post.
- 24.187 The residents all wore their own clothes; there was no uniform.
- 24.188 There was no burial plot in the grounds of Dunboyne. The Good Shepherd Sisters bought a plot in the local authority graveyard in Dunboyne where some infants were buried.