

Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes confirms the presence of human remains on the site of the former Tuam Mother and Baby Home

INFORMATION SHEET

3 March 2017

1. What is the being announced today in relation to the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes?

The Commission has informed Dr Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, that its investigations have now confirmed the presence of human remains on the site of the former Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, Co. Galway. The Commission has published this information on its website this morning.

This news confirms the various sources of information which had strongly indicated that deceased residents of the home were buried on the site. Establishing the truth in relation to these suspicions was one of the reasons for setting up the Commission of Investigation in the first place.

The reality of this news is very disturbing and will touch everyone's heart. Importantly, the findings trace the remains specifically to the period of the Home's operation, rather than to earlier times in our history such as during the Famine. The State's primary concern now is to ensure that the dignity of the deceased children who lived their short lives in this home is respected and recognised.

2. How did the Commission identify the presence of human remains?

The Commission conducted a series of geophysical surveys and test excavations. This testing identified two large sub-surface structures, one filled with rubble and covered with top soil and a separate long structure which is divided into 20 chambers. The Commission has not yet determined what the purpose of this structure was but it appears to be related to the treatment/containment of sewage and/or waste water. It is important to stress that the Commission has not yet determined if this was ever used for this purpose.

The Commission has partially opened 20 of the underground chambers and reports that human remains are visible in 17 of the 20 chambers. The Commission believes there are a significant number of children's remains in these chambers. The Commission recovered a small number of juvenile remains and determined that these remains were of children with age-at-death ranges from approximately between 35 foetal weeks to 2 to 3 years. Radiocarbon dating of the

recovered samples suggest that the remains date from the timeframe relevant to the operation of the Mother and Baby Home (from 1925 – 1961). Further scientific tests are being conducted by the Commission.

3. Is there any indication of the number of children buried at this site?

The Commission believes the number is significant. We do know that the General Registrar's Office has records relating to the deaths of 796 children who died at the Tuam home during the 36 years in which the Home was in operation. The death certificates indicate the children died from a variety of natural causes. We do not know how many of these children's remains may be buried on the site.

The Commission has not made any finding in this regard. The Commission's is conducting further scientific tests on the samples already recovered and its investigations are on-going.

4. Will further investigations be made into these burials?

Having been notified by the Commission of its discoveries, the Coroner for North Galway will consider what steps may be necessary and appropriate in accordance with his statutory functions, on the basis of the information now made available.

The Coroner has legal responsibility for investigating sudden, unexplained and unnatural deaths in the public interest. He is of course independent in the discharge of these functions. It is open to the coroner to call on the support of the Gardaí and any other authorities as he may deem necessary.

The local Coroner was aware of the Commission's work and visited the site in the course of the Commission's excavations.

5. What happens next?

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs has coordinated a series of actions with relevant departments and agencies to ensure that there is an appropriate and respectful response to the discovery. Firstly, as outlined above, the Coroner for North Galway will consider what steps may be necessary and appropriate in accordance with his statutory functions, on the basis of the information now made available

Secondly, Galway County Council will engage with the Commission in relation to the next steps on the site, now that the Commission's excavations have been concluded. Importantly, the site has been made secure pending any further decision.

Thirdly, and critically, Galway County will engage with local residents and other interested parties on what should happen next in relation to the remains. The Government is acutely conscious of the sensitivities that will arise in this regard, and it is appreciated that there may be sincerely held but differing views on what is the best way forward. Without being in any way prescriptive about this matter, the Government is very anxious to ensure that all decisions are taken in an appropriate, respectful manner that honours the dignity of those whose remains are interred there. The question of an appropriate form of memorial or memorial rite will perhaps also arise in this context.

6. Who decides on exhumations and any further forensic testing?

These are two separate issues. If there is reason to believe that there were deaths which may have occurred in a violent or unnatural manner, it will be a matter for the Coroner and Gardaí to pursue.

Separately, a decision will have to be taken whether the remains should be reinterred elsewhere and a process is required around that decision and any further testing which may be considered viable.

7. What is known about the history of this site?

The site is on lands in the ownership of Galway County Council. The former Mother and Baby Home was run by the Bon Secours Sisters from 1925-1961 in what was previously a workhouse dating back to famine times. In the 1970's the former home was demolished to make way for a local authority housing estate. The remaining grounds from the former site now encompass a small memorial garden which is maintained by local residents, green spaces and a children's playground.

8. What further investigations are being undertaken by the Commission?

While the Commission has concluded its work in relation to the excavations at Tuam, it has not yet reached any formal conclusions about the site, such as whether the burial arrangements were in line with the laws or practices of that time – which would of course be very different today. The Commission will continue its wider work on such matters as post mortem practices and procedures, reporting and burial arrangements for residents of Mother and Baby Homes.

The Commission was anxious to bring this information to our attention now, but it will continue its work in relation to its overall terms of reference, including the wider practices and procedures that were applied to burials and other matters relating to deaths that occurred in

these homes. Given the on-going independent statutory investigation, it is essential not to preempt the outcome of these investigations. The Commission must be given the opportunity to complete its investigations and to issue its report in accordance with the legal framework under which it was established.

9. Will the burial sites associated with other mother and baby homes and county homes be excavated?

The Commission's terms of reference require it to examine the reporting of deaths and burial arrangements in relation to the 14 named homes. The Commission's investigations are ongoing and I am satisfied that the Commission has sufficient powers, expertise and resources to make a determination on these matters.

10. Where can I get further information and support?

There is dedicated telephone Information line being made available for people seeking further information over the coming days. Those seeking factual information may contact the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Information Line @ Tel: 01-6473118 or 01-6473232 during Monday to Friday 9.30am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 12pm to 5pm (4th and 5th March).

There is also telephone line available for people seeking details of support available to those affected by these issues. Those seeking such information may telephone the HSE National Information Line; Low Call Telephone 1850 24 1850 during Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and Saturday 10am -5pm

Anyone affected can also directly contact the CONNECT free telephone out of hours telephone counselling and support service where they can talk in confidence with a trained counsellor. The CONNECT out of hours service is contactable at Freephone 1800 477 477 from the Republic of Ireland. Its services will be available on Friday 3rd March, Saturday 4th March and Sunday 5th March from 5pm -12am and then from Mon 6th March – Fri 10th March 6pm -10pm.

Any person seeking adoption information and tracing information may wish to visit the following sites:

The Adoption Authority of Ireland - www.aai.gov.ie , or

TUSLA (Child and Family Agency) - www.tusla.ie

ADDITIONAL CONTACT DETAILS

Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters

Confidential Freephone (ROI only): 1800 80-66-88

Confidential Freephone Outside ROI: +353-1-6445088

Email: info@mbhcoi.ie

Galway North Coroner

Dr. Val Costello

Headford Health Centre

Co. Galway

Phone: 093 35740

Fax: 093 36012

Email: drvalcostello@gmail.com

Galway County Council

Phone: +353 (0)91 509000

Email: customerservices@galwaycoco.ie

Media:

Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Press Office

Tel: +353 1 647-3153 (Monday-Friday) / 087 2294881

Media@dcya.gov.ie

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These contact details and other information related to the Commission are available on the website of the Department of Children and Youth affairs at www.dcy.gov.ie