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which ultimately funds the NAS. And how planning at the ambulance service is hopelessly flawed and without logic.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) this weekend confirmed it has commissioned an 'external examination' into 'issues' emerging from the recording.

Today's revelations come as the NAS, its management and its €231m budget remain the focus of ongoing controversy. Last month, the death of Ian McCarthy in Roscrea was raised at council meetings in north Tipperary.

Mr McCarthy, 29, died of an asthma attack last August as his family waited two hours for an ambulance. After the wait, two ambulances arrived at the same time, but it was too late to save the father of three. Mr McCarthy's father Karl said at the time: 'Until someone tells me different, he died needlessly last night, leaving three beautiful children fatherless and a family and wife broken-hearted.'

At last month's meeting, angry councillors described a state of crisis at the NAS and spoke of front-line staff being at breaking point.

The NAS responds to more than 400,000 calls every year, employs 2,400 staff at 100 locations and operates a fleet of 675 vehicles. But the service is desperately under-

'He died needlessly last night'

funded and understaffed.

This has been openly acknowledged by NAS Director Robert Morton, who has spoken of 'a significant mismatch between demand for services and available capacity'. Mr Morton is not one of the executives who features in the recording obtained by the MoS.

The management figures who do take part in the meeting never discuss or consider the real life-and-death consequences of the failures in the service they are responsible for running.

The recording was made during a scheduled meeting between six NAS executives in July, 2021. At the beginning of the meeting, a senior executive explains the purpose of the gathering.

'Today we want to look at work-force planning on the grounds we have to have one - on the grounds that we need certain pieces for the service plan for 2022,' they tell the other managers.

'The 2022 service plan was confirmed yesterday and has to be off our desks and in the Department [of Health] on 27th July.'

This leads to an in-depth discussion about problems establishing correct staffing numbers, and the manner in which some posts have been deceptively retained.

One attendee freely admits: 'There are some posts in there where if I says when the person dies the post should be gone. And some of those are not gone since 2017. We know that. More importantly I'd be trying to tell the department either a lie on it or a way that it has been done since whenever it is... and that's the difficulty in going to the department.'

This appears to relate to various rolling moratoriums on recruitment at the HSE that prohibited new recruitment and promotions into more senior roles when staff retired or passed away.

Deceiving the department in this way means funding for the vacated post would continue - allowing the money to be diverted elsewhere or

CAUGHT ON TAPE: Ambulance service executives admit to lying to HSE about staffing and manipulating recruitment

'I'm quite happy to promote my own team. I don't give a f*** any more'...

LEAKED RECORDINGS CATCH NAS EXECUTIVES AGREEING TO DECEIVE THE DEPARTMENT

The damning recording, provided to the Irish Mail on Sunday by a whistleblower, was made during a scheduled meeting between six National Ambulance Service executives in July, 2021.

01.

Several executives discuss how to advance their own promotion prospects internally by manipulating the system.

EXECUTIVE 1: 'Whether you've done it or not, put it on your CV.'

EXECUTIVE 2: 'I mean, I'm quite happy to promote my own team and f*** them all. I don't give a f*** anymore. I'm at that stage now. I think you deserve it. I think you've worked f***ing hard.'

02.

They speak about lying to the Department of Health - or smoothing over - the fact that job positions that should not exist anymore remain after the original holder has died.

EXECUTIVE 1: 'There are some posts in there where it says when the person dies the post should be gone. And some of those are not gone since 2017. We know that. More importantly I'd be trying to tell the department either a lie on it or a way that it has been done since whenever it is... and that's the difficulty in going to the department.'

facilitating the unauthorised promotion of a favoured manager to a higher grade.

The meeting continues to discuss how the NAS has been deceiving the Department of Health about these 'zombie' posts. 'One executive says: 'More importantly, I'd be

trying to tell the department either a lie on it or a way that it has been done since whenever it is... and that's the difficulty in going to the department.'

At another point, a senior executive points to the urgent requirement for correct staffing and

recruitment figures.

'I need to go to Government on Wednesday... with a draft service plan. I need figures,' they said.

This prompted a discussion on the difficulty in getting accurate staff figures. Others who were not present were blamed for the problem.

struggling with this last year because I thought, "Okay, I'll wait and see. I'll sit down." But there's no logic attached to the process of how we manage.'

EXECUTIVE 2: 'All this f***ing shite to prove your bodies on seats - with no plan.'

06.

They mock the NAS director's intention to hire consultants Grant Thornton to go through their figures.

EXECUTIVE 3: 'What will they do?'

EXECUTIVE 2: 'We will give them all the information... and they will present it quite nicely on a written page and charge us a fortune for it.'

EXECUTIVE 1: 'Two pages.'

07.

They praise as accurate a series of anonymous Whatsapp videos circulated about senior management - while acknowledging they shouldn't.

EXECUTIVE 2: 'Professionally they were shocking because it just tells you the type of culture there is in the organisation. From a management perspective you think, f*** it, they're so close to the bone that they weren't funny. You'd have to stand back and laugh at yourself but you couldn't be seen to be laughing at management level. You just couldn't. You know.'

Eventually, it is decided to proceed with inaccurate data.

One manager says: 'What I can do is send... what I have. I cannot stand over it.'

Another executive replies: 'I have no issue with that, because what they're getting on Wednesday



ON TAPE: The recordings emerged amid ongoing concerns about ambulance response times



TRAGEDY: Robert McCarthy died while waiting for an ambulance

is the same difference.' A third manager adds dryly: 'No change there then.'

Despite the admission that their numbers are incorrect, the team then pours scorn on a plan by their director to hire consultants Grant Thornton to establish correct figures.

After discussing their weekend drinking plans, one executive jokingly refers to Grant Thornton as 'Gin Tonic'.

'What will they do?' asks one executive. 'We will give them all the information... and they will present it quite nicely on a written page and charge us a fortune for it,' answers another.

'At one point, one executive complains, with apparently genuine frustration, about the way the service is being managed. 'It's like catching f***ing butterflies,' they said.

'There's no logic. And I've struggled with it. I was really struggling with this last year because I thought, "Okay, I'll wait and see. I'll sit down." But there's no logic attached to the process of how we manage.'

In response, another

manager agrees, saying: 'I know, there isn't.'

The first executive then adds in exasperation: 'All this f***ing shite to prove your bodies on seats - with no plan.'

Once the main meeting has concluded, the same person then discusses how to rig recruitment processes so their own team members can advance.

'Whether you've done it or not, put it on your CV,' one attendee is advised. 'I mean, I'm quite happy to promote my own team and f*** them all.'

'You'd have to stand back and laugh at yourself, but you couldn't be seen to be laughing at management level. You just couldn't. You know.'

The recordings emerged amid ongoing concerns and criticism about ambulance response times.

Figures made public last summer show that 864 seriously ill or injured patients endured a wait of at least an hour for an ambulance

series of anonymous, AI-generated WhatsApp videos that were circulated among NAS employees.

The messages depict management figures singing different songs, the lyrics of which portray how they're viewed by employees.

One of those attending the meeting plays one of the videos they are discussing.

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The recordings emerged amid ongoing concerns and criticism about ambulance response times. Figures made public last summer show that 864 seriously ill or injured patients endured a wait of at least an hour for an ambulance

during the second half of 2023. One ambulance took three hours and 15 minutes to get to a high-priority call in Carlow.

The worst-affected county was Cork, where 118 calls were not responded to within an hour.

Wexford was the second-worst affected with 96 separate emergency calls unattended for more than an hour, followed by Donegal, Mayo, Tipperary and Waterford.

An audit of the service released under Freedom of Information legislation in December was critical of management and governance issues.

'The report concluded it could only provide 'limited' reassurance about the appropriateness of risk management and internal control systems in place for the NAS fleet. It warned: 'There are weaknesses in the system of governance, risk management and controls which create a significant risk that the system will fail to meet its objectives.'

The report also noted that the Workforce Relations Commission on a new agreement for many frontline roles that will 'enhance remuneration arrangements, improve retention and enable the implementation of a new strategy for NAS.'

The Department of Health said: 'Due to the ongoing internal HSE investigation, the Department of Health cannot comment.'

Action is required to improve the adequacy and/or effectiveness of the system.'

The report found some ambulances are being used beyond their recommended lifespan and highlighted concern over the lack of a complete record of ambulance breakdowns and an incomplete listing of all service vehicles.

In response to queries from the MoS, the HSE said it is 'aware of the matters you outline' and confirmed the health authorities have commissioned an external examination of a number of these issues.'

They added: 'It's important having regard to the rights of everyone involved, that this process is allowed continue in private. The National Ambulance Service provides high-quality, safe and patient-centred services as part of an integrated health system. In 2025 we will continue to build on the significant previous investment in NAS and focus on improving access to care.'

The HSE said discussions with unions are underway through the Workplace Relations Commission on a new agreement for many frontline roles that will 'enhance remuneration arrangements, improve retention and enable the implementation of a new strategy for NAS.'

The Department of Health said: 'Due to the ongoing internal HSE investigation, the Department of Health cannot comment.'

Robert Morton was not taped

CONCERNS: NAS director Robert Morton was not taped



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