

Evening Herald Tuesday January 27 2009

Incest kids 'let down by HSE'

Health service staff who worked with children at the centre of the Roscommon incest case should have taken them into care 'an awful lot sooner', Health Minister Mary Harney admitted yesterday.

A 40-year-old alcoholic mother was jailed for seven years last week after pleading guilty to a harrowing catalogue of neglect – including forcing her then 13-year-old son to have sex with her.

Fine Gael will table a private members' motion in the Dail today calling for a high-level Commission of Investigation probe into the circumstances surrounding the case.

The HSE has already set up an independent probe to study how social workers interacted with the family which lived in a squalid bungalow strewn with rubbish and dead rats.

Ms Harney said: "My own hunch, at the outset, not knowing the facts yet, is that if we acted more thoroughly and more robustly and more speedily, these children should have been taken into care an awful lot sooner."

She added: "It is probably the most horrific case any of us has ever read about. That abuse could have gone on for so long. Clearly so many people must have been aware of it and yet nobody seemed to have the capacity to act."

The woman pleaded guilty to 10 charges, including two of incest, two of sexual abuse and six of neglect and wilful ill-treatment and neglect of the children between 1998 and 2004.

She is the first woman in the state to be jailed for incest.

Ms Harney also called for a change to the 1908 legislation on incest offences.



Health Minister Mary Harney has called for changes to the state's incest legislation in the wake of the horrific scale of abuse and neglect that a 40-year-old Roscommon woman inflicted on her own children.