

# FF reneges on pledge to cut waiting lists in two years, claims Rabbitte

by Mary Dundon  
Political Reporter

## Government promises

FIANNA Fáil was accused yesterday of doing a U-turn on its high-profile election promise to cut hospital waiting lists within two years.

Even before the new coalition Government is announced today, Fianna Fáil has reneged on one of its key election pledges, according to Labour's Pat Rabbitte.

Only one month ago, health minister Micheál Martin promised: "There will be no waiting lists in two years' time no matter what state the economy is in."

However, there is no mention of this pledge in the new Programme for Government, which was published on Tuesday. It must be a record even for Fianna Fáil, to have reneged on such a major commitment within a month," Deputy Rabbitte added.

Instead, the new Programme for Government promises to increase the number of public hospital beds by 3,000 over the next five years. But there is no commitment to clear the 28,000 hospital patient waiting list within two years, as promised before the election.

A Fianna Fáil spokesman rejected Labour's claim that the party had done a U-turn on its pledge to clear hospital waiting lists in two years.

He said the new Programme for Government promises to treat people within the new national guidelines on maximum waiting times as set out in the National Health Strategy.

But the national health strategy does not state that waiting lists will be completely cleared within two years.

Instead, it says the new national guidelines are that no public patient should wait longer than three months for treatment following referral from an outpatients' department by 2004.

The Government aims to achieve

● Fianna Fáil promise on May 6, 2002:

"There will be no waiting lists within two years, no matter what state the economy is in," Health Minister Micheál Martin said.

● Programme for Government pledge on June 4, 2002:

"We will treat people within the new national guidelines for maximum waiting times set out in the National Health Strategy."

● The strategy states no public patient should wait longer than three months for treatment following referral from an outpatients' department by 2004.

this through a major expansion in acute bed capacity and the new Treatment Purchase Fund, which will be used to buy treatment from private hospitals in Ireland and international providers.

Fianna Fáil promised to spend €5 billion on health capital funding and €3.8 billion in recurrent funding over the next five years.

This new Programme for Government does not confront the changed economic circumstances we are facing, Deputy Rabbitte said.

The Department of Finance is predicting a €3.05 billion budget deficit next year and a further deficit of €3.7 billion the following year.

"Unlike the 1997 Programme for Government, this new one contains no commitment to running a current budget surplus and provides no figures for any increase in government spending," Deputy Rabbitte added.



Haunted House: Investors have not been put off by rumours of ghostly activity at the famous Delmege House.

Picture: Kieran Clancy

## Things going bump in night don't spook investors

by Mícheál Lehane

NOT even the thought of a ghost lurking in the bedroom or things going bump in the night can frighten off some determined house buyers.

Ghostbusters have the opportunity of purchasing one of the most famous haunted houses in the country. Castlepark House, at Ballygrennan near Limerick, is believed to be the home of a ghost, but the auctioneers are confident this won't deter anyone interested in buying this 18th century period house.

"There is reputedly a ghost there but

he's a friendly type of chap. I don't think he'll put anyone off buying the house," estate agent Pat Kearney said.

The ghost has been part of the house for hundreds of years and he has a central place in the folklore of Castlepark since the 19th century.

"People have been noticing strange things there for hundreds of years and they have heard the odd noise as well. This ghost has even been recorded in several books," Mr Kearney said.

The house and the 80-acres surrounding it could fetch more than €1 million, according to Mr Rooney who works for Rooney Auctioneers.

A group of businessmen have already looked at the property with a view to building a luxury hotel there. However, a fire at the residence last year scuppered those plans.

The blaze damaged a large section at the rear of the two-storey house. But the haunted house is still attracting a lot of interest, especially from wealthy US residents wanting to buy property here.

"It's something that really interests Americans and they always like the idea of ghosts," Mr Kearney said.

The house was once owned by wealthy Limerick families including

the Smiths and the later Delmeiges. Miss Caroline Delmege lived there until 1969.

The auctioneers admit the ghost's house is in need of renovation but the full site could be the perfect location for community sports facilities.

"It would be a great property for the county council to buy because you could build several units there. Sports pitches could also be developed," Mr Kearney added.

And Rooney auctioneers, as well as the owner of Castlepark, James Lyons, believe the ghost would give the thumbs up to such a move.