Warning for industry after 305 press complaints last year

LAURA LYNOTT

More than 300 press complaints were made last year, with the industry being warned it must never "undermine" the Press Council and its duties to a code of ethics and professionalism.

"In Ireland, we are fortunate that both politicians and the public retain high levels of confidence in the honesty and fairness of the press. This cannot be taken for granted," Press Council chairman Rory Montgomery wrote in the council's 2024 report.

"Developments in the United States show that."

Yesterday Mr Montgomery said the Irish press industry must not "undermine rules" set to protect ethical and professional journalism.

The Press Council is a "voluntary body" and that means, Mr Montgomery said, those participating must abide by guidelines.

"If the Press Council is to function, it is essential members act faithfully and in accordance with the letter and spirit of the requirements," he added.

"Any effort to reject or undermine these rules poses real dangers and we will vigorously object to any such efforts."

Of the 305 complaints made about the press, 105 were against national newspapers (print and online); 58 were against online-only publications; 28 against local newspapers (print and online); and 16 against publications that are not members of the Press Council.

Twelve appeals were considered. Three complaints were upheld, but two were overturned on appeal. There was, it was found, "sufficient remedial action" offered by a publication to resolve a complaint in one case. Twenty-one complaints were not upheld.

Those who made complaints against the press cited allegations of falling short on truth and accuracy (75); the distinguishing of fact and comment (24); fair procedure and honesty (18); principle and respect for rights (14); privacy (32); and court reporting (19).

A total of 43 complaints alleged prejudice – 28 of which referred to a single article. Five were made in respect of reporting on children and one on suicide. Complainants often cited more than one breach of the Code of Practice.

Mr Montgomery also referred to issues with press freedom. He and Press Ombudsman Susan McKay recently met Justice Minister Jim O'Callaghan, to "clarify the rules around which gardaí can seek access to information obtained by journalists in their work", he said.

"Any improvement of this is desirable," he added, noting the Supreme Court ruling in June 2023, when the court dismissed the Garda Commissioner's appeal to access a journalist's phone.

Comhairle Contae Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT ACT 2000 (AS AMENDED)
NOTICE OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
Proposed Development Works at Port Pier, Inver

Pursuant to the requirements of Section 177AE (4)(a) of the Planning & DevelopmentAct 2000 (as amended) notice is hereby given that Donegal County Council proposes to seek approval from An Bord Pleanála to carry out development works at Port Pier, Inver, Co Donegal. The development works will include the following:

(i) Construction of a two new sheet pile pier sections encased in a concrete façade (44.5m x 10.1m to the south and 49.3m x 10.1m in an easterly direction).
(ii) The area enclosed by the new pier will be dredged to a depth of -0.9m CD.
(iii) Prior to dredging, a sheet pile retaining wall will be installed in front of the existing slipway to prevent it from being undermined.
(iv) An additional area of approximately 1121m2 behind the existing pier will be reclaimed using predominantly the dredged material.

A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been prepared for the proposed development. An Bord Pleanála may give approval for the development with or without conditions or may refuse the application for the development.

A copy of the plans and particulars, including the Natura Impact Statement, will be available for inspection or for purchase, for a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy, from 20/11/2025 until 01/01/2026 at the following locations:

- **Donegal County Council, Drumlonagher, Donegal Town, Co.Donegal**
  Monday 09:00 – 16:30
  Tuesday 09:00 – 16:30
  Wednesday 09:00 – 16:30
  Thursday 09:00 – 16:30
  Friday 09:00 – 16:30
  CLOSED Saturday, Sunday & Bank Holidays
- Donegal County Council, County House, The Diamond, Lifford, Co.Donegal, F93 Y622
  Monday 09:00 – 16:30
  Tuesday 09:00 – 16:30
  Wednesday 09:00 – 16:30
  Thursday 09:00 – 16:30
  Friday 09:00 – 16:30
  CLOSED Saturday, Sunday & Bank Holidays
- Donegal County Council Website: **https://www.donegalcoco.ie/**

Submissions or observations may be made to **An Bord Pleanála** on the proposed development in relation to:

- The implications of the proposed development for proper planning and sustainable development in the area concerned.
- The likely effects on the Environment of the proposed development, and
- The likely significant effects of the proposed development on the European Site, if carried out.

Any submissions or observations may be made in writing to **An Bord Pleanála, 64 Marlborough Street, Dublin 1, DO1 V902,** not later than 5.30 pm on 01/01/2026.

A person may question the validity of a decision by An Bord Pleanála by way of an application for judicial review under Order 84 of the rules of the Superior Courts (S.I. No.15 of 1986) in accordance with Section 50 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Information in respect of the judicial review process can be accessed on the Board's website **www.pleanala.ie** or on the Citizens Information Service website **www.citizensinformation.ie**

Cathal Sweeney
A/Senior Executive Enginee

Laya health profits doubled to €19m last year after two premium hikes

GORDON DEEGAN

Pre-tax profits at one of the country's largest health insurers, Laya Healthcare last year more than doubled to €19.02m.

New accounts filed by Laya Healthcare Ltd show that pre-tax profits increased by 108pc from €9.13m in 2023 to €19.02m last year.

This followed revenues rising by 2.5pc from €100.85m to €103.39m.

Last year, Laya imposed two premium price hikes on its customer base.

In October 2024, it increased its premiums on average by 6.5pc, saying at the time that the price rise was needed to address the increased demand for healthcare services and rising costs.

The hike followed a 7pc price increase in April 2024 and the insurer has increased premium rates twice this year – in October and April as part of a trend of recent years.

Last month, Laya increased its prices by an average of 4.5pc, blaming higher demand for private and high-tech healthcare and new advances in medical technology.

October's increase comes following a separate increase in premiums of 6.6pc at the beginning of April this year.

In their report on the 2024 financial performance, the directors don't refer to the 2024 price increases.

Instead they say there were a number of factors contributing to the profitable results, including Laya Healthcare's continued growth in the Irish market.

They say this growth saw the company's membership base increase to over 717,000 in 2024, from 696,000 in 2023 – a jump of apporoximately 3pc.

The directors say the company's health and wellness services also saw growth.

The directors have also stated that Dermot Oliver O'Connor succeeded Dónal Clancy to assume the position of managing director of the company on January 1 this year.

Last year was the first full year of the ownership of Laya Healthcare by French-headquartered Axa following the €650m sale by AIG subsidiary, Corebridge Financial in 2023.

Profits were hit in 2023 by a €15.1m bill in transactional costs in the sale to Axa that did not recur last year.

Numbers employed by Laya Healthcare last year increased by 43, from 664 to 707 as staff costs rose from €44.74m to €46.44m.

The profit last year takes account of non-cash depreciation costs of €5.6m.

The company recorded post-tax profits of €14.8m after a corporation tax charge of €4.2m.

At the end of last December, the firm's accumulated profits totalled €67.26m.

The company's cash funds increased to €111.09m.

The cash funds were made up of Laya Healthcare cash balances of €38.59m and restricted cash of €72.5m that was held on behalf of the underwriter.

Commenting on the results, managing director Mr Oliver O'Connor said the company's financial strength allows it to meet the growing healthcare needs of 717,000 members.

"When normalised for once-off transactional costs linked to the sale of Laya Healthcare to Axa in 2023, our net profit after tax is down 35pc, reflecting our continued investment in expanding access and clinical excellence," he said.