

TU AIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

*Dé Máirt, 12 Nollaig 2006.
Tuesday, 12 December 2006.*

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 2.30 p.m.

*Paidir.
Prayer.*

Appointment of Minister of State.

The Taoiseach: I wish to announce for the information of the Dáil that on 8 December I accepted the resignation from office of Deputy Síle de Valera, Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science. In her place, the Government has today appointed Deputy Seán Haughey as Minister of State at that Department.

Ceisteanna — Questions.

Departmental Programmes.

1. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the implementation of his Department's quality customer service charter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37094/06]

2. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the implementation of his Department's quality customer service charter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40253/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 and 2 together.

My Department's quality customer service charter was published in April 2004 and has been distributed to staff and customers. The charter is displayed around the Department in a number of appropriate locations. The charter is also available on the Department's website and a link is attached to all outgoing e-mails.

Under the charter, the Department measures customer service performance and reports on this in its annual report. Methods used include customer feedback, annual surveys, mystery shopping, interviews and focus groups. The 2006 customer survey has been completed and almost 450 external customers were surveyed. Initial analysis shows broadly favourable findings. Overall, the results show consistently high scores in relation to the quality of our services. There was an

increase in the awareness of the Department's complaints procedure and an increase in those who had noticed an improvement in the service quality. This improvement is mainly due to a general view that the Department's staff were very efficient and courteous, prompt e-mail response times and the layout of the Department's website.

Mr. Sargent: Gabhaim comhghairdeas leis an Teachta Haughey as a cheapachán mar Aire Stáit. Tá súil agam go n-éireoidh go maith leis agus guím gach rath air. Tá sé tuillte aige — b'fhéidir go bhfuil sé thar am ach sin scéal eile.

Does the quality customer service charter of the Department of the Taoiseach include a mechanism for evaluation? The on-line Irish Statute Book, which we have discussed before, falls short of the quality customer service charter and is not the reliable database it should be. We previously discussed the equivalent in other jurisdictions. Does the Taoiseach still hold the view that decentralisation will not create difficulties for customer service standards?

An Ceann Comhairle: The question refers specifically to the Department of the Taoiseach.

Mr. Sargent: Indeed it does, and so does decentralisation.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to confine himself to a question relating to the Department of the Taoiseach.

Mr. Sargent: The Taoiseach will know, as does the Ceann Comhairle, that decentralisation is relevant to his Department.

An Ceann Comhairle: This refers specifically to the Department of the Taoiseach.

Mr. Sargent: It is obviously relevant. The Taoiseach must deal with all Departments.

Mr. N. Dempsey: The Taoiseach's Department is not being decentralised.

Mr. Sargent: I am sure the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Deputy Noel Dempsey, is trying to be helpful.

Mr. N. Dempsey: As always.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not want this to arise every time questions are taken.

Mr. Sargent: I am sure he realises the Department of the Taoiseach must interface even with his Department. I will ask a question relating to the Department of the Taoiseach before the Ceann Comhairle asks me to sit down. It concerns the quality customer service charter standards for doing business through Irish. I recently spoke to a civil servant who was unable to say

[Mr. Sargent.]

who would deal with queries through Irish. Should the Taoiseach not review that aspect of the quality customer service charter? It is one thing to put something down on paper, but will every civil servant be able to say who will deal with queries through Irish? It would be ideal if the person to whom I referred could do so, but the person was from England and had no Irish.

The Taoiseach: I dealt with the Deputy's first supplementary question in a recent reply. The matter relates to the Office of the Attorney General and is not covered by my Department's charter.

Mr. Sargent: It is covered by the charter.

The Taoiseach: It is covered by my Department but is not by the departmental charter. It is in the domain of the Attorney General, which also comes under my area of responsibility. I replied on that issue in detail approximately two weeks ago and it is being addressed. It will take us some time to resolve that issue, though hopefully not too long into the new year. The South African company originally responsible for the matter has been contacted. It is regretted that it happened but attempts are being made to resolve it.

My Department is not being decentralised but there are no difficulties in dealing with other Departments. We have our own procedures for dealing with our clients and that is well covered in our charter.

Deputy Sargent raised on a number of occasions the issue of dealing with queries through Irish, including by e-mail. My Department tries to deal with such queries within each section. There is no problem with correspondence via e-mail but difficulties arise when people ring the office. Sections in my Department have endeavoured to each have at least one person who is adequately able to write and speak in Irish. To the best of my knowledge, some sections have a number of such people, but other sections have only one. That is the Department's policy and the management team of the Department has tried to address the matter. There can be some difficulties if the person is out from work, which can happen, but sections try to ensure adequate cover.

As the Deputy will appreciate, quite a number of sections dealing with commemorations and other issues, such as Northern Ireland, have many dealings through Irish, but some sections do not. It is policy that no matter how small the section — a number of my Department's sections are very small — it tries to ensure one person who would be——

Mr. Sargent: Should everyone not know who the person is?

The Taoiseach: Yes. I will communicate the Deputy's point.

Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Ar an cheist chéanna, mar gheall ar na scéimeanna i dtaobh na dteangacha oifigiúla atá aontaithe ag an Roinn, deir sé sa chairt do chustaiméirí go gcuirfear na scéimeanna ar bun faoi dháta a n-aontaítear leis an Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta agus go gcuirfear na scéimeanna i bhfeidhm taobh istigh den tréimhse ama aontaithe chun na custaiméirí a shásamh maidir leis na seirbhísí a chuirtear ar fáil trí Ghaeilge. As Béarla, the customer charter of the Department of the Taoiseach states regarding the Irish language:

Official languages scheme in place by date agreed with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs;

Scheme implemented within agreed framework;

Customer satisfaction levels with services provided through Irish.

The Taoiseach gave some indication of how the different parts are working, but will he report on progress in respect of the delivery of the full scheme, part of which is to have someone on standby at all times? Will this——

An Ceann Comhairle: Does the Deputy's question relate to the Department of the Taoiseach?

Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I am referring to that Department's customer service charter.

The Taoiseach: As I stated in reply to Deputy Sargent, a number of sections in my Department have quite a number of dealings through Irish, but other sections do not. Sections with ongoing dealings through the Irish language have a number of people who can deal with telephone calls or callers to the Department. The Department does not receive many visitors due to the nature of its work, but it receives correspondence, e-mails and telephone calls.

Some of the smaller sections dealing with other issues may not have many people, but the policy is to try to ensure at least one person with ability in Irish per section. Some sections are quite small and may not always have such a person, but larger sections have a number of people who can deal with matters through Irish on a daily basis.

Mr. Rabbitte: I offer my congratulations to Deputy Haughey on his appointment as a Minister of State and wish him well in the conduct of his Ministry.

Departmental Bodies.

3. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach his plans to alter the functions of the communications unit in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37095/06]

4. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the communications unit

within his Department; if it is intended that the unit will continue to work during the period following the dissolution of Dáil Éireann in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38684/06]

5. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Taoiseach his plans to change the role of the communications unit in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39992/06]

6. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the communications unit within his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40254/06]

7. **Mr. J. Higgins** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the work of the communications unit in his Department. [42770/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 3 to 7, inclusive, together.

I have no plans to alter the functions of the communications unit in my Department. The unit will continue to work during the period following the dissolution of the 29th Dáil as it did following the dissolution of the 28th Dáil.

The unit operates on an apolitical basis and only deals with the Government Press Office and the press offices of the various Departments. It has no contact with Government backbenchers or other Deputies. The staff of the unit are subject to the usual conventions that apply to civil servants in respect of political impartiality at all times. I am satisfied they will continue to observe these conventions in the performance of their work.

The unit provides a media information service to Ministers and their Departments. It furnishes news updates and transcripts that ensure Departments are kept informed in a fast and efficient manner of any relevant news developments. In this way, Departments are able to provide a better service to the public.

The communications unit works an 18 hour day based on a flexible rota of three working shifts. The unit is staffed by six established civil servants, five of whom are seconded from other Departments. The work of the unit means Departments have greatly reduced their use of external companies and ensures they no longer duplicate work such as transcripts and tapes.

Mr. Sargent: I like the hypothesis that the communications unit is apolitical. I appreciate the staff are doing the job they are being asked to do so to that extent they are not driven by the same political motivations as a Deputy or party worker but the work carried out by the unit, however, is ostensibly for the Government and, therefore, supports Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrat policy positions. Does the communications unit deal with either party's headquarters in the course of the Government work the Taoiseach

outlined? Is it not reasonable, given the apolitical nature of the unit, that it would deal with all national public representatives in terms of feedback from the communications it monitors?

I am interested in finding out the definition of apolitical. Is it the same as the way non-electoral activity happens before the three week run-up to the election and has nothing to do with it? It is difficult to gauge where apolitical ends and political starts. Does the Taoiseach agree there is a political dimension to this work and, therefore, all parties should benefit from it?

The Taoiseach: The unit has no dealings with the headquarters of any political party as that would be totally inappropriate. For that matter, it has no dealings with Ministers and Ministers of State, it deals with the press offices of Departments. Its work during election periods is to send information to a Department and it is likely the Minister and Minister of State will be there. Other than that I would not change any of its functions.

Mr. Rabbitte: Did the Taoiseach mean to say the communications unit has no contact with Ministers? I understand it does and I understand why it does.

The question is what happens in the course of a general election. Officeholders already enjoy a significant advantage by definition. During the course of an election campaign, although Deputies are no longer Members of this House, Ministers continue in their positions with access that is unavailable to those on this side of the House. Is the communications unit not supporting the infrastructure of ministerial involvement which, by definition, in an election campaign is politically partisan?

The question arises of that work being declared to the Commission on Standards in Public Office as a relevant payment. The unit costs around €350,000 per annum and whatever about the political impartiality of the good civil servants working in it, and I do not question that, the work in the context of an election in supporting and briefing Ministers is very political indeed.

The Taoiseach: The communications unit takes the daily news from the national broadcasting agencies and presents it to the Departments; Ministers and Ministers of State would then receive that. Individual Ministers look for reports from the unit through their own staff but it has no political purpose. It is not engaged in political activity on any given day. The unit provides information to a huge range of senior departmental officials. No political gain or benefit accrues to a politician from this unit either inside or outside an election period. Individual press offices in the political system gather their own information and notes, but the information gathered by this unit either inside or outside an election period is not of a political nature. There tends to be less

[The Taoiseach.]

activity in a Department during an election period and, therefore, the unit would be less busy because Departments may not seek as much information when the House is in recess. The unit's work at any time is not of a political nature and it is used only by Departments.

Mr. Rabbitte: The question arises, if no benefit is conferred on Ministers, what is the point of the exercise in the first place. The information being conveyed and the fact of the communication is to brief and support Ministers and make them aware of what is being said, including by the Opposition, and so no. That benefit is not available to Deputies Sargent and Kenny, to me or any other Opposition Member. Has the Taoiseach sought a view from the commission, for example, on whether these transactions have no political content, particularly during a general election?

The Taoiseach: I have not done that. If I wanted to find out what anybody said on a political issue, I would ask my press office to check that rather than examining the nuanced report on the first 15 items of a news bulletin. That is not a great political issue and it would probably be quicker to listen to the news headlines. The unit does not provide any political benefit whatsoever, particularly during an election. It performs a useful function in providing the news reports to the entire Civil Service system and to Ministers and Ministers of State. When Departments seek information on what was said during programmes and transcripts of programmes, they contact the unit, which produces them, and that is of benefit because if Departments were to do this, they would use an external agency. The unit provides a useful service without any political connotation. Its work is produced by civil servants and I assure the Deputy they do not provide blow by blow insights into the political nature of issues. If I was trying to get a feel for what Deputies Rabbitte, Kenny or Sargent were saying about me, I would not check with the Civil Service.

Mr. O'Dea: They do not get the nuance.

Mr. Kenny: The Minister for Defence, Deputy O'Dea, might want to know what I was saying about him before he writes about it in his Sunday newspaper column.

Mr. Sargent: Why let the facts get in the way?

Mr. Kehoe: Who writes the column for him?

Mr. Kenny: If the unit has no political connection, can we take it that it will close during the forthcoming general election campaign? What value does the Taoiseach see in having such a unit?

Mr. S. Power: The Deputy will have other things on his mind.

Mr. Kenny: Will the unit's staff call the Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, Deputy Sean Power, during the campaign to inform him they are talking about him in Wexford and he needs to issue a press release about that? Will the unit be closed during the general election?

The Taoiseach has always made the point that the unit saves Departments approximately €200,000 annually, yet its projected cost for 2006 is €352,626. The Taoiseach is spending €350,000 to save €200,000. There are many examples showing financial management to be a weakness in some Departments, so how does he justify this, if it is merely a floating information service? Will the communications unit be closed during the forthcoming election so people can see there is no political element to it? Cost is another issue with savings of €200,000 contrasting with costs of €350,000.

The Taoiseach: The Civil Service is not closing down during the election and the communications unit is part of the Civil Service structure. Before the communications unit, a range of news agencies made a small killing from Departments by collecting information from media sources and selling it on. It was a good service but it is now done by a unit within the Civil Service. The information provided by news programmes is made available throughout the Civil Service and it is good that the various information units within the Civil Service know what is being said and done. Deputies are welcome to go and have a look at the communications unit. I do not think they will find it of huge political benefit, but it provides a good service to Departments and agencies, though one would not use it as one's press office.

Departmental Spending.

8. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach the cost of political advisers in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [37096/06]

9. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach the cost in terms of salaries and expenses of political advisers or other political staff within his Department in respect of each year from 2003; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38685/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 8 and 9 together.

The information sought by the Deputies is contained in a schedule which I propose to circulate with the Official Report.

Travel and subsistence payments are made at the appropriate civil service rates in respect of certified official travel and subject to the usual Civil Service regulations.

Salaries and expenses of Political Advisers and other Political staff

Year	Cost
	€
2003	1,340,576.60
2004	1,525,306.60
2005	1,529,292.56
2006 (to date)	1,625,142.67

Mr. Sargent: I did not expect to hear about travel arrangements. Regarding the cost of political advisers, does the Taoiseach feel he is getting value for money? Should the type of adviser and the advice sought and given be examined? We have raised this issue previously, especially in regard to the responsibilities of Ministers of State, and Sustainable Energy Ireland raised related matters today. Regarding global heating, or climate change — there are many different terms now for the phenomenon — does the Government have an equivalent to the British Government's chief scientific adviser, Professor Sir David King? If so, will the Government act on the advice it will probably receive, given that we have re-coupled CO₂ emissions with growing energy use and expect transport related energy to increase by over 8% every year for the foreseeable future? Is the Taoiseach receiving advice on climate change and is this advice coming from advisers or elsewhere?

The Taoiseach: A science group gives Departments and agencies advice in that field. We regularly ask members of agencies to present a briefing to Cabinet committees and meetings. This is a day-to-day feature of Cabinet committees in particular. The science group addresses senior staff in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment regularly.

Mr. Sargent: I asked if there was an equivalent to the British Government's chief scientific adviser, Professor Sir David King, in the Irish context, and did not receive an answer. The Taoiseach said a group gives advice, but on the issue of carbon credit who advised that €270 million be given away to pay a fine?

An Ceann Comhairle: This question refers specifically to the Taoiseach's Department.

Mr. Sargent: I am trying to find out if an adviser exists. Apparently one does not, but a group fills this role. Will there be an adviser at that level? The Taoiseach will remember we had problems previously with a science adviser who did not have the proper qualifications.

An Ceann Comhairle: I remind the Deputy we are referring specifically to the Taoiseach's Department.

Mr. Sargent: It is fundamentally the Taoiseach's responsibility.

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, but not every Department comes under these questions.

The Taoiseach: On the Deputy's specific question of whether we have advisers similar to those referred to in No. 10 or No. 11, where there are contract advisers for practically every area, we do not operate such a system.

Mr. Sargent: I asked about one person.

The Taoiseach: They have one person for everything, irrespective of the issue.

Mr. Sargent: I would not say that about Professor David King.

The Taoiseach: They also have a science adviser.

Mr. Sargent: I thought the Government has a science adviser.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach to answer.

The Taoiseach: A science adviser works in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and we are working with that individual. A small group, the science committee, holds meetings which we attend to discuss issues including environmental issues. However, its members do not work in my Department but come from relevant Departments or, in many cases, relevant agencies. The Deputy is correct with regard to what happens in No. 10 but it would cost us a fortune to duplicate that in a country of 4.3 million people.

Mr. Sargent: My question was whether the Taoiseach listens to advice.

The Taoiseach: I always listen.

Mr. Rabbitte: Does the Tánaiste have a programme manager and is that manager located in the Taoiseach's office, as was the practice under the previous Tánaiste? Has the Taoiseach's former press officer been replaced or, if not, is it intended to replace him? I am aware he is trying to do for the HSE the job he did so well for the Taoiseach.

With regard to the most recent indication by the Taoiseach that 13 staff are employed in his private office and eight in his constituency office, are those figures still correct and, if so, are they not somewhat extravagant? My colleague, Deputy Costello, has one parliamentary assistant,

[Mr. Rabbitte.]

whereas the Taoiseach has an entire infrastructure.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Rabbitte's last question comes under Questions Nos. 10 and 11.

Mr. Rabbitte: As usual, the Ceann Comhairle is ahead of me.

Mr. Kenny: The Ceann Comhairle is very sharp.

Mr. Rabbitte: The Taoiseach might therefore address my other questions.

The Taoiseach: The Tánaiste has a programme manager who is based in my Department.

Mr. Rabbitte: Is it a State secret?

The Taoiseach: No, his name is Mr. John O'Brien. He worked for the previous Tánaiste in a different capacity. My former Government press secretary is currently undertaking a different task and I do not intend to replace him. I share the work with the others.

Mr. Rabbitte: The Minister for Defence will give the Taoiseach a dig out if he needs it.

Mr. O'Dea: Why not?

The Taoiseach: In terms of numbers, we have a small staff of advisers, contract advisers and press officers compared to what previously obtained. This is probably the biggest area of cutbacks in the public service in recent years.

Mr. Rabbitte: The Taoiseach should not be too hard on himself.

Departmental Staff.

10. **Mr. Rabbitte** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff broken down by grade in private offices and constituency offices in respect of himself and each Minister of State within his Department; the annual costs in terms of salaries and expenses of each such office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [38686/06]

11. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach the cost of staffing his private and constituency offices and those of his Ministers of State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41356/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 10 and 11 together.

The number of staff broken down by grade in my private office and constituency office, in the offices of the Minister of State and Government Chief Whip and the Minister of State for European Affairs, as well the annual costs in terms of salaries and expenses of each such office are

detailed in material which I propose to include in the Official Report. With regard to Deputy Rabbitte's question, 12 staff, as well as one usher, are employed in my private office; and nine staff, four clerical officers and five others, are employed in my constituency office.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

Staff in my private office comprise one private secretary at assistant principal grade, one assistant principal, two assistant private secretaries at higher executive officer grade, one personal assistant, one staff officer, one executive officer, five clerical officers and one usher. The total cost, estimated to November 2006, of salaries including allowances and overtime for my private office is €675,217, while expenses total €2,508.

Staff in my constituency office comprise two personal assistants, one personal secretary, one executive officer, one staff officer and four clerical officers. The total cost of salaries including allowances and overtime for my constituency office is €291,442. No expenses are incurred.

Staff of the office of the Minister of State and Government Chief Whip comprise one private secretary at higher executive officer grade, one executive officer, two staff officers, one staff officer, one clerical officer, one personal assistant and one personal secretary. The total cost, estimated to November 2006, of salaries including allowances and overtime for the staff of the office of the Minister of State and Government Chief Whip is €389,430, while expenses total €7,312.

Staff of the office of the Minister of State for European Affairs, excluding Department of Foreign Affairs Staff, comprise one private secretary at higher executive officer grade and one clerical officer. The total cost, estimated to November 2006, of salaries including allowances and overtime for the staff of the office of the Minister of State for European affairs is €96,430, while expenses total €1,196.

Mr. Rabbitte: I will repeat my question. While I accept the Taoiseach has a huge constituency workload, is it not the case that he has an extravagant array of staff to back him up? Such a facility is not afforded to the rest of us in any fashion. I note the Taoiseach said he has cut back on his level of staffing. The Taoiseach referred to the appointment of a personal tipstaff. Was that always there? Is that a new appointment? What exactly is the responsibility of that appointment? Is the Taoiseach saying there is now one person less in his private office than there was when this question was last answered, about a year ago?

The Taoiseach: They are all civil servants. Many of the people in the private office and the constituency office are civil servants who are always seeking promotions to other areas. There is always a movement of people. I do not think there is any great change. The individual in ques-

tion is a former member of the staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas. I think the person held their entitlements from here. The person in question brings delegations and deputations from the gates of Government Buildings through the House, back and forward, on a daily basis. I think the person just happens to be somebody who was seconded from here. There was somebody else doing it, but it was not a member of the staff here. In the advisory staff, there is one less, or maybe even two less, over the last few years. Dr. Martin Mansergh became a Senator and there was also a change in the numbers. Most of the constituency staff are juniors. Most of them are from the former typist grades, the clerical officer grade and the staff officer grade. There are two personal assistants. I think all of the others, bar one, are civil servants.

Mr. Sargent: The Taoiseach is one of the lucky Deputies who have constituency offices in respect of which they do not have to pay rent. Would the Taoiseach like to comment on the level of fairness in that regard? I refer to the fact that Deputies like him, who have property, are able to base their constituency offices in their own properties, whereas Deputies who have no property have to pay the commercial rate to rent such offices. Both categories of Deputy are treated the same by the Oireachtas, essentially. Is there not a need to look at that from the point of view of fairness? Although the Taoiseach is benefiting from this arrangement, I am sure he empathises with those of us who do not have the fortune to have mighty trusts providing us with offices free of charge.

I would like to ask a question that relates to the Taoiseach's own office. Will the Taoiseach tell the people in his office that it is not appropriate to send electoral material in Oireachtas envelopes with Christmas cards? The Taoiseach's Christmas cards include a request for people to help him with his canvassing or with anything else he needs to get re-elected. Has the Taoiseach given an instruction to his officials in that regard? While my colleague, Patricia McKenna, welcomed the Taoiseach's Christmas greetings, it came as a bit of a shock to her to be asked to help with the Taoiseach's canvassing. I thought it was quite audacious of the Taoiseach to make such a request. Will the Taoiseach advise his officials in that regard? None of us, least of all the Taoiseach, wants to get into trouble for flouting electoral regulations.

The Taoiseach: My political party has had a house and an office in my constituency since the 1940s.

Mr. Sargent: The Taoiseach is very lucky.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Sargent's party might have a similar facility in due course. My party has

moved from one office to another over the last 60 years.

Mr. Morgan: I have two offices.

The Taoiseach: If Deputy Sargent's party were to make an effort to do likewise, it could be in exactly the same position.

Mr. Kitt: That party is fairly active on the ground.

The Taoiseach: Now that Deputy Sargent has raised it, I think it is peculiar that even if one does not pay rent, one gets a form every year saying that one received the benefit of rent that one never paid. It is extraordinary. It is misleading because when people see it, they think one paid rent because one notionally declared it.

Mr. Sargent: It does not cost anything.

The Taoiseach: Exactly, and then one sees a declaration that the value of it is €30,000 when there is no cost. It is totally confusing but those are the rules and I comply with them.

With regard to using Oireachtas envelopes, which I did, it is totally within my entitlement — I have had a chance to check this — to distribute what is not an electoral leaflet. I was shocked that Patricia McKenna was upset about this because only three days earlier she came to me to ask me to help her with the school her children attend. If she came to ask me to do that, I thought she might help me out. I did not think there was anything wrong with it.

Mr. Sargent: There is no such thing as a free lunch.

The Taoiseach: I assure the Deputy I will help her out anyway.

Mr. Rabbitte: I do not think eight people in the Taoiseach's constituency office is enough with other candidates coming to him for help. I do not know how he does it.

Mr. Sargent: Too many staff.

Priority Questions.

Social and Affordable Housing.

43. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of extra affordable housing units he expects to be built as a result of the measures announced in budget 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42881/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

[Mr. O'Dowd.]

(Mr. N. Ahern): Budget 2007 introduced last week provides the necessary financial underpinning in my Department's capital envelope to deliver on its ambitious affordable homes target set out in Towards 2016.

Specifically, the Government has acted to address issues of housing affordability. A range of targeted schemes to assist first-time buyers has been put in place directed specifically at those who cannot meet their own housing needs. These include the shared ownership scheme, the 1999 affordable housing scheme, affordable housing through Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2006 and the affordable housing initiative under Sustaining Progress.

In addition, we have established the affordable homes partnership to co-ordinate and accelerate the delivery of affordable housing in and around the capital. Since its establishment last year, the partnership has made progress in a number of areas. These include land exchanges, a "call for lands" initiative designed to bring forward additional land for affordable housing and the development of common approaches to the implementation of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

The momentum of delivery under the various schemes is growing, particularly under Part V, and it is estimated that some 3,000 homes will be delivered from all the schemes this year. On the basis of the momentum now achieved, we have an ambitious target for the period 2007 to 2009 with some 17,000 homes in total to be delivered under the various affordable schemes. This is a substantial commitment to meeting the needs of first-time buyers seeking affordable housing.

Mr. O'Dowd: Does the Minister of State agree that he has performed poorly in the supply of affordable housing, particularly under Part V? In view of the fact that approximately 90,000 houses will be built this year, the Minister of State should have told me that 18,000 affordable housing units will be coming on stream rather than the paltry 3,000 — welcome as they are — he has made available. Will he agree it is time for him, as Minister, to shake up the local authorities that are not delivering the affordable housing they ought to be delivering?

Mr. N. Ahern: I do not accept the Deputy's suggestion that our performance in this respect is poor. The Deputy will note from the data available that the number of units has increased year by year. I explained the position about the Part 5 provision several times. It is a great idea and in time it will be a marvellous deliverer of social and affordable housing but, as we all know, it will take time for it to click in. It does not apply to planning permissions which existed prior to the introduction of the legislation. This year the figures are up on those of previous years. From now

on we can expect a better dividend from the Part 5 provision. It will be proven in time to have been an innovative idea. The Deputy's party fought it tooth and nail at the time but I firmly believe in it. In time it will produce the goods in terms of social and affordable housing.

Mr. O'Dowd: The Minister of State is not fighting tooth and nail for the people of Dublin or for the young people in his constituency. They have been forced to leave the city and must commute to Dublin from outlying counties. They have long commutes resulting in work days of up to 12 to 14 hours. This is the position because the Minister of State is not fighting their corner and ensuring that land is released. He is not ensuring that local authorities do their job.

It appears that the kernel of the issue is that a significant number of developers are sitting on land rather than developing it. Will the Minister of State introduce a "use it or lose it" provision in legislation to insist that where that is happening such land will be released and that affordable housing will be built on it? If he does not do that and continues on the path he is following, he will make it impossible for young people to buy their own home, to purchase an affordable house, particularly in his constituency and elsewhere in the city of Dublin.

This is the first generation of Dublin people who cannot afford to live beside their parents or grandparents and who must spend practically day and night commuting to and from work. In doing that they rarely see their own families. The Government has abjectly failed them. It has failed to provide the affordable housing that is badly needed. The Minister of State's performance today in saying that 3,000 units will be delivered this year is unacceptable.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy is making a long statement. He should ask a question.

Mr. N. Ahern: It happens in every generation that, to a large extent, family members cannot afford to buy homes beside their parents.

Mr. O'Dowd: That is not true.

Mr. N. Ahern: In the part of Dublin from where I come people have moved from Drumcondra to Santry, Santry to Swords, Swords to Balbriggan—

Mr. O'Dowd: People are now commuting from Portlaoise to Dublin.

Mr. N. Ahern: —Cabra to Finglas and Finglas to Ballymun. That happens with every generation.

All aspects of the housing market have been under pressure in recent years because of the huge increase in population. One need only check

the census figures to note that the population has increased by 8%. The percentage of people in the 25 to 34 year age bracket, which is the key household formation age group, has increased by 18%, which is a huge increase. The people in that age bracket are working and contributing to the economy. Such an increase in the number in that age bracket has caused a huge demand for housing, be it private or other forms of housing. Dublin city is nearly totally built up. There is not much opportunity to provide further housing in the city other than increasing housing density. People are moving out further. Finglas County Council is the local authority area in which there has been the greatest level of development — a similar pattern applies to South Dublin County Council — and it has responded most to the challenge presented. Some people have moved to live in Drogheda, which is only up the road. Once one is at the airport it takes only ten minutes to reach Drogheda.

Mr. O'Dowd: Some people have moved much further afield and they spend 12 hours a day commuting.

Mr. N. Ahern: I realise that, but as I said to the Deputy previously, most of them are reasonable people.

Mr. O'Dowd: This Administration has failed them.

Mr. N. Ahern: If I was the Deputy I would not be afraid of them. Most of them are reasonable.

Mr. O'Dowd: We are not afraid. The Government is not doing anything for them, that is the problem.

Mr. N. Ahern: As the Deputy gets to know them and is nice to them, he might in time win their confidence.

Mr. O'Dowd: The Minister of State should beware of the "Ides of April". We are nearing the Ides of March.

Mr. Gilmore: It may take a person ten minutes to travel from the airport to Drogheda but it took people ten hours to get through a pothole in Bray.

Local Authority Housing.

44. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of approved applicants for local authority housing in 1996; the number of such applicants in 2005; the percentage of housing output represented by social housing in 1996; the percentage in 2005; the number of social housing units completed to date in 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42630/06]

Mr. N. Ahern: The assessment of housing need undertaken by local authorities in March 1996 indicated that a total of 27,427 households were in need of housing while the corresponding figure for March 2005 was 43,684 households. The March 2005 figure was a decrease of almost 10% on the corresponding figure of 48,413 households in March 2002. The decrease in the numbers on the waiting lists has resulted from the positive impact of the Government's investment in the provision of social and affordable housing.

Of the 33,321 new houses completed in 1996, 3,593 were social housing units, which represented over 10% of total output. In 2005, 80,957 new houses were completed, of which 5,559 units were social units, representing almost 7% of total output. The number of completed social housing units at the end of September this year was 3,340. It is expected that the total social housing output for this year, including acquisitions, will be in the region of 6,800. Overall, it is estimated that the needs of over 14,000 households will be addressed through social and affordable housing measures this year compared with 8,600 in 2000, six years ago.

Additional resources will be provided next year to address social and affordable housing need. A record provision of €1.5 billion is being made available, which is a 9% increase in Exchequer housing programmes over this year's levels and double the provision of six years ago.

Mr. Gilmore: I thank the Minister of State for his reply, notwithstanding the fact that he managed to describe a 16,000 increase in social housing numbers between 1996 and 2005 as a decrease. Did he see "Prime Time Investigates" last night? It showed the scandalous way in which home buyers in this country are being ripped off by estate agents and mortgage brokers, because of the failure of the Government to regulate these bodies. What action will he take to regulate estate agents and other professionals in the housing market? What action will he take to end the scandal of unfinished housing estates? What action will he take to regulate management companies and management charges? What will he do to end the rip off of young people trying to buy a home of their own?

Mr. N. Ahern: Unfortunately, I did not see the programme last night, but from what I have heard, it covered areas that are not under my Department's responsibility.

Mr. McCormack: The Minister of State was out knocking on doors.

Mr. N. Ahern: The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has proposed that managing agents answer to the regulator dealing with estate agents. Mortgage brokers are already under the financial regulator and the data protection office. Several Departments are involved

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with management companies, including the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment when some management companies do not fill their company law requirements. The Law Reform Commission is working on an overall report, but several Departments are involved. The brokers also have to deal with the Department of Finance and the Central Bank.

Mr. Gilmore: I am surprised the Minister of State with responsibility for housing would not have taken time to watch a programme — well signalled in advance — dealing with an issue so central to housing policy. I am also surprised the extensive media monitoring units, available to the Government at the expense of the taxpayer, did not do the job for him so he could address the issue today. Instead, he has kicked to touch and stated it is the responsibility of other Departments.

The Labour Party proposed a Bill over five years ago to regulate the housing market, which was shot down by the Government. We have brought a number of private members' proposals before the House which dealt with taking charge of unfinished housing estates and the regulation of housing management companies and management charges, all of which were shot down by a Government that promised to do something in the future. After ten years in office, is it acceptable that the Government allows the scandalous rip-off that we saw demonstrated on television last night? Young people trying to buy a home of their own are being ripped off by unscrupulous chancers who have licence to do as they like from a Government which seems more interested in keeping some people's pockets full than protecting the consumer interests of home buyers.

Mr. N. Ahern: I was not at home last night and I did not see the programme. I will try to view it this week. Nobody gave me a tape of it this morning. Questions were previously asked about the media monitoring service, of which I am aware.

We have acted on the issue of unfinished estates.

Mr. Gilmore: The Government half implemented our proposals.

Mr. N. Ahern: Deputy Gilmore is stretching the question a bit.

Mr. Gilmore: I am asking about housing for which the Minister of State has responsibility.

Mr. N. Ahern: The Deputy moved on a bit from that. I did not get to one part of the original reply and I am afraid that the Deputy might misinterpret the data I gave him.

Mr. Gilmore: I can count. There are twice as many people on the housing list now.

Mr. N. Ahern: The information given was complete and thorough, but it did not include acquisitions. Local authorities buy approximately 1,000 units per year. If one were trying to make an accurate comparison between the numbers in social housing ten years ago and today, one would need to allow for the acquisitions. However, we could not give that figure because of the way the Deputy asked his question. Local authorities acquire houses through new buildings and second-hand purchases. We also need to look at the number in receipt of rent allowance.

Mr. Gilmore: Too many.

Mr. N. Ahern: Okay. However, the number has risen from 30,000 to 60,000 in ten years. If the acquisitions and the number of private houses on rent allowances are factored in, things would be different.

Nuclear Plants.

45. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the results of meetings he has had recently with British Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Mr. Alistair Darling on the issue of Sellafield; if and when there are other meetings planned during the coming year; his plans to reiterate to the British Government the adverse environmental and health consequences that have arisen for Ireland in the past; the way he will reflect the unacceptable nature of Sellafield's existence to the British Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42631/06]

Mr. Roche: In reply to Question No. 65 of 8 November 2006, I advised that my meeting with the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Mr. Alistair Darling MP, is due to take place on 9 January 2007. This follows my earlier meeting with Mr. Darling's predecessor, Mr. Alan Johnson MP, as well as contacts with my UK counterpart Mr. David Milliband MP, and with the chairman and chief executive of the British Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. I met earlier this year with European justice Commissioner Frattini, energy Commissioner Piebalgs and environment Commissioner Dimas to discuss Irish concerns on Sellafield in the context of the EU jurisdiction for nuclear safety.

Adverse environmental consequences have arisen for Ireland as a result of nuclear policy decisions and actions adopted by the UK. Our concerns about Sellafield have been consistently articulated to the UK Administration at Prime Minister, ministerial and official level and I intend to reiterate strongly these concerns to the UK Secretary of State next month. Ongoing contact through correspondence and meetings at ministerial, official and expert level is maintained with the UK authorities regarding a range of issues on the Sellafield plant. These contacts are

productive and reflect an increasing recognition by the British Government of the serious concerns held by the Irish Government about Sellafield. This increasing recognition stems from the fact that this Government has consistently impressed upon the UK — through international legal actions and so on — that Ireland has a substantive interest in the nuclear issues under deliberation in the United Kingdom. However, there remains a significant difference in views between this Government and the British Government about the nuclear energy issue in general and more particularly on the continued operation of the Sellafield nuclear plant.

Government policy continues to reflect the firm position that the existence of Sellafield is an unacceptable threat to Ireland and that it should be closed in a safe and orderly manner. The Government will also continue to use every legal, political and diplomatic avenue open to it to secure the closure and safe decommissioning of the plant.

Mr. Morgan: I should love to join the Minister at the meeting on 9 January.

Mr. Roche: The Deputy would be very welcome.

Mr. Morgan: Will he agree that the British are now getting ahead of him again, substantially, as regards Sellafield and its reprocessing operations? Does he accept that the proposed new chain of nuclear power plants planned for across England, in particular, will feed Sellafield with waste for reprocessing for at least another generation? Is he aware that people wishing to object to those nuclear power plants cannot do so directly? They have to go through an advocate appointed by the British Government, who will not be permitted to engage, even to the point of giving information to the clients he or she represents, or share any information with the objectors. Will the Minister object to that whole new chain of power plants, because they will feed into and sustain Sellafield for some considerable time to come?

If the Minister so objects, will he accept an advocate acting on his behalf and through him, the Irish people? In the event, will he accept that level of restriction from the British Government? Given the week that is in it, that looks more like a salute to Pinochet than any type of democracy I could consider. I look forward to a brief supplementary.

Mr. Roche: I share the Deputy's view that the planning process about to be embarked upon in the United Kingdom is less than satisfactory. It is certainly less open, transparent and democratically acceptable than the Irish system. I have made clear, particularly in my meeting with Mr. Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the predecessors of Mr. David

Miliband, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, that we do not agree with the build-up policy with which the British Government seems intent on pressing ahead. We have made it very clear that there is widespread opposition, not just in the Government parties, but across the entire democratic spectrum in Ireland. We have made it very clear that there are great concerns here.

We have also made clear to them that we have the right to do so, and, to be fair, they have accepted we have a view that must be factored in. The general issue encompasses the fact that we will continue to build as many alliances as we can on this, and not just across the Irish Sea. There are also concerns among other governments within the European Union. There is an increasing dawning of reality in Europe that the nuclear initiative, whatever else it is, is not the answer to global warming or the energy crisis. It is simply putting off the crisis and imposing on future generations the cost of dealing with energy issues today. The Deputy may feel assured that at each and every opportunity we will pursue the matter, and I am sure we shall have his support in so doing.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister appreciate the level of destruction that is occurring on the eastern seaboard, particularly in my constituency in particular, as a consequence of the whole Sellafield plant and the emissions coming from it? Does he appreciate the urgency of the issue because people are dying in great numbers right across that area and a serious investigation is required to get to the bottom of this?

Mr. Roche: I am very sympathetic to the views expressed by the Deputy. These are views I have long shared. As a long-term reality we should all unite to make it abundantly clear to politicians of whatever persuasion in the UK that we do not believe this is acceptable, and neither is it a good solution for them.

Local Authority Funding.

46. **Mr. McCormack** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he is satisfied that the level of local government funding is adequate to meet the increased responsibilities of local authorities, the increase in population as shown in Census 2006 and the increase in the level of housing due to the huge increase in construction activity in recent years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42879/06]

Mr. Roche: This question from Deputy McCormack touches on both capital and current expenditure so I shall deal with both. The Exchequer capital provision for mainstream capital programmes funded through my Department and administered by local authorities will amount

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to €1,976 million in 2007 representing a year on year increase of 7%. There will be some upward adjustment, when I mention non-national roads. When account is taken of the capital provisions for national roads, funded through the NRA, the Exchequer capital funding to local authorities in 2007 rises to €3,451 million, an increase of 8% over 2006. That is significant on the capital side.

Funding for 2007 to local authorities, through general purpose grants from the local government fund, will continue the strong trend of increasing central Government support for the local government sector. Yesterday I announced the allocation of almost €958 million to local authorities for 2007, increasing the level of general purpose grants by 8% over the final allocation for 2006. The 2007 allocations figure represents an increase 2.8 times the initial allocation provided in 1997. The allocation includes an additional €10 million to certain local authorities for additional operational costs associated with new water services infrastructure, which will be distributed shortly. Deputy McCormack will be aware that some local authorities are finding it difficult to make the transition from the full capitalisation of current costs and I will provide relief for them in that regard.

In total, the increase in funding is five times greater than the level of inflation, which was about 35%, between 1997 and the end of this year. This funding will assist local authorities in framing realistic and reasonable budgets in the statutory time period available to them to complete their budgetary process. Further allocations will be made to local authorities in January for non-national roads and local improvement schemes. These allocations will also show an increase on the allocation of €558 million provided for 2006.

The Government has provided unprecedented increases in funding to local authorities since 1997. I am satisfied that with our commitment to local government and increased income generated from the greatly strengthened commercial base supported by the Government's successful economic policies, local authorities are in a very good position to respond to the public's need for quality services. In allocating funding for 2007, I have taken into account the cost to each authority of providing its services, and factors including population increases and the income from local sources.

Additional Information not given on the floor of the House.

Local authorities have also benefited from substantial income from development levies, currently bringing in over €500 million per annum, as well as buoyancy in their rates' base in line with general business growth in the economy brought about by sound national economic policies. The adoption of a budget is one of the most

important reserved functions conferred on local authorities as it underpins their financial business for the following year. While I have no direct function in budgetary decision making at local level, I have urged local authorities to continue to exercise appropriate restraint in setting any increases in commercial rates and charges. This is important to the long-term viability and competitiveness of commercial operations and to the overall competitiveness of the economy. Local authorities responded positively this year to my request in this regard and increases in rates and charges for 2006 were generally of a lower order than in previous years.

Current expenditure in the local government sector in 2007 is likely to be some €4.5 billion. Within this quantum of expenditure there is scope for efficiencies, innovation and further steps to ensure greater value for money. Elected members should examine their draft budget closely to ensure that every effort is made to get the maximum value for the expenditure proposed.

Mr. McCormack: I accept what the Minister is saying to the effect that funds to local government have increased. He quoted almost a 7% increase in funds this year, but the cost to local authorities of fulfilling their duties has greatly increased also. They are now responsible for many more services than previously. The Minister mentioned funds for national primary and national secondary roads. I assume he realises that in the eastern and southern regions, as regards Cohesion and Structural Funds, six times more is spent than in the BMW region. There is clear discrimination against the BMW region as regards the amount of funds being spent on infrastructural projects. Recent figures showed that about six times more was being spent, despite the fact that it was the BMW region that helped Ireland qualify for the higher level of grants the last time, because the GNP was less than 90% of the European average.

Will the Minister explain, despite what he says about the 7% increase, why local authorities are still charging development fees and setting up management companies? The householder is paying for this all the time. Despite the fact that the Minister gave me genuine assurances in the House more than six months ago that he would instruct local authorities to discontinue placing conditions in planning permissions for management fees, they are still doing this. I should like him to look into that again.

Mr. Roche: I am grateful to the Deputy for that. If he wants to let me have particular details of any local authority which is operating in the manner he has outlined, I shall have the matter investigated. I am sure the Deputy is sincere in his assertion.

The increased funding for local authorities is five times higher than the rate of inflation over the past ten years, and that is a very significant increase. A question has been tabled for later on development charges in general, but there are absolutely phenomenal amounts of money flowing into the coffers of local authorities. The Deputy touched on the issue of the spend on non-national roads. The national road spend comes under the auspices of the NRA. He has a point in that regard. It is disappointing that as the Exchequer, under a number of different Administrations over the past decade, increased the resources it made available to local authorities for non-national roads, councils have cut the proportion of local funds they are putting into non-national roads. I have published some details on the website because it is important public representatives know the facts in this regard.

It is simply not acceptable that as central Exchequer funding for non-national roads rises, the proportion of funding from some local authorities falls. Ultimately however, this is within the control of local councils.

Mr. McCormack: I have a supplementary question. If the Minister is giving this money to local authorities, why are there higher charges for water rates and development fees? Why are local authorities' commercial rates rising every year? Why are local authorities unable to balance their budgets, even with the 7% increase approved by the Minister, and still must impose such additional costs on the householders and business communities within their localities?

Mr. Roche: The Deputy is aware that last year saw relatively moderate rate increases nationwide and one local authority — Limerick City Council if I recall correctly — cut its rates for the first time for a long period. The circular letter I will issue this week to local authorities will ask them to exercise caution regarding rate increases. However, the gross rates figures achieved by local authorities reflect a considerable buoyancy in the commercial sector. The Deputy should note there are approximately 250,000 more small and medium sized companies than was the case and consequently, the rates yield is significant.

The Deputy is correct as this illustrates that tighter control within local authorities will certainly squeeze out more value for money. I made an announcement yesterday to the effect that I would make significant changes regarding audit committees within local authorities, to allow them to bring in expertise. A point made by councillors from across the political spectrum is that they find it increasingly difficult to come to grips with the estimates as presented. The latter are frequently described as being impenetrable and frequently are so. I want this to change because, like the Deputy, I want value for money in local government.

47. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will seek an early review of local authority development contribution schemes; if so, when that will occur; the amount that has been collected by each local authority since the new schemes were adopted; if he has given consideration to the wide variation in the amounts levied per dwelling; if so, the impact this has had on the cost of house prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42633/06]

Mr. Roche: This issue touches on the point raised by Deputy McCormack's supplementary question. Prior to the enactment of the Planning and Development Act 2000, planning authorities could require payment of a development contribution as a condition of a planning permission on a discretionary basis. From 2004, in order to introduce transparency and openness to the system, each local authority was required to adopt a development contribution scheme stating the basis for determining the contributions to be paid in respect of public infrastructure and facilities in its area and indicating the contribution to be paid for different types of infrastructure.

Development contribution schemes are adopted by the democratically elected members of the individual planning authorities. They are reserved functions and it is a matter for councillors in each locality to decide democratically what the scale will be.

I consider the new system that was endorsed by the Oireachtas and which helps to ensure contributions are levied appropriately across all sectors of development to be fair and transparent. The question is asked as to why there are significant differences between localities. As development contributions constitute one of the fundamental sources of financing for infrastructure and underpin the facilities required in particular areas, it is inevitable there will be variation in development contribution rates.

However, in circular letter PD 4/2003 my Department advised planning authorities that they should be mindful of the policies adopted by other authorities in their immediate area in respect of setting the level of development charges. Planning authorities were also advised in the aforementioned circular that while it is expected that developers should make an appropriate contribution towards the costs of public infrastructure, care should be taken to avoid development contributions that are excessively high. Deputy McCormack's supplementary question touched on this point. My Department also has the opportunity to comment on draft schemes before they are adopted and has so done.

Circular letter PD 4/2003 also stated it would be advisable to review the scheme at two to three year intervals, where the scheme is adopted for a longer period. The Department has established an interdepartmental committee to consider

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issues raised by different interests regarding development contributions schemes. There have been some complaints in this regard.

As previously noted, since the introduction of the planning code paying a development contribution has been a basic cost for developers, which is payable in advance of the start of construction. There is no evidence that development contributions have had the effect of increasing the final price charged by developers, as is sometimes suggested. While the tabular statement is too lengthy to be read in the House, the Deputy will find the figures staggering. Last year, the amount collected by planning authorities in development contributions came to €519.4 million.

I will be interested in the months ahead to ascertain how these funds will be spent. The circular letter issued to local authorities has asked them to ensure the local councillors, as they enter the estimates process, are aware of the amount of money being collected. Based on returns made for the annual planning statistics, in 2004 the figure in development levies came to €337 million, which rose to €519.4 million last year. Consequently, any suggestion that local authorities are short of funding for the types of services all members wish to see them provide deserves close scrutiny.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

The table below provides a breakdown of these figures by planning authority.

Development Contributions by Area

Area	2004	2005
	€	€
Carlow	5,423,712	4,782,745
Cavan	2,443,668	3,463,676
Clare	15,012,318	8,459,942
Cork	23,372,801	42,277,686
Donegal	5,408,421	5,133,251
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	12,005,514	24,197,857
Fingal	36,418,076	50,499,281
Galway	10,192,308	12,589,385
Kerry	8,414,791	12,331,312
Kildare	21,553,713	27,446,483
Kilkenny	8,104,213	13,072,063
Laois	4,846,814	12,679,478
Leitrim	2,177,356	4,254,073
Limerick	5,102,569	7,812,743
Longford	2,840,998	2,724,196
Louth	13,576,797	19,816,995
Mayo	4,156,144	8,690,858
Meath	23,739,581	38,569,452
Monaghan	1,684,053	2,610,452
Offaly	5,077,802	4,141,990

Area	2004	2005
	€	€
Roscommon	3,679,966	6,405,252
Sligo	2,669,171	7,419,691
South Dublin	20,759,303	31,581,698
Tipperary North	5,227,791	6,083,430
Tipperary South	5,342,596	6,976,825
Waterford	3,519,316	5,125,913
Westmeath	5,274,025	6,984,991
Wexford	11,591,327	33,916,182
Wicklow	11,541,145	18,341,470
Cork City Council	10,831,391	11,043,286
Dublin City Council	27,571,393	63,572,817
Galway City Council	7,358,804	5,249,281
Limerick City Council	4,592,920	7,812,743
Waterford City Council	5,807,685	3,367,703
Total	337,318,481	519,435,198

Ms C. Murphy: I voted for the scheme in Kildare and sought some ring-fencing in order that councillors would have some control over it. It is obvious that in seeking local contributions from any capital schemes, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is one of the drivers of the final extent of the levies. There is no shortage of projects on which money should be spent. Indeed, a considerable amount was excluded from the Kildare scheme because it would not have been sustainable.

However, the burden has been shifted from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to local authorities. Although much money is being collected, some local authorities are in significant debt. I received a parliamentary reply from the Minister regarding capital and current debts as of last year and the amount came to €3.5 billion. Apart from a major capital debt, Kildare County Council has an additional overdraft of €25 million.

The jury is out as to whether levies have an impact on the price of houses. I will provide one example with which I believe the Minister will agree. In a development which was carried out in two phases, the price of a first phase apartment was €350,000. However, by the time the second phase was being sold, the price of an identical apartment with the same development levies and planning permission had risen to €500,000.

Last night's "Prime Time Investigates" programme demonstrated that unscrupulous auctioneers, valuers and estate agents have as much of a role in driving up prices as do development contributions. While I am unsure whether this is a cause for concern for the Minister, there can be variations in house type, as opposed to the amount of contributions paid. In the case of County Kildare, a large number of apartments are being constructed—

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy should ask a question.

Ms C. Murphy: —for which there is a lower level of contribution. Such issues must be considered because apartments rather than houses are being built under the Part V provisions. Frequently, they are not the best solution in family situations.

Mr. Roche: At the outset, the Deputy noted she had voted for development contributions in County Kildare. She was correct in so doing because development contributions are meant to deliver value on the ground. She also mentioned the idea they should be ring-fenced, which is also appropriate. I have no issues in this regard. However, I wish to see greater transparency in order that councillors who enter the estimates process know exactly what money is on hand.

The Deputy also referred to an issue that is outside the scope of this question, namely to the treasury management or fund management capacity of individual local authorities. I find it difficult to understand the reason some local authorities run substantial overdrafts on schemes when, on investigation of the issue, one discovers the existence of draw-downs and a range of other issues. Perhaps the audit committees to which I have referred will be able to deal with this matter.

I accept the Deputy's other point that undoubtedly, there is unscrupulous profit taking. I know of a case in my constituency in which two housing estates were for sale. When the first estate sold out, the houses in the other estate immediately rose in price by €50,000. As for the issue regarding public funds and the control of development levies, the latter are now well in excess of €500 million and are heading for €600 million this year. This provides a significant fillip to local authorities and is one reason I become extremely impatient when local authorities state they lack money to install a footpath as they have imposed levies to do precisely that. This issue must be driven at both local and national levels and I am highly conscious of the value for money points raised by the Deputy.

Ms C. Murphy: On the Minister's point about the funds available to local authorities, he spoke of the development levies being part of the budget process. The budget process relates to the revenue account rather than the capital account. In his circular letter of 2004, the Minister specifically excluded the use of development levies. Where is the relevance there?

Mr. Roche: The relevance is that many of the activities for which local authorities now return the excuse to Deputy Murphy, me and every other public representative that they do not have funds are by their nature capital activities. Deputy Murphy correctly stated that local authorities cannot use the development levies. She

mentioned that they are ring-fenced in Kildare, and properly so. They cannot use for current purposes developmental levies which were incurred for capital purposes because that would be simply unacceptable, but they can use them for all sorts of activities, for example, new roads, car parking, specific public traffic infrastructure in their own areas and specific land acquisition. They have used them, for example, to create certain facilities in individual areas.

I need and am looking for far more transparency for the people. The councillors have had to make the brave decision to introduce a levy scheme. They should have a clear account of where the levy scheme money is going and all too frequently that has not been the case. Councillors of all parties and none, from many different councils, have told me that they want to see the system more transparent. That is why I am introducing additional audit committees and will provide additional resources and supports for that by way of regulation in the new year.

Other Questions.

Special Areas of Conservation.

48. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the reason he has closed off the opportunity to appeal special area of conservation designations already notified to the European Commission without allowing a period for landowners to submit appeals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42247/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. B. O'Keeffe): There has been no amendment of the provisions relating to special areas of conservation, SACs, appeals as set out in the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997. These provisions allow persons with a legal interest in designated areas to object to such designations, on scientific grounds, within a three-month period from the time of designation. Moreover, in circumstances where a candidate site has already been notified to the European Commission for acceptance as an SAC, the habitats directive and the regulations provide that no alteration of site boundaries shall be made without the consent of the Commission. The three months allowed for appeals in respect of SAC designations compares favourably with the 28 day appeals period available for objections under planning and environmental law generally.

Ireland is required by a decision of the European Court of Justice to finalise and transmit to the European Commission the boundaries of our SACs. In these circumstances, it is necessary to adhere to the formal provisions of the 1997 regulations regarding appeals and not to permit

[Mr. B. O'Keeffe.]

administrative derogations from these, as had been practised in some cases in the past. This approach is also justified given the improved notification procedures to land holders which are now being operated by my Department.

I am satisfied that it is not only legally necessary but also fair and reasonable to apply the statutory three-month period provided for SAC appeals.

Mr. Naughten: I thank the Minister of State for his response. Is it not the case that until last month the three-month period for appeal was not enforced by the Department and farmers continued to have the opportunity to make appeals to the Department, and that such facility has been withdrawn as and from a decision by the Minister of State last month? Is it not the case that the Minister of State has introduced new notification procedures because the previous notification procedures were wholly inadequate? For example, I received a telephone call last week from a farmer who applied for planning permission on his land but was refused because his lands were designated as an SAC. He was not aware that was the case, even though the SACs were designated three years ago, until he received the refusal from the local authority. He cannot appeal that designation because that window of opportunity is not open to him. Is there not an onus on the Department, first, to notify farmers directly rather than by publishing advertisements in the newspapers and, second, to explain to farmers what the designation means?

Mr. B. O'Keeffe: The answer to Deputy Naughten's first question is "yes". It was introduced during 2001. For nine years the farming community should have been aware that some of their lands were designated. There has been an opportunity over a nine-year period. In addition, the National Parks and Wildlife Service has notified through radio, television and newspaper advertising, and through the provision of maps in public places such as libraries, Garda stations and other public utilities, that these areas are designated. As a former member of a local authority, I might point out to Deputy Naughten that SACs would also have been applied in the ongoing provision and changes in county development plans. Every effort has been made by the Department to notify individuals of this designation.

The three farming organisations were made aware of the difficulties when they were met on 31 October. It was made quite clear to them at that time that what had gone on in the past could no longer apply. We got a reasoned opinion, as of 18 October, which clearly set out to us that unless some action was taken in terms of finalising the designation, this country would be subject to serious fines. Such has been the case in France and Greece. It is of substantial concern to this

country that we would get this matter in its proper perspective and that we would abide by the provisions of the directive.

Mr. Naughten: Is it not the case that the main delay in processing appeals has been the delay by the Department and its agents in furnishing documentation to the appeals committee? Is it appropriate to put a map in a library and in a Garda station where the vast majority of the population do not visit on a regular basis, and does that satisfy the criteria in providing public notification to farmers?

Is it not the case that there are numerous examples throughout the country of where areas of land have been designated, which are a significant distance from what people believe is the SAC, and of where there is no scientific basis for it? In fairness, the appeals committee has taken those parcels of land out of the designation. As farmers were given no notification, this decision was literally taken overnight. Is it not the case that when the Minister of State met the three farming organisations on 31 October, they expressed their strong objection to bringing in this decision literally overnight without giving farmers the opportunity to make a formal appeal?

Mr. B. O'Keeffe: Over the nine-year period, where the Department was aware of the ownership of land, all the people concerned were written to. In certain instances there might be a question over the ownership of certain parcels of land and to make contact with those people, all the other devices of making that information available were used — the media, public notices and maps in public places.

In addition, we used a process whereby we had access to all the land holdings known to the Department of Agriculture and Food. As a result, we were able to make contact with each of the owners of the parcels of land. Over that period 1,500 appeals were lodged by farmers, which seems to suggest they were very much aware of the opportunity to appeal within a three-month period. I can confirm that we will examine and honour all those appeals and we hope to have done that by year end.

4 o'clock

Water and Sewerage Services.

49. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the anticipated effect of the national water pricing policy which will result in a new countrywide consolidated charge for water services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42570/06]

Mr. Roche: There are no proposals for a new countrywide consolidated charge for water services. Each of the 34 city and county local authorities have financial and management autonomy in their functional areas, and will con-

tinue to operate individually, in the setting of water charges for non-domestic users.

The Government's water pricing policy envisages full and transparent cost recovery of water services supplied to the non-domestic sector. Cost recovery from the non-domestic sector is to be achieved by way of a consolidated, meter-based volume charge to be applied within the functional area of the relevant authority. I envisage that local authorities will have completed the metering of all non-domestic water users by the end of 2007. The effect of this will be to enable local authorities to measure the amount of water supplied to each non-domestic water connection, thus providing a transparent and equitable cost recovery mechanism for non-domestic water services in accordance with the polluter pays principle.

Mr. O'Dowd: I should point out that the question was misspelled. It should have referred to countywide, rather than countrywide, charges. I apologise in that regard.

If counties have not completed their water metering programme, they do not have to apply the county at large charge in 2007. It is inequitable that the same circumstances do not apply in every county. Until it does, it can be deemed unfair that it applies to certain counties like, for example, County Louth.

Where non-domestic users in towns such as Drogheda and Dundalk had water and sewerage charges applied, users in Ardee and Dunleer paid water charges only. This year, users in Ardee and Dunleer will have to pay water and sewerage charges and this involves a significant increase — up from 80 cent per cubic metre to €1.55 per cubic metre. This will have a significant and adverse impact on some communities whereas other communities in other counties do not pay this county at large charge.

Mr. Roche: Individual councils control these matters. The current system of volume charges can be very unjust to individual users. One will find people paying higher charges than necessary if they are charged simply on the volume of water that enters their system. Some councils have also made a single charge for "water in and waste out".

The installation of meters is the only way to achieve equitable charging for non-domestic water users. I understand that metering is well advanced. The Deputy mentioned County Louth and I understand that it has almost completed its metering programme. We expect the balance of the country will be metered by the end of this year or early next year.

Mr. O'Dowd: If the metering programme is not completed in a county, the consolidated county at large charge does not apply and businesses will therefore pay the same this year as they paid last year. However, where the metering programme

has been completed, users in towns outside major urban areas which have a separate rating capacity now face a doubling in the charge they paid last year. Non-domestic users in other counties are getting away completely. These charges are being applied as a result of the directive the Minister issued. I ask him to delay the directive for at least another year until all counties are in compliance.

Mr. Roche: I am not aware of the specific case the Deputy has mentioned.

Mr. O'Dowd: It is unusual and it is not equitable.

Mr. Roche: If the Deputy wishes to send me a note, I will look into it. It sounds like a perverse effect. It is, of course, more equitable that everyone pays on the same basis.

Mr. O'Dowd: These users only had water charges levied last year, whereas this year water and sewerage charges have been applied in some towns.

Mr. Roche: The Deputy has made the point clearly. If that were to continue, it would be inequitable. Some users would be paying the full cost while others are not.

Mr. O'Dowd: That is what the county at large charge means. That is the point.

Mr. Naughten: Does the Minister believe it is fair that farmers should be charged for individual meters? In one instance, a farmer has been charged for the installation and running costs of 13 meters; 20% of farmers have to pay for more than five meters and the majority of farmers, especially those in the west, must pay for at least three meters. Does the Minister think this is acceptable?

Does the Minister believe the commercial users of water should have to pay for the leakage on the public element of that supply? This can happen where the local authority, through a lack of investment, has allowed leakage to occur. Should farmers and commercial users have to pay for the water that does not reach their places of work?

An allocation of €10 million was provided in the budget for the installation of equipment. Does this help cover the cost of the installation of meters and the repair of leaks?

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister accept that the increase in these charges, from 80 cent to €1.55 in Louth as outlined earlier, will have a substantial, adverse effect on the competitiveness of businesses in those areas and seriously damage the economy?

Ms C. Murphy: I previously received a reply from the Minister outlining the charges applied by each local authority and these varied from 60

[Ms C. Murphy.]

cent per unit to €2.60 per unit. Can the Minister account for this variance? Is it an income generator, or is it only supposed to cover the cost of providing the service? For example, Intel in my constituency is a major user of water and we must be aware of the impact charges would have on future industrial developments.

Why has the installation of meters in new homes and apartment building been insisted upon?

Dr. Cowley: I previously asked the Minister about farmers with many separate water taps and he said he would look kindly on their circumstances. A bill ranging from several hundred euros up to €1,000 can be a heavy ongoing expense for farmers. I hope he will reiterate his previous position. Some farmers may keep stock indoors for half the year and do not use the water meters.

Mr. Roche: I will start with the issue of multiple metering raised by Deputies Naughten and Cowley. It is a specific problem, particularly in places like Sligo and parts of the west where there are multiple or fragmented holdings. I have already indicated that I am favourably disposed to resolving that and will issue guidelines to local authorities. More prudent attention could have been paid to this factor when some local authorities were establishing their charging systems. As Deputies are aware, I do not like intervening in areas that I regard to be within the specific responsibility of local authorities. The active functions and powers of local authorities have haemorrhaged to the centre for generations and I do not like that fact. This is an area where local authority members have some responsibility and they should exercise it.

That leads me to the points raised by Deputy Murphy. There are inexplicable differences in charges from area to area and I was pleased to publish and circulate that information. We have informed local authorities by circular that when they are striking their rates they should not, to take the point raised by Deputy Morgan, perceive it as some sort of cash cow to be milked. They must ensure cost recovery because otherwise the burden will fall on the general taxpayer; it is right and proper that business should carry some of the cost.

Deputy Naughten asked about fragmented holdings. I will be issuing a circular in that regard. I do not think the Deputy asked specifically whether it was fair that a person with a smallholding had to pay for up to 13 meters but the answer, in any case, is "No." That case should never have arisen and I will issue guidelines on abatement. Local authority members can now make those decisions but there needs to be homogeneity.

The Deputy also asked about the cost of running the scheme, including the cost of unac-

counted-for water, which is a euphemism for the more common term, "leaks". We do not charge for the domestic element in this country but we charge for all other aspects of water services. Irrespective of the charging system, and bearing in mind that the domestic element is paid for by the general taxpayer, the full costs must be met. However, a more significant issue arises with regard to leakage, in the reduction of which we have invested a lot of money in the past two years. It is unacceptably high in some areas, for example it is more than 40% in the city of Dublin, which is an outrageous amount. A small investment of capital to address the problem of unaccounted water, or leakage, in the past few years has reduced the level from over 42% to below 32% in Dublin. That is the way forward and it is an issue we continue to press with local authorities.

Mr. Naughten: There is no incentive for local authorities to deal with it. It is paid for by local ratepayers.

Mr. Roche: That is not quite true.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

50. **Mr. Curran** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the European Commission's decision on Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions national allocation plan; and the way the decision on Ireland's plan compared to the plans submitted by the other EU member states. [42649/06]

Mr. Roche: I welcome the European Commission's conditional acceptance of Ireland's second national allocation plan, which was announced on 29 November. This is the first stage in a process that will enable us to make a final decision on the allocation of allowances to operators in the emissions trading sector for the period 2008-12. The Commission's approach to our plan recognises that Ireland was one of the few member states which carried out the allocation process correctly in the first national allocation plan in 2004 and we have followed the same approach in the second plan.

The Commission has raised a number of issues in the plan, to which Ireland must respond by 31 December. In particular, it considers that Ireland has not fully substantiated its proposals for Government purchases of carbon allowances, which I addressed in the Dáil last week, and it expects transport emissions to increase by more than we have projected. On foot of these concerns, the Commission seeks a reduction of 6.4% in our proposed allocation of allowances to the emissions trading sector.

In my response to the Commission, I will be able to provide considerably more substantiation of our arrangements for Government purchases. Following the approval of the Dáil on 30

November, I signed a contract with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for €20 million to secure carbon allowances. Last Friday, I published the Carbon Fund Bill 2006 and this is scheduled for Second Stage debate on Thursday, 14 December. I will seek Dáil approval this week to enter into agreement with the World Bank with a view to an investment of a further €20 million. I have also responded on the question of transport emissions and on a number of issues of a technical nature which were raised by the Commission.

Ireland's response will inform the Commission's further consideration of our plan and I believe we will reach agreement on an allocation closer to what was originally proposed in final discussions with the Commission.

Mr. Curran: I appreciate that the Minister must make the submission by 31 December but I wish to ask about the transport allowances to which he referred. The Minister for Finance made specific reference in the budget last week to the fact that he intended to review the manner in which car tax is paid, moving away from the current system based on cubic capacity to one based on emissions. Will that form part of the submission the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche, will make?

Mr. Roche: I do not accept that the Commission's approach to the transport allocation is correct. The national allocation plan, when read with the ICF Consulting-Byrne Ó Cléirigh report of 2006 which underpins it, very clearly sets out information on projections, policies and measures for the transport sector. These do not appear to have been fully taken into account. I held only a very brief conversation with the Commissioner but I will make that point. I will also draw the Commissioner's attention to the fact that the transport sector is clearly dealt with in Ireland's Pathway to Kyoto Compliance, which was drawn to the attention of the Commission following its publication.

In general, the Commission's response to Ireland's second national allocation plan was very positive.

Written Answers follow Adjournment Debate.

Adjournment Debate Matters.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 21 and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Kirk — the need for the HSE to examine the feasibility of extending the doctor on call scheme to all parts of County Louth; (2) Deputy Crawford — the need for the allocation of funding and permission to proceed with a project in a school in Virginia, County Cavan; (3)

Deputy Cowley — to ask the Minister if he will intervene to ensure equity for rural dwellers in the Mayo area who have been given only ten days due to holidays to source an alternative refuse collection service, whereas up until now this has been done by Mayo County Council, and if he will agree that a waiver system needs to be retained for older and impoverished people; (4) Deputy Sargent — to ask the Minister to withhold a percentage of the aid package earmarked for Greencore until it complies with the Labour Court's recommendation to pay the 145 families of former workers their due entitlement as part of the social aspect of the plan to end sugar protection in Ireland, given the amount due to workers beyond what Greencore has offered is €3.4 million, in light of the fact that the company's profits amounted to €98 million last year and in light of the recommendation of the European Commission that the Minister take this course of action; (5) Deputy Stanton — the need for urgent funding to counteract the dangers posed by landslides in Cobh, County Cork; (6) Deputy Broughan — the urgent need for the Minister to respond to the memorandum submitted by the Stardust victims and relatives committee requesting the urgent establishment of a new commission of inquiry into the Stardust disaster where 48 young people tragically lost their lives and in light of the 25-year struggle of the relatives and survivors for justice and closure; and (7) Deputy Connolly — to discuss staffing and accommodation difficulties at St. Mary's national school, Virginia, County Cavan.

The matters raised by Deputies Kirk, Crawford, Connolly and Stanton have been selected for discussion.

Leaders' Questions.

Mr. Kenny: The Government has always proclaimed itself a low-tax Government, but it has introduced a raft of stealth charges and new taxes in the past few years. Last week in the budget, the health levy was increased by 25%, there was an increase in the cost of private beds in public hospitals and the Government voted through a measure requiring 5% of the notional value of a person's home to be assessed for the purposes of a claim for subvention.

Yesterday, we saw the introduction of a new death tax on the elderly. It appears the Government intends to wash its hands entirely of the future care of the elderly, those who built up this country, worked in far more difficult times than now and paid their taxes and PRSI, but now find they will be subject to a death tax after they have gone, in some cases requiring the sale of the family home. The Government's proposal is built on three pillars, namely, an inspectorate regime for nursing homes, community services and this funding proposal. The Government seems com-

[Mr. Kenny.]

pletely unaware of what is happening in respect of the provision of community services. It is some years since those in psychiatric institutions were abandoned in communities with no facilities to support them, but I see something similar happening now.

Is the Taoiseach aware that, in respect of the provision of community services for elderly people, we do not have sufficient general practitioners, nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists or home helps? To expect those services to be in place by 1 January 2008 is complete and utter fantasy. If the Taoiseach has been unable to prevent the serious abuse of some elderly in some licensed nursing homes, where a monitoring regime is supposed to exist, how does he expect that a community service to look after those elderly who are semi-highly dependent can be put in place by that date? How can he justify that as one of the fundamental pillars of this new programme, which also includes a death tax which was introduced yesterday?

The Taoiseach: Providing safe and decent residential care for older people is one of our key long-term challenges. As people live longer, the number who will need residential care will increase. The Government's response is twofold. We want to provide home help and qualified assistance to allow as many as possible to live as independently as possible and for as long as possible in their own homes. An enormous range of measures has been put in place and funded in the recent past. An outline has also been given by the Health Service Executive and the Department of Health and Children of what they want to achieve in the short term.

Second, we want to ensure that those who must go into residential care have the assurance of a quality place in a nursing home, where there is now a new and fair deal on how everybody pays. Long-term issues facing us such as care for the elderly and pensions are very important. As Deputy Kenny knows, the system that has been in place for the past decade and a half for supporting nursing home residents is deeply unfair. People with the same means and care needs can face different costs in public and private homes. We have decided on a new and fair deal for older people, a scheme that must be——

Mr. Sherlock: The Government did not consult members of the public.

The Taoiseach: ——in effect by 1 January 2008. In accordance with the agreement reached through the lengthy discussions on Towards 2016, the scheme will ensure the same level of support for public and private nursing home residents and involve co-payments between care recipients and the State. Unlike the current system, it will ensure

that care is affordable for all and no one will be asked to sell or mortgage his or her home to pay for care.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: One would wonder who has been in Government for the past ten years.

The Taoiseach: A major change is that in the future, a person will make his or her contribution and the State will meet the balance of the costs and take on the risk of price increases. The scheme will be transparent with the same standardised needs assessment for everyone.

Mr. F. McGrath: There is no home care package.

The Taoiseach: Everyone knows that the cost of care of the elderly has increased dramatically and will continue to do so. However, the individual contribution will be based on income and assets. At the time of receiving care, the individual will be expected to contribute 80% of his or her disposable income. Contained in the documents provided yesterday were details of the calculations, how the figure is capped and the residential sector matters that have been addressed, legislation on which will be discussed here in the new year.

Mr. Stagg: Saying one thing and doing another.

Mr. Kenny: From the Taoiseach's reply, it seems that there is no more a foregone conclusion in respect of this matter as there is regarding a number of other policies referred to by the Taoiseach.

The persons who will need nursing home care in the next ten to 15 years are those who worked in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, built the Celtic tiger enjoyed by the Taoiseach and paid their taxes and PRSI. They find themselves in a situation whereby the State says that this proposal, which is supposedly revenue neutral, will leave a legacy of a new death tax of 15%. It will not be acceptable at a time of such economic strength when the Tánaiste says that the €2.4 billion received by the Government is not necessary.

The Taoiseach has not referred to the complete failure of community services to deal with this issue.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time has concluded.

Mr. Kenny: What will happen in the case of a person who is unable to avail of home supports and is required to go to a nursing home, but is refused for not being high-dependency? Are these people being told to get lost and go back where they came from? If they are refused the option of nursing homes, where will they go?

Many years ago, psychiatric patients released from mental institutions were abandoned in the community.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Mr. Kenny: The Government is proposing that by 1 January 2008, there will be community services to look after elderly people in their homes and communities. The service's current rate of provision makes a mockery of this issue. The Taoiseach is living in fantasy land if he believes the service will be provided. There are not enough general practitioners, nurses, occupational therapists or home helpers and the State cannot employ the physiotherapists it has trained. Where will the Government find the personnel to provide cover to people refused entry to nursing homes?

In a country of considerable wealth, why are we facing a situation——

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask the Deputy to give way to the Taoiseach.

Mr. Kenny: ——in which the Exchequer will no longer contribute to care of the elderly and a 15% death tax will be imposed on those who have built up the country led by the Taoiseach?

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: People will be afraid to die.

The Taoiseach: I do not know where Deputy Kenny has got the notion that the Exchequer is no longer funding care for the elderly.

Mr. O'Dowd: The Taoiseach said it.

The Taoiseach: This year, the State's expenditure on long-term residential care is €648 million. There has been an additional——

Dr. Twomey: The Government is freezing the contribution.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Kenny asked me a question. Deputies should stop interrupting.

Mr. Durkan: The Taoiseach is not answering the question.

The Taoiseach: In addition, €117 million will be provided in 2007. Some €85 million of that amount will support improvements in subventions and the balance will be used for the provision of 1,250 beds, mostly public, during 2007 and 2008.

Dr. Twomey: Mostly private.

The Taoiseach: The amount of €85 million was added in anticipation of the care support scheme.

Residential care is only one part of long-term care that requires funding. Care in the community — while the Deputy has claimed it is not present, it is — also needs to be funded.

Mr. Naughten: It is not there.

Mr. Stagg: People cannot get home helpers.

Mr. Kenny: It is rubbish.

The Taoiseach: There has been an increase of €400 million in services for older people in the past two years, all of which——

Mr. Durkan: Does the Taoiseach believe that amount is sufficient?

The Taoiseach: ——has been used in respect of staff to look after the elderly in the community. There is a whole range of new HSE facilities for the elderly across the country, which I am sure Deputy Kenny has seen in his travels.

Dr. Twomey: The elderly cannot find them.

The Taoiseach: The facilities are staffed by nurses and others.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: With all that money, why is the Government grave-robbing?

The Taoiseach: Home help services are operating——

Mr. Stagg: They have been cut by 30%.

The Taoiseach: ——and will continue to provide care to people at home.

Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin: One hour per day.

Mr. Stagg: Two hours per week.

The Taoiseach: They will require additional funding over the years. Yesterday, the Minister made it clear that she envisages a further expansion in home-based care.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: The Government is grave-robbing.

Mr. Stagg: Government backbenchers will not be happy.

The Taoiseach: We have made provision for a large increase in the number of professionals in all of the related services so that we will have a greater cadre of people in terms of occupational therapy, physiotherapy and other health professions. Far from——

Mr. Kenny: The State cannot employ physiotherapists.

Mr. Stagg: It is a skeleton service.

Mr. F. McGrath: One cannot get the services.

The Taoiseach: I can understand why the Opposition does not want to hear about the services or the figures.

Mr. Stagg: The Taoiseach only——

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: We do not want to hear about grave-robbers.

The Taoiseach: Unlike the old system in which someone would need to sell his or her house, the current system set out for people is fairer and more certain.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: Legislation was introduced last week——

(Interruptions).

Mr. Stagg: The Taoiseach is misinforming the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Stagg to desist from interrupting. If he does not desist, the Chair will deal with him.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: The Minister of State introduced legislation one or two weeks ago.

Mr. Stagg: The Taoiseach might be inadvertently misinforming the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach is entitled to the same courtesy Deputy Kenny was afforded.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: We have a problem. Bertie and Harney are the new Burke and Hare.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Jim O'Keeffe should also desist.

Mr. Stagg: Last week, the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Power, introduced legislation concerning the sale of one's house.

An Ceann Comhairle: If the Deputy interrupts again, I will ask him to leave the House. We will have an orderly Leaders' Questions. The Taoiseach is entitled to the same courtesy as every Member of the House when he is called.

Mr. J. Brady: Hear, hear. It is only fair.

The Taoiseach: All of the resources I have mentioned — the €400 million in the past two years and the resources outlined in the budget — relate to staff working for the elderly and more home care packages. The organisations have

acknowledged the considerable increases provided to home care and community care people.

Dr. Twomey: They have not.

The Taoiseach: Given what has happened in other services, we must continue to try to provide a better service.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach's time has concluded.

The Taoiseach: It has often been pointed out that what has happened during the past 14 years has been unfair and unbalanced. The new system will be seen as being fair and far more compassionate.

Mr. Stagg: The Government is legislating to rob the dead.

The Taoiseach: Where there are difficulties, they can be ironed out with legislative changes.

Ms O. Mitchell: People will be turfed out of communities.

Mr. Allen: They will have no right of appeal.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: People will not be able to afford their gravestones.

The Taoiseach: Unlike the off-the-top-of-the-head remarks made by Deputies who do not understand the system, the services were negotiated during the past year in the context of Towards 2016. We will see them implemented next year.

Mr. Durkan: The Government is following people down the line.

Mr. Rabbitte: This low tax Government will tax us from beyond the grave.

I want to raise the issue of an innocent young plumber's assistant who was murdered today in broad daylight. This case follows a situation when, four days ago, a post office worker was shot dead on the streets of Kilkenny during an armed robbery. Three weeks ago a young, separated mother was shot on her own doorstep. A few months ago Donna Cleary was shot at a party. This year there have been 23 gun murders — there were many other murders — the highest number in the history of the State. Fianna Fáil made such a row and many of us remember Deputy John O'Donoghue in 1998 when in the first year of the Government of the two parties opposite there were four gun murders. Since January 1998, there have been 120 gun murders, 30% of which saw proceedings commenced and 15.8% a conviction. That is the record.

I remind the House of the pledge made by the Taoiseach in 1997 when he said he would make the fight against crime his priority in the new Fianna Fáil Government. He put the Fianna Fáil message in five simple words to the drugs barons and criminal gangs: we will not accept this, he said, they would no longer be allowed hold sway over our communities. They would not live in luxury with impunity because Fianna Fáil had a plan for them: to arrest them, prosecute them and put them out of business.

Compare that with the reality now. We have a Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform who will advise on any aspect of human affairs at the drop of a hat but this is the reality in his portfolio. What was his reaction last Sunday? He blamed the judges. He said the Judiciary is to blame because it will not implement his mandatory sentencing. He blames whoever is near at the time.

Does the Taoiseach acknowledge that drugs are driving this crime wave? Does the Taoiseach acknowledge there is a crisis in policing and crime? If he does not accept that, how many more killings must there be for the Government to acknowledge there is a crisis and to put the relevant measures in place?

The Taoiseach: I utterly condemn the barbaric and senseless killings in Finglas today as well as the tragic slaying of Alan Cuniffe on Friday in Kilkenny. What else can I add to what I have said about some of the recent other murders? I said here two weeks ago when a mother was shot in Swords that there have been too many gun murders. This year there has been 23 to date, with 21 last year. Two years ago, there was a small figure, nine, although one is too many. There have been two bad years, I will not say anything else, with 44 murders. The figure has increased from nine to 23 this year.

What are we doing and what can we do? Deputies can be assured that a major Garda operation is underway to deal with the perpetrators of the Finglas murders. The Tánaiste has spoken to the Garda Commissioner and senior gardaí today. A senior, experienced garda has been put in charge of the investigation. I have seen some of the details but I am constrained from giving information. The Tánaiste, however, will give further details later.

I extend my sympathies to the families concerned. The fact that one of the victims was a young apprentice going about his work makes his murder doubly horrific, if that is possible. The Tánaiste and the gardaí have clearly stated that no stone will be left unturned in hunting down the killers in any of these murders. I assure the House there is no question of a lack of resources or laws. Deputy Rabbitte knows there is plenty of legislation on the Statute Book and there are

sentencing procedures to deal with these issues. The issue is to apprehend those responsible.

Operation Anvil has been in place for the last year and a half to deal with this sort of drug-related crime, which most of these murders are, although some of them involve internal conflicts between gangs and individuals concerned. Operation Anvil has a large number of gardaí dedicated to dealing with this issue. In doing so, there have been 56 arrests for murder since the unit was established, with 800 arrests for robbery, 1,700 arrests for burglary and 800 for serious assaults. They have arrested almost 3,400 in that operation alone.

In recent months, Operation Oak, an intelligence operation, was undertaken by a large number of gardaí to target gangs and individuals. It may not be news to the House, but a large proportion of the resources of Operation Oak targeted the individual murdered today. Many detectives were involved in that operation because of the activities of that individual.

I regret that these things happen. They are drug-related and gang-related and the laws are there but the resources in place for both Operation Anvil and Operation Oak, which are focussed on the man murdered today, did not stop these murders from happening. That cannot deter the gardaí, however, who must continue their efforts to the best of their professional ability using the resources they have been given to deal with these gangs and individuals, particularly those who have been engaged in disputes for the last 18 months.

Mr. Rabbitte: The Taoiseach may well say we have plenty of laws but the average, law abiding citizen is concerned that we have plenty of deaths as well, plenty of killings, a huge increase in the crime wave, falling detection rates and communities ravaged by drugs and drug pushers. That is the reality.

When we think about the cliché uttered by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when he came before the House two years ago to tell us that we had just experienced the last sting of the dying wasp, it was reported as a colourful remark from the boring Minister, but should someone with that sort of judgment be in charge of this portfolio, someone who told this House in all gravity that this was the last sting of the dying wasp?

There has been a swarm of wasps since and this Minister does not seem to have any grasp of the reality of life in communities afflicted by the drugs menace. He does not seem to understand that there is not a town or village that is not affected by the drugs menace. He does not seem to understand that most of this vicious crime is driven by drugs. A plumber's apprentice was shot down in broad daylight in his place of work. The Taoiseach made a remark but one can never

[Mr. Rabbitte.]

know whether he meant it or it was a slip of the tongue. He said whatever about the other murders, these are terrible today. There is an attitude that while a gangland member is killing a gangland member, the rest of us will put up with it but the fear was expressed so frequently that one of these days, one of these gangland killings would involve an innocent citizen, which is exactly what happened earlier. A young apprentice was shot down in his place of work this morning, presumably casually, because he could have been a relevant witness to the crime.

It is not good enough for the Taoiseach to say he is turning over stones, we have plenty of laws and it is terrible this is happening. Somebody needs to get a grip on this situation.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time is concluded.

Mr. Rabbitte: The Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform wanders from one radio studio to another—

Mr. F. McGrath: He should resign.

Mr. Rabbitte: ----advising on anything that happens to come up and not attending to his primary duty to protect the safety of citizens in their places of work and homes.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Mr. S. Ryan: Shame on the Government.

Mr. Stanton: The Minister should resign.

Mr. Allen: He is a failure in every way, including on stamp duty.

The Taoiseach: Lest I am in any way misinterpreted, I condemn all murders and I am dealing with those that happened last Friday and earlier today. All murders, regardless of who is involved and the circumstances, are barbaric and senseless killings. While I have not received a final Garda statement on the earlier murders because I do not usually get them for a few days, it seems the apprentice was a totally innocent individual going about his day's work.

I will not get into a debate about what is happening in the drugs area, the successes in communities or other statistics. I have any amount of figures, which show with the population increase—

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: It is worse than Chicago in the 1930s.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Jim O'Keeffe will have plenty of time to debate this. He is becoming a

professional interrupter and he should listen for just a few minutes.

Mr. S. Ryan: Just like the Minister beside the Taoiseach.

Mr. Durkan: The public is at risk.

Mr. English: The Government is exacerbating the problem.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach, without interruption, please.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Rabbitte raised serious questions, which I will try my best to answer.

Mr. English: The Taoiseach should give a serious answer.

The Taoiseach: The overall figures show significant reductions in many areas but with regard to gun murders over recent years, mainly due to a war between various gangs, the number of deaths annually increased from nine to 21 last year and 23 so far this year.

Ms O. Mitchell: Were the people killed by a wasp?

Mr. Costello: We know what is happening. What will the Government do about it?

Mr. English: What is the solution?

Ms O. Mitchell: That wasp had a lot of venom.

The Taoiseach: Hundreds of gardaí have been involved in Operation Anvil.

Dr. Cowley: They are down in Mayo where they are not needed at all.

The Taoiseach: In fairness to the gardaí, in a short period they have arrested more than 3,400 people. A large number have been sentenced or are on remand.

It is fair of the public or Deputy Rabbitte to ask how about some of these individuals. I also ask this question but 55 detectives were working on Operation Oak, which targeted significant effort at the individual murdered earlier.

Mr. McEntee: He was still shot.

The Taoiseach: Time and again, that individual and related activities were highlighted. His name has come up in connection with several serious incidents over the past year and while 55 gardaí were involved in that operation, the issues surrounding him were not resolved and he was gunned down earlier. Operation Oak was trying to deal with him and a small group of others properly before the law. As a civil society, which

totally opposes such acts, he was dealt with by those with whom he was in conflict. That is dangerous for all of us. All we can hope is that the gardaí who are intensely involved with the various gangs can have better success than they have had. This involves an intricate web of activity across the city but it does not involve many people. It is no good my saying there have been enormous numbers of convictions against these gangs. Their members are well known and the name of the individual murdered today was mentioned in every briefing I have heard over the past year or more. I refer to the criminal, not the innocent person.

Mr. Broughan: He should have been arrested.

The Taoiseach: The Garda, not me, makes those decisions. I will convey our sympathies to the individuals involved as well as our support for the Garda. We have been at pains to say to the Garda regarding this operation since the beginning of last year that we would make whatever resources were necessary available to deal with the people involved.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe: A helpless, hopeless, hapless response.

Mr. Sargent: I am not sure whether the Taoiseach saw "Prime Time Investigates" on RTE last night, which made me very angry, but he can indicate whether he did. We can all be angry about people being forced to live 50 miles from where they work because they cannot afford a house any closer. However, the behaviour of the gombeen men and racketeers who give auctioneers and estate agents a bad name angered me the most because of their unethical, criminal and downright two-faced dealings with vulnerable, hard pressed and cash strapped clients. As the programme continued, it emerged that the activity being reported and shamefully exposed is the result of the Government's inaction on a number of clear failings in the industry. For example, false bidding at an auction continues quite legitimately, yet if one did this in Australia, one would be put behind bars. False information is regularly provided about the floor size of a property to make it look bigger in its description but if that happened in the US, it would be a criminal offence.

Is protection being provided for the industry that was exposed last night? Are certain activities permitted as long as estate agents, auctioneers or the Government parties receive a cut of the action at the Galway Races? It is impossible to understand how such an obvious omission in law is not being tackled by the Government. The estate agency review group recommended an independent regulatory authority. Will the Government put that into effect so that com-

plaints can be followed up and the conflict of interest reported last night can be clearly legislated for and prevented? Will the Taoiseach introduce legislation to end false bidding and the false disclosure of information and to prosecute individuals who engage in clear breaches of data protection law similar to those exposed last night? The Taoiseach has a job to do. When will he do it?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy raised two issues. The Auctioneering/Estate Agency Review Group submitted a report last year. We subsequently approved preparation of a scheme for a Bill to give effect to its central recommendations, including the key recommendation to establish a regulatory authority with licensing and consumer protection functions. That legislation is due shortly. Pending enactment of the legislation, preparatory arrangements for the establishment of the new authority are under way. A chief executive designate has been appointed and is engaged in the preparatory work. The office for the new authority is located in Navan, County Meath.

I was told today that, following last night's programme, the Data Protection Commissioner, accompanied by the Financial Regulator, has met associations representing mortgage brokers to discuss the allegations raised. I understand that the Data Protection Commissioner has taken very seriously the information brought to his attention by the programme. He has launched an investigation into the allegations of improper relationships and the disclosure of information from mortgage brokers to estate agents seeking to force extra money from bidders. This investigation began yesterday with the inspection of a mortgage broker where information pertinent to the investigation was seized and is now under examination.

These powers already exist in statute. This morning an inspection took place on the premises of the firm of south Dublin auctioneers. The commissioner reported to the Government that he is determined to use his statutory powers of inspection and enforcement to clamp down on these issues, if they are proven. He will act in close co-operation with the Financial Regulator, which authorises mortgage brokers under the terms of the Consumer Credit Act, an Act which bestows legal powers in such cases. The commissioner is calling on individuals who believe the law has been broken to report such breaches to the Office of the Financial Regulator.

The Data Protection Commissioner and the Financial Regulator have substantial powers of investigation to address this issue and are investigating the issues raised in last night's programme.

Mr. Sargent: I asked a number of questions that the Taoiseach did not answer in his response. I

[Mr. Sargent.]

asked when legislation will be introduced to stop false bidding and require truthful disclosure. Such matters require law, not merely independent regulation or a regulatory authority. The Taoiseach has had nearly ten years to deal with these matters.

The Central Bank suggests that house prices are over-valued by 14%. The Taoiseach has pumped up prices through various forms of property tax relief and by talking up the market. Why does the Taoiseach continue to tolerate racketeering scams when he has the power to address the matter? He could give a signal to indicate the Fianna Fáil Party will not be as welcoming of corporate donations as it has been. How much of the Fianna Fáil Party's funding comes from auctioneers, estate agents and developers who set up management companies and walk away from unfinished estates? Is an ethical yardstick used before such funding is accepted, because I think it has a bearing in this matter?

An Ceann Comhairle: I request that the Deputy give way to the Taoiseach as time is pressing.

Mr. Sargent: We must get answers to these questions as they were raised on the public airwaves. The Taoiseach referred to an independent regulatory authority but did not say when legislation will be introduced in the areas I mentioned. He has not told us when prosecutions will be taken relating to data protection, though I hope they come about soon, and he has not informed us of when we will see an end to the racketeering scams exposed on television last night.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy asked me questions, which I answered, and now he is asking me the same questions again.

Mr. Gormley: The Taoiseach did not give answers.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Sargent has gone four minutes over time and he should allow the Taoiseach to speak without interruption.

Mr. Sargent: I was correcting the Taoiseach as he did not hear me.

The Taoiseach: I heard what the Deputy said. If he feels the legislation at the disposal of the Data Protection Commissioner is inferior he can raise that matter, but the legislation exists. I have outlined precisely what the Data Protection Commissioner is doing.

Mr. Sargent: The Taoiseach knows the legislation is inferior.

The Taoiseach: If the Deputy believes the Financial Regulator is not dealing with these matters,

despite what I have told the House, he can raise that issue.

Mr. Eamon Ryan: If the Taoiseach believes everything is all right we are in trouble.

The Taoiseach: I have outlined the strength of the Consumer Credit Act in this matter. Now the Opposition refuses to listen to me. I was asked about the situation regarding the auctioneering-estate agency review group and I have outlined what is happening.

Mr. Allen: The gazumping Bill from this side of the House was rejected by the Government.

The Taoiseach: I pointed out that, pending the enactment of legislation, the preparatory regulations for the establishment of the new regulatory authority are under way. The chief executive designate has been appointed and is engaged in preparatory work and the authority will be located in Navan, County Meath. Property management agents that maintain shared facilities and common areas in developments and estates are being examined. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche, outlined in the House last week that the new licensing system that will apply to agents will improve consumer protection and bring about greater transparency in their operations.

Mr. Cuffe: Perhaps the Minister of State, Deputy Haughey, should look into it.

The Taoiseach: The Law Reform Commission will publish a consultation paper next week that will give an overview of problems in this area. The issues are being addressed. Legislation is pending and going through Government. The Data Protection Commissioner and the Financial Regulator are dealing with the issues raised by the "Prime Time Investigates" programme last night. They all have the necessary powers.

Mr. Sargent: The Taoiseach should deal with the matter.

The Taoiseach: I am not dealing with it. I will not do the jobs of the Financial Regulator and the Data Protection Commissioner.

Mr. Sargent: The Government is responsible for legislation.

The Taoiseach: There is no point in my employing these people if I do not let them do their jobs.

Mr. Sargent: There is no legislation.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Sargent should allow the Taoiseach to answer and request the other members of his party to desist from interrupting and allow the Taoiseach to speak.

Mr. Sargent: We are all quiet now.

The Taoiseach: For the third time, the Deputy has asked what I am doing about legislation and, for the third time, I will tell him that the auctioneering-estate agency review group submitted a report last year to Government. We subsequently approved preparation of legislation giving effect to the report's central recommendations and that legislation is before Government. Pending the enactment of the required legislation we have applied the substance of the review group's recommendations and put in place preparatory arrangements for the new regulatory authority. We have established an executive chairperson and the office is based in Navan. I hope this is clear to the Deputy.

Mr. Sargent: The Taoiseach should outlaw false bidding.

Requests to move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 31.

An Ceann Comhairle: Before coming to the Order of Business I propose to deal with a number of notices under Standing Order 31.

Dr. Cowley: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the insensitive manner in which subscribers to the refuse service in County Mayo are being left without such a service from Mayo County Council and are being given only ten days to source an alternative, private refuse collection service. There is no provision of a waiver for old and impoverished people. I wish to discuss whether this abdication of responsibility by Mayo County Council and the move from a public to a private refuse collection system mark the death-knell for local government in Mayo.

Mr. Crawford: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the totally unacceptable situation at St. Mary's national school, Virginia, County Cavan, where 315 pupils are accommodated in a school built for 160. Five classes, some in prefabs, have more than 30 pupils, with more than 35 pupils in three classes. There is no accommodation for the principal, only one toilet for 17 female teachers and seven prefabs cover most of the play area. This situation is an example of a failure to plan in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government housing section and in the Department of Education and Science.

Ms C. Murphy: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to debate the following urgent matter: the need to establish a national database of rogue developers. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche, recently informed

me that section 9 of the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 does not enable planning authorities to rely on information supplied by others, including a centrally maintained list, when refusing planning permission to those with histories of non-compliance. This means planning authorities have no way of knowing what compliance record an applicant has outside their area. The legislation is either flawed or has been incorrectly read and, in the interests of consumer protection, a national database of rogue developers needs to be established immediately.

Mr. Broughan: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the need for the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to respond to the memorandum submitted by the Stardust victims and relatives committee requesting the urgent establishment of a new commission of inquiry into the Stardust disaster, in which 48 young people tragically lost their lives, in light of the 25 year struggle of the Stardust relatives and survivors for justice and closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. Three weeks ago, the Taoiseach promised to respond by this week.

Mr. Eamon Ryan: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the report published today by Sustainable Energy Ireland which indicates that our CO₂ emissions are once again rising faster than our energy use; and the prediction that energy use in Ireland will increase in the next 14 years by 30% at a time when we are making international commitments for a 35% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions over the same period.

Mr. Costello: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the closure of all 24-hour pharmacies in the capital city; the refusal by the Minister for Health and Children to introduce a national out-of-hours rota system as repeatedly requested by the Irish Pharmaceutical Union; and the failure of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to provide the necessary security to enable pharmacies to provide a 24-hour service in Dublin

Mr. Connolly: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the difficulties with classroom accommodation and teacher staffing at St. Mary's national school, Virginia, County Cavan, in a town with a rapidly-increasing population; the high levels of enrolment and the severely restricted children's play area caused by five prefabricated classrooms; and the calls on the Minister for Education and Science to address these problems as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Morgan: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of national importance, namely, the need for the Government to take heed of the survey published by the Irish Traveller Movement which found that most Travellers wish to be nomadic for some part of the year; whether the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government believes that nomadism is an integral part of Traveller culture; and, in respecting that cultural right, whether he will provide the urgently needed transient halting sites for Traveller communities around the State to enable them to exercise that right.

An Ceann Comhairle: Having considered the matters raised, they are not in order under Standing Order 31.

Order of Business.

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. 16, motion re proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the World Intellectual Property Organisation Copyright Treaty of 20 December 1996 — back from committee; No. 17, motion re proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the World Intellectual Property Organisation Performances and Phonograms Treaty of 20 December 1996 — back from committee; No. 18, Supplementary Estimates for Public Services [Votes 1, 18 to 22, inclusive, 26, 30, 32, 35 and 37] — back from committee; No. 19, motion re referral to joint committee of proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Criminal Justice Act 1984 (Treatment of Persons in Custody in Garda Síochána Stations) (Amendment) Regulations 2006; No. 20, motion re referral to joint committee of proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of the Regional Fisheries Boards (Postponement of Elections) and Fisheries (Miscellaneous Commercial Licences) (Alteration of Duties) Order 2006; No. 1, Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Bill 2006 [*Seanad*] — Second and Subsequent Stages; and No. 6, Social Welfare Bill 2006 — Order for Second Stage and Second Stage.

It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. tonight and business shall be interrupted not later than 11 p.m., Nos. 16 to 20, inclusive, shall be decided without debate and, in the case of No. 18, Supplementary Estimates for Public Services [Votes 1, 18 to 22, inclusive, 26, 30, 32, 35 and 37], shall be moved together and decided by one question which shall be put from the Chair and any division demanded thereon shall be taken forthwith, and Second and Subsequent Stages of No. 1 shall be taken today and the following arrangements shall apply: the proceedings on Second Stage shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion after 90 minutes, the speeches of a Minister or Minister of State and of the main spokespersons for the Fine Gael Party, the Labour Party and the Technical

Group, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 15 minutes in each case, the speech of each other Member called upon shall not exceed ten minutes in each case, Members may share time and a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed five minutes; and the proceedings on Committee and Remaining Stages shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 7 p.m. tonight by one question which shall be put from the Chair and which shall, in relation to amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Private Members' business shall be No. 76, motion re public transport system in Dublin.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are three proposals to put to the House. Is the proposal for the late sitting agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with Nos. 16 to 20, inclusive, motions re intellectual property, Supplementary Estimates for Public Services, motion re draft custody regulations and motion re regional fisheries board postponement of election, without debate, agreed?

Mr. Kenny: I could refer to a number of matters. The Farrell Grant Sparks report on matters pertaining to No. 20 cost €250,000. That report has not yet been debated in the House, which is a shame given the consequences for inland fisheries of the decision made by the Government on ending driftnet fishing are important in terms of the work that needs to be done on the role and responsibilities of the Central Fisheries Board, if it is to continue, and the overlapping of responsibilities among regional fisheries boards. I object to No. 20, therefore, because we have not discussed that important report.

Mr. Broughan: I also oppose No. 20 and, in particular, the postponement of elections to regional fisheries boards, for similar reasons to those set out by Deputy Kenny. We expected to have the regional fisheries authority Bill before the House by Christmas. However, it is now being said in the responsible Department that the legislation will not be introduced by this Government and that the key decisions about inland fisheries will be left for the next Government. It seems most undemocratic that regional fisheries organisations will be left in a limbo over the next year because of this postponement. I oppose No. 20 for that reason.

Mr. Sargent: Each of these matters deserves debate, with No. 20 deserving our particular attention in light of the Farrell Grant Sparks report. The future of fisheries is clearly perilous. This omnibus approach does not suggest the Government is paying attention or being accountable to the House on these matters. No. 20, which

is to be taken as part of a general omnibus, highlights the irrelevance of the House to people outside if this is how they think we deal with our business. We should deal with each of these matters separately.

Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I oppose the proposal to send No. 19 to committee without debate because these regulations, which purport to govern the treatment of persons in Garda custody, have been in place since 1987. No. 19 provides for only a minor adjustment given that the regulations pre-date the events uncovered by the Morris tribunal in County Donegal and many of the deaths which occurred in custody, including that of Terence Wheelock. These regulations are, therefore, dangerously ineffective, as has been proven by the many grave abuses which have been commit-

ted in custody since 1987, including the Dean Lyons case. These regulations need to be radically overhauled rather than sent to committee without debate. There should be a full debate in the House on this issue, to take account of the recommendations of Mr. Justice Morris and the recommendations made by the likes of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and the Irish Human Rights Commission, which was established after these regulations were initiated in 1987. I urge the House to ensure this is not referred to the committee without debate. The House should debate some proper amendments and changes to the regulations to give effect to the recommendations.

Question put: "That the proposal for dealing with Nos. 16 to 20, inclusive, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 72; Níl, 58.

Tá

Ahern, Bertie.
Ahern, Michael.
Ahern, Noel.
Andrews, Barry.
Ardagh, Seán.
Blaney, Niall.
Brady, Johnny.
Brady, Martin.
Brennan, Séamus.
Browne, John.
Callanan, Joe.
Callely, Ivor.
Carey, Pat.
Carty, John.
Cassidy, Donie.
Cooper-Flynn, Beverley.
Coughlan, Mary.
Cowen, Brian.
Cregan, John.
Curran, John.
de Valera, Síle.
Dempsey, Noel.
Devins, Jimmy.
Ellis, John.
Finneran, Michael.
Fitzpatrick, Dermot.
Fleming, Seán.
Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
Glennon, Jim.
Grealish, Noel.
Hanafin, Mary.
Harney, Mary.
Haughey, Seán.
Hector, Máire.
Jacob, Joe.
Keaveney, Cecilia.

Kelleher, Billy.
Kelly, Peter.
Killeen, Tony.
Kirk, Seamus.
Kitt, Tom.
Lenihan, Brian.
Lenihan, Conor.
Martin, Micheál.
McGuinness, John.
Moloney, John.
Moynihan, Donal.
Moynihan, Michael.
Mulcahy, Michael.
Ó Cuív, Éamon.
Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
O'Connor, Charlie.
O'Donnell, Liz.
O'Donoghue, John.
O'Donovan, Denis.
O'Flynn, Noel.
O'Keeffe, Ned.
O'Malley, Fiona.
O'Malley, Tim.
Parlon, Tom.
Power, Peter.
Power, Seán.
Roche, Dick.
Sexton, Mae.
Smith, Brendan.
Smith, Michael.
Treacy, Noel.
Wallace, Mary.
Walsh, Joe.
Wilkinson, Ollie.
Woods, Michael.
Wright, G.V.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
Boyle, Dan.
Breen, James.
Broughan, Thomas P.
Bruton, Richard.
Burton, Joan.
Connaughton, Paul.
Connolly, Paudge.

Costello, Joe.
Cowley, Jerry.
Crawford, Seymour.
Crowe, Seán.
Cuffe, Ciarán.
Deenihan, Jimmy.
Durkan, Bernard J.
English, Damien.

Níl—*continued*

Enright, Olwyn.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Gormley, John.
 Higgins, Joe.
 Higgins, Michael D.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kenny, Enda.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 McCormack, Padraic.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Paul.
 McHugh, Paddy.
 McManus, Liz.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Morgan, Arthur.
 Moynihan-Cronin, Breeda.
 Murphy, Catherine.

Murphy, Gerard.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 Ó'Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Pattison, Seamus.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Quinn, Ruairi.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Ryan, Seán.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Sherlock, Joe.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Twomey, Liam.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Kitt and Kelleher; Níl, Deputies Kehoe and Stagg.

Question declared carried.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the proposal for dealing with No. 1 agreed?

Mr. Gilmore: Since last September the House has had to be adjourned on a number of occasions because of the lack of legislation coming from the Government. Now, in the week before we rise for Christmas, we have a 29 page Bill which, while the Labour Party agrees in general with its content, is quite complex providing for a new levy system for business and changes in the way in which rates are levied on start-up businesses. If ever a Bill required a proper Committee Stage consideration this one

does, not a guillotined debate that will finish an hour and half from now. There is, for example, a new formula in the Bill for the liability on rates which states that it will be $A \times B + C$ where C is $D \times E + F$ but the A and B is a different A and B to the A and B provided for in section 211 of the principal Act. I do not know if Members on the Government side of the House will be able to explain to businesses in the new year that this legislation was passed in an hour and a half and that we all understand what it means. This Bill requires a proper Committee Stage debate and on behalf of the Labour Party I oppose the guillotine to take all Stages by 7 p.m.

Question put: "That the proposal for dealing with No. 1 be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 70; Níl, 56.

Tá

Ahern, Bertie.
 Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Johnny.
 Brady, Martin.
 Brennan, Seamus.
 Browne, John.
 Callanan, Joe.
 Callely, Ivor.
 Carey, Pat.
 Carty, John.
 Cassidy, Donie.
 Cooper-Flynn, Beverley.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cregan, John.
 Curran, John.
 de Valera, Síle.
 Dempsey, Noel.

Devins, Jimmy.
 Ellis, John.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Dermot.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Glennon, Jim.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Hanafin, Mary.
 Harney, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Hoctor, Máire.
 Jacob, Joe.
 Keaveney, Cecilia.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Killeen, Tony.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Tom.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 Martin, Micheál.
 McGuinness, John.

Tá—continued

Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Ó Cúiv, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghail, Seán.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Donnell, Liz.
 O'Donoghue, John.
 O'Donovan, Denis.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Keeffe, Ned.
 O'Malley, Fiona.
 O'Malley, Tim.

Parlon, Tom.
 Power, Peter.
 Power, Seán.
 Roche, Dick.
 Sexton, Mae.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Smith, Michael.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Mary.
 Walsh, Joe.
 Wilkinson, Ollie.
 Woods, Michael.
 Wright, G.V.

Ní

Allen, Bernard.
 Boyle, Dan.
 Breen, James.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burton, Joan.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Connolly, Paudge.
 Costello, Joe.
 Cowley, Jerry.
 Crawford, Seymour.
 Crowe, Seán.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.
 Durkan, Bernard J.
 English, Damien.
 Enright, Olwyn.
 Ferris, Martin.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Gormley, John.
 Higgins, Joe.
 Higgins, Michael D.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Kenny, Enda.
 Lynch, Kathleen.
 McCormack, Padraic.
 McEntee, Shane.

McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Paul.
 McHugh, Paddy.
 McManus, Liz.
 Mitchell, Olivia.
 Morgan, Arthur.
 Moynihan-Cronin, Breeda.
 Murphy, Catherine.
 Murphy, Gerard.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Dowd, Fergus.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Pattison, Seamus.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.
 Quinn, Ruairi.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Ryan, Seán.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Sherlock, Joe.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Kitt and Kelleher; Níl, Deputies Kehoe and Stagg.

Question declared carried.

World Intellectual Property Organisation Copyright Treaty: Motion.

**Minister of State at the Department of the
 Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt):** I move:

That Dáil Éireann approves the ratification by Ireland, at a date to be determined by the Minister for Foreign Affairs following consultation with fellow European Union member states, and with the European Commission, in the matter of:

The World Intellectual Property Organisation Copyright Treaty of 20 December 1996,

and authorises the Minister for Foreign Affairs to deposit the signed Instrument of Accession

with the Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organisation; copies of the treaty were laid before Dáil Éireann on 13 November 2006.

Question put and agreed to.

World Intellectual Property Organisation Performances and Phonograms Treaty: Motion.

**Minister of State at the Department of the
 Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt):** I move:

That Dáil Éireann approves the ratification by Ireland, at a date to be determined by the Minister for Foreign Affairs following consultation with fellow European Union member states, and with the European Commission, in the matter of:

[Mr. Kitt.]

The World Intellectual Property Performances and Phonograms Treaty of 20 December 1996,

and authorises the Minister for Foreign Affairs to deposit the signed Instrument of Accession with the Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organisation; copies of the treaty were laid before Dáil Éireann on 13 November 2006.

Question put and agreed to.

Estimates for the Public Service 2006.

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): I move the following Supplementary Estimates:

Vote 1 — President's Establishment (Supplementary).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €450,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 December 2006 for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Secretary to the President, for certain other expenses of the President's Establishment and for certain grants.

Vote 18 — Office of the Ombudsman (Supplementary).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €1,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 December 2006 for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Ombudsman, the Standards in Public Office Commission, the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Information.

Vote 19 — Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Supplementary).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €1,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 December 2006 for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, probation and welfare staff and of certain other services including payments under cash-limited schemes administered by that office, and payment of certain grants and grants-in-aid.

Vote 20 — Garda Síochána (Supplementary).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €15,000,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the

year ending on 31 December 2006 for the salaries and expenses of the Garda Síochána, including pensions, etc.; for payments of compensation and other expenses arising out of service in the Local Security Force, for the payment of certain witnesses' expenses, and for payment of a grant-in-aid.

Vote 21 — Prisons (Supplementary).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €52,000,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 December 2006 for the salaries and expenses of the Prison Service, probation and welfare staff and other expenses in connection with prisons, including places of detention; for probation and welfare services; and for payment of a grant-in-aid.

Vote 22 — Courts Service (Supplementary).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €1,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 December 2006 for the salaries and expenses of the Courts Service and of the Supreme Court, the High Court, the Special Criminal Court, the Circuit Court and the District Court and of certain other minor services as are not charged to the Central Fund.

Vote 26 — Education and Science (Supplementary).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €47,000,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 December 2006 for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Education and Science, for certain services administered by that office and for the payment of certain grants and grants-in-aid.

Vote 30 — Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Supplementary).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €1,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the years ending on 31 December 2006 for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, including certain services administered by that Office, and for payment of certain grants and sundry grants-in-aid.

Vote 32 — Transport (Supplementary).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €1,000 be granted to defray the charge which will

come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 December 2006 for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Transport, including certain services administered by that office, for payment of certain grants and certain other services.

**Vote 35 — Arts, Sport and Tourism
(Supplementary).**

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €1,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 December 2006 for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, including certain services administered by that office, and for payment of certain subsidies, grants and grants-in-aid.

Vote 37 — Army Pensions (Supplementary).

That a supplementary sum not exceeding €1,200,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31 December 2006 for retired pay, pensions, compensation, allowances and gratuities payable under sundry statutes to or in respect of members of the Defence Forces and certain other military organisations, etc., and for sundry contributions and expenses in connection therewith; for certain extra statutory children's allowances and other payments and for sundry grants.

Votes put and agreed to.

**Criminal Justice Act 1984 (Treatment of
Persons in Custody in Garda Síochána Stations)
(Amendment) Regulations 2006: Referral to
Joint Committee.**

**Minister of State at the Department of the
Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt):** I move:

That the proposal that Dáil Éireann approve the draft of the Criminal Justice Act 1984 (Treatment of Persons in Custody in Garda Síochána Stations) (Amendment) Regulations 2006, a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 1 December 2006, be referred to the Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights in accordance with paragraph (2) of the Orders of Reference of that Committee, which, not later than 14 December 2006, shall send a message to the Dáil in the manner prescribed in Standing Order 85, and Standing Order 84(2) shall accordingly apply.

Question put and agreed to.

**Regional Fisheries Boards (Postponement of
Elections) and Fisheries (Miscellaneous
Commercial Licences) (Alteration of Duties)
Order 2006: Referral to Joint Committee.**

**Minister of State at the Department of the
Taoiseach (Mr. Kitt):** I move:

That the proposal that Dáil Éireann approve the following Orders in draft:

(i) Regional Fisheries Boards (Postponement of Elections) Order 2006, copies of which were laid before Dáil Éireann on 6 December 2006

(ii) Fisheries (Miscellaneous Commercial Licences) (Alteration of Duties) Order 2006, copies of which were laid before Dáil Éireann on 7 December 2006,

be referred to the Joint Committee on Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, in accordance with paragraph (2) of the Orders of Reference of that Committee, which, not later than 14 December 2006, shall send a message to the Dáil in the manner prescribed in Standing Order 85, and Standing Order 84(2) shall accordingly apply.

Question put and agreed to.

**Local Government (Business Improvement
Districts) Bill 2006 [Seanad]: Second and
Subsequent Stages.**

**Minister for the Environment, Heritage and
Local Government (Mr. Roche):** I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

As the festive season beckons, I am pleased to bring before the Dáil the Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Bill 2006. The Bill has already been passed by Seanad Éireann having benefited from a wide-ranging and worthwhile debate on its provisions in the Seanad. The primary purpose of the Bill is to provide the legislative framework for the operation in Ireland of business improvement district schemes. It will introduce two technical amendments to the rating and valuation systems that will terminate an anomaly between these two codes and introduce more equity into the rating system.

Business improvement district schemes have been in operation for many years. A BID scheme can be described as an organisational and financing mechanism with legal backing through which businesses can develop and implement initiatives in defined areas to improve those areas for the betterment of the trading environment.

Essentially, in a BID scheme a group of businesses come together and decide first that they want enhanced services, a wider range of services, new facilities or new activities in an area. Second, these businesses decide that they are willing to

[Mr. Roche.]

pay for such services, facilities or activities. A specially established BID company is charged with responsibility for implementing the provisions of the BID scheme. The local authority plays a key role in such a company. In addition, the local authority collects the annual BID contributions that fund the scheme.

Originating in Toronto, Canada in 1971, business improvement district schemes are now in operation in many cities and towns throughout the world. It is estimated that there are more than 400 BID type schemes in operation in Canada and the United States. BID schemes are becoming increasingly popular in Europe. In the United Kingdom, for example, a legislative framework for BIDS was put in place in 2003. In so far as the UK is concerned, 42 BID ballots have taken place to date, of which 34 have been successful. The type of BIDS vary from town centre BIDS to mixed use, leisure, commercial and industrial BIDS and vary in location from Bolton to Liverpool to Swansea. In London alone, 12 BID schemes have been approved to date.

A wide range of activities can be carried out under a BID scheme, ranging from street cleaning, hospitality, promotions and special events to the provision of street furniture, signage and special lighting. A fundamental feature of the legislation is that the geographical boundary of a business improvement district and the range of services and improvements to be carried out in the district are determined by the business community. Thus, the business community, rather than central or local government, is the sponsoring party for BID schemes.

BIDS will represent a new and unique partnership arrangement between business and local government. While occasional tensions exist between local government and the business sector, important advances have been made in recent years in terms of formal partnership arrangements. A number of structures are now in place at local authority level which facilitate direct input by business into the development of policy at local level. Strategic policy committees at county and city level and municipal policy committees at town level are providing a direct channel for engagement by business in local authority areas. These changes have made a positive impact. Chambers Ireland has been very proactive in engaging with local authorities through these structures and local government has benefited greatly from this interaction. The BIDS will further enhance current partnership arrangements at local government level.

An important point I want to emphasise is that the services in a BID scheme will be additional to, not a substitute for, the services already being provided by the local council. I have included important benchmarking provisions in the Bill

which will ensure that the level of services provided by a local council will be fully quantified in advance of a BID scheme being developed. These provisions will allay any concerns that local authorities might reduce the level of existing services following the introduction of a BID scheme.

In developing the provisions of the Bill, extensive consultation has been carried out with a wide range of interested parties. As key partners in BIDS, it was essential that early engagement took place with local authorities on this new and novel concept. In November 2001, my Department circulated local authorities with a draft framework for the operation of business improvement districts in Ireland. The concept of BIDS was outlined in the accompanying documentation. The observations of local authorities provided at the time were extremely useful in the further development of the framework.

There is also considerable engagement with the business community. The Dublin City Business Association in particular has been to the forefront in this regard.

I would like to set out for the House the main elements of the Bill and the principal issues associated with the development, running and financing of a scheme. Given the link between local government and BIDS, the legislative framework for BIDS will be incorporated into the Local Government Act 2001. The BID provisions are contained in section 4 of the Bill as passed by Seanad Éireann. The Bill inserts 20 new sections into the 2001 Act and these are numbered sections 129A to 129T. For ease of reference in discussing the Bill, I will refer to the new section numbers as they appear in the 2001 Act.

Section 129C provides that people wishing to undertake a business improvement district scheme must submit a proposal to the local authority for approval. The section sets out in detail the elements that must form part of a BID proposal. These include the boundary of the proposed BID area; a description of the objectives to be achieved under the scheme; a detailed description of the scheme itself specifying each project, service and work to be carried out or provided; the timeframe for operation of the scheme; details of the BID company which would be responsible for administering and managing the scheme; details of the current level of services being provided by the local authority; and details of the income and expenditure for the scheme. In addition, the proposal must include a current list of each rateable property in the proposed BID area.

In practice, the development of a proposal will require the BID proponents and the local authority to work together in a partnership approach. A key to the ultimate success of any BID proposal will be the extent to which there is meaningful engagement with the public and business

community in an area. The Bill sets out a framework for such comprehensive consultation. In the first instance, a BID proposal submitted to a local authority must be made available for public inspection under section 129D. In response to an Opposition amendment on Committee Stage in the Seanad, I brought forward an amendment which provides that a BID proposal may be made available on the Internet.

Following publication of a BID proposal, the local authority must, by way of public notice, invite submissions from the public on the proposal. Following consideration of the submissions received, if the local authority is of the opinion that the BID proposal may be inconsistent with the interests of the local community, it must notify the BID proponents of the nature of the inconsistency. Where the local authority notifies the BID proponents that there may be inconsistency with local community interests, this would represent a clear signal that the BID proposal needs to be reviewed. Where any BID proposal is withdrawn or deemed to be withdrawn under section 129F, the BID proponents will be liable for all costs incurred by the local authority regarding the proposal.

Section 129G provides for the holding of a plebiscite to determine the level of support among ratepayers in the area. The financing of a BID scheme is a matter for the business community. It will involve the payment of an annual contribution by each business in a BID area. It is vital, therefore, that all businesses have a formal say on whether a BID proposal is to proceed. The plebiscite will be organised by the local authority. In the BID plebiscite, each business will have one vote. The vote of the corner shop is as valuable as that of the major department store. This is important because a BID scheme must have widespread and popular support. When a majority of the ratepayers who vote in the plebiscite vote in favour, the BID scheme can then be submitted for consideration by the local authority.

Section 129I provides that a BID company will be responsible for implementing and managing a BID scheme. The board of directors will be made up of businesses or their representatives and nominees of the local authority. At least two thirds of the directors must be ratepayers or ratepayer representatives. The Bill provides that where the board consists of fewer than 13 members, one will be selected by the elected council and one by the manager. Where the board consists of 13 members or more, two will be selected by the elected council and two by the manager.

I have given some thought to the balance of representation between local authority members and officials on a BID board. I believe that the equal level of representation provided for in the Bill is appropriate. Members of the councils have a clear role as policy makers and as guardians of

the public interest, while the official representation is desirable in view of the high level of interaction which will take place with the BID proponents in the development and implementation of a BID scheme.

The BID company adopts a budget for the forthcoming year. The amount of the levy on any individual business is determined by the rateable valuation of that business. The local authority collects a BID contribution levy from each business in the BID area. The Bill provides for relief of 50% of the amount of the levy where a property is unoccupied. Current rating law contains similar provisions on rate refunds where a property is unoccupied. In effect, the 50% rate will apply where no income is being derived from a property and this is an equitable provision.

Two important provisions, which are not related to BIDs, deserve a mention. Section 5 provides that owners of newly erected properties will be liable to pay a levy to local authorities from the date the properties are entered on the valuation list. This ends an effective rating holiday which existed because of the inflexibility of current arrangements and increases equity in the rating system. Section 6 provides for an amendment to the Valuation Act 2001. Section 56 of that Act sought to ensure that the revaluation process, to be carried out by the Valuation Office, would not lead to disproportionate gains in rates income by local authorities in the year following a revaluation. The primary aim was to limit any negative consequences for the business community. In limiting the amount of income a local authority could raise through rates in the year following revaluation, section 56 did not provide for the rates buoyancy from new properties to accrue to local authorities. Section 6 addresses this anomaly.

I will table an amendment to the Bill on Committee Stage to provide that local authority audit committees can operate in line with best practice. I will deal with this issue in more detail on Committee Stage

The Bill provides an innovative framework for businesses and local authorities to work together for the betterment of towns and cities throughout the country. Research on the operation of BIDs in the USA has indicated that they provide a vehicle for innovative and proactive management of an area and yield significant positive impacts on the economic vitality and viability of cities and towns. All investment made through BIDs will be additional and complementary to the current level of services provided by the local authority. Investment under BIDs will leverage further investment into BIDs and surrounding areas as a consequence of the goodwill and impetus which will be generated by such schemes. There has been a broad welcome for this Bill across all sectors. I am grateful for the cross-party support for the Bill during its passage through Seanad

[Mr. Roche.]

Éireann and I look forward to similar support today.

Mr. O'Dowd: A unique partnership is proposed in this Bill. The idea comes from the United States, where it has worked successfully in a number of cities. It has also been used in Canada and the UK and now it is being introduced here. In principle, I favour the proposition that money other than the normal expenditure of a local authority, with the consent of commercial ratepayers, may be used in projects to improve their community. Such projects would include the improvement of signage, the removal of graffiti or even more high profile projects, but I have some serious questions and, in view of the fact that this Bill will be law in an hour, we have been given inadequate time to discuss it. Nonetheless, we are in favour of the Bill in principle.

The Minister's proposal states that the majority of ratepayers, each of them having one vote, will decide whether a bid goes through. My research shows that in the UK, a two-part process exists that is not in this Bill. First, a majority of those voting must vote in favour. Second, the total rateable value of the properties of those voting in favour must be more than that of those voting against. Therefore, an in-built balance exists which is not in this Bill.

The chambers of commerce welcome the Bill and are very much in support of it. They have been anticipating this Bill for more than four years and it is a significant step for the funding of local services. Therefore, I am coming from the point of view of those who want this Bill to work and who favour it in principle. I ask the Minister to examine the situation in the United Kingdom, where there is a second check and balance provision regarding ratepayers. The problem is that communities in Ireland are different from those in the United States and the United Kingdom, where there are many more cities than towns and large centres of population. In places such as Dublin, this could be a very dynamic and useful operation where there are many successful businesses. However, further down the line, we need to be very careful in Cork, Galway, etc, because while a number of people might be doing significant business, others might not. The Minister must ensure that a consensus emerges rather than a dominant group which may have the economic power in this regard.

I acknowledge that what one pays is based on one's rateable valuation. Nonetheless, I want to ensure that the Bill is as inclusive as possible and I ask the Minister to consider raising the bar from a simple majority to perhaps two thirds, which would achieve greater consensus. If there is only a simple majority for the proposal, it might lead to conflict, pressure and so on. I make this point in the context of supporting the Bill in principle while trying to improve it and make it more sus-

tainable. That is an important issue and I would appreciate it if the Minister would consider it on Committee Stage.

The Minister has announced he will insert an amendment, which we will have little time to discuss, about the audit committees of the council. In terms of auditing local authority financing, I presume this applies to all of the business of the council across the board, not just the BID proposals.

Mr. Roche: That is correct.

Mr. O'Dowd: In that case, the issue is how local authorities and elected members look at what the council is doing financially — how it exercises its power. I have found in the past that they are very reluctant to exercise their power. I have always argued that there ought to be a finance committee that meets quarterly at least with the finance officers of a local authority to ensure that the budget is what it says it is and to go through all the financial proposals from each department in the council before the final proposal is put before councillors, which is happening as I speak. The problem is that councillors tend to pass the estimates, having been given a lead as regards particular projects they might be interested in, but they do not deal with matters in minute detail. I would like to see this happening and if that is the objective of the Minister's amendment, I have no problem with it. However, I have an issue as regards local government finances generally and value for money. One of the problems is that the auditing of the accounts is done by the local government auditor, but they are not presented or laid before the Committee of Public Accounts.

As a further step I would like to see, in terms of the transparency and openness of local authority funding and expenditure, that having gone through the democratic process of the council, it would be laid before the Chairman of the Committee of Public Accounts so that issues which specifically relate to value for money in local government might be examined. I do not know whether that is to be in the Minister's amendment, but I ask him to address that issue because it is very important that this should happen.

Another issue that has arisen relates to the additional provisions of the Bill, as referred to by the Minister. I will quote from his speech, but I am not sure whether the chambers of commerce have been consulted on this point. I understand he has had consultation as regards the Bill as a whole, but I do not know whether this particular issue was addressed.

Section 5 of the Bill provides that newly erected properties will be liable to pay a levy to local authorities from the date the properties are entered on the valuation list. This ends an effective "rating holiday" which existed

because of the inflexibility of current arrangements and increases equity in the rating system.

The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I understood that over ten years one paid an increasing proportion of the final rateable levy. The first year 10% is paid, while 20% is paid the second year and so on. Is the Minister proposing to do away with that position? If so, I would be concerned. For example, in the context of a start-up business which might not have much money and obtains family support or a small loan within the local community, it would now be faced with full rateable valuation from day one. If that is what is being proposed, I am opposed to it on the grounds that it is a retrograde step.

Section 6 of the Bill provides an amendment to the Valuation Act 2001. I ask the Minister to explain those issues more clearly to me on Committee Stage. I will support the Bill on Second Stage but I would like clarity as regards those other proposals.

The last point I wish to make concerns an issue brought to my attention by Members in my party. They want clarity regarding where the Minister talks about the work that the BIDs might do so that they do not perform activities which at present are being done by the local authority. The point made to me by a number of Deputies was to the effect that the improvement or beautification of streets or footpaths in the business improvement district or on any lands buildings and other structures, such as the removal of graffiti, etc, is work which the local authority is obliged to carry out at present. The Deputies have asked me to query where the Minister draws the line. If it is a local authority with a poor rates base, as in some counties, will this be work, which should be done by a local authority which does not have the capacity to do it, that will fall on the business community? This is an important point and needs clarification.

Generally, I welcome the significant progress that can be made. I welcome that the chambers of commerce are behind the principle of the Bill and the innovation legislation it represents. I look forward to getting the clarifications I sought. I need them before I can support the Bill on Committee and further Stages.

Mr. Gilmore: The Labour Party is generally supportive of this Bill, but I very much regret the fact that we are being asked to pass it into law in about an hour's time because many aspects of it require teasing out in a normal Committee Stage discussion. There are three essential elements to the Bill — the establishment of the business improvement districts and the procedures in that regard; changes in the rating and valuation system for new businesses; and the amendment the Minister is introducing in respect of audit committees in local authorities.

In so far as the Bill is primarily concerned with rates and levies being paid by businesses to local

authorities for certain services, the legislation requires a greater deal of discussion than it will get today. Frankly, the Government is being disrespectful to the business community, which is now the only section of Irish society to pay rates to local authorities. It makes a very substantial contribution to the finances of local government. As a matter of respect, while I appreciate that their representatives have been involved in consultation and that the chambers of commerce are broadly supportive of the legislation, a Bill dealing with a charging and levying regime for business deserves more consideration in this House than being rushed through the week before Christmas without a proper Committee Stage discussion.

I would like to have seen a number of areas teased out in a proper Committee Stage discussion. One of the proposals for the adoption of the BID scheme, for example, is that it should be done by one third of the membership of the local authority. I do not know where that threshold came from, but it is an area I would like teased out. It seems a low threshold for such a serious proposal.

There is an inconsistency as regards the provisions on the plebiscite and the way in which the levy is to be applied.

My understanding of section 129G(4) is that where there is multiple occupancy of a premises, there will be only one vote. Consequently, rate-payers who occupy part of such building will be obliged to agree among themselves how the vote is to be passed, even though the building might contain a number of separate rateable businesses. However, when it comes to applying the levy, the businesses will each be levied separately. This seems inconsistent and I would have liked Members to have teased out this issue.

The levy will apply on a majority basis. Businesses in a particular district will vote for it and it will then apply to everyone. While I appreciate that the majority rules, I would have liked some discussion as to what might happen in a case where a significant minority might be opposed to it, but is faced with being levied for it. In particular, I would have liked this issue to have been teased out in respect of circumstances in which the district might involve dominant businesses and in which pressure might be applied to businesses.

I also would have liked to have teased out questions regarding circumstances in which the Bill might be used for purposes for which it was not intended. The Minister's presentation stated it is for the upgrading of areas, by providing car parking or general improvements. I put the following scenario, with which Deputy Cuffe is familiar, to the Minister. At present, a proposal for a local area plan in Stillorgan is being prepared by the local authority. Much of the old shopping centre in Stillorgan and adjoining properties have

[Mr. Gilmore.]

been bought by a single developer who proposes to carry out his own local area plan. What in this Bill can prevent the following scenario? A developer who owns all the properties and who represents a majority of the ratepayers involved, proposes a BID scheme. He or she then begins to create what effectively would be a local area plan, using the BID scheme as a back door method for so doing. This matter should also have been teased out. I know of many other cases, such as redevelopments of shopping centres, which can be quite controversial in a locality. How can one avoid the BID formula being misused in such a manner?

What becomes of people who are not ratepayers? I cite Dún Laoghaire as an example. A significant number of people live in the town, whose interests as to what might happen to the town may not always coincide with what is being advocated by business in the town. All Members know of the conflicts that can arise in respect of matters such as car parking arrangements, traffic management, deliveries, the physical appearance of a town and similar issues, in which businesses may have one view while local residents might have another. Under this formula, businesses obviously will have a vote on BID schemes because they will pay for it and will have the clout. However, the only recourse for those who have lived in the town all their lives and who may have a different view would be to try to persuade members of the local authority not to proceed with the scheme.

How will one ensure the BID levy will not act as a substitute for rates? It is interesting that currently businesses are the only part of the economy that pay rates to local authorities. This is a formula in which a new voluntary rate, if I may put it that way, will be added to businesses. What safeguards exist to ensure businesses' payments under a BID schemes will not be used to provide services that local authorities should have provided from the rates the former have already paid?

I am concerned in respect of the provision for a local authority clawback in section 129K(6) which states: "The rating authority may recover from the BID fund all reasonable costs it incurs in performing functions related to the BID scheme". I wish to hear more regarding how one could prevent a local authority from getting greedy and taking too much back from the BID fund. Moreover, there is a lack of clarity regarding the role of councillors and local authority officials on such boards. The Minister's contribution noted they will be present as policymakers and as guardians of the public interest. However, my understanding is that under the Bill, they will be directors of the company and will have obligations, as company directors, under company law which may not always coincide or rest easily with their func-

tions as guardians of the public interest. To whom will they owe their loyalty? Are they, as company directors, required to comply with one set of rules and, as public representatives, to comply with a different set or to serve a different master? There is a lack of clarity in this respect that must be dealt with.

The formulae for the changing of rates and of the valuation system also requires more time to be teased out than is available this evening. On the Order of Business, I drew attention to the rather complex algebra, to which Members are being invited to give approval, to give effect to the new rating regimes and to the limits on valuations and on rating payments. Such subjects require some time to ascertain exactly what is meant. For example, at some point all Members as legislators will be asked what is the liability for rates on a business in a particular set of circumstances. Members are not being provided with an opportunity to have this issue elucidated and explained as it should be. Rushing the Bill through in such a short time is no way to make law governing rates and valuations of businesses.

The Minister has tabled an amendment in respect of audit committees for local authorities. This morning, I read in a newspaper that this constitutes a new venture on the Minister's part and that the idea to have independent auditing and evaluation of local government financing is new. However, it is nothing of the sort as section 122 of the Local Government Act 2001 already provided for the establishment of audit committees in local authorities.

Mr. Roche: It did.

Mr. Gilmore: It did not work for two reasons. First, the Minister and the Department frustrated its operation.

Mr. Roche: I certainly did not.

Mr. Gilmore: While I do not know when the Minister commenced the section to enable local authorities to establish audit committees, there was a long delay in so doing. Second, it was frustrated at local level by local authority management, who did not wish to see the establishment of audit committees before which a local government auditor could be called and questioned.

Section 122 of the Local Government Act provided for the equivalent of the Committee of Public Accounts to operate in local authorities. It is a great pity Members lack the time to work through the Minister's amendment, which does not appear to strengthen this position at all. If anything, it weakens the role of audit committees in local authorities. At present, section 122 allows for the local government auditor to be brought before the committee in the same manner in which the Comptroller and Auditor General

attends the Committee of Public Accounts. The latter is questioned, makes a report, explains what the audit means and so on.

There are similar powers enabling the audit committee to bring before it council management and to have them questioned. However, the Minister is replacing these provisions with a formula in which there will be a council committee that can discuss all kinds of matters, can review financial and budgetary reporting and foster the development of best practice. However, it will have no teeth whereas the current section 122, if it was allowed to operate, does so. If anything, the new formula proposed by the Minister, which he has touted in the media as representing a strengthening of financial accountability in local authorities, appears to be weakening its potential. I use the term "potential" because I am conscious the audit committee idea never really got up and running in local authorities, as it should have. The Minister's amendment weakens rather than strengthens it. I would like to see it strengthened and made effective and really operational.

As far as the principle of this Bill in terms of the establishment of the business improvement districts is concerned, I can see the logic of what is being done with rates and valuations. I have my doubts, which I have expressed, about the amendment on the audit committees that the Minister intends to propose. I have no difficulty with the general thrust of the Bill and if this were a Second Stage debate in the normal sense, I would support it. Unfortunately, we are being deprived of the opportunity to give the Bill the detailed scrutiny it needs and deserves. The Minister is unwise in rushing this Bill through the House when there would have been general goodwill towards it and a general willingness to see it enacted, but also to have it properly considered, scrutinised and evaluated line by line.

Mr. Cuffe: Although the business community is creative, entrepreneurial and dynamic, and I fully agree that such energy should be harnessed and local authorities have not necessarily been to the fore traditionally in capturing it, I am concerned at the manner in which the Minister is bringing forward legislation in the House today, the third last sitting day of the session. Rushed legislation is almost inevitably flawed. We must now go back and revisit the A case legislation from six months ago. The concerns about which I argued then are now all being reiterated by the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy McDowell. No doubt if the Minister, Deputy Roche, railroads this legislation through today or tomorrow, we will have to revisit it.

Not only is this complex legislation being hammered through today, but the Minister is also throwing in some important amendments to the existing rates legislation. It is a great deal to ask that we shove this through within the next 45

minutes. It is not the right way. Frankly, it is disrespectful to the House. This is not the way to put it through the House.

On a wider issue, the organisations that are behind this Bill are worthy ones and have a significant amount of creative energy to add. The Dublin City Business Association, through Mr. Tom Coffey, has added enormously to the debate about Dublin city. I recall that ten or 15 years ago Tom gave me a copy of Richard Rogers's *A New London*, which contained a considerable number of great ideas about the city. Chambers Ireland has also added to the discussion on accountability and the need for districts to be responsible. That is all useful.

Behind all this is my gut conviction that local authorities should be dealing well with these activities and I am very nervous about a bolt-on strategy to the existing local authority system. There are perhaps two elephants in the corner in this regard. The first is the Minister's denial of the adequate funding that local authorities should receive. He is not providing it. The second is the inflexibility of local authorities, whether that is due to inherited work practices or simply an inability to be dynamic and to respond to changing ideas and needs. I passionately believe that local authorities should be to the forefront of change and we need to make them work well rather than clamp an extra framework onto them that, ironically, will make them more bureaucratic.

If something needs to be fixed within local authorities, let us fix it but let us not simply add another layer to a process that is remarkably murky at present due to the changes that have been put upon the local authority system over the past ten years. The strategy policy committees are difficult for the outsider to comprehend but if one thinks they are bad, the addition of business improvement districts will make it even more difficult to comprehend what is happening.

I am also nervous of the examples that have been chosen. Business improvement districts appear to be popular, both in the UK and the United States. Frankly, our towns are not like Philadelphia, midtown Manhattan, Nottingham or Birmingham. We are lucky enough to have inherited strong town centres, although these are under threat from out of town shopping due to the changes wrought by the Minister whereby he opened the stable door to allow development elsewhere, whether on the Ballymun Road with IKEA or in getting rid of the cap on the size of shopping centres. The Minister did something similar to what Margaret Thatcher did 20 years ago when he essentially gave *carte blanche* for development to take place outside the traditional town centres. That was a retrograde step.

Returning to the kind of issues that will be undertaken by business improvement districts and their boards, it is crucially important that we

[Mr. Cuffe.]

get right issues such as street cleaning, street furniture, signage and special lighting. Mr. Dick Gleeson, the chief planner in Dublin City Council, has referred to the public space of the city as being the living room. That is a good comparison to draw. When one looks at the floor as the footpath or pavement and the walls as the buildings, it is important that we get it right. In Ireland, we went through a particularly bad phase over the past 30 years when we allowed second best to suffice. The paving of Grafton Street with concrete bricks was a retrograde step.

Mr. Roche: I agree.

Mr. Cuffe: The bad aluminium street signs falling apart after 20 years were a retrograde step. We need to rediscover good materials such as cast-iron signage and natural stone. The examples I would look at are cities such as Ferrara and Bologna in Italy and Barcelona in Spain which do things well. Such cities do not use business improvement districts. They use the local authorities and they have reinvigorated them and given the power, ability and funding to deliver on improving the public space. That is significantly important.

I am tabling amendments to the Bill this evening. One of the most important concerns the idea that we must work with the existing residential community as well. I favour mixed use communities, that is, businesses and residential units in the same area. It is important that we harness the know-how of those communities and allow the residents and communities representation.

This is being rushed and I disagree with that process. I am putting forward amendments to it. Behind all of this is the need to give local authorities the power and clout they deserve. Sadly, I do not think Fianna Fáil and the Minister believe in it. If the Minister did, he would put local authorities on a firm financial footing and that would really harness the creative energy which local communities and local businesses possess and which, if all hands were put to the wheel, would really deliver the best for local communities. There are good examples of that, but they are against the odds.

I worry that it could go dramatically wrong. I look at one of the towns in the Minister's constituency, Wicklow town, where businesses have sponsored seats and put their advertising onto them. That is how one does it badly. We need to do it well and I am not convinced that rushing through a Bill over the next 40 minutes will do that ultimately.

Mr. Morgan: I welcome the thrust and intention of the Bill. We all want achievement of its objectives because we know that visual appearance is extremely important, not just on high

streets, but also industrial centres in urban and rural areas. The Bill seeks to bring together people to efficiently and effectively produce a plan to enhance their area beyond a point which would be reasonable for public financing. The concept of modern marketing is heavily dependent on image, although we should not underestimate the depth of the substance behind it. Irish businesses are significantly improving their image.

The Bill provides for the improvement or beautification of streets and footpaths in business improvement districts. This can be achieved by grouping together, as described in the Bill, in a business improvement district. This type of work could not be done by local authorities alone. While local authorities strive to, for example, remove graffiti, they are rarely successful because that problem is prevalent in many areas. It is not unreasonable that local businesses join together to deal with such issues. I welcome the provision for the carrying out of studies and making of reports in respect of the business improvement district.

The new section 129E proposed for Part 13A of the principal Act gives an opportunity for public input into the consultation process. We are familiar with consultation processes in this State and I must sound a note of caution. We have had such processes on issues such as incineration and road development, but they were paper exercises and the consultation was not heeded. This causes me considerable concern. Provision must be made for consultation.

Section 129F allows the local authority to weed out what I can best describe as bluffers, namely, developers who will cause considerable expense to taxpayers or ratepayers in preparing material or working with the local authority to develop a scheme, but cry off at the last moment. Section 129H provides for the cost of preparing for the scheme and ensures that it will not fall upon the local authority. This is an important and welcome element of the Bill.

However, I am concerned about section 5 and this has also been referred to by another speaker. It states: "It is necessary for the passing of a resolution under subsection (1) that at least one third of the total number of members of the authority concerned vote in favour of the resolution." What happens if 60% of members vote against a resolution, 10% abstain and 30% vote in favour of it? How stands the business improvement district in such circumstances? I do not think the Bill is clear enough on this matter. I welcome the fact that plebiscites are to be organised by the relevant local authority; no one in this State is as proficient in organising plebiscites as local authorities.

I have a difficulty with water pricing policy. When discussing business it is important that we mention not only marketing and image, but com-

petitiveness too. I am concerned that some local authorities have shown disregard for the effect of water pricing policy on competitiveness. Businesses are expected to pay over the odds. I acknowledge that the Minister said that he would try to ensure this does not happen. Unfortunately, it is currently happening.

It is unfortunate that we do not have more time to deal with this matter. The framework of the Bill is fine and a couple of decent amendments would ensure that we could all accept it. Unfortunately, we cannot do so as it stands.

Mr. Connaughton: Like everyone else, I welcome the overall concept of this Bill. I took particular notice of the Bill as it progressed through the Seanad. Given that the Dáil adjourned early several times in recent months, I do not know why we have such a short period to deal with this Bill. At that time, the Government was not able to bring forward legislation, but all of a sudden this Bill has become hugely important business.

I do not have a background in this area and I am not exactly sure how the issue will pan out. The Bill gives an opportunity to businesses and others to progress matters in a communal manner in a particular area. A number of factors would have to be in place for this to work. Based on what is happening in Britain and the United States, critical mass is important. I find it difficult to see how this will come about in a small town like Ballinasloe, for example. There is no reason that it should not, but I imagine that it would have to be pioneered by an organisation as powerful as the Dublin Chamber of Commerce or some similar organisation. It is worth giving this Bill a chance. Assuming it is passed in its current form, I expect an organisation will pilot this in one of our cities, probably Dublin.

I was a member of local authorities and have been a Member of this House for some time, and I have always found great tension between the business community and local authorities. It should not be like that; everyone should be on the same path and should aim to bring about prosperity and the better delivery of services. However, for some reason there is barely a town with a local council where there is not tension between it and the business community. Perhaps when this concept was first mooted many years ago it was done with the intention of overcoming this problem. If that could be achieved, it should be closely examined. With the competition this county faces, there is no room for tension between local authorities and the business community — it is better that they sing from the same hymn sheet. I assume that much of the tension arises from rows over rates and valuations. Many people either think the money is not well spent or that they are too highly rated. There is also the clear disparity between what is deemed commer-

cial and social in a community. These lines can be jarred on occasion.

I note that the chambers of commerce are strongly behind the concept of this proposal. There are likely to be big businesses in the areas where this will work best. They tend to bring a lot of business and traffic into particular areas. One could argue that they might have been the cause of extinguishing or diminishing existing businesses. The Minister proposes checks and balances in the system of rateable valuations by the use of a mechanism preventing one anchor tenant controlling everything. That is a very important provision as the proposals would not otherwise work.

The Bill reminds me of the Leader programme in agriculture in the way it tries to bring together various features which increase productivity and beautify an area. That is a very useful concept, provided it is handled correctly.

I also understand the Minister proposes to amend the Valuation Act 2001. Some businesses have low valuations and others high, which has been a vexed question for many years. It can be assumed that any changes in valuations will be upwards — current high valuations will not be reduced and lower valuations will be increased, which will cause problems.

The Bill proposes to introduce outside audit experts to sit on existing boards, on strategic policy committees and on finance committees of county councils or local authorities. I share the view of Deputy Gilmore on this matter. Having been a member of the Committee of Public Accounts for a few years, I always believed that local authorities should be brought under its remit. I do not think many in the Dáil would disagree, however, that local authorities have a good record on the question of misappropriation of funds. Over the years there have been no major disasters and, while they may move slowly and lack imagination when proceeding with various projects, at least the books always seem to have been correct, for which I pay tribute to them. Will the people who take up additional seats on the board become directors? What responsibilities will they have?

On the detail of a BID proposal, the Minister said: "Following publication of a BID proposal, the local authority must, by way of public notice, invite submissions from the public on the proposal." When summing up can the Minister say what will happen if the public objects to a proposal in large numbers? What mechanism will deal with that? It is very important the public be taken into account but, at the same time, a good project should not be jettisoned for a frivolous reason.

Fine Gael, like most in the House today, supports the principle of the Bill and hopes the Minister provides answers to the many questions that have been asked. He does not have much time

[Mr. Connaughton.]

to convince us, however, for which he should be ashamed. There is no excuse for that but we await his words of wisdom between now and 7 p.m.

Mr. Connolly: How long do I have?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Ten minutes.

Mr. Connolly: I wish to share time with Deputy Cowley. I welcome this Bill. There has been widespread support for business improvement districts, BIDs, since their emergence in the late 1960s or early 1970s in Toronto. BIDs are essentially public private partnerships, to which we have become accustomed, in which property and business owners of a defined area decide to make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development, marketing and promotion of their commercial district. The idea is similar to the promotion of a suburban shopping centre or mall, for which tenants must pay a maintenance fee. Chambers of commerce have also come together to promote themselves and it is a very effective way of doing business. I recall a supermarket being granted planning permission to open beside a small shop, prompting many objections from the small shop owner, fearing her business would be wiped out. Eventually, she had to take on three or four more employees because of the increase in her trade. There can be a fantastic spin-off for individuals if they approach such developments in the right way and realise there is strength in numbers.

In the coming decade business improvement districts will develop more partnerships with residents and, in doing so, show more concern for open public space and community projects. I, Deputy Crawford and the Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food, Deputy Brendan Smith, attended a meeting in Virginia last night at which bad planning and the failure to demonstrate joined-up thinking were discussed. One such example was of a primary school whose services had become quite inadequate. Planners had been happy to grant permissions, builders to build and people to move into the neighbourhood but the education of children had not been catered for. The speakers also decried departments being separated from each other.

We need people to come together and be responsible for their own planning issues. The people of Bailieborough should have been brought into the loop by councillors, or by us in this House, and told about the planning process, the implications of planning permission to build houses and the greater importance of schools in that equation.

In many cities across the United States, business improvement districts have brought new economic opportunities and revitalisation stra-

tegies to run-down areas. Central government cannot achieve that so people must accept some responsibility for their own area and take a degree of ownership. In another example in Monaghan, the Mullaghmat housing estate was built some time ago. The council then let the houses to people but did not properly maintain them. Now people are trying to take ownership of the scheme. They should get some Government assistance as they are meeting with many objections and not being adequately supported. I ask the Minister to give ownership to these people because, in the long term, the Government will receive a greater dividend by supporting and encouraging such local developments and it would involve a relatively small amount of money.

Business improvement districts provide an opportunity for co-operation, not only between the public and private sectors but also with planners, by bringing together various interest groups who share common goals. There are many diverse interest groups and the idea of business improvement districts offers the opportunity to pull people together.

In the coming century initiating and fostering these partnerships among community groups may be one of the most important roles of urban planners. Urban planners must start to think outside the box and include people. The people on the housing scheme to which I referred do not believe that they are in the loop. There are similar schemes in Muirhevnamore etc. It is a matter of pulling people in and giving them a voice, be it unofficial or whatever. They may not need to be elected representatives of the public, but while they do not necessarily go forward for public election, they are the voice of the people.

Dr. Cowley: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Bill. People interested in developing areas should note that this innovative concept has been used internationally and I welcome the idea behind the scheme.

Unfortunately, I approach this matter with a degree of cynicism. While I like to be positive and proactive in everything I say and do, I have seen wonderful projects across Europe that were co-financed by local authorities. As someone who has been involved in community projects, I am upset and annoyed by the lack of support provided by local authorities to communities interested in positive projects. If one comprises a for-profit business, one has every opportunity to get money and to use it to good effect, but it is more difficult for community concerns. Previous schemes required local community contributions, but getting that money can cost an arm and a leg and such projects may not get off the ground.

I welcome the positive idea of a business improvement districts scheme, but enterprise schemes are only as good as the investment made

and the willingness of the local authority to carry them through. In my area, the local authority has been incapable of handling waste management. People have been given notice of ten business days, excluding holidays, to try to get an alternative disposal system for our county. One would be inclined to succumb to the cynicism stemming from such issues, but one likes to be positive concerning these matters.

The town of Ballina is a neglected area and has lost thousands of jobs without replacements. It does not have an IDA Ireland site to which industrialists can locate. We have been told that industrialists have been brought by IDA Ireland, but we do not know where because no industrial site exists. There is a legal problem in respect of land acquired a number of years ago, but any local or State authority interested in the type of development that would bring necessary jobs to the area should ensure that the matter of land is not held up in a legal quagmire for years.

We lack the resources to build the infrastructure necessary to make our area competitive, namely, broadband, roads and railways. We must wait until 2008 before the BMW region is brought up to a par with the east and the south. By 2008, the deficit of €500 million in respect of our roads will have been made up, but where will the south and east be? They will have gone so far ahead that the BMW region will not have caught up. We will continue to lose 60% of graduates to the greater Dublin area.

Such problems exist, but I welcome the business improvement districts scheme and any measure that allows local autonomy in collecting funding for local use. It is my earnest wish that schemes such as this succeed. I will be positive concerning the matter and I hope that the Government will live up to its obligations to balance the deficit, which should have been made up by the end of this month, by 2008.

Mr. Crawford: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this legislation. While I may not be as positive as some of my colleagues, it is not for reason of being awkward. I come from the Border region where rates, insurance and so on have been major headaches. I am slow to agree to more levies that may push businesses further into difficulty. I realise that benefits will accrue from the BID scheme, but we must be careful. During a Dáil term when business broke down several times, it is unfortunate to rush this Bill through with little time to debate the nitty-gritty of the scheme.

To start with the end of the Minister's speech rather than the beginning, one statement was particularly interesting. Often, I have heard the Minister make statements that sound great. He stated: "All investment made through BIDs will be additional and complementary to the current level of services provided by the local authority."

I welcome the various funding provided to the Border region, such as the IFI funding resulting from the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the peace and reconciliation funding resulting from the Good Friday Agreement and the INTERREG III funding.

The assurance given in respect of all the funding programmes was that, beyond a certain point, they would comprise additional funding based on the fact that areas had suffered dramatically due to the Troubles. I went to school in Clones, and every road around it was closed down. I will speak on valuations later, but the rates and insurance costs paid by businesses, such as hotels and filling stations, despite their economic difficulties, led to their closing.

INTERREG, peace and reconciliation and IFI funding were introduced as additional funding to ensure that businesses would get extra money to guarantee them a step up. Thank God for the funding. It was needed, but it certainly was not additional, and I am not the only person who has said so. The Taoiseach, who sat where the Minister is seated, admitted it to me across the floor of the House. Anyone who examines the figures knows that is the case. If the Bill is to be meaningful, it is important that the funding is additional and that, in one or two years, we do not find that it has become a replacement.

As the Chambers of Commerce of Ireland support the scheme, it has the backing of business people and industry. My colleague, Deputy Connolly, mentioned Mullaghmat. While it is a housing estate, it differs from those for which this scheme is intended. However, I cannot help but support my colleague's cry for Mullaghmat to be examined. While a great deal of money is being provided, it is a matter of keeping the scheme moving and ensuring the community's involvement. The community is prepared to get involved to ensure that the scheme works properly and that support is given for the work on the houses and walls. There could be community employment scheme involvement if the groups concerned worked together.

Money was allocated by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to build a back road behind Dublin Street in Monaghan to allow major development. There was, however, no mechanism to bring people together so it did not happen and the money was used for a road in Mullaghmat. I see benefits in this legislation so I want to tease it out to see how it might work. That money was allocated and certain people in the area were enthusiastic but unfortunately it did not work.

Towns such as Ballybay, Clones and Castleblayney have been on their knees. Many businesses are not being utilised and many for sale signs are visible. The problem is that the moment someone tries to get reconstruction off the ground, some person arrives from the Valuation

[Mr. Crawford.]

Authority in Dublin. Immediately a high rate is placed on the property. I wrote to the Minister some time ago and received in reply a two page letter dictated by some of his Civil Service colleagues.

Mr. Roche: It was signed by me.

Mr. Crawford: I appreciate that, not all Ministers do it. It does not, however, address the problem that there must be some leeway to allow those people to get off the ground.

There is a business in south Monaghan in a factory that was closed for many years. It is now a cement works, a completely different enterprise from the towel factory it once was. It has been compared to all sorts of other businesses for rates. This company decided to utilise the steel work to ensure its workers were covered while making the cement where many of its competitors work in the open air. The company was given a valuation of €1,196 or a rate bill of €63,000 for 30 workers. There must be a degree of fairness in the system, and this is completely over the top. I talked to a number of people in the business and they say this is madness because the company will have to shed jobs to find the means to pay the bill if it is to continue in business. It is a miracle the factory has reopened. CPD in Clones was a major ratepayer and it is lying empty.

We must be sympathetic towards small businesses that are trying to get off the ground and ensure they are not forced out of business. I welcome the ideas in the Bill but small businesses need help to get off the ground and extra levies are not the answer.

Mr. O'Dowd: On a point of order, what are the arrangements for the conclusion of the debate?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The debate will conclude at 7 p.m.

Mr. O'Dowd: Can the Minister extend that time?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: No, it is an order of the House.

Mr. O'Dowd: That is a shame.

Mr. Gilmore: It is a shame.

Mr. O'Dowd: Here is a golden opportunity to amend the Bill and we are all in favour of it in principle.

Mr. Gilmore: We could do this by consensus.

Mr. O'Dowd: The opportunity, however, is being denied us and the Minister. It is very arrogant for the Minister to treat the House in such a

cavalier manner. It is unacceptable and undemocratic and does the Minister's cause no good.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): It is a pity that Deputy O'Dowd chooses to personalise his points, although he is entitled to make them.

Mr. O'Dowd: The Minister is being arrogant.

Mr. Roche: He calls me arrogant but I want to make some points.

Mr. O'Dowd: This is Fianna Fáil arrogance at its worst and the Minister is the worst of them all.

Mr. Roche: I am what?

Mr. O'Dowd: He is the most arrogant Minister; he has a Bill he will not allow us to debate when we agree with it in principle.

Mr. Roche: Name calling in the House is just silly.

Mr. Gilmore: The Minister is no slouch when it comes to that himself.

Mr. Roche: I regret the Deputy takes that point of view but I will not return it in kind.

Deputy Crawford said he was worried about this being imposed but it will not be. We are introducing facilitative legislation which will allow businesses in a particular area to come together for a specific purpose.

Deputy O'Dowd, until his last few moments in a very constructive contribution, was concerned about the majority and he made the point that the British have a double system. The opposite effect would arise here, however, because it would give a disproportionate representation to the views of large business and it is important that there is equality in the system.

Deputies O'Dowd, Gilmore and Crawford mentioned additionality. The idea is that it is protected by the benchmarking arrangements that exist specifically for that purpose.

A number of Deputies mentioned the rating holiday that is being ended. I was surprised this was raised so frequently because it is an injection of equity for all the other ratepayers; a holiday must be paid for and it is not fair it is paid for by other ratepayers.

Deputies asked about the additionality and how to protect against it. The BID company will have a specific requirements that will then be costed and allocated. Nothing other than those things the company requires to be brought on board will be brought into it.

Deputy Cuffe, who characteristically made a contribution and then left the House having asked a series of questions, made the point about local government being sufficiently funded. I

draw attention to the allocation yesterday of €958 million to local authorities through the general purposes grant. Last year we allocated almost €600 million for non-national roads and the figure will be higher this year. This funding is almost three times what it was when other parties were in power in 1997.

Mr. Connaughton: The roads are still a mess.

Mr. Roche: I make that point because it is becoming jaded for us to argue continuously that local authorities do not have money. The major issue now is that local authorities have taxpayers' money, €9,000 million in one way or another in the coming year. That is a huge amount and explains why I have introduced the amendments on the audit committees. Deputy Gilmore was partly correct, the committees have not worked. I agree that local authority members find it challenging to deal with the funds that come forward. Local authority accounts are impenetrable and when talking about the expenditure local authorities are dealing with, it is important we strengthen the audit process. We do not get value for money for every penny spent in all parts of public administration but I would be hard to persuade that we get 100% value for money in local government.

In amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 11 we see a different form of audit committee with external membership to provide an alternative view and assess and promote efficiency, review the financial and budgetary reporting relationship, foster the development of best practice, review the auditor's report, review risk management and make other recommendations to the members of the local authority.

I will bring forward specific regulations to deal with audit committees, the holding of meetings and so on. Regardless of whether they should comprise five or seven members, they should be small. It is important that significant additional expertise is injected into local government because it is no longer a Cinderella service starved of funds; it handles a vast amount.

I am grateful to Members who contributed. The reason for the speedy passage of the legislation is the proposal has been around since 2001. It is a good proposal and business interests are anxious to get on with the process, as Deputy Crawford mentioned. We are enabling a new partnership between local government and businesses from which everybody will benefit.

Question put and agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: As it is 7 p.m., I am required to put the following question in accordance with an order of the Dáil of this day: "That the amendments set down by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local

Government for Committee Stage and not disposed of are hereby made to the Bill; in respect of each of the sections undisposed of, that the section or, as appropriate, the section, as amended, is hereby agreed to in Committee; the Title, as amended, is hereby agreed to in Committee; the Bill, as amended, is, accordingly, reported to the House; Fourth Stage is hereby completed and the Bill is hereby passed."

Question put and agreed to.

Private Members' Business.

Public Transport.

Ms Shortall: I move:

"That Dáil Éireann,

- concerned at the serious traffic problems facing the Greater Dublin Area and the inadequacy of the current public transport system;
- conscious that even if the metro and rail proposals contained in Transport 21 are delivered on time, it will be many years before these services become available to the public; and
- believing that in those circumstances the Dublin bus service will remain the principal provider of public transport in the city and surrounding areas for many years to come;

calls on the Government to ensure relief for hard pressed commuters by:

- the expansion of the Dublin Bus fleet by 50% (500 buses);
- the introduction of a flat fare of €1 for adults and 50 cent for children;
- the completion of all quality bus corridors and the construction of additional QBCs; and
- the construction of a network of park and ride facilities on the outskirts of Dublin with express bus services to central areas."

I wish to share time with Deputy Burton.

Dublin traffic is on a knife-edge and recent experience has borne that out all too clearly. With average speeds of 10 mph, we live in a city that grinds to a halt when it rains and cannot handle even minor road works and road traffic collisions without serious congestion. Average peak time bus speeds have reduced to 8 mph. Even on some quality bus corridors, QBCs, the average peak-time speed can be as low as 6 mph, and as low as 3 mph at pinch points. With a popu-

[Ms Shortall.]

lation increase of 250,000 in the greater Dublin area, GDA, over the past ten years, half of it in the counties bordering Dublin, more commuters are travelling ever longer distances to work. As a result, journey times have become unbearably long. According to the latest available journey time figures, from Finglas to the city centre, it takes 54 minutes; from Howth, 56 minutes; from Malahide, 61 minutes; from Donabate, 63 minutes; from Stepside village, 64 minutes; from Dunshaughlin, 75 minutes; from Loughlinstown roundabout, 76 minutes; from Kill 86 minutes; and from Saggart village, 99 minutes. Many thousands of commuters, whether in private or public transport, spend more than three hours per day on the road on a good day. If they were unlucky enough to be caught on the M50 during one of its recent monster tailbacks, they spent up to seven hours in a car. That is the scale of the problem facing commuters in the GDA and, by any standard, it is a crisis.

The fundamental problem is our utterly inadequate public transport system. Dublin remains a heavily car dependent city. Annual traffic surveys show that cars represent more than 80% of the traffic crossing the canals into Dublin city centre, whereas buses represent only 2% of that total. At the time of the 2002 census, more than 60% of us travelled to work in the GDA by car, lorry or van. The latest Dublin Transportation Office survey figures indicate this trend is continuing. That figure is more than 70% for the three counties in the mid-east region. We are counting the cost of all this congestion in our pockets and in our lives. First and foremost, there is the incalculable cost to people's lives in the loss of significant family and leisure time, increased stress levels, reduced job and social opportunities and the ongoing degradation of the environment. Business groups suggest the annual cost of congestion could be in excess of €2 billion, while it is estimated congestion costs Dublin Bus €60 million annually.

The Government response to this crisis has been bewildering. Incredibly, despite all the congestion, the Government has spectacularly failed to meet the demand for public transport services. Its belated strategy is the €34 billion Transport 21 plan. It remains to be seen the extent to which this plan will ever be implemented, given the complete failure to deliver on the earlier Platform for Change plan. The public transport element of Transport 21 essentially represents a long-term plan to expand rail services in the capital, little of which will come on stream within the next five to ten years. However, the Government has no short to medium-term strategy to deal with the congestion crisis facing commuters now. Dublin commuters cannot wait for Transport 21.

Mr. Quinn: Hear, hear.

Ms Shortall: It does not have to be like this. Congestion is not a problem of prosperity but of poor Government. The Government has deliberately starved Dublin commuters of additional buses, with no increase in the Dublin Bus fleet between 2001 and late 2005. Transport 21 only delivered 17 new buses in 2005 and 15 this year and, in both cases, the buses were not operational until November or December. QBCs without adequate bus services and bus services without adequate QBCs remain a problem.

The only short to medium-term solution to the traffic chaos in the GDA is to provide commuters with the option of reliable public transport through improved bus services. The Government's approach to bus services has been lethargic and incompetent. No serious attempt has been made to develop them to the point to where they are seen by the public generally as a realistic, reliable or attractive alternative to the private car. There are lessons to be learned from the experience with Luas. When commuters are given the option of a transport system which they can depend on, which is fast and which ensures reliable journey times, they will make the switch. Many of the characteristics of Luas can be replicated across the GDA if a strategic approach is adopted to bus services. There is an urgent need to vastly expand bus capacity, speed up journey times and make bus travel financially attractive. Only then will significant numbers of people leave their cars at home.

The first part of this motion calls for the addition of 500 buses to the Dublin fleet. At a time of great demand for public transport, Dublin has been starved of buses. Under the current national development plan, NDP, the Government promised to provide Dublin Bus with 275 additional buses by the end of 2006. This promise was never kept and, astonishingly, at a Dáil committee last week the Minister suggested that the buses were not provided because they were not needed. How far removed are the Minister and the Minister of State, Deputy Gallagher, from reality? It is hard to believe the Minister has any understanding of his area of responsibility or has any regard for the thousands of commuters stuck in traffic on a daily basis.

Incredibly, in spite of population growth and increased numbers in employment between 2001 and late 2005, the Government refused to increase the size of the Dublin Bus fleet of 1,062. Late last year, there was a minor increase and the same occurred this year and we are told the figure will rise to 1,182 by the end of next year.

There is a vague Government promise to provide a further 100 buses from the private sector and this is supposed to be overseen by a Dublin transport authority that we have yet to see. Not only will this not meet demand, the issue is when, if ever, we will see these promised buses. The Dublin transport authority has yet to be

established, does not even have an interim chief executive officer and no Bill for its establishment has yet been published by the Minister for Transport, let alone passed by the Dáil. In addition, reform of bus licensing law which dates back to 1932 is required, although legislation is not expected to be available until the end of 2007 at the earliest.

The Government's proposals are hopelessly inadequate. In its network review of 2005, Dublin Bus set out the need for an extra 425 buses, primarily to service areas of expanding population and to increase bus frequency along quality bus corridor, QBC, routes such as Tallaght, Rathfarnham, south Clondalkin, Malahide, Blanchardstown and Lucan, all of which badly need more buses. It is inexcusable that the Government continues to deny commuters decent public transport and it is particularly frustrating for commuters to see bus lanes without buses.

The Labour Party accepts the figure of 425 extra buses that Dublin Bus proposes, but we also want to extend expressway and limited stop services from outside the M50 and from park and ride sites. We want to expand orbital and feeder services and we want more local services for centres of population, work and commerce. To do this, Dublin Bus would require 500 additional buses in its fleet.

Mr. Stagg: Hear, hear.

Ms Shortall: The second part of this motion calls for the completion of quality bus corridors. At 13 km/h, the average speed of Dublin buses is almost the slowest in Europe and, apart from Paris, no other capital city has a slower peak time bus speed. Our average speed compares to Reykjavik at 28 km/h, Helsinki at 27 km/h, London and Prague at 26 km/h, Rotterdam at 23 km/h and Venice at 22 km/h.

The Labour Party wants to put the quality back into quality bus corridors. QBCs have contributed enormously to Dublin's transport system. A 50% increase in bus passenger numbers on these routes in the past nine years shows that they are popular with commuters and they can work. However, QBCs have the potential to be much more effective in terms of shorter journey times and achieving much greater efficiency from the bus fleet. To do this, we want the following steps taken.

We want to see the existing bus corridors completed. In six of the current 13 QBCs less than half the route is actually a bus lane and, overall, only 52% of the road space on QBC routes comprises bus lane. The Howth Road, Tallaght, Rathfarnham and north Clondalkin QBCs all have bus lanes on less than 40% of their length. There are particular shortages on outbound routes with only four of the existing QBCs having

bus lanes on half or more of their routes. Overall, only 42% of outbound QBC kilometres are actually covered by bus lane.

It is this lack of bus priority that impacts drastically on bus journey times and operating costs. It makes buses an unattractive alternative for motorists because of the uncertainty relating to journey times and, in many cases, the minimal time advantage of travelling by bus. It also makes the system unmanageable for bus operators.

Bus speeds on part of the Swords QBC where bus priority is not in place can be as low as 4 km/h. Some Blanchardstown services now have journey times lasting up to a gruelling 130 minutes. A Labour Party survey in March 2006 of the Granby Row and Dorset Street junction at peak time showed that outbound buses were waiting an average of 22 minutes, and up to 31 minutes in some cases, to travel around a block, a distance of one eighth of a mile. That junction is critical and serves most buses on the north side of Dublin. More QBCs must be commissioned on the main arteries and we need to give much greater priority to buses at junctions. In addition, we need the early introduction of real-time information at bus stops. Certainty of journey time is an important factor in the minds of commuters as it allows people to plan a journey. People need to know a bus will be along in five or ten minutes time when they arrive at a bus stop rather than standing waiting for 25 to 30 minutes not knowing if a bus will ever come as is the case at present.

The third part of this Labour Party motion deals with fares. There is a need to totally revamp fare structures because, at present, fares are too high, too cumbersome and add to delays. There are strong arguments, on grounds of convenience, for a flat rate €1 fare. If one examines the current Dublin Bus fare structure, the lowest adult fare of 95 cent takes at the very least four coins, the €1.35 fare takes at least four coins, the €1.55 fare takes three coins and so on up the scale. This change relates to convenience, but the Labour Party believes there is a strong argument for a flat €1 fare to provide a financial incentive to convince commuters to switch from private to public transport. Later I will discuss how the cost of such a simplified low fare system can be recouped tenfold.

The Labour Party is calling for the introduction of a standard €1 per trip fare across the entire Dublin Bus network, similar to the London model, and on all public bus services within 25 miles of the city centre. Outside this zone, fares should be tapered according to distance, ensuring simplicity and fairness in the fare structure.

We want to place particular emphasis on child fares by providing a standard 50 cent fare and extending eligibility to all children under 18 years of age. This is critical as the school run adds considerably to morning congestion and it is important to encourage the use of public trans-

[Ms Shortall.]

port from an early age. In addition, there is no logic to the current system which dictates that 16 and 17-year-olds pay adult fares.

The Labour Party also wants to make tickets more accessible by ensuring that on-street ticket machines for buses, similar to Luas, are available to the public at key city centre bus stops, suburban stopping points and, if necessary, on buses themselves.

In addition, the Labour Party wants to extend the Dublin Bus network and the €1 fare zone to major residential areas within a radius of at least 25 miles of the city centre, including towns and villages like Ashbourne, Dunshaughlin, Clane, Kill, Naas, Prosperous, Ratoath, Sallins, and Straffan. We want to reduce fares on a scale related to distance beyond this zone, which will result in a more affordable and simplified fare structure throughout the region. While Bus Éireann may continue to operate the service, it will become the overall responsibility of Dublin Bus and the latter's fare structures will apply. This will address a serious anomaly in fare structures, whereby a commuter can pay 127% more on a one way adult fare and 58% more on the equivalent of a weekly ticket over comparable distances. It will also end the public bus rip-off of areas of south County Meath, about which I have received a number of representations.

Finally, this motion calls for the early commissioning of park and ride facilities. The logic of bus-based park and ride has been discussed for many years but no action has been taken. As a result, there is no permanent bus-based park and ride facility in the greater Dublin area. In 2004, the Department of Transport paid a paltry €800,000 to local authorities for park and ride facilities in the greater Dublin area and, in 2005, the even smaller sum of €289,000. It is not as if there has been a massive expansion of rail based park and ride. Transport 21 provides for at least six park and ride sites around the M50 in conjunction with planned rail improvements. Metro north is due to have two park and ride sites providing parking for over 2,000 cars at Lissenhall, north of Swords, and at Metro Park, north of Ballymun. In the past two weeks, a planning application was made to Fingal County Council for a separate 1,386 park and ride site beside the NCT centre to serve Dublin Airport. If there is a need to facilitate parking at the airport, the need must be all the greater to serve commuters to the city centre. The Luas extension from Sandyford to Cherrywood will have a park and ride site at Carrickmines providing 300 spaces. Why not provide those spaces now? There are also park and ride facilities planned for the junction of the N11 and the Luas extension from Cherrywood to the Bray area and the junctions of Metro West and the N2, N3 and N4. Again, why wait for a project that will take more than ten years to com-

plete? A serious need exists for park and ride facilities in order to relieve the city's chronic congestion problems and the sites have identified, so why not provide the facilities now? If these are real proposals and not just stunts, there is no excuse for not proceeding with them. Once in Government, the Labour Party will establish these park and ride sites immediately and will service them with express bus services to the city centre. We will also develop additional park and ride sites on approaches to the city as identified by the local authorities. The proposals being made by the Labour Party on bus services are achievable, cost effective, deliverable in a matter of months and represent the only viable alternative to the daily car commute endured by many thousands of people.

Of course, there are further issues to address in terms of congestion. In particular, urgent action is needed on the West Link toll bridge. Next Wednesday, the Dublin Port tunnel will open, spilling thousands of trucks on to an already congested M50. The West Link is a major congestion point on the M50 and for traffic in general in the greater Dublin area. A minimum of 2,500 additional trucks will use the West Link on a daily basis, the equivalent of 6,500 cars in terms of road space, making an already congested road impossible to travel during the day.

It is not as if this situation has arisen overnight. The Government has known for the past ten years that the port tunnel would open and that these additional trucks would spill on to the M50, yet it has done nothing to prepare for it. It could have put in place a system to allow for barrier-free tolling or, in the context of its negotiations with NTR, taken early control of the toll bridge to ensure it will be in a position to manage the chaotic situations which are likely to arise once the port tunnel opens. It could have managed the situation by lifting the toll barriers whenever congestion and tailbacks became unbearable or by varying tolls to allow for greater use of the West Link and the M50 during non-peak hours. Incentives such as free tolls could have been offered at certain times of the day. However, the Government has no scope to take such actions because the best it can offer is that something will happen in two years time. Given the record it has set in terms of missing deadlines and targets, there is no reason to hope that matters will ever improve. There is no excuse for the lack of preparation for the opening of the port tunnel. The Government has utterly failed to develop a system which would have improved conditions at the West Link. Further measures should be introduced to ensure the city's traffic moves reasonably freely, such as more policing or a year-round version of Operation Freeflow.

It is important that the costs of my party's proposals are put in their proper context. The Chamber of Commerce has estimated that con-

gestion costs the business community some €2 billion annually. Dublin Bus estimates the costs it faces in terms of congestion at €60 million annually, a figure which entirely consumes the subvention provided to the company, while Bus Éireann estimates its congestion costs at €35 million annually. Dublin, at 26%, has the lowest subvention rate for bus services out of 16 European cities. It compares terribly with, for example, Athens at 62%, Brussels at 67% and Luxembourg at 78%. The principal expenses in Labour's plan will be 500 buses at a mere €300,000 each, or €15 million on an annualised basis and €50 million to complete the quality bus corridors. The estimated loss to Dublin Bus arising from the proposed €1 incentive would be approximately €25 million. We have to bear in mind that it is estimated that the additional income from the increased numbers of passengers would be €17.5 million. Given that thousands of commuters are spending more than three hours on the road each day, it is clear that considerable social and economic savings can be made by shortening journey times. The Labour Party estimates that the number of bus passengers who travel during the morning peak period can be increased from the current 115,000 to 180,000. If these plans can save people an average of just 15 minutes on their journey times, it is possible to quantify the financial savings in terms of time saved. Over €1 million will be saved each day — €250 million will be saved per annum — if 180,000 commuters save a total of 30 minutes each every day. That estimate is based on average wage costs of a conservative €12 per hour. In addition, those who have to continue to use their cars would enjoy time savings worth an estimated €60 million per annum. It is clear that the cost benefit of the Labour Party's proposal would be quite substantial, in terms of economic, social and personal costs. The Minister of State, Deputy Gallagher, needs to show some leadership, vision and political will to solve the problem. None of those characteristics is evident from him tonight, sadly.

Ms Burton: I commend my colleague, Deputy Shortall, on proposing this motion, which outlines a most imaginative plan for tackling the short-term difficulties which are causing gridlock in Dublin.

When the Taoiseach opened the National Aquatic Centre in west Dublin a couple of years ago, he famously declared to gasps from the locals who were present in the audience that it was great that Blanchardstown was just 20 minutes away from the GPO. He can dream on. It might take one just 20 minutes to make such journey if one has a State car and a Garda driver who is legally allowed to use the bus lanes. The average bus journey time from Dublin 15 to the city centre for the ordinary commuter is 111 minutes. When the M50 clogs up, as happened

last week, it can take three hours to make an eight-mile journey. It took longer to get from Blanchardstown or Lucan to the city centre last week than it would have taken to travel by train from Dublin to Belfast. That is what we are talking about. I expect that new novels, films and other works of art or rage will start to emerge some day soon when people outline the details of their experience of commuting from places like Blanchardstown in the west of Dublin.

The Government, which has encouraged the construction of tens of thousands of homes in west Dublin and similar areas in Dublin and other cities, is indifferent to the plight of people who use public transport. A significant number of people, particularly young people, who are moving into new homes in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Waterford would love to be able to use public transport — buses or trains — but they cannot do so. Such services are either not available or, in the case of bus services in particular, are not available reliably. If extra buses were made available immediately, I do not doubt that up to 20% of car users who currently make direct journeys in and out of cities like Dublin would transfer to public transport services like buses and trains.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a European capital city that has traffic congestion that is as bad and public transport that is as poor as Dublin and other Irish cities. Deputy Shortall cited some statistics in that regard. We know how fast the economy is growing, although it seems to come as a surprise to the Government. We know where houses, factories and offices are being built. The provision of appropriate transport infrastructure at an early stage is standard government practice in the rest of Europe, but not in Ireland.

Mr. Quinn: That is right.

Ms Burton: The Government is incapable of making the right decisions about transport, or of making such decisions in a timely fashion. Traffic levels on the M50 reached that motorway's design capacity some years ago. It was obvious for the previous two or three years that it was about to happen. The decision to widen the M50 and to improve the junctions leading to it should have been taken in the late 1990s, rather than last year. We will have to endure roadworks for the next four years on an orbital city motorway that jams up every morning and afternoon because it is carrying traffic at almost twice its design capacity. The same thing can be said about the toll barriers on the West Link bridge. It famously took the Taoiseach and his Ministers three years to make a decision on the new terminal at Dublin Airport. However, the Government is able to make decisions on tax breaks for the property developers who fund Fianna Fáil in a matter of days.

[Ms Burton.]

New towns have been developing since the 1960s in the greater Dublin area, in places like Blanchardstown, Lucan, Clondalkin, Tallaght and Swords. It is pretty obvious that high capacity rapid rail and bus links to the centre of Dublin are needed in such towns, many of which have populations in excess of that of Limerick city. Good local transport links between the outlying areas and centres of such towns are also needed. No such facilities are available at present. People have to walk up to two miles to town centres, or are forced to buy two cars for each household. The level of traffic congestion in the areas I have mentioned is notorious. It takes at least an hour and a half to travel into the centre of Dublin from the outlying areas of these new towns by car or by bus in the mornings and evenings. Working in the city centre can involve a three-hour commute for people who want to see their children, particularly their young children, before they are fast asleep in bed.

The cost to business of the transport difficulties I have mentioned is substantial. The lifestyle of many young workers is being affected by these problems. People who have children are unable to spend as much quality time as they would like with their families. The Minister for Education and Science famously said last Easter that parents should spend more quality time with their children. She gave us all a lecture about the matter, as if parents were unaware of it. I hope she will have a word in the ear of the Minister of State, Deputy Gallagher. As a member of the Government, the best thing the Minister, Deputy Hanafin, could do to improve the ability of parents to spend quality time with their children would be to help to reduce the exceptional amount of time that parents have to spend commuting. The citizens of no other city in Europe have to endure such time consuming journeys for such relatively short distances. It is totally unprecedented in this country for an eight-mile journey to take three hours.

The Government needs to recognise the scale of the transport crisis throughout Dublin. Suburban towns are expanding rapidly without additional transport infrastructure being put in place. Dublin is expanding not only into counties Meath, Kildare and Wicklow, but also into counties Carlow and Kilkenny. It takes those who live in a small place like Paulstown, which is ten miles from Kilkenny city, a great deal of time to travel into that city. Commuters from west Dublin are at their wits' end because any minor crash or obstruction anywhere along the M50 is guaranteed to lead to a morning of hell for them, regardless of whether they take public transport or drive to work in their cars. Local bus services, such as the 39 route, are supposed to be served by bus lanes or quality bus corridors, just like the 46 route, which passes RTE. The bus corridor in that

part of west Dublin is a fantasy, in practice, because buses use dedicated bus lanes for just 22% of their journeys. The crisis in journey times cannot be allowed to continue.

A commuter recently sent me a letter about commuting from Clonsilla. The letter states that the train arrives seriously overcrowded with approximately three carriages — half a train. He is then faced with pushing, shoving and, on occasion, people fainting beside him. He states that he could not face this journey daily because of the claustrophobic conditions. Unfortunately, he would rather face a one hour 30 minute plus journey on the bus than travel on a train for 25 minutes. He states that in the evening he has to rely on a lift from the train station which allows him to get home at a reasonable time to ensure some kind of life. He further states that the option of affording a house on a train line is not possible due to the extortionate price of houses beside decent transport services.

Deputy Shortall listed the imaginative and simple steps the Labour Party would take. Transport is key to our competitiveness and to the quality of life of our young, well-educated people whom we hope will stay in this country. We do not want them to emigrate to London where they will be able to afford a house and get a decent commuter service that allows them have some quality of family life. Transport is essential for business.

I noted with concern the famous ambiguity of the Taoiseach this week as he hinted that the lorries may not be taken off the streets of Dublin when the port tunnel is open. The Taoiseach is famous for being like Janus — facing in every direction. Having spent all that money, if there is not a total quality bus corridor all along the north and south side of the quays, the Taoiseach, who represents the constituency that covers most of central Dublin, ought to resign before the people show him the door.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Mr. Gallagher): I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

— commends this Government’s very substantial levels of investment, both capital and current, in the expansion of the transport system in the greater Dublin area over the past ten years and the consequential significant increases in public transport and roads capacity arising therefrom;

welcomes:

- the outstanding success of the Luas which will carry over 25 million passengers in 2006;
- the doubling of DART capacity and expansion of suburban rail services;

- the significant expansion of bus services and supporting quality bus corridors and the delivery of a further batch of 100 extra buses for Dublin Bus by the end of January 2007; and
- the opening of Dublin Port tunnel next week which will enable almost two million truck trips annually to access the motorway network directly, in place of passing through the city centre streets and residential areas;

comments:

- this Government's investment of €34.6 billion in Transport 21, including the unprecedented investment under Transport 21 of almost €13 billion in public transport, which will see:
- a 60% increase in bus capacity and a doubling of the quality bus network;
- the development of metro north and metro west;
- a major expansion of suburban rail services, including the construction of the interconnector; and
- a substantial extension of the Luas network;

resulting in an integrated public transport network carrying almost double the current passenger numbers."

Tá áthas orm deis a bheith agam páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht tábhachtach seo faoi thrácht i gcathair Bhaile Átha Cliath.

I wish to share my time with Deputy O'Connor. I am disappointed but not surprised by the terms of the motion. The Labour Party seems to be of the view that proposals such as a €1 fare represent the best way forward in terms of building an integrated approach to meeting the transport needs of the greater Dublin area. The headline-catching €1 fare proposed is uncoded and it is not clear whether it would apply to some or all services in the Dublin metropolitan area. The motion is evidence, if that was needed, of the weak foundations on which the Labour Party's policy for public transport in Dublin is based.

The Government has a very proud track record of delivery. Since 2000 we have invested almost €3.5 billion in public transport, unprecedented in our history; more people are switching to public transport as we expand capacity; and major projects have been delivered, more are almost ready for delivery and more are at planning stage.

Traffic has grown nationally and in the Dublin area in line with the population and the growth in employment and the economy. The success of our economy has created new and more complex mobility and accessibility needs. This is demonstrated by comparing the total number of motor

vehicles registered in the country in 2000 to 2005, which shows an increase of 27% to some 2.1 million vehicles. Average daily traffic flows on the M50 adjacent to the N4 junction increased by over 11% between November 2003 and November 2005, while traffic on the M4 increased by almost 9% in the same period. That level of traffic growth clearly reflects population and employment growth on the back of a thriving economy.

The Government has responded to these needs and is continuing to do so. There has been major investment in transport in the greater Dublin area since 1997. I wish to take this opportunity to put some of the benefits and achievements of this investment on the record of the House.

On the bus service, the Dublin Bus fleet and its capacity have been significantly increased. In 1997, it stood at just over 900 buses. By the end of January next it will have increased to approximately 1,182, taking into account the 100 additional buses currently being purchased by Dublin Bus. Bus Éireann has also deployed additional buses in commuter services to the Dublin area.

As well as those additional buses, there has also been significant bus replacement. Over the period since 1997, and including the 100 additional buses currently being delivered, Dublin Bus will have purchased a total of 1,095 new buses of which over 280 are additional, which is in line with our NDP commitments.

In terms of capacity, both seated and standing, I understand the capacity of the Dublin Bus fleet at the end of 2005 was, at over 98,000 passenger spaces, 30% greater than in 1999 due to the purchase of additional buses and the replacement of smaller buses by double deckers.

This increase in the fleet of Dublin Bus has been reflected in the increased subvention paid to Dublin Bus. The annual subvention paid has increased from €8.8 million in 1997 to almost €70 million in 2006. Over that period almost €440 million has been paid in subvention to Dublin Bus towards the cost of loss-making services.

The increased bus fleet and bus capacity has benefited from major investment in quality bus corridors and traffic management systems. Since 2001, a total of over €130 million has been allocated to bus priority measures. As a result, the current length of quality bus corridors in the greater Dublin area comes to 139 km, of which 72.3 km comprises inbound bus lanes and 52.5 km comprises outbound lanes. There are also a further 20 km of non-QBC corridors with bus priority measures.

Eleven QBCs are now in operation in the greater Dublin area. They are south Clondalkin, Swords Road, Blanchardstown, Tallaght via Rathgar, Rathfarnham, north Clondalkin, Finglas, Stillorgan Road, which includes an exten-

[Mr. Gallagher.]

sion to Bray, Malahide Road, Lucan Road and the western orbital.

In January of this year, the Dublin Transportation Office reviewed the bus priority programme in the context of the goal set in Transport 21. As a result, extra capacity will be delivered by the end of 2007 by projects that are currently under construction. These include the Blackrock QBC, Snugborough Road, Kilmacud QBC, South Clondalkin QBC — phase 3, Pearse Street bus priority scheme — phase 2, Dunshaughlin, Bracetown, Earlsfort Terrace-St. Stephen's Green, Naas Road QBC — phases 2 and 3, and Waterloo Road bus priority scheme. In addition, the tender process is under way for schemes at Santry Avenue and Coolock Lane-Oscar Traynor Road.

As part of the overall effort to improve bus services, the Dublin Transportation Office undertakes an annual monitoring exercise of bus services. This helps to pinpoint where bus priority measures are constrained by pinch points. These are particular locations that need additional work to protect bus operations from the effects of traffic congestion. The results of this monitoring is taken into account by the DTO in the bus priority scheme programme. I understand that a significant portion of the quality bus network office's 2006 programme addresses urgent needs at such pinch points.

The rail service has also been dramatically improved since 1997. The DART fleet has been increased from 80 to 156 carriages and the DART upgrade project involving track renewal, upgrades of stations, etc, has been completed. Peak hour capacity on the DART increased from approximately 14,000 to 27,000 when refurbishment of the original fleet was completed.

The Maynooth line has been upgraded through the doubling of track between Maynooth and Clonsilla and 143 new diesel commuter railcars have been brought into service. More than 90% of the 180 commuter railcars are new or less than ten years old. Capacity increases of approximately 25% have been achieved on the Maynooth line, more than 40% on the Dundalk line and approximately 30% on the Gorey line.

The completion of the Heuston Station redevelopment project including, *inter alia*, the provision of four additional platforms and the upgrading of track and signalling has improved services. The beneficial impact of this investment is reflected in the overall passenger numbers on the DART and suburban services, which have grown from 20 million in 1997 to approximately 25 million today. In overall terms, numbers being carried on the Irish Rail suburban rail network are at an all time high.

The completion of the two Luas lines has taken public transport services to a new level. Luas has been an unprecedented success and is indicative

of what is to come in terms of the quality of public transport services to be developed under Transport 21. Luas is providing high quality, high capacity and frequent services. The existing Luas network is expected to carry in the region of 25 million passengers this year, an increase of more than 13% on last year's carryings, and the expanded Luas and metro networks provided for in Transport 21 are expected to add an additional 80 million passengers per annum when complete.

The success of the Luas has already demonstrated that light rail is an essential and popular component of the public transport infrastructure for Dublin and augurs well for the continued success of the major expansion under Transport 21. This will make an important contribution to achieving more sustainable transport solutions through reducing congestion on the road network.

The investment I have outlined in public transport is only part of the picture. Since 1997, the Government has driven the upgrade of the national roads network in the Dublin area with major upgrades completed on the M1, the N2 to Ashbourne, the N3, the N4 to Kinnegad and beyond, the N7 to Portlaoise, the N11 to Arklow and the completion, and now the upgrade of the earlier sections, of the M50. The opening in the coming days of the Dublin Port tunnel will remove thousands of trucks from the city streets and will be another milestone in the upgrading of our roads infrastructure.

All of these investments have helped tackle major traffic bottlenecks in the Dublin area and greater Dublin region and helped in coping with the vastly increased volume of traffic attributable to our economic, employment and population growth. Progress has also been made by the director of traffic for Dublin in improving traffic management and control while the growth in the number of taxis has improved that service dramatically.

Transport 21 will build on these achievements. The Transport 21 strategy for the Dublin area includes the transformation of public transport in the greater Dublin area through a major expansion in rail based public transport infrastructure, a 60% increase in bus capacity and a doubling in size of the quality bus network. Transport 21 recognises that the bus will continue to play a crucial role in Dublin's public transport system. Accordingly, it provides for major investment of more than €500 million in the bus service with a greater focus on the development of orbital, feeder and local services. In addition to funding for the 100 additional buses, my Department has also approved funding of €12 million towards the cost of replacement buses for Dublin Bus in 2007. As announced by the Minister, Deputy Cullen, in September, it is intended to secure the next tranche of additional buses for Dublin from the private sector.

Transport 21 also provides for major improvements in the suburban rail service through the Kildare line project, the opening of a new station in Docklands, the provision of rail services to Navan on a phased basis and improvements to city centre resignalling to increase the number of trains per hour through the city centre. All these improvement works are progressing well with the Docklands Station due to open in four months' time in April next and work due to get under way shortly on the Kildare project and the signalling project in 2007.

The key to unlocking the full potential of the suburban railway network in the Dublin area is the interconnector and electrification project. Irish Rail has commenced the planning of this project. With the interconnector in place, a major expansion in services will be possible. New DART services will be available on the Kildare line, to Drogheda on the northern line and to Maynooth. On completion of the Transport 21 programme, the suburban rail systems will be able to carry an extra 80 million passengers per annum.

The Railway Procurement Agency is making good progress on the roll-out of the Luas and Metro projects provided for in Transport 21. Projects for early delivery include the extension of the trams on the Luas red line, the Tallaght line, from 30 m to 40 m, which will provide an additional 40% capacity. The first 40 m trams will be delivered early in 2007 and all tram extensions will be completed in 2008. Additional trams will be purchased to increase capacity on both Luas lines. Subject to approval by my Department of the business case, an additional eight trams will be ordered early next year and will commence service early in 2009, providing an additional 15% capacity across the existing system.

Subject to an enforceable railway order, the Docklands extension to the red Tallaght Luas line should be completed in 2009. This extension will add an additional 2 million trips to the Luas network and remove over 1 million trips from the road network. Subject to the provision of a railway order, the Citywest extension to the red Tallaght Luas line should be completed in 2010. It will serve the residential and commercial centre of Citywest, including the National Digital Park. The project will also serve the communities of west Tallaght, including Fettercairn and Cheeverstown. Additional patronage is estimated at 3.5 million per annum.

The Minister, Deputy Cullen, signed the railway order for the Luas extension to Cherrywood on 14 August 2006. Additional patronage on this extension is expected to be 8 million passengers and over 5 million car trips will be removed from the roads. In early October, a third party sought leave in the High Court to challenge the grant of this order by way of judicial review. This matter is now before the courts. The completion date for

this project is now dependent on the outcome of the High Court proceedings.

Good progress is also being made on other major metro and Luas projects. The RPA has completed a comprehensive public consultation process on four potential routes for metro north and the preferred route was announced on 19 October last. Metro north will have 15 stops between St. Stephen's Green and Lissenhall. An estimated 34 million passengers a year will travel on this service, with trains every four minutes, increasing to 90 seconds as the demand builds. The journey time from the city centre to Dublin Airport will be 17 minutes and the journey to Swords from the city centre will be 26 minutes.

The RPA is on target to submit a railway order application in summer 2007. The procurement phase will start shortly with the prequalification of consortia to finance, build and maintain the metro. The Minister launched the public consultation process for metro west on 22 November last. Some 50,000 newsletters will be circulated to households and other interested parties along the proposed routes as part of this consultation. It is expected that a preferred alignment will be identified in 2007. A feasibility study on route alignments for the Lucan Luas line is ongoing and public consultation on the further extension of the Luas from Cherrywood to Bray was launched on 14 August 2006.

Under Transport 21, the quality bus network will be doubled over the ten-year period of the programme. This will result in a more consistently reliable set of services than is possible with existing congestion levels. QBCs will allow for more efficient use of buses resulting in enhanced levels of service. Priority projects being targeted by the quality bus network project for an early start and for which funding has been provided include south Clondalkin QBC — phase three; Malahide super QBC upgrade; Howth Road; Blanchardstown Road north and south; Foxrock to Dún Laoghaire, Blanchardstown super QBC; north Clondalkin; Tallaght QBC; Lucan QBC enhancements; and city centre priority measures.

Transport 21 also provides for substantial investment in park and ride facilities. As the Minister has made clear on previous occasions, we regard the provision of appropriate park and ride facilities as having an important role to play in persuading people to move from their cars to public transport. This in turn will have obvious benefits for congestion relief, for the wider economy and for the environment.

In 2005, a Dublin Transportation Office strategy for rail-based park and ride facilities was approved. This envisages facilities at 22 locations on the existing and proposed rail network within the greater Dublin area. These sites represent a combination of strategic and local sites. The DTO strategy emphasises the importance of developing

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[Mr. Gallagher.]

park and ride facilities in line with expansion of the rail network, rather than ahead of it. This is because there is no point in building park and ride facilities where the public transport network is not yet ready to absorb additional capacity. Accordingly, additional park and ride facilities are being provided as part of rail improvements, such as the Kildare route project at Hazlehead, Fonthill, Kishogue and Adamstown, as well as the metro.

Ms Shortall: Has the Minister ever heard of bus-based park and ride facilities?

Mr. Gallagher: The Labour Party is proposing in this motion that the problems of Dublin might be solved if we constructed a network of park and ride sites, fed by what it calls express buses. Perhaps the Labour Party has not had time to do much homework on this topic, but I am only too happy to help. Its members may be surprised to know that the DTO commissioned a study on bus-based park and ride facilities and their potential solution to traffic problems in Dublin, which was published in 2002 and is available on its website. This study, conducted by the British firm TAS, looked at the suitability of bus-based park and ride facilities as a solution to congestion in Dublin. The study explains the appropriate conditions in which bus-based park and ride solutions work on a large scale. These include a maximum travel distance of 5 km from the park and ride facility to the urban centre, a maximum journey time of 15-20 minutes, and notably concluded that bus-based park and ride facilities are ideally suited to urban areas with a population of less than 200,000.

This does not mean that there may not be specific bus-based park and ride projects on specific corridors which could be very successful. The study noted that a role existed for small parking facilities close to bus stops in the outer regions, where access to bus services is poor because of the low density of the population and where existing bus services have capacity to take more passengers. In this context, South Dublin County Council has indicated that it may seek funding for a pilot park and ride service and has selected two possible sites, one on the N4 and one on the N7 near the Citywest interchange. We remain open to proposals for such projects.

From the TAS study, it is clear the idea that strategic park and ride sites served by buses can be a magic bullet for the problems of congestion in Dublin is objectively not the case. Certainly, bus-based park and ride facilities can play some role in solving Dublin's problems, but not a decisive role. Iarnród Éireann has park and ride facilities at the majority of the railway stations throughout its network, ranging from small on-street facilities to large pay facilities at major

stations. All commuter parking at Iarnród Éireann stations is currently free, while Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Council operates a pay car park at Salthill. Connolly and Heuston Stations both have dedicated pay car parks for intercity users. Iarnród Éireann plans to expand a number of these park and ride facilities next year. There are currently four park and ride sites along the existing Luas network at Red Cow, Sandyford, Stillorgan and Balally. The RPA proposes to open a new park and ride facility adjacent to the Tallaght Luas stop within the next two years, with an anticipated capacity of 450 spaces.

It is clear that we have made substantial progress in addressing the weaknesses in our transport infrastructure. It is also clear that the fast pace of growth we have experienced is straining our infrastructure at peak times, and that this can be exacerbated to intolerable levels when accidents or incidents combine with poor weather to cause major delays and tailbacks. The challenges we face are to manage our transport system better and to take measures in the short term to improve the system, while ensuring that the major projects necessary for a well functioning transport system in the medium and longer term are rapidly advanced. The Government is dealing with these challenges. It has committed the funding and it is taking action now, while at the same time keeping a clear focus on the integrated transport system necessary to underpin Ireland's competitiveness and growth. The amendment to the motion sets out our commitment to providing Dublin with the transport system appropriate to its status as a thriving capital city and states our record of significant progress in pursuing this objective. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. O'Connor: I thank the Minister of State for allowing me to share his time. I was going to make a national speech, but as the Minister of State has mentioned Tallaght several times, I should be allowed to mention Tallaght a few times. Before Deputy Shortall heckles me, I compliment her on her initiative in this area. It is good that she has given us an opportunity to air our different views. I am sure different political points will be made and that is fair enough. I have often praised Deputy Mitchell, but it suits Deputy McEntee to sit in the Ceann Comhairle's seat.

This is an important debate and we all know the challenges for public transport. I drive into work some days and I use the Luas other days. There are difficulties and challenges involved. Tallaght is the third largest population centre in the country and the Luas has been a great success. However, there are still public transport problems in the area. The people of Tallaght are being let down by Dublin Bus. New estates and communities have been established in Tallaght in the last few years, with many people coming from different parts of the city and elsewhere. Many of

the estates in Ballycullen, Firhouse, Westbrook and so on have huge populations, yet Dublin Bus has decided not to cater for them.

Ms Shortall: Then why not support the motion?

Mr. O'Connor: The buses are there, but there are other issues.

Acting Chairman (Mr. O'Shea): I ask the Deputies to address their remarks through the Chair.

Mr. O'Connor: Thank you, Chairman. I hope you will protect me.

Acting Chairman: I will protect the Deputy if he does not encourage interruptions.

Mr. O'Connor: I will look at you in order not to attract any attention. Dublin Bus should not be putting the blame on Luas. Dublin Bus management has never stated that the company has not enough buses, but it is using the success of Luas as an excuse for not developing services in parts of my constituency. As someone who does not have a marketing degree, I say that it does not take quantum physics to figure that out. There are many opportunities for the development of public transport in the Tallaght region. I will continue to make the point about my town and its surrounding communities. Every day people from urban and even rural parts of my constituency raise public transport issues with me.

In his fine address, the Minister of State outlined the Government's actions on public transport in the greater Dublin area. Other colleagues are entitled to hold different views, but it is a fact that the Government has invested in public transport improvements since 2000. The DART fleet has practically been doubled. New eight-car peak services have been introduced, providing for 30% more passengers. For the outer suburban lines, passenger-carrying capacity was increased on the northern line to Drogheda by 50%, on the south-east line to Arklow and Gorey by 30%, on the western line to Maynooth by 66%, and on the south-western line to Kildare by 130%. Some 117 km of quality bus networks are in place in the greater Dublin area, including my own constituency. Peak capacity has been increased on all main routes into Dublin, as the Minister of State said. I recall various adverse comments made in this House and indeed, the media, about the Luas. The Luas is a tremendous success on both lines. It is used by many people coming and going to Tallaght. Now that we know that the extension to Citywest is to take place, it is kind of the Minister of State to mention the various estates and it is good to open them up. I have been pointing out to the RPA that stops must be included at Fettercairn, Brookfield and out towards the west.

It is important to take every opportunity to make that point.

Transport 21 will entail enormous investment over the next ten years. It will include in excess of €13 billion being spent on transport, here in the greater Dublin area, and also in our major cities and on bus fleets countrywide. We have all been pleased to see progress over the last 12 months, with the railway order for Cherrywood Luas being signed in August. Public consultation of the extension of the Luas from Cherrywood to Bray also began in August. The Minister for Transport will shortly decide on the railway order for the Docklands Luas.

This is a very important debate. We are all entitled to our political views and perspectives. It is good, too, that we are able to share information and fight for our constituencies. I hope the Minister of State will let the Minister for Transport, Deputy Cullen, know we are doing that.

Ms O. Mitchell: I wish to share my time with Deputy McEntee, with the agreement of the House.

I am very happy to support this motion. In fact, it deals with issues about which I have been appealing, virtually like a broken record, since the early 1990s.

When I spoke in the House nearly ten years ago of impending gridlock, I was laughed at, dismissed and considered guilty of hysterical exaggeration. However, no one is laughing now or accusing me of exaggeration. It is almost impossible to find words to describe just how difficult traffic conditions have become for people who live in and try to do business in Dublin. Already, in the last two weeks we have seen two examples of genuine gridlock. In both cases manageable incidents resulted, very quickly, in unmanageable chaos because of the sheer volume of traffic and the absence of public transport. I warn now, with no fear of being proved wrong, that if we think congestion is bad but will not get worse, we are very wrong.

It is inevitable that matters will worsen. Economic growth will be followed by population growth and the simple passage of time will mean more traffic. When those traffic volumes are superimposed on existing congestion, gridlock incidents such as those we have witnessed, will become commonplace. The tortuously slow travel times will become the norm. Only five or six years ago, travel times of half the current levels were thought to be outrageous. It shows what we are putting up with, as each year the congestion gets worse.

It will not stop there, however. Into this chaos must come the diggers, the JCBs, the tunnelling machines, the trucks and the machinery that will provide the metro, the extended Luas and the upgrade on the M50. These are the ingredients that will give zest to the cocktail of traffic conges-

[Ms O. Mitchell.]

tion that already exists. No matter what we do now, or what ameliorative measures are taken, these works, albeit absolutely necessary, will bring street conditions from hell to Dublin. It is pointless for the Minister of State to talk about developments that will come about in five years time. That has nothing to do with what people will face next Monday and the week after.

All we can hope and plan for now is some way to manage the hell that faces us. It does not seem to be an overambitious target for a Government with endless resources just to try to keep the mayhem at bay. Yet, the Minister of State does not seem to have any conception of the depth, severity or urgency of what is facing us.

The Minister, the Minister of State and indeed the Taoiseach seem to think that simply announcing big capital projects is the end of the story; that somehow we can all put the need to move around on hold for the next five or ten years. It is not until then that we will see the benefits from the investment in public transport. Meanwhile, the construction of the proposed projects superimposed on congested conditions, will simply make matters worse. Promises for the future, welcome as they are, must be accompanied by short-term actions to manage the mayhem. That is all we can hope for.

On behalf of Fine Gael, I have consistently and persistently called for more buses. Lowly, uncool and hard to hype buses they may be, but despite their poor and sometimes unloved image, they are the only form of transport that can be provided quickly and the sole option for taking a proportion of cars off the road. We know that buses are not the whole solution but that does not mean we should just sit on our hands and do nothing. Doing nothing is not an option any more. Instead of growing the bus fleet and consequently the bus market, and responding to the calls of despairing populations going into these new isolated estates all around the M50 and further out, the Government has instead operated an entirely perverse policy of a zero increase in the fleet. At the very time when they are most needed, suddenly the coffers were dry and no buses were available. The result of this is that a static bus fleet is being spread over an increasing population and the ever growing geographic area Dublin Bus is serving. In turn, this has resulted in a poorer service for people who are forced to take buses and an actual drop in the numbers travelling at peak times into the city centre.

Simultaneously, more than €117 million has been spent on bus lanes, which have removed valuable road space from car drivers who have no alternative means of transport. Where buses were made available, they were taken from other areas so that people who had services found themselves deprived of them. Commuters fume at the sight of underutilised bus lanes — and in some cases

bus lanes that have no buses at all, despite the money that was made available to build them. Buses are not the whole solution, but they can in sufficient numbers make a genuine and quantifiable contribution by removing at least some cars from the road. There is enormous unmet demand from commuters who have no hang-ups about using public transport. If it is available and reasonably frequent and reliable, people will use it; indeed they are clamouring for it.

Bus services must reflect the new polycentric city, not the limited single destination city of 20 years ago. It must serve where people live, where they work and where they recreate. The latter is becoming increasingly important. Around Dublin and throughout the country people need to socialise and the new drink driving ban demands a safe public transport response. Opening up the bus market could provide that response and at least partially serve the needs of those who have no scheduled bus services.

The figures released today about the transport contribution to carbon emissions are enough to generate a crisis response in terms of buses instead of private cars. Fine Gael has called for a liberalisation of the bus market in Dublin so that the private sector can, in conjunction with Dublin Bus, begin to respond to unmet demand. We have called for a regulator to manage the network and ensure standards, but primarily we need the extra capacity, consumer orientation and the additional efficiencies competition can bring to this crucial problem in Dublin.

There is no co-ordination or sense of urgency from Government. Unless there is a press conference in prospect, the Minister is not involved. The proactive finding and implementing of solutions, as well as responding to emerging issues is of no interest to the Minister. He had the nerve to tell Members he was dismayed there had been no response to the money he had made available for park and ride facilities. There has been no response for several years and the Minister did not feel any obligation to be in any way proactive or to wonder why people did not provide such facilities. While the local authorities have expressed an interest in providing parking facilities, there is not much point unless people have something on which to ride when they park. The Minister simply sits on his hands as though it had nothing to do with him.

At present, the management of the road network is permanently on the brink of collapse and attention to immediate measures is vital. Buses are one solution while traffic management is another. This area has been completely neglected and it is beginning to show. The traffic corps is overwhelmed by the demands made on it and even with Operation Freeflow, it is unable to cope. The critical junctions and heavily trafficked areas are still unmanned. The traffic corps must be supplemented with mobile, specially trained

and patrolling civilian traffic managers or with similar teams drawn from the Garda Reserve. As traffic congestion becomes more acute, traffic management becomes all the more vital.

As for communications, more traffic lights should be attached to the SCATS system in the city centre. Of course, there is no point in so doing if no one is looking at them or if no one communicates to those on the ground who could do something about problems. Far more attention and focus on traffic management is required. More buses, more focused bus services and a liberalisation of the bus market in order that there can be a response to local demand is also needed.

The city is now so close to chaos that we must assiduously manage our road network or face recurring gridlock incidents, such as those which have been experienced recently, as well as ever higher levels of stress among the hapless commuters of Dublin. Ultimately, the economy will collapse as it becomes ever more difficult to conduct business in the capital city.

Mr. McEntee: I thank my colleague, Deputy Olivia Mitchell, for sharing her time and I support this motion. No one wishes to be negative regarding the country's growth and everyone is proud of the new roads and dual carriageways that have been opened. I was on such a road in County Westmeath last week and it was great to see it.

Given the introduction of Operation Freeflow for the Christmas period, I did not anticipate the number of telephone calls I have received from my constituents. This was also the case for Government Members as everyone received calls regarding commuters who were caught in traffic for three or four hours for the past two weeks, when the problems were meant to have eased.

Members recently had a debate with the Minister of State, Deputy Gallagher, on road safety. I recall making the point that there is no co-operation whatsoever between the different bodies in Dublin or in the country. I visited the Minister of State's native County Donegal two weeks ago with Senator McHugh and the position there does not differ from that in County Meath or in Dublin. While the problem may be on a smaller scale, there are times of the day when one experiences massive chaos outside schools or whatever. In counties Donegal and Meath, as well as in Dublin, one experiences chaos outside schools and when entering or leaving towns.

Someone must take the bull by the horns and admit that while Ireland is a great country and while roads are being built, it is not working. Until a collective decision is taken by all the bodies involved in transport, there is no point in blaming the present Government and then facing the same issues when Fine Gael is in Government.

Last week, I met hauliers' representatives who informed me they are about to go out of business because of the gridlock in Ireland, as well as the foreign hauliers who come and put them out of business. This will be the case until Dublin becomes a city like others, in which one begins to create jobs outside the major urban centres. Not everyone should be obliged to go through the same gap every day like sheep. This point annoys me when travelling to the Dáil on a daily basis. In the morning, two free traffic lanes come out of the city without anyone on them. Moreover, everyone sits in one lane, while an empty traffic lane lies to one's left. It would be a simple matter to notify commuters better that one can travel on some bus lanes at certain times; they should be opened to traffic more frequently.

As for the M50 and tolls, the day has come when the barriers must be lifted. If the authorities wish to continue collecting their money, people who do not throw in their toll money can be fined. However, the barriers should be lifted and this has proved possible in other countries. The registration numbers of those who try to break the barrier can be picked up, they can be fined and traffic can flow freely.

My colleague's comments that jobs are suffering were true and thousands of hours are lost due to traffic chaos. This happens not only in Dublin, but in every town in Ireland. For example, the town of Navan is a nightmare. Those in business suffer as people refuse to enter such towns because they are unable to leave them. With regard to co-operation between the different bodies, I believe the Minister of State commented that people find it hard to agree. Someone strong must make the decision as to what must be done in respect of transport. Everyone must pull their weight and individuals must consider what is best for the people, rather than for their particular organisation because people are at breaking point.

Members of all parties will agree that the telephone calls last week were raw and abusive, and rightly so. People were stuck in traffic for three and a half hours on the M50. They could not get off the motorway and were unable to get to work, simply due to an incident involving a single car. Having met representatives of the National Roads Authority, NRA, I am confident we have the money and people to increase the number of possible projects. The NRA has stated it has the capacity to carry out more projects if it received funding. Members must anticipate the position in 2020 and must accept there will be an additional 1.5 million people. As Irish people love to have their own cars and do not wish to be confined to buses, there will be an additional 600,000 or 700,000 cars.

We must have the will and foresight to spend the money and broaden our infrastructure as otherwise this issue will destroy the country. I

[Mr. McEntee.]

recognise the top-class work that has been done. As I noted last week, the Tyrrellspass project was one year ahead of schedule and everyone there, regardless of their party affiliations, was proud of it. Hopefully, Fine Gael will be in power next year as someone must state that while the money spent heretofore has been spent well, the manner in which we conduct our business is not good enough.

Every bus lane must be full in the morning. People have asked me why there are not three inbound lanes and one outbound in the morning. This could be changed in the evening to have three outbound lanes and one inbound lane. At present, commuters are like sheep who all go through the same gap in the morning and evening. It can take two and half to three hours to return home in the evening. I live 40 miles away and can leave my house at 7.45 a.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings. It then takes until 10.30 a.m. to get to Leinster House. However, I could leave my house one hour later and would still arrive by 10.30 a.m. Something is wrong in this regard.

I wish to raise an issue pertaining to transport safety that concerns Leinster House and someone should pick up on it. Leaving Leinster House from the back gate to try to get out on to the road is a serious problem. One has no vision, cyclists pass by and there will be an accident. While I do not know who will pick up this issue, it is serious. Perhaps the Minister of State will ask someone to examine this matter, which has been raised by many people.

Ms Shortall: The front gate is as bad.

Mr. McEntee: I only drive in the back entrance.

Ms O. Mitchell: There is no visibility on to the road at the back entrance.

Mr. McEntee: I hope the interchange between the M50 and the port tunnel will work from the road hauliers' perspective. We will find out in a few weeks time. Fine Gael Members do not want to complain it is not working. All Members hope it will work because the number of lorries travelling through the city is too high and until they are removed from the city, matters will not improve.

I return to the business of jobs. Jobs are being lost because of the failure to be able to move freely, be it in Dublin, Kerry, Donegal or Galway. Representatives of Bus Éireann, Dublin Bus, the metro and the various rail organisations must sit down together, but we must have a Minister who is prepared to bang heads together to ensure that our transport system is one of which everybody is proud. If they can successful systems in other

European countries, I do not see why we cannot have them here.

Debate adjourned.

Social Welfare Bill 2006: Order for Second Stage.

Bill entitled an Act to amend and extend the Social Welfare Acts and to amend the Health Contributions Act 1979.

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): I move: "That Second Stage be taken now."

Question put and agreed to.

Social Welfare Bill 2006: Second Stage.

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I am pleased to introduce this Bill, the first of two intended to implement the largest social welfare package in the history of the State of €1.41 billion announced last week in the budget. This substantial investment brings total expenditure on social welfare in 2007 to €15.3 billion. In simple terms that means that €1 for every €3 of Government day-to-day spending goes directly into welfare entitlements and supports. In total, week in, week out, some 1.5 million people will benefit from the significant increases and improvements in the budget that will protect and improve the living standards of social welfare recipients.

This budget is about delivering on this Government's commitments in the programme for Government by bringing the State non-contributory pension to €200 a week and realising the 2007 target for the lowest social welfare rates. With increases in the qualified adult allowances, a pensioner on a State contributory pension will be better off by almost €40 per week. In addition, the lowest rate of social welfare payments have increased by 12.1%, far in excess of the expected increase of 4.5% in private sector earnings and almost three times the forecast rate of inflation for 2007.

As well as massive income support improvements of over €970 million, another €430 million — nearly one third of the total package — is being directed to support a range of significant reform measures, including confronting and tackling remaining child poverty, increasing income supports for all pensioners, recognising and supporting carers and those with disabilities, and increasing the status and incomes of women. These are major structural reforms which, when taken with a number of other reforms and changes being implemented or progressed, particularly in the areas of lone parents and pensions,

will contribute greatly to the overall policy reform agenda that I have been pursuing for the past two years. These reforms on child poverty, carer's support, women's incomes and pensions are about more than just increasing incomes. They are important and necessary structural reforms that create change, open up fresh opportunities and deliver enlightened social policy.

On many occasions I have described child poverty as totally unacceptable in the prosperous and progressive Ireland of the 21st century. Childhood deprivation can leave lasting marks on children by impeding their development and curbing their life chances. It is not just the child who suffers — society also loses, for children are its wealth and its future.

Since my first days in this portfolio I have been determined to make the changes and reforms that will make a lasting impact on child poverty. It is a complex area that overall requires an integrated, joined-up Government response such as that envisaged in *Towards 2016*, which lays out an ambitious programme of priority actions for the next ten years. In the meantime, I am determined that further progress must be made in tackling remaining child poverty. That is why at the core of this welfare budget is the commitment to an even stronger and more focused campaign. We have already travelled some distance towards eliminating hardship and deprivation. In recent years we have lifted more than 250,000 people, including 100,000 children, out of poverty, but there is still a distance to travel and now it behoves us all to redouble our efforts and complete the task.

I have long held the view that implementing a second tier of payment for children in low income and welfare families is the most effective method of confronting and significantly reducing remaining child poverty. While child benefit remains the main overall support for families with children, I now intend introducing in this Bill a new single high rate qualified child allowance, formerly known as child dependant allowance, targeted at families on welfare where children are most at risk of poverty. This involves combining the current three qualified child allowance rates into a single rate of €22 per week, which will now apply to all social welfare schemes and will be paid for over 340,000 children of welfare families. For those on the current lower rates of €16.80 and €19.30 per child per week, this represents a substantial improvement, particularly when taken with child benefit and other increases.

Child dependant allowances have remained unchanged since 1994 because they were viewed as a disincentive in moving people from welfare to work but, as we all know, the Ireland of 1994 is not the Ireland of 2006. The labour market has changed dramatically. The introduction of the national minimum wage, the national employment action plan and the re-focussing of the

family income supplement scheme, to name but a few initiatives over the past decade or more, have all served to further reduce the impact of the loss of qualified child allowance in the decision to take up full-time employment. This message has been further reinforced by the Combat Poverty Agency and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and many other welfare groups, who strongly supported increasing the qualified child allowance. I view this improved and targeted allowance as representing a substantial move in the direction of a second-tier payment and that is why in this budget I have deliberately taken the decision to focus increased child supports in this area.

The budget included a number of other targeted measures to address the position of children in low income households. The back to school clothing and footwear allowance provides vital additional income support for poorer families at a particularly difficult and stressful time of the year. That is why I am increasing the allowance by €60 for children aged two to 11, and by €95 for children aged 12 to 22, bringing the rates of payment to €180 and €285, respectively, an increase of 50%. Over just two budgets this allowance has nearly doubled in value.

Another important weapon in tackling remaining child poverty is the family income supplement, FIS, which provides cash support for low earning employees with families, while at the same time maintaining incentives to enter or remain in employment. I was particularly encouraged by the impact of this year's FIS improvements, and also the response to the awareness campaign undertaken by my Department which has resulted in an increase of over 20% — to 21,400 families — in those receiving FIS. As all the evidence is that poverty is more likely to be concentrated in larger families, last year's budget re-focused the FIS weekly earnings thresholds in favour of such families and I have followed this approach again this year in this legislation. Consequently, average payments per child will increase to nearly €50. It is also anticipated that the changes in the thresholds will entitle approximately 5,600 additional families to the payment.

Everyone is entitled to a basic standard of living. All are entitled to a decent pension and security and dignity in their later years. I have repeatedly stated my conviction that this generation will be judged on how it uses the fruits of the economic miracle of recent years to help those most vulnerable in society. We have a responsibility to assist those who for reasons of age, health or other circumstances need the financial lifeline that is welfare support to help them through bad times and to offer hope and encouragement towards better times.

This Government has committed itself to delivering a number of specific and ambitious improvements in social welfare rates by 2007. At the core of this commitment was the pledge to

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bring the basic State pension to €200 per week. I am pleased that we are able to deliver on this promise by increasing the State non-contributory pension by €18 a week to €200 with effect from next January, and the State contributory pension to over €209 per week.

The needs of older people have been, and will remain, a priority for this Government. That has been repeatedly demonstrated by the numerous initiatives which have been taken over the past ten years or so in the areas of pensions, supports for carers and household benefits such as free electricity, gas and telephones. For instance, since 1996, and including increases granted in the current year, pensions have increased by almost 119%, or approximately 57% in real terms — faster than both price and wages growth over the period.

All the more recent indicators, including the latest EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions for 2005, show the progress which is being made in significantly improving the well-being of older people. The EU survey found that consistent poverty rates for older people were very low at 3.7%, and that was before the many benefits flowing from budget 2006, and the many and significant increases and improvements announced in last week's budget for 2007, are taken into account.

In budget 2006, for the first time in many years, I increased the basic income disregard for the purposes of the means test for the State non-contributory pension to €20 per week. At the same time, I introduced incentives for pensioners on means-tested payments who may wish to continue in employment by providing for allowed earnings of €100 per week. I am happy to be able to build on these improvements by increasing the basic means disregard to €30 per week, and at the same time building on the employment incentives provided this year by increasing the allowed earnings to €200 per week. These measures will benefit approximately 26,000 pensioners who are currently in receipt of a reduced rate of pension. They will, of course, also benefit from the general €18 per week increase in the personal rate of payment and, where relevant, the €11.90 increases in the qualified adult rate. In other words, many non-contributory pensioner couples will gain by over €46 per week from these combined measures, with effect from next January.

We all share a wish that older people have security and comfort in their later years. Meeting household heating costs, particularly through the winter months, can be a cause of concern and anxiety for older people. Increases in energy and fuel prices only add to these anxieties. That is why we have taken action to protect older people from the impact of price increases. Last year, I increased the fuel allowance by €5 a week to €14 and this year I am increasing it by a further €4

to €18 a week. Therefore, the level of the fuel allowance, which is paid to 274,000 recipients, will have doubled in the past two years.

This is not the only measure being taken to address fuel poverty and to alleviate the worries of elderly people. As the Taoiseach announced in September, from next January the number of free units of electricity and gas paid under the household benefits scheme will increase significantly by 600 units a year to 2,400 units at a cost of €50 million.

A number of other improvements have been made over the past few years to the household benefits package for older people. In this budget I am introducing a number of further enhancements which, for example, take account of changing trends in society and the impact of technology. From next April, it will be possible for pensioners and others who qualify to have the free telephone allowance paid in respect of either mobile phones or fixed land-lines. This will allow older people to have more flexibility and mobiles can also be reassuring from a security point of view. More than 320,000 people will benefit from the telephone allowance this year.

I am also extending the automatic entitlement to a free travel companion pass to pensioners aged under 75 who are medically unfit to travel unaccompanied. Early 2007 will see the introduction of all-Ireland free travel which will deliver all-island free travel for all pensioners, North and South.

The Government is concerned about retirement income now and in the future. We all know the demographic pressures our pensions system will face in the future. While we are facing a pensions problem, unlike many other countries with less favourable demographics, we are not yet facing a crisis. It is critically important that we use the time we have available to find the pensions solutions for tomorrow. Everyone is entitled to adequate income, dignity and security in their older years. I am determined that we will work towards delivering adequate retirement income to all our citizens which does not place an unsustainable burden on future taxpayers.

Pensions are now high up on the national agenda. The past two years have seen considerable movement and a completely new focus. The two reports published by the Pensions Board over the past year — the national pensions review and savings for retirement — require serious debate and analysis. I was pleased to see pensions at the centre of the social partnership negotiations for Towards 2016. The agreement features a number of commitments in this area, including the publication of a Green Paper on pensions outlining the major policy choices and challenges which I intend to publish by the end of March 2007. After a consultation process, the Government will develop a framework for comprehensively

addressing the pensions agenda over the long term.

Carers make a valued and valuable contribution to society by devoting their time and energy to improving the quality of life of others. I am determined that their dedication and sacrifice will be recognised and acknowledged through increased benefits and improved support measures. Since 1997, the Government has been committed to supporting care in the community to the maximum possible extent. Over that period, weekly payment rates to carers have been greatly increased, qualifying conditions for carer's allowance have been significantly eased, coverage of the scheme has been extended and new schemes — such as the respite care grant and carer's benefit — have been introduced and extended. As a result of these improvements, almost 28,500 carers are in receipt of either carer's allowance or carer's benefit.

Our commitment to carers has been further reinforced in the partnership agreement Towards 2016. We are committed to the development and publication of a national carer's strategy next year which will focus on supporting informal and family carers in the community.

I am pleased to announce further reforms, increases and improvements to the income supports available to carers which builds on the significant progress of recent years. As I have said on many occasions, the primary objective of the social welfare system is to provide income support and the rules generally specify that only one weekly welfare payment can be paid to an individual. Until now, the rule has been that those qualifying for two social welfare payments always receive the higher payment to which they are entitled. I am aware that this has been a cause of particular concern to people in receipt of one social welfare payment when they become carers. Indeed, the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs, chaired by Deputy Penrose, made specific recommendations in this regard which I have taken into account.

Accordingly, I am introducing fundamental structural reforms in this area. In future, people in receipt of certain social welfare payments who are also providing full-time care and attention to a person will be able to retain the main welfare payment and also receive another payment, equivalent of up to half-rate carer's allowance. The reform of the system and the abolition of the old rule that one cannot get two welfare payments means that for the first time people who are caring can have some real recognition of their caring duties. Introducing the new dual payment system means we will be starting to recognise the carer's allowance less as a welfare income payment and more as a direct support for caring duties and responsibilities. I consider this reform to be an important step forward and I am deter-

mined to press ahead with other needed reforms and improvements in the caring area.

It is estimated some 14,000 people are currently in receipt of a carer's allowance who would also have an entitlement to another welfare payment, while a further 4,000 carers are also in receipt of other welfare payments. This means that some 18,000 carers should qualify for a half-rate carer's allowance of up to €109 per week. The precise details of this arrangement are currently being examined by my Department and will be set out in the next social welfare Bill.

The budget delivered an investment of more than €107 million in a comprehensive carers package. This included an annual respite care grant increase of €300 to €1,500 which will benefit almost 40,000 carers; increases of €18 and €20 in the rate of carer's allowance and carer's benefit which will directly benefit 28,500 carers; the means test for carer's allowance was eased with income disregard increased by €30 to €320 per week for a single person and by €60 to €640 for a couple, meaning that a couple with two children can earn up to €36,240 and still receive the maximum rate of carer's allowance as well as the free travel and household benefits. The easing of the means test will allow an additional 1,200 carers to qualify for payment and 2,500 existing carers to receive increases in weekly payments. The earning threshold for carer's benefit increased by €30 to €320 per week. Grants of €500,000 were made available for carers' organisations.

These improvements, together with the improvements in home care and related services announced by the Minister for Health and Children, represent a further advancement of our vision of a co-ordinated approach to services and supports for carers in the community.

I am pleased that with this Bill I will be achieving one of the principal commitments in my Department's disability sectoral plan. As a result of their residency, people in residential care prior to August 1999, or those who entered residential care after that date without an entitlement to disability allowance, are disqualified from receipt of the allowance. This was partially addressed in budget 2005 when I introduced a new disability allowance personal expenses rate, currently payable at €35 per week to 2,700 people in residential care. This payment replaced, at a standardised and higher rate, the so-called pocket money spending allowances which had previously been paid to some of these residents.

I am particularly pleased to now provide for the eligibility in their own right to disability allowance to all persons resident in institutions, subject only to the same conditions as apply to others. This will ensure that all persons with disability in residential care have an entitlement to an income maintenance payment and are treated in the same way as other social welfare recipients.

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In further advances in the area of disability, the Citizens Information Bill 2006, which is currently being debated by this House, lays the statutory foundation for the provision of a personal advocacy service to people with disabilities. I am providing for a further €1.9 million to Comhairle, soon to be renamed the Citizens Information Board, to continue the development of this and related services next year.

In delivering on the commitment to greater gender equality in the welfare system and in making the welfare code fairer to women, the Bill includes important reforms that will lead to more enlightened social policies in the pensions area. Increasing the rate of qualified adult allowance for the spouses and partners of contributory pensioners by €23.70 per week will directly benefit 35,500 couples. It will bring the rate of qualified adult allowance payments for those aged 66 and over to 86.5% of the target rate contained in the Government commitment of bringing the rate up to the rate of the non-contributory State pension. There is now a €60 million commitment to reaching that target in the next three years.

In the next social welfare Bill, to be presented to the House in February, I intend to provide for the qualified adult's entitlement to the qualified adult allowance for the duration of the entitlement of a State pensioner. As most qualified adults are women, this decision will be of particular benefit to them as it will, in most cases, transform the payment into what is in effect a woman's pension in her own right as distinct from being a dependant allowance. I also intend to provide for this payment to be made directly to the qualified adult. It will remain open to any qualified adult to continue to have his or her portion of the pension paid jointly with that of the State pensioner if that is what they wish.

I am also proposing to significantly reform the manner in which spouses and partners are assessed as qualified adults across a range of social assistance schemes and, in particular, the treatment of part-time and low-paid work done by qualified adults. The proposed reform involves assessing both members of a couple in a similar manner, with common disregards and assessments applying to both. I will also remove the poverty traps that are present in the current method of assessment. For example, at certain income levels if a woman increases her income from part-time employment to over €100 per week, her spouse or partner can lose €1.20 from his jobseeker's allowance for every €1 she earns in excess of the disregard. Clearly this situation has no place in a modern system of employment supports.

Under the reforms proposed, increases in labour market participation will instead be rewarded and this will facilitate women in moving beyond the occupational cul-de-sac of indefinite

part-time employment with earnings kept below €100 per week. Both partners will now be able to claim jobseeker's allowance in their own right. This will also facilitate women in particular to access the range of employment supports and training opportunities that go with receipt of jobseeker's allowance. I am confident that these proposals will significantly reduce the complexity in the present system, while recognising and rewarding increased labour market participation by all, particularly by women.

This Bill also introduces two beneficial measures which will assist widows and widowers at a particularly difficult time in their lives, namely, in the immediate aftermath of the death of their spouse. Financial worries add to the stresses experienced at such times. Not only do widows and widowers have to cover the cost of a funeral but often they also have to cope with the sudden loss of an income. The six weeks after death payment paid to the survivors of social welfare recipients are intended to ease this financial strain. In addition, my Department makes once-off payments to assist with immediate costs. To help ease the financial strains at this sensitive time, the widowed parent grant is being increased by €1,300 to €4,000 while the bereavement grant will be increased by €215 to €850.

I will now outline the main provisions of the Bill. Sections 2 and 3, together with Schedules 1 and 2, provide for an increase of €16 for contributory State pensioners, widow's and widower's contributory pensioners, those in receipt of deserted wife's benefit aged 66 and over and people on State pension transition and invalidity pensions aged 65 and over. An increase of €18 per week is provided for those in receipt of non-contributory State pension and carer's allowance. Recipients of invalidity and widow's and widower's non-contributory pensions, as well as those in receipt of deserted wife's benefit and carer's benefit, will receive an increase of €20 per week. Payments such as jobseeker's benefit and allowance, illness benefit, one-parent family payment, disability allowance, supplementary welfare allowance, carer's allowance, farm assist and guardian's payment are all increased by €20 per week.

These increases will bring the elderly pension rates to €209.30 and €200, with carer's allowance recipients aged over 66 receiving €218 per week. The lowest payments, such as illness benefit, jobseeker's allowance and supplementary welfare allowance will reach €185.80 per week, with those on carer's allowance aged under 66 receiving €200 per week.

Weekly increases in respect of qualified adults, ranging from €23.70 in the case of contributory and transition State pensions where the qualified adult is over 66 years of age to €10.70 if under 66, will ensure that the existing proportional relationship between all personal rates of payment and

that of their associated qualified adult allowances, is either significantly increased to almost 83% in the case of the former or maintained at over 66% in the case of the latter.

These sections of the Bill also provide for increases in the qualified child allowance rates to bring the existing three rates up to a single standard rate of €22 per week. Where reduced rates of payment apply, proportionate increases apply. All personal, qualified adult and qualified child increases take effect from the first week in January 2007.

Increases for recipients of jobseeker's benefit and allowance, illness and maternity benefit, one-parent family payment, family income supplement, farm assist and supplementary welfare payments will be paid from the first payday in January 2007. Due to the lead-in times involved in the production of personal payable orders for certain long-term payments such as pensions, it will not be possible for budgetary increases to be paid immediately, in such cases, from January next. Some 142,000 recipients of, for example, widow's and widower's, carer's and invalidity payments, will receive their new order books in mid-February. This group will receive six weeks' arrears of its budget increase, which will be included in the first order of the new book, and the weekly increase will be incorporated in their normal weekly payment thereafter.

Certain other long-term recipients, such as State pensioners and those in receipt of disability allowance — some 276,000 customers — will receive new pension order books at the end of March. This group will receive a special once-off payment in mid-February representing 12 weeks of their budgetary increase. This will cover retro-specification of the increase to January plus an advance payment of the increase to the end of March. From the book renewal date at end of March, the increase will be incorporated in the normal weekly payment.

As already mentioned, section 4 provides for increases in the weekly income thresholds applied in determining entitlement to family income supplement. The new thresholds will range from €480 for a family with one child to €1,090 for a family of eight or more children. For example, a family with three children on €500, or about two thirds of gross average industrial weekly earnings, will receive €75 in 2007 compared with €39 currently — an increase of €36 per week.

Sections 5 and 6 of the Bill provide for changes in PRSI. In budget 2006 the threshold for liability to the employee element of PRSI was set at €300 per week. This was equivalent to the entry point to taxation. The measure ensured that an employee earning up to this threshold amount, which was slightly higher than the annualised equivalent of the minimum wage rate for 2006, would not be subject to tax or PRSI. With a view to maintaining this position in 2007, the weekly

threshold is set, in section 5 of this Bill, at €339, which is, at €17,628 per annum, slightly above the threshold of €17,600 for payment of income tax for employees under 65.

Sections 5 and 6 provide that the earnings ceiling for employee's social insurance contributions and the income ceiling for optional contributors are increased by €2,200 from €46,600 to €48,800 per annum with effect from 1 January 2007. This is an increase of approximately 4.8% and is in line with projected earnings increases. The increase was contained in the Abridged Estimates Volume, published earlier this year.

Section 7 of the Bill provides for an increase of four weeks, from 22 weeks to 26 weeks, in the duration of maternity benefit. Section 8 provides for an increase of four weeks, from 20 to 24, in the duration of adoptive benefit. These improvements take effect from 1 March 2007.

As already mentioned, section 9 and Schedule 1 to the Bill provide for an increase of €1,300 to €4,000 in the widowed parent grant and €215 to €850 in the bereavement and death benefit grants. All these increases take effect from budget day.

Section 10 provides for an increase of €10, from €20 to €30, in the weekly means disregard for non-contributory State pension means testing purposes from January 5, the same day the budget increase of €18 per week comes into effect. This means, for example, that a pensioner with weekly means of €30 per week will receive a pension in 2007 of €200 per week instead of a pension of €172 per week in December 2006, a net gain of €28 per week, €18 arising from the rate increase and €10 from the increase in the means disregard.

Likewise, a pensioner with means of €100 per week and a pension of €102 per week in December 2006, will get €130 per week from January, also a gain of €28 per week. Nearly 26,000 pensioners will gain from the increase in the disregard.

Section 11 makes provision, as outlined earlier, for the payment of full-rate disability allowance to those in residential institutions. The legislation providing for the introduction of self-employed or class S contributions in 1988 excluded from liability self-employed workers whose total income was below a threshold of £2,500, equivalent to €3,174 per annum. This threshold correlated approximately with the rate of non-contributory old age pension for a single person. The level at which a self-employed person becomes eligible for class S contributions has remained unchanged over the past 18 years.

At the time, those who engaged in self-employment but were entitled to unemployment assistance were excluded from liability for PRSI in view of their low income levels. This principle carried over to the introduction of farm assist in 1999, when it was again accepted that a person

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should not have a PRSI liability where he or she was on sufficiently low income to warrant entitlement to a means-tested payment.

Over the years, the threshold for class S liability has remained unchanged while there have also been significant improvements in disregards for means-tested schemes, notably relating to farm assist. Therefore, a self-employed worker who is in receipt of farm assist or jobseeker's allowance may only maintain his or her contribution record by opting into the voluntary contribution scheme. In this context, it is desirable to improve access to social insurance coverage and enable continuing social insurance protection, specifically the accrual of contributions towards a contributory State pension, by removing the exemption from PRSI liability for those in receipt of farm assist and jobseeker's allowance. I am providing for this in section 12 of this Bill.

To ensure that the position of those on lower incomes is protected, the health contribution levy threshold is being increased by €40, from €440 to €480 per week, with the corresponding annual threshold being increased from €22,880 to €24,960. Furthermore, an additional 0.5% is being introduced in respect of income to the extent that it exceeds €100,100 per year or is equivalent to €1,925 per week. This increase, which is expected to affect only the top 10% of earners, is effective from 1 January 2007.

The Social Welfare Bill 2006, the first of two instalments, builds further on the considerable progress that has been made in recent years. It safeguards the living standards of those who rely on social welfare income and other supports and prioritises the allocation of resources to those most in need. The Bill is also about solid and fundamental structural reforms of welfare policies — reforms that will modernise, will make the welfare system fairer to all and will deliver more enlightened social policies.

I commend the Bill to the House and look forward to a constructive debate.

Mr. Stanton: As always, the Opposition assures the Minister of a constructive debate. I thank him for asking his officials to brief Opposition Deputies on the Bill, which was helpful. I hope that the practice will continue.

The Minister must be one of the happiest Ministers in history to have so much money to give away. I will not be churlish because the Bill has many good aspects. One cannot give away €1.41 billion as the Minister is doing without helping many people or making them happy. We must remember that people have paid this money to the Exchequer through taxation, particularly indirect tax, capital gains tax, stamp duty and so on. We are redistributing their money.

9 o'clock

The Combat Poverty Agency stated that last year's package was more progressive than regressive. According to the agency, previous years' packages were regressive, but there is a trend leading away from that situation. The Opposition has sought evenly distributed payments to target the most needy, which is finally being done. I compliment the Minister in that regard.

On the first page of his speech, the Minister referred to "important and necessary structural reforms that create change, open up fresh opportunities and deliver enlightened social policies". While the Minister has gone a long way in this respect, there is further to go, which I am sure he will acknowledge.

The first issue mentioned in the Minister's speech was child poverty, which he described as "totally unacceptable in the prosperous and progressive Ireland of the 21st century". He should examine an article in today's *Irish Examiner* by Mr. Fergus Finlay, the head of Barnardo's, who describes an experience of a child care worker dealing with a child from an extraordinarily deprived background. Going to school at the age of four or five years, the child is already old and has been through a lifetime of awful experiences. The child is typical in many areas where streets have no signposts in order to confuse gardaí searching for drug dealers, criminals and so forth.

Today, that underbelly was evident in the shooting dead of an innocent bystander in this city. We must tackle this underbelly, at the root of much of which is poverty. While children suffer child poverty, the Minister was right to say that society also suffers in that children are society's wealth and future. Speaking as a former teacher, primary school teachers will identify the child in junior infants who will go to prison as a young adult. We must intervene before that point. We need a structured pre-school system, particularly for children lacking support at home. We need to examine the crèche system and the child care sector.

For some time, the Minister has spoken of a second tier payment. In his reply he might tell me that I am wrong but I understood that it was to be an amalgamation of the CDA, back to school and FIS payments and targeted, possibly automatically, at the families most in need of it. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility to do. I welcome the Minister's amalgamation of the three CDA payments and the increase to €22, which the Opposition called for previously.

What of the Minister's other vision that he shared with the House two years ago or more, namely, a special, targeted second tier payment? The Minister obliged the Opposition's calls for advertising campaigns to increase the take-up of the back to school clothing and footwear and FIS payments. While they were successful to a certain point, some people have still not availed of the

payments. A means of doing more would be to make automatic payments, which should be possible in this day and age.

Recently, I suggested that the deadline for claiming the back to school clothing and footwear payment be extended to the end of November if not the end of the year, but I was disappointed when the Minister, who I have privately and publicly said is progressive, bluntly said "No". Regularly, people attend my clinics and office and say that they never knew about the payment. They would have claimed it if they had known, but it was too late by that stage. They can apply for exceptional needs payments, but those are not the same as the back to school payment and are messier. These people are entitled to the back to school payment.

September is a busy time for parents. They must prepare children for school and there are many hassles, worries and things to do. It is simple to forget, fail to go about claiming or not to know of the back to school clothing and footwear payment. It should not incur an additional cost to extend the deadline to the end of November so that those entitled to it can make their claims. As it is an administrative issue, I do not know why the Minister said he had no plans to extend the deadline and would not consider the matter. It was unlike him and I appeal to him to re-examine this modest proposal.

If people find out about the payment — that they can get it from community welfare officers if their families are on low incomes, have a certain number of children and so on — when they meet other parents at school gates in the first or second week of October, it is already too late. I do not know whether the Minister would need to issue a directive or administrative order to community welfare officers or whether legislation would be required, but he should consider the matter.

I meant to state at the outset that the social welfare debate, what the Minister is doing and the budget are important and fundamental. Is it not amazing that this debate is taking place in the last week before Christmas, that we will continue until 11 p.m. tonight, the graveyard shift if ever there was one, and that it will be guillotined tomorrow? Reading through the Minister's speech, it struck me that certain payments, while commencing in January, will not be made until the middle of February for all kinds of administrative reasons. Why can this process not be commenced earlier than the Christmas holiday deadline? It would give us time to debate the matter and for the payments to be made in January. An election will intervene, but the issue could be examined for the future. We should not be debating the important issue of social welfare and all that goes with it while heading towards the midnight hour.

Like everyone, pensioners are entitled to a basic standard of living. I welcome that the Mini-

ster has kept his promise to increase the basic rate for those under 80 years of age to €209.30. With all the pressures and expenses that now exist, should the increase have been more? Some agencies were seeking more but it is welcome and we acknowledge that it was done. Older people need it because they worry about having enough money and the future.

I regret that another worry has been added to that list — that there will be a bill for their dependants after their deaths to pay nursing home charges. Do we really need to do that? The Government should reconsider this because it will add to the worries of those who have worked all their lives. Such a fear could cause them to hand their houses over earlier to avoid this death tax.

The fuel allowance was increased by €5 last year but only €4 this year. I expected the same increase at least this year because fuel prices have increased so much. From January, however, the number of free units of electricity and gas will increase, which is welcome. Older people need heat more than the rest of us. It has been argued that the time for the fuel allowance should be extended by four weeks, starting two weeks earlier and ending two weeks later in the year. We should consider that next year.

Pensions policy was mentioned by the Minister. It is a major issue and many models exist. The cost to the State of tax foregone through pension investment is heading for €3 billion per year, a huge amount. The Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs held hearings on this and some witnesses expressed concern about the way some of the current schemes are being administered. The Minister should ensure the Pensions Board has enough power to carry out its functions because €3 billion is a huge amount to forego each year. We must shine a light on this. I welcome the publication of a Green Paper on pensions but by the time anyone gets around to looking at it, we will be on the other side of the election. We must, however, debate this topic.

The Government has done much for carers. I welcome the half rate carer's allowance now payable to people in receipt of another social welfare payment, although we are yet to hear which payments will be allowed. The Minister must have read Fine Gael policy in this area because that was one of the key elements when we drafted a policy on carers. I must rewrite it now. I congratulate the Minister, however, because this will help many people. There was an anomaly that when people reached a certain age, they had to make a choice between the State pension and the carer's allowance when they were still caring for a person. It was unfair.

Carers do a great deal of work and we all agree we should try to maintain those who need care in their own homes for as long as possible. People prefer to stay in their own homes with their own

[Mr. Stanton.]

possessions and live longer as a result. I visited Denmark this year and it was remarkable. The Danish stopped building nursing homes in 1997 because the home care and rehabilitation is so good. People who have a stroke enjoy immediate occupational and speech therapy and physiotherapy. The person is back on his or her feet as soon as possible. That is certainly not the case here, where the policy is to get someone into a nursing home at huge cost to the State and to the person's dignity and independence. I support the Minister for Health and Children's policy of trying to keep people in their own homes. We must refocus to make services available to allow for proper care in people's own homes. The spouse's means test removes the recognition of a carer's work, however, because the spouse's income can lead to a carer receiving a reduced amount or nothing at all. We must reconsider this.

We have called for some time for the disability allowance to be payable to people in institutions as a matter of right. The HSE takes back 80% anyway so it is a case of swings and roundabouts. Recognition of the need for such a measure is important even if the State is giving with one hand and taking with the other.

For many years we talked about the effect of the marriage bar. If it was introduced now it would be found to be unconstitutional. The Minister has not given a timetable for the introduction of the qualified adult allowance payments up to the full rate of the non-contributory State pension but it is important that a woman has a pension in her own right. Many women gave up work outside the home but worked twice as hard in the home for years rearing children and looking after older relatives. Ireland has changed and both parents now must work to keep a roof over their heads. Individualisation encouraged that system. Some people ask if that is the best for society.

Widows and widowers need support but I do not know if the Minister has considered making the household benefits package available to widows over a certain age who might find it difficult to find employment.

I was disappointed that the budget and the Social Welfare Bill do not mention support for young carers. There are 3,000 of them in the State. The Minister implied that I asked for them to get the carer's allowance but that is not the case, I asked that other support be made available to them. Ministers promised they would discuss this but these young people are out there and their schooling, social lives and entire childhoods are suffering while the Government is doing nothing to address this issue. It is not that it has not been alerted — I do not know how many times I have asked questions about it — but nothing has been done for young carers.

Young carers must help a parent or sibling in intimate tasks, such as feeding, washing or cloth-

ing, then go to school, where they worry about the parent at home, and then go home and do this work again. I do not know whether somebody comes in during the day, but the Carers Association says 3,000 young carers are affected. I would like the Minister to outline a strategy for them. The Minister might say this will be part of the carers strategy, which will be brought forward later in the year, but nothing has happened in the two years I have debated this issue and I do not know why, given that the Minister has acknowledged the issue should be addressed. Perhaps he will outline why they are being ignored.

The introduction of a national waste waiver scheme is another issue not covered by this legislation and it may not be covered by the Bill the Minister proposes to introduce next year. Every local authority does its own thing, depending on its budget but a number do not operate a waiver scheme. The cost of the disposal of household waste is impacting on older people and social welfare recipients. While this does not fall strictly within the remit of the Department, it should be addressed.

Many social welfare recipients on housing estates depend on oil heating and they receive a once off oil fill to do them for most of the year. I am not sure whether the Minister has ever considered a bulk payment of the fuel allowance rather than a weekly payment to help them pay in one go. Officials might say it should be paid weekly rather than in one lump sum because otherwise the recipient could blow the money on a holiday or something else. However, this is not a total nanny State and, therefore, if a social welfare recipient would like the fuel allowance up front to pay for an oil fill, it should be examined. I do not know whether this has happened in the past and there might be an administrative issue, but I hope the Minister will examine the possibilities in this regard.

I welcome the changes to the farm assist scheme and I am pleased many farmers will have an opportunity to improve their pension entitlements, as requested by the IFA and others. The Bill has a great deal going for it as a significant amount is being given away to social welfare recipients. The job is not complete, however, and much more needs to be done. Payments must be focused where they are needed and a good start has been made with the operation of the CDA in particular. The Minister must move beyond that to provide a targeted, automatic payment to recipients and poverty traps must be avoided.

During his budget speech, the Minister referred to lone parents and the cohabitation rule, about which he has been talking for some time. When will proposals be brought before the House to make amendments in this regard? Will they be introduced in the Bill the Minister proposes to bring forward in February or will it be left until after the election? The major problem faced by

lone parents is the cost and availability of child care, which prevents them from joining the workforce as they need also child care before and after school as well during school holidays. I was approached recently by a lone parent who wants to return to work. She has two girls aged nine and ten but she wanted to know who would mind her children when they are off school.

The cost and availability of housing is not covered by the legislation but it impacts significantly on social welfare recipients. They pay huge rents to private landlords. While the rental accommodation scheme has been introduced, it is not working. Its implementation has been extremely slow because property is not available to the standard required. This is a worry because that implies people are living in substandard housing throughout the State.

All of us are worried by the levels of personal borrowing and indebtedness. The Minister has quite rightly expressed alarm and concern about people who borrow money at exorbitant rates from licensed moneylenders. This demonstrates the pressure people are under and in the current era major expectations and pressures are placed on parents with children. Children go to school and if one of their class mates has bought expensive new trainers or a school bag, they want the same. Parents want to do the best they can for their children as a result. I commend the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and other voluntary organisations on their work and on the millions of euro they spend to alleviate hardship and poverty.

Moneylending and debt is a problem. The Minister is probably the happiest ever holder of his office because of all the money he can give away but the underlying structural issues, which are still causing problems, must be examined. Imagination and vision are required to tackle them. Community welfare officers are in the front line trying to address hardship. They make exceptional needs and other payments to people under serious pressure. We have all been visited by such people in our clinics. However, the Government proposes to transfer community welfare officers from the Department of Health and Children to the Department of Social and Family Affairs. I am not sure how much debate has taken place on this proposal but the Government should not tamper with their role without great care and thought because they are at the coalface dealing with dire problems.

I welcome the improvements in the legislation and the many increases that people deserve. I look forward hopefully to being on the Government benches this time next year when we will be in a position to do more for them. In the meantime, I thank the Minister for what he has done to date. His predecessor introduced 16 savage cutbacks and we have all worked hard to reverse them. The Minister has done a great deal in this regard but more remains to be done. As Jesus

once said, "The poor will always be with you" and we will have to do our best for them. Every Member is committed to doing the best he or she can for people who need support and help. I ask the Minister to examine the relative income poverty model, which deals with the significant gap between those who have a great deal and those who have very little. Consistent poverty remains, although a great deal of progress has been made. Relative income poverty is beginning to surface and cause problems. The Minister has had his head in the sand in this regard for a long time. He has been in denial, saying this is not the way to consider poverty. He says he has solved the problem because consistent poverty has almost been tackled.

Significant issues related to indebtedness, credit and borrowing are being driven by relative income poverty and this must be tackled.

It is getting late and I think I have said enough so I will hand over to Deputy Penrose.

Mr. Penrose: I am glad to contribute to this debate on social welfare on behalf of the Labour Party. I thank the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, for allowing his officials give us some very useful information on the Bill earlier today and I thank those officials for their diligence and courtesy in taking us through the legislation.

I always try to be constructive and when I express a view, it is a fundamentally held belief, rather than something put forward for the purpose of disagreement or antagonism. The Labour Party feels that at times of great economic prosperity wealth should be shared generously with those most in need. I am chairperson of the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs and we wrote the report on carers ourselves, without input from consultants, over six or seven months down in the bunker. I wrote the part referring to the need for recognition and acknowledgement. The first thing consultants do is charge a fee for hours worked and a lesson we learned from the report, which I advise the Minister to heed, is to forget about such input and instead put ordinary people, Deputies and Senators in those bunkers to create reports. They meet real people every Friday, Saturday and Sunday in their clinics and know what is going on.

Theory should be done without as it has led the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, into a notorious mess relating to payment for the provision of nursing home care. I predict that the Minister, Deputy Harney, will sink without trace as a result of the move made yesterday which has taken the gloss off the budget. It may not have a major effect in Dublin, but in rural areas there is a great deal of dissatisfaction relating to the new scheme on payment for nursing home care. I met a man last night aged 76 who was very happy with the budget.

[Mr. Penrose.]

However, he said he worked for 46 years to build up his house and would like to leave it to his daughter without a legacy of debt. For this reason, he said he hopes he never has to go into a nursing home. The Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, will force people to make decisions that they should never have to make. I am not here to take the gloss off the budget, but remember the words I have spoken tonight.

I congratulate the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, on this, his third budget, and the significant effort he has made to deal with some of the issues we have brought to his attention over the years. The Minister has gone some way in improving the lot of the poor and disadvantaged, a process that began in the budget of 2004 and continued in 2005. However, I disagree fundamentally with the Minister for Finance's assertion in his Budget Statement that throughout its term in office the Government has assured the less well off have shared in Ireland's growing economic prosperity. That is an effort to rewrite history. If the current Minister for Finance has forgotten the dreadful years of the regressive McCreevy budgets, the savage 16 and other insidious cuts, none of the disadvantaged, nor the groups who support them, have forgotten.

From 1997 to 2004, the gap between rich and poor widened as each of seven successive budgets gave to the rich and took from the poor, making Ireland one of the most unequal countries in Europe. As the Conference of Religious of Ireland, CORI, put it in 2004, the same year they were taken to Inchydoney to manufacture a Pauline conversion, "the rich get richer while those living in poverty still have a long way to go before they ever reach the poverty line of income". That is taken from page 41 of the *Priorities for Fairness — Socio-Economic Review 2004* by the CORI Justice Commission in case anyone should accuse me of being political. Two recent budgets giving more to the poor than the rich can only go a small way towards putting right the neglect of the previous seven years and we await the outcome of the most recent budget.

I would also question the real meaning of the boast by the Minister for Finance that in this budget he is providing "the biggest package of support for those on low incomes in the history of the State". There are two very clear reasons for this large package, both arising from this Government's mismanagement of the State's finances. First, as outlined above, the Government increased income inequality and worsened the situation for the poor over the first seven years of its time in office. It will take more than two or three years of higher spending on social welfare to put right the damage done over so many years. Second, a recent economic commentator has put our current inflation rate at 4%. We

have not done nearly as well as our EU neighbours in keeping inflation under control although we are facing the same international problems with rising energy prices and the fall in the value of the dollar.

With significant inflation, the Government will obviously spend more in absolute terms just to buy the same amount of goods and services this year as last year. Any Minister for Finance presiding over an economy with significant inflation can always make the very hollow boast that he is spending more than he ever did before, but this is not the same as devoting more resources to the needy. Indeed, the Government, during its entire time in office, has never spent as large a proportion of the country's total income on social welfare as the rainbow coalition did in 1995 and 1996, when social welfare expenditure accounted for 10.4% to 11.1% of the gross national product, GNP. The advent of the current Government led to social welfare expenditure falling as low as 7.5% of GNP and it has remained in single figures throughout its time in power. I have taken these figures from page 85 of the Central Statistics Office Statistical Yearbook of Ireland 2006.

Those struggling on inadequate social welfare incomes are very sensitive to every price increase, whether caused by general price inflation, stealth taxes or Government agreed increases in gas, electricity, transport and health care costs. Real improvements in circumstances are important to the disadvantaged, not comparisons and changes relating only to the previous year's financial circumstances.

The great cheer during the budget speech from Fianna Fáil Party backbenchers at some social welfare payments at last crossing the €200 per week barrier gave a clear indication that it is perceived that helping the poor might improve the party's prospects in the next election and that any social welfare payment of €200 per week solves all the problems of low income groups. Neither of these assumptions is justified.

As far as the election is concerned, let us wait for the results. As far as the increase in social welfare payment is concerned, have any of us in Dáil Éireann tried to live on €200 per week and face the price increases that inevitably come? It is, I think, unlikely. Yet the cheers from Fianna Fáil Party backbenchers at having reached this boundary for some social welfare recipients shows how little those in power know about the realities of life on the bread line.

In fact, the minimum weekly disposable income required to avoid poverty in 2006 is €203 for one adult, €270 for one adult and one child and €337 for two adults. The source for these statistics is again CORI, page 23 of a report entitled, *Justice: Developing a Fairer Ireland 2006*. Thus, even before the first instalment of these new improved payments has been made, the unemployed, widows and widowers under 65, lone parents, the

disabled, carers and many other groups will be below the poverty line.

Before looking at some cases in detail I must say a few words about poverty in general. We are all getting tired of the way in which the Government and the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, refuse to accept the fact that Ireland has poverty levels which are far too high. Instead they criticise and try to rubbish the statistics presented as being out of date, irrelevant to Irish conditions or unfair comparisons. Let me make it clear that all the references to poverty made by me today are taken from the Central Statistics Office's most recent publication on poverty, dated 16 November 2006. The CSO refers to some of the Laeken indicators, agreed by Ireland and all other EU countries in 2001 as the most appropriate methods of measuring social inclusion and of comparing the effectiveness with which different EU countries handle problems of social inclusion and poverty. These statistics show that Ireland has the highest poverty levels of any country in the EU except Portugal and the Slovak Republic.

Ireland is far less effective than other EU countries in reducing poverty levels through social transfers. Our total transfer system only reduces poverty by 18%, compared to the EU average of 25%. The unemployed, one parent families, the ill and disabled and the elderly have very high poverty levels, while a very worrying feature is that in Ireland up to one third of all children live in poverty.

I am tired of the Government closing its eyes to the real and deep seated problems of poverty in Ireland and either criticising the statistics, as if this were just a theoretical game, or trying to pretend that just one year's budget change can put everything right. If the Government refuses to accept the EU's official comparisons outlined above, it must, surely, believe the experience of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and other charitable organisations. In the last year SVP spent more than €41 million giving direct help to more than 300,000 families that had been let down by the Government's social support system. Some €7.5 million of this figure was emergency support for families who had no money, no food and no resources, €4.6 million was allocated for food and €3.1 million for fuel. It is clear that fuel poverty is a big issue, and spending has been doubled in this regard in recent years, but the level of support should rise to approximately €25 over an extended period because it is a real issue throughout the country. Elderly people tend to be frugal in their budgets and often turn the heat off in their homes to save money. It is sad that people have to scrape together a few bob in this way.

If life is as good as the Government would have us believe, why do members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul stand outside churches to collect

the €41 million the society needs to rescue people? As Professor John Monahan once said, our ultimate aim should be to put the Society of St. Vincent de Paul out of existence. The society spent €1 million on reconnecting families to gas and electricity supplies and, in light of the continuing increases in fuel bills, pleaded with the Government for a weekly fuel allowance of €24 between September and April. However, the budget provides a mere €18 per week. More help is required if ill, disabled and elderly people and families with young children, all of whom remain at risk of poverty, are to keep warm and prepare hot food.

In 2002, there were 154,000 lone-parent families in Ireland, which represented about one sixth of all families, and one in three births took place outside marriage. Approximately 80,000 lone parents, or just over half the total number, received a one-parent family payment, which has been increased in this budget to €207.80. However, the minimum disposable income needed by one adult and one child to avoid poverty is €270, so one-parent families will start the new year below the poverty line.

What has happened to the proposals on lone parents which the Minister for Social and Family Affairs published earlier this year? Genuine concerns were expressed that elements of the proposals could result in new poverty traps. All proposals must be poverty proofed so as to ensure they do not make people worse off. There was a failure to ensure adequate access to education, which is the best route out of poverty, and appropriate child care. Nevertheless, there was considerable merit in the Minister's proposals, particularly in terms of the abolition of the long outdated prohibition on cohabitation. It is time we got over the idea that being a parent is somehow a problem and addressed the farcical barrier that prevents lone parents from entering long-term relationships for fear of losing their incomes.

One-parent families are now a significant feature of our social system and they deserve better from this year's budget increases than being left on the breadline. The problems they face in terms of caring for their children while trying to find suitable employment are exacerbated by Ireland's high child care costs and the absence of free child care provided by the State. This budget contributed little to child care and the issue remains a stumbling block for many people across the country. The exorbitant cost of child care is preventing many people from reaching their full potential by preventing them from working outside the home. The State must intervene to provide more child care places.

The Minister for Finance spoke eloquently about the national disability strategy and his intention to continue the rate of expenditure provided for in last year's budget. He failed to mention that the State's support for the disabled

[Mr. Penrose.]

started from a very low base. A report published in September by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions stated that, compared with the European average of 2.2%, at 0.8% Ireland spends the smallest proportion of GDP on disability benefit in Europe. While there are some problems in terms of comparing across countries, a deficit as large as ours will not be overcome by a couple of years of increased expenditure. The report also found that the guidance and counselling services necessary for those claiming sickness and disability benefit to return to work are less accessible in Ireland than elsewhere. The right to work is as fundamental to disabled people as it is to the able bodied. Some 8.3% of the population are disabled but only 14.7% of those who can work are employed.

The Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs recently received a submission from the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland. Multiple sclerosis, which affects 7,000 people in Ireland, is the most common disabling neurological disorder among young people, although it can occur at any age. Among the issues raised by the society was the necessity for the Government to provide a costed disability benefit. It is widely recognised that the daily cost of living for people with disabilities is higher than for the general public and many disabled people experience a lower standard of living as a result of their disabilities. Among the many areas of increased cost are transport needs, housing adaptations, disability aids and appliances, heating, care assistants and home helps. In 2005, a report from the Department of Social and Family Affairs indicated that 66.5% of people receiving disability payments fell below the 60% level of median income and 22.5% suffered basic deprivation. Current research indicates that people with disabilities are less likely to be in paid employment. A diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, therefore, often means the end of paid employment. A costed disability payment should be carefully considered in the context of introducing equality to the system.

Ireland has approximately 149,000 carers, of whom one third spend more than 43 unpaid hours per week looking after elderly, frail or otherwise disabled relatives and friends. Nearly half of all carers have no paid employment but, whether in work or school, in their middle years or elderly, they sacrifice their time to care for others in their homes. They do not generally choose this role but are forced into it by family circumstances. There is strong evidence that carers suffer from stress and poor health because of the difficult 24-hour nature of their role. The NESF has calculated that all the unpaid care provided by carers in Ireland saves the Exchequer up to €2 billion per year. Unfortunately, the Government is not keen to repay carers for their vital and dedicated work.

Less than one fifth of all carers receive any direct financial support from the State. The measures on increased respite care and additional payments are therefore welcome.

I know a woman over the age of 66 who looks after her old-age pensioner husband. She could have received the qualified adult dependant benefit but opted for the carers allowance because it was financially preferable. Is she now entitled to the qualified adult dependant payment? For reasons of equity, I submit that she is entitled to receive that payment at half rate. I ask the Minister to investigate the matter.

Carer's allowance and other State supports for the disabled and carers rely on a variety of complex means tests administered by different State agencies. Apart from the demeaning nature of such tests, transparency is so lacking that few can make their way through the associated labyrinth of rules and regulations. Despite the Minister's claim that the budget offers great support for the disadvantaged, all carers receive is an increase in the carer's allowance to €200 for those aged under 66 and to €218 for those over 66. This leaves carers under the age of 66 below the poverty line of €203.

The Minister has made only minor improvements to other Government aids for carers. In 2003, the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs undertook a detailed study of carers and their problems. It was the committee's unanimous conclusion that all carers needed help and that the carer's allowance should no longer be means tested but should be made available to all carers. More benefits are means tested in Ireland than in any other EU country, yet international evidence shows that means testing leads to high administrative costs and poor social provision. The Labour Party, therefore, continues to support the provision of a universal carer's allowance. In 2003, the estimated cost was €180 million. That was probably an over-estimate, as it did not calculate the reduction in administrative costs which universalism brings.

The Government pandered to the Progressive Democrats' right-wing ideology in the recent budget by unnecessarily giving away €186 million in reducing the top rate of income tax from 42% to 41%. I will benefit from the reduction, but why should I? It would be much fairer and more socially just for Fianna Fáil, which occasionally claims to be socialist, to use this money to universalise the carer's allowance. In that way, the money would end up in the hands of those who really need it. Such people clearly deserve recognition and support for looking after people and saving the Government up to €2 billion. That is where the money should be spent. The €150 million could be used to eliminate the need for the degrading means test.

The Minister might ask me whether, as a member of the Labour Party, I have gone mad. I

have not gone a bit mad. One's child is entitled to free primary school education in this country even if one is earning €1 million a week. The children of the very rich have such entitlements. A person over the age of 70 who gets a pension of €10,000 every week is entitled to a free medical card. Why should people who provide essential services be penalised for exceeding the means test limit by just €2, €3 or €10? The proposals regarding nursing home care which have been made by the Minister, Deputy Harney, are the worst I have seen for a long time. People will eventually be forced to sell their homes, through no fault of their own, even after they have left this life. It is an attack on the elderly.

If the Government were to abolish the means test, it would deal with this issue immediately. Many people would become even more encouraged to look after elderly people. As Deputy Stanton said, it has been proven in every country in the world that people are far happier in their home environment. He mentioned the wrap-around care system in Denmark, under which psychological services and care packages are provided. In Denmark, all kinds of services, such as rehabilitation services, are made available to the elderly as soon as anything happens. This proposal will put the heart crossways in older citizens who are feeling unwell. We should remember that we all will reach that stage at some time.

I reject any proposal to include the family home in any means test. The family home is not used to calculate means for any other services, such as medical cards, pensions and third level grants. Why should an exception be made in the case of elderly people who are too sick to stay at home? Old people are being singled out. It seems that their homes will eventually be sold to pay for their nursing home bills. If the Labour Party gets into government, it will set about overturning this measure. The Minister for Social and Family Affairs can beat us to it by abolishing the means test. Such a move would send an important signal. It could be an important step for the Government.

I acknowledge what the Minister is doing in section 12. I applaud him for this very good initiative. He might not think it is important. Section 12 provides that certain self-employed people in receipt of social welfare payments who are not entitled to credited contributions, such as farm assist and jobseeker's allowance, can pay PRSI contributions. It is an extremely important measure, even if he does not think it is.

We will have to do something about the averaging system. We start off on the day the ball is thrown in, there is a big gap in the middle and then comes the tail. It is a disaster. It is time to change the law to allow the spouses of farmers and other self-employed persons to make voluntary PRSI contributions so they can qualify for pensions in their own right. The Minister has

admitted to me that the spouses of employed or self-employed contributors are specifically excepted from social insurance contributions in respect of their working activity with their spouses. Such spouses are effectively forgotten. They are invisible in the social welfare code. They spend many hours at the shoulders of their spouses trying to retain and build up businesses. They work extremely hard from morning to night.

Many of the people to whom I refer are shopkeepers in rural areas — I am sure it is the same in Dublin — who get up at 7 a.m. and work until 9 p.m. to provide a service that many of the whizz-kid supermarkets do not provide. Such people, who comprise an important part of Irish society, are being let go. Many of them will end up poverty-stricken. They might have an old building, but that is all they will have at the end of their time. The same can be said about farmers. This anomaly in the social welfare code relates to the spouses of farmers and shop owners, as well as people in other self-employed categories. Women who are classified as "relative assistant" and are prevented from paying PRSI cannot qualify for contributory pensions in their own right. If they work a certain number of hours in the shop or on the farm, they should be allowed to pay a PRSI contribution on a voluntary basis, as is the case with carers. It is time for this matter to be reviewed. A submission should be made and examined in this context.

I now turn to an issue of real concern to me and my Labour Party colleagues. It has been partially addressed by the Minister. Having raised the matter in this House, I have to take some credit for driving it this far. While the Minister does not tend to show much of a reaction, he is keen to listen to us. He gets somebody to examine the matters we raise, which shows he is fairly shrewd. I suppose accountants tend to have more guile than more robust people like us who are from rural areas. I am speaking about the modernisation of the social welfare system, which is full of outdated and outmoded concepts. When I spoke previously about this matter in the Dáil, I received e-mails from men saying I must be the most anti-man person who ever went into this House. While I am not anti-man, I hate inequity and inequality. I love to see it rooted out, wherever it is.

As someone who is proud to represent the Labour Party in this House, I want the 1920s and 1930s social welfare model to be overturned and reformed because it contains outdated and outmoded concepts. In so far as the model relates to eligibility and assessment, it tends to relegate women to roles within the system which are subservient to the roles of men. I highlighted an example of that when I spoke about the spouses of farmers and shopkeepers. Those who are set apart in the social welfare code are virtually not recognised. We have to bring an end to such con-

[Mr. Penrose.]

cepts, in the interests of equality, equity and fair play.

Members should not doubt that the Labour Party wholeheartedly promotes and supports economic independence for women. If we are to achieve this worthwhile and noble objective, we must agree unequivocally to abolish the limitation rule for all payments. We should not fiddle around with it — we should abolish it. The Progressive Democrats are looking to waste money by giving people like me an additional €20 per week, but they should keep that money and use it to bring equity to the system. They might not be interested in that, however. I almost forgot that the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform is a promoter of inequality, so what am I talking about? I was a bit of a clown to mention it.

I would like the Minister to increase the rate of all qualified adult payments to 100% of the rate of the personal payments and to make them directly payable. While he is starting to do that, he is not doing them all together. He is going a bit of the way. I suppose he has been in politics long enough to understand that the foot in the door is a good start. I acknowledge that. Women are the qualified adults in many households. It is sometimes the case that there is no economic benefit to the household if both adults receive an individual payment. In the cases of the majority of qualified adults, their payments go directly to their husbands, which is wrong. They should get payments in their own right. If a woman's payment is given directly to her husband, it takes away from her economic independence and excludes her from receiving any payments in her own right.

As the Minister has said previously, the only way for him to address this situation is to ensure that qualified adult payments are paid directly to the qualified adults. I welcome the Minister's move in the direction of abolishing the limitation rule. We must bear in mind that 95% of qualified adults are women, many of whom are excluded from the labour market because of their caring and parental roles, to which Deputy Stanton referred. The Government gave a commitment in Sustaining Progress to increase the qualified adult payment to 100% of the full person's payment by 2007. That commitment will not be honoured, however. The timescale for the achievement of this worthy and important objective has been long-fingered.

The Labour Party is alarmed at the Government's proposal to subsume the community welfare service into the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The service, which caters for the most vulnerable people in our society and operates at the cutting edge of the link between health and poverty, should be left where it is, within the health service. If it is not broken, why

should it be fixed? This is little more than a craftily disguised cutback and an attack on vulnerable people in the community. This plan, which is being pushed by one or two people — I know who they are — is provided for in the Bill. The Minister should take advice from a fool by throwing this aspect of the Bill into the bin.

If the plan proceeds, community welfare officers will ultimately be reined in and prevented from providing information, advice and advocacy to vulnerable people in our communities. It would mean in effect that the most effective link that such people have to statutory health and personal social services would be severed. This is because the people whom community welfare officers serve, including those with addictions, those with mental health problems, abuse victims and people with chronic social, behavioural and psychological issues, are far more likely to access health and personal social services through the community welfare system than through formal channels because the possibility of discretionary community welfare payments provides an incentive, allows CWOs to make needs assessments and puts them in touch with appropriate health services. If the Minister allows this to go ahead, he will run an unacceptably high risk of breaking the link between payments and access to health services which will be severed over time, if not very quickly. That is because the Department of Social and Family Affairs will be reluctant to fund functions for which it has no statutory responsibility. That is the point.

The Government's policy is based on the report of the interdepartmental review group on the core functions of the health service report, which recommended the transfer. There is no difficulty with the objective of focusing the Health Service Executive's resources and activities on core health functions but the community welfare service performs a core function.

Our former leader, the late Frank Cluskey, on introducing the scheme stated it was more than a mere cash response. The service was deliberately placed within the community care structure and under the auspices of the Department of Health with the intention of delivering a local response to individual need and, crucially, providing its clients with access to a range of health and personal social services. The importance of the relationship between income maintenance and effective personal and health services, as well as a safety net separate from other social welfare payments, was clearly and specifically identified in the Dáil debates as what led to the establishment of the services.

I ask the Minister not to do this. With the exception of that, he has done a reasonably good job and I hope he takes note of the various points and suggestions I made which will get us further

down the road to ensuring poverty will be a bygone in time to come.

Mr. Boyle: I wish to share time with Deputies Crowe and Connolly. I am not sure whether the Acting Chairman intends to contribute at this time.

Acting Chairman (Dr. Cowley): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Boyle: I apologise for not being able to attend the briefing on the Bill the Minister kindly organised this year, as in other years. It was due entirely to a scheduling difficulty on my part. I value such briefings and I would have appreciated it again this year. Nevertheless, I got the gist of what the Minister was proposing last Wednesday although there may be clarifications in my contribution to which he may care to respond when replying to the debate.

Opposition spokespersons are not here to bury the Minister but to praise him and to take into account much of what he has achieved in improving the standard of payments across the board. Our role as Opposition spokespersons comes into play because the Minister's artistry, like that of most of us, is born out of an industriousness rather than a sublime talent. He probably believed too readily the writing on the paint tin given to him by the Minister for Finance which stated that a guaranteed velvet texture can be applied to any surface. In reality, while he has managed to paint the wall, there are significant lumpy bits and the paint peels in the strangest of places.

As we critically examine the current social welfare system, it is valid to ask why the opportunity was not taken to correct many of the anomalies that continue to exist. There is no doubt the level of payments have been increased significantly but the categories of payments, the inconsistencies in such payments and the degrees of unfairness that exist for different categories of people who do not qualify for many of those payments are the real remit of any Minister for Social and Family Affairs. This Bill, and the Social Welfare Bills in January and February, provide an opportunity to address those anomalies.

The Minister and the Government made great play about the fact that the contributory State pension has exceeded the €200 benchmark they set out, just as they made great play about the £100 benchmark at the end of their first term of Government. While there have been large increases in the State pension and massive progress has been made, when one compares a percentage of the average income here with that in other developed countries, Ireland continues to lag considerably behind.

Despite the benchmark the Government must address immediately the partnership commitment

to have the State pension at one third of average pension levels and the possibility of further increases in future budgets to help bring that about. In percentage terms, that figure is only half the amount on which people in other developed countries are living. We must debate the reason that is the case.

Deputy Stanton said we already spend more in tax forgone in giving support to private pensions. In my other role as finance spokesperson in the small party I represent, I asked the Minister's Cabinet colleague about the restriction last year regarding the €5 million limit on private pension personal plans. A total of 116 individuals managed to get under that limit last year. One individual managed to acquire a personal pension plan of more than €20 million which the State was subsidising at a rate of 42%.

What is the state of our pension policy when, on the one hand, we forgo more in tax from the richest individuals while, on the other, we make a song and dance about large increases which effectively could be doubled if we did not have a tax subsidy on private pensions? That is inconsistent and it is unfair on pensioners who have built up this country to the position it enjoys today. Unless we have an honest debate on pensions at that level, these €20 increases will be seen historically as a missed opportunity because the likelihood is the economic circumstances in which we found ourselves in the past ten to 15 years will not exist to the same extent in the next 15 to 20 years. We must have the vision to ensure those benchmarks can be reached in the future.

What is also curious about the Minister's current policy is that he mentioned the Government's commitment to making qualified adults in receipt of the State pension or the qualified dependants of State pension recipients equal to those at the non-contributory level. I accept the higher increases will allow that to happen but the fact that those on the non-contributory pension will receive a higher increase than those on the contributory pension indicates there appears to be a policy, which has yet to be stated — if it exists the Minister might enlighten us — about overall individualisation. Is it a fact that the gap between the non-contributory and the contributory pension is narrowing while at the same time the qualified adult allowance level is meeting the non-contributory level? Has some new figure to be reached at a date the Minister has decided not to tell us about? If that is the way the State policy is going, we must have that debate as well.

If that is the policy, it contradicts the way the Minister is treating the same issue in respect of other social welfare payments. For instance, the State pension for qualified adults over 66 will increase by X amount but the increase is less for those under 66. That is reversed in respect of other social welfare payments, particularly with regard to carer's allowance. Why are carers over

[Mr. Boyle.]

the age of 66 getting a smaller increase than those under 66, especially when the representative organisations like the Carer's Association tell us that 50% of all carers are over 60 years of age? The likelihood is that the proportion of people who will be disadvantaged by the smaller increase are the majority of carers. Has the Minister's Department done any analysis of that figure? What is the reason for that distinction which appears to be at variance with what the Minister is trying to achieve in the general pensions area? In terms of all other social welfare payments, the way qualified adults are being treated means that gap will widen. We appear to have three distinct strands in regard to payment policy and the way qualified adults are treated.

Deputy Penrose is right. The opportunity existed in this budget to get rid of the limitation rule. At a stroke that would have abolished discrimination against the greater number of our citizens dependent on social welfare, including women affected by the socially disgraceful marriage code that existed until the early 1970s. Those people, who are becoming grandparents, are being adversely affected by those employment practices, by the State itself and by other large institutions such as banks. Until the Minister begins to recognise that anomaly, budgets which provide that the system stays the same but the benefit payments improve will not continue to keep the masses happy. Our system is creaking. It is a contradictory system that is in need of large-scale change. I would like the Minister to address that in his reply having regard to the opportunity that will be presented by the second Social Welfare Bill that will be introduced early in the new year.

The PRSI changes and the threshold applying to health insurance assist minimum wage earners, but this represents merely a widening of the band. In effect, the Department will end up receiving more money. Increasing it at the higher income end of the scale in terms of the interest that PRSI is charged at means more money will come into the Department. The same is true of the health levy, especially with the proposal for higher income earners.

The Minister might explain the changes in regard to the optical benefits. There does not seem to be a parallel change such as there seems to be in the case of PRSI benefit. Is the Minister providing in the Bill that the lower limit in regard to optical benefit will remain unchanged, and if so, why is that anomaly being created?

The health levy is a flat rate tax on people's gross income, regardless of the fact that a higher charge will apply to people earning more than €100,000 per annum, about which I will not squeal even though it will affect most Members in this Chamber. The Minister's Cabinet colleague speaks against the idea of hypothecated taxes,

that taxes can be raised for specific purpose and used for that purpose, particularly in the area of the environment. Yet the health levy is meant to pay for some of the health service inadequacies in terms of ongoing funding. Other members of the Government seem to deal more in hypothetical taxes but I do not want to bring the Tánaiste into this debate at this time.

This Bill will not be opposed by any Member of this House but in this context more imagination and efforts to introduce reforms are required. If that is evident in the second Social Welfare Bill, there will be more support in this respect from this side of the House.

Mr. Crowe: This year and for the past eight years the Government has had at its disposal an unprecedented surplus. It had, if it really wanted, an opportunity to transform the Ireland in which we live. My party, Sinn Féin, argued that this year, in view of the unprecedented surplus in our economy, a historic and golden opportunity had been presented where quite literally and with the right political will, we had a real opportunity to lift children and their families out of poverty. An opportunity that no other generation had has been wasted.

Last week's budget regrettably continued down the well worn path of the well-off being rewarded at the expense of those on low and middle incomes. A fair and equitable redistribution of wealth failed to take place and a budget was delivered that will further exacerbate the gulf between the rich and the poor in today's society.

The fact remains that not everyone responsible for our economic growth is benefiting from it. Many people are being left further behind. By reducing the higher rate of tax by 1% down to 41%, the Government took a decision to once again reward those who have done well, making them even more well off, while ensuring that those on low incomes will continue to struggle to make ends meet. The tax reduction removed €186 million from State resources, money that could have transformed the lives of many people who live on the margins of society. For the same amount of money, the Government could have increased the State pension by €34.80 per week, with plenty of change left over. The fact the Minister, Deputy Cowen, choose to reward the well-off over the interests of the aged, struggling to cope on their pension, clearly reflects the Government's priorities.

Some 18.5% of the population in this State are at risk of poverty and 7% live in consistent poverty and suffer deprivation. Some 40% of lone parents are at risk of poverty while a similar number of unemployed endure poverty. These are among the highest poverty figures in the European Union in a so-called first world or developed country. I share the growing viewpoint that economic success should not be an end in

itself but should create the conditions or be the launching pad to ensure that everyone has a decent standard of living. Some 100,000 children live in poverty. That is not a made up figure but comes from the Government's statistics. It is an appalling indictment of a Government obsessed with producing the inequities of wealth while turning a blind eye to exploitation, literally turning its back on and ignoring the vulnerable the most marginalised in our society.

As a society, we are continually peddled the image of success. New millionaires, we are told, are being made every day in this new Ireland. We are told that more money in one's pocket will solve everything, but it does not. If we want a first class health service, someone must pay for it. If we want a first class public transport service, it must be funded. If we want our homeless off the streets, we must build accommodation for them. If we want young people from the most marginalised of society to stay in school, we need to create the places and the necessary supports for them. If we want people to move from welfare to work, we need to support and create a safety net for that transition.

We are told by those in the leadership of one party in Government that inequities are necessary and even help drive the economy. However, for many of us and particularly those from my political background, the reality of any child, Irish or non-Irish, having had his or her life crushed and strangled by poverty while surrounded by enormous wealth is an abomination.

Children in some of the poorest one-parent families will benefit from the budget changes but not to the extent the Minister implied in an earlier speech. The increases will be seen by many as nothing more than a token gesture and will not be effective in tackling or removing any child from abject poverty.

The majority of the €20 increase in the lone parent allowance will be swallowed up by rising fuel and food costs. While Ministers continue to pat themselves on the back for their budget efforts, the reality is that trying to raise, feed and clothe a child and put them through school on €185.80 a week is no easy task. While I welcome the increase in the back to school clothing and footwear allowance, it must increase further to reflect the true costs of sending children to school. I am also conscious of the low take-up rates of this payment and others such as family income supplement mean many of the families most in need fail to receive those vital reliefs.

Ireland is one of the most unequal societies in the world. The top 10% of earners have incomes on average five times greater than the bottom 10%. The foundation blocks of the Celtic tiger were created by the hard work of ordinary workers, a significant proportion of whom are now pensioners. The proposed increase in State pensions will ensure that many of those elderly

people will remain in or on the edge of poverty. Electricity and gas price increases will ensure that social welfare increases are swallowed up, preventing people on low incomes from adequately heating their homes.

Some 44,000 families are on local authority housing lists, thousands of families cannot afford to purchase homes and more than 5,000 people are homeless. This budget has done little to ease their plight. To meet the NESC's recommendation of 10,000 social housing units per annum, Government expenditure would have to be increased to €2 billion. With an increase of just over €100 million in the budget, total Government output still lags behind the target of €1.27 billion. The 10% of households in this State living in private rented accommodation were ignored in the budget, as increases in tax relief for private renters were miserly.

There has still been no dedicated effort to improve affordable high quality child care throughout the State. Families are still obliged to fork out more than €800 per month per child on child care costs and have to use child benefit to subsidise such costs. The €1,000 early child care supplement covers only a month and a half of child care costs. This was another missed opportunity to reduce the economic burden on young families.

Some 30% of adults who have only primary level education are at risk of poverty, one in three children in a disadvantaged area cannot read and write properly and 1,000 children fail to make the transition from primary to secondary school each year. This budget has done little to address the inequalities in the State and is a long way from securing Sinn Féin's vision of an Ireland of equals.

Mr. Connolly: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue. The Social Welfare Bill 2006 gives effect to the social welfare changes announced in last week's Budget Statement. Reading through the budget, there were signs that the Minister listened to representations made in the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs. I spent some time on that committee and I must say that I enjoyed it. I regretted leaving it, because we were dealing with real life issues on an ongoing basis. In contrast to some of my contributions on Social Welfare Bills in recent years, I must concede that the social welfare package was one of the more welcome aspects of this year's budget. Few people realise that the Department of Social and Family Affairs is the biggest spending Department and it was heartening to see Fr. Seán Healy welcome the budget's provisions in this area. However, many people depend on social welfare and it is our job to find weaknesses in the budget.

Social welfare changes are normally calculated to ease the pain and make life a little more bear-

[Mr. Connolly.]

able for the most socially deprived people in our society. The question is how they measure up in the task of bridging the poverty gap between the most disadvantaged and the most privileged. It has been acknowledged that the gap has widened because of the 1% cut in the higher level of income tax, which for the most part benefits the better off. This includes Members of the House and people on a reasonably comfortable salary. It is ironic that we are giving out about such a decrease in the tax take. We also note that the increased non-contributory old age pension, which has hit the €200 barrier for the first time and which raised a chorus of war-whoops from the Government benches, is still €3.50 below the poverty line. We should acknowledge that and not jump out of our skins. Is it fair that pensions are linked to the poverty gap? The contributory old age pension, at €209.30, is just €6 above the poverty level, and clearly shows that we have a long way to go to eradicate poverty.

One yardstick by which to measure both the ongoing and the cumulative effects of successive budgets on the lives of the poor is the list of figures quoted by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Calls to the society have quadrupled over the past three years, and it needs to spend over €750,000 each week to relieve both poverty and social exclusion. It is ironic that calls have quadrupled during a period in which three of our better social welfare budgets have been introduced. There are many people out there whose pride will not allow them to call the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. These people would rather keep the struggle indoors than hurt their pride, so I am not sure whether we are getting the full picture of what is happening out there. Older people often want to keep a few euro for their funeral and for the relatives who have looked after them. This fear of dying in poverty is in the psyche and some people will not spend money on themselves, no matter what is given to them. People want to keep that little bit of their €200 in reserve because they are afraid of the rainy day.

The annual spend by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of more than €39 million dampens the Celtic tiger's roar, and many of those who found it necessary to contact the society for help were in poorly paid jobs. Their low levels of income rendered them ineligible to qualify for any social welfare benefits.

Pensioners have been playing catch-up over the past three budgets from a very low base, and it is disturbing to note that our old age pension is still bottom of the EU heap, fifth from bottom of the OECD countries. To bring old age pensions up to an acceptable European level, they would need to be increased by at least €50 to take them clear of the poverty threshold. However, their increases will also come under severe pressure from increases in electricity, gas and medical bills,

or merely trying to stay warm. They pay the same price as the rest of us for gas, electricity and even bread, but if gas goes up by 33%, it eats much more into their income. Inevitably, these problems hit in the middle of winter when people are more likely to suffer from hypothermia. We have been told for the past two or three years that the country has been awash with cash, so it is mystifying to consider why pensions and State payments have not been adjusted to a more realistic level before now.

A key group likely to be caught in poverty traps is that of lone parents, whose child dependant allowance, targeted at children in poverty, has not increased in 12 years. Overall, the social welfare package is to be given a guarded welcome, but to state that it completely tackles the issue of poverty is somewhat wide of the mark. We must admit that a bit has been done, while the Government must admit that there is much more to do.

A couple of years ago, the ESRI stated that any dent in the relative income poverty levels in this country would require a 9% rise in income tax. That would not be welcome in many quarters. Although we have high employment and average income has risen dramatically in recent years, the number falling below 50% of the average income is still well above the EU average. The ESRI stated that a successful anti-poverty policy would need improved education, greater employment opportunities and better income support. Many teenagers are leaving school without sitting their leaving certificate examinations. One must be educated to get into the skilled labour force. The onus is on us as a society to ensure that happens. There are many well educated people in Europe and we could be displaced if education is not kept to the fore. The budget could have made a more targeted approach to help those in need, particularly families on social welfare and those in lower paid employment.

Childhood food poverty needs to be tackled, particularly in the area of inequality. Food and poverty are intrinsically linked and we know that families on low incomes have low consumption levels of fresh fruit and vegetables. Fruit is often seen as a treat for these people. They also tend to consume more foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar, putting them at risk of a poor diet, with children being the most vulnerable. Parents, however, are not to blame, since diets are strongly influenced by people's social and environmental circumstances. Low income is a major factor in this mix. Parents play a key role in providing for their children's diet, and it is important they are supported through social welfare initiatives that would improve availability and access to healthy and affordable food. There is a growing awareness of food poverty as a structural constraint of food consumption and dietary intake, particularly among low income groups.

Food poverty has multi-faceted consequences for health, education and social partnership, and there is considerable scope for the Government to eradicate it.

The commitment to end homelessness by 2010 sounds like a pipe-dream. It is somewhat reminiscent of the boast by the Soviet Union that it had abolished poverty when people were begging for bread outside Russian Orthodox churches. I must mention to the next homeless person I meet that he or she has only another four years to go before the problems are sorted out. The €20 increase in social welfare rates is to be welcomed, but it provides cold comfort for those on the streets without a roof over their heads. The attitude prevails that they are victims of their own circumstances, but I do not believe that, rather they are victims of society's circumstances and we have to take it on ourselves to sort this out. Their Christmas will be spent trying to ensure they have hostel accommodation.

The measures announced for family carers in the home, while welcome, will only deliver for them a modicum of support and certainly do not go far enough to have real impact. There are 150,000 family carers in the country and the increase in allowance will provide a degree of support for them. Ireland's family carers provided over 3.5 million hours in unpaid care every week. They are the unsung heroes and heroines of family care. I come across the fraught situation on a regular basis where old people are expected to look after even older people and not enough recognition is being given to them.

Mr. O'Connor: I am sharing time with Deputy Johnny Brady, with the agreement of the House.

Mr. P. McGrath: Will the Deputy mention Tallaght?

Mr. O'Connor: In an earlier contribution I said that with so many of my colleagues, including Ministers, mentioning Tallaght, my job was done. I am always happy, when I have the opportunity to speak, that such prominent members of the Opposition turn up to support me.

First, I want to refer to the Minister. We are all entitled to our politics across the floor, but I believe we all agree this Minister is revolutionising social welfare and taking on reforms that many of his predecessors in successive Governments over the years did not, or would not do. We should applaud the work of the Minister, Deputy Brennan, and encourage him to carry on that work.

Mr. P. McGrath: The Deputy has done so.

Mr. O'Connor: I am not just saying this because it is Christmas, but I have often applauded the efforts of Deputy Penrose, who is

Chairman of the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs. The Minister will know that he gives members of that committee the opportunity to voice their concerns. At a parliamentary party meeting last week, I said that not only is the Minister listening to Fianna Fáil colleagues, but indeed he listens to members at meetings of the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs also. Deputy Stanton will nod his approval at that because I believe the Minister is listening.

Mr. Stanton: He is listening too well.

Mr. O'Connor: Colleagues are entitled to their politics and I have no problem with that, except to say that I have been listening to all the speeches, including the recent contributions tonight. While Members make their political points, they are being honest enough to say that this has been a good, caring budget and that the job is being done. My colleague, Deputy Ned O'Keefe, said the other day that this budget is all give and no take, with which I believe everyone in the House will agree. That is fair enough. The Minister's stamp is clearly on what is before the House and I am happy to compliment him in that regard.

The question of the challenge of carers is something that has been talked about a good deal at the joint committee meetings. I frequently make the point that all of us have had opportunities within our families to observe difficulties in that regard. I often speak of my father, who before he died ten years ago was cared for by my sister. Such a role presents many challenges and it is right to highlight the needs of carers whenever possible. I believe the Minister has listened and the reforms he has introduced will go a long way to helping families that are affected. As the saying goes, much done, more to do. We should continue to do what we can for carers and the public will be very much in favour of that.

I was not going to talk about my constituency. Some Members will know I represent Dublin South-West, which includes Tallaght, the third largest centre of population in the country. It also includes communities in Firhouse, Templeogue and Greenhills as well as in rural areas such as Bohernabreena and Brittas. I read in a newspaper this evening that someone claimed not to have seen me in a while. I have walked the streets of my constituency, week in and week out, and certainly over the past week or so I have visited every part and have been listening to what people are saying about the budget. Whether Members agree, people are responding positively to what was done, particularly as regards social welfare.

At a time when the economy is doing so well, as everyone admits, we must remember that as all craft rise the smaller boats must not be forgotten. The Taoiseach has often reminded us about this and it is something I do. I always recall learning

[Mr. O'Connor.]

from my Tallaght-based predecessor, former Deputy Chris Flood who, as everyone will agree, put his stamp on the social inclusion ethos and got the message across both within our party and in the House. We all want to ensure that the small boats are helped. In many of the measures introduced by the Minister, he has had a clear focus on the people in need.

We are all keen that the fuel and energy challenges faced by many families are met. I am from a bygone Dublin era. When I was small, I lived around here, funnily enough, and I recall people having difficulties and challenges with fuel and energy. That seemed to abate over the years as my life developed. Now there are challenges again and I am glad the Government has taken account of them.

Mr. P. McGrath: That was the weak spot in the budget. The Deputy should not go down that road.

Mr. O'Connor: I shall have to await the Official Report to find out what the Deputy is saying since I am trying to get through my few minutes and let my colleague, Deputy Johnny Brady, make his contribution. The Minister must realise there are difficulties among families as regards energy and fuel. I am glad he has been able to do something in that regard and that he has been progressive. I hope he will continue to do that.

I also want to raise the question of disability benefits. Again, we all listen to the various representations and submissions we receive from many organisations. We must be careful not to patronise such groups, but at the same time we have to understand that people want us to look after those who are disabled in our communities. The Minister has done that in successive budgets. I hope Fianna Fáil will continue to do what it has always done and look after that sector.

I support also what has been said about homelessness. One must be careful what one says. I heard Deputy Connolly refer to this, using his political perspective, and that is all right, but I hope the Government and the Department of Social and Family Affairs will continue to give every benefit available to those who look after people who are homeless. I have often spoken, for example, about Tallaght. People who are homeless there find they must leave on the bus for town to access services. That is something that must be looked at by the agencies. Clearly, the HSE in this case has a particular role to play. Tallaght is no worse than any other place, but where people have such difficulties and need accommodation and assistance, we should provide services for them as far as is possible without them having to get a bus to access services. At a time when the agencies have funds, we should encourage them to use those moneys

wisely so that effective use is made of resources and people are not homeless.

This could be done in Tallaght or anywhere else. There is no harm in continuing to raise this point because people should not be homeless in this day and age. They should be able to avail of resources, such as hostels or temporary accommodation. Members should be creating a situation in which people do not live on the streets.

At a recent Oireachtas joint committee meeting, I commented that people should not be poor when the economy is thriving and there is so much money in the system. I am glad the Minister has taken particular account of the need to deal with child poverty. Many projects in my constituency are funded by the Department and other agencies. This should continue and at a time when moneys are available, we should use the resources to help those groups in need.

As I noted earlier, as the Minister is aware, there will never be enough done and there will always be work to do. However, in respect of this debate, he can be proud of his achievements. My Opposition colleagues may make political points, which is fair enough.

Mr. P. McGrath: Never.

Mr. O'Connor: However, if one listens carefully, people are appreciative of what the Minister is trying to achieve. This particular Minister listens carefully to the points made by all Members. People talk to Members, who come to the House from their constituencies in Cork, the midlands, Kildare, Meath, or Tallaght to represent their cases. All Members do so skilfully. On such a night, it is a pity the Gallery is not more full.

Mr. Stanton: They have more sense.

Mr. O'Connor: I know it is late.

Mr. Durkan: Members could arrange that.

Mr. O'Connor: The Minister understands this is an important debate.

Mr. Stanton: Even the press has gone.

Mr. O'Connor: Finally, in the spirit of Christmas, all Members appreciate the work done by the Minister's Department and officials. I have heard many colleagues state, as do I, that the Department of Social and Family Affairs is by far the best Department for dealing with queries.

Mr. Durkan: Come on.

Mr. O'Connor: I have heard Deputy Durkan say so himself. In such a debate, we should not be afraid to make such a point.

Mr. Durkan: Members are overcome with emotion.

Mr. O'Connor: I thank the Acting Chairman for allowing me to speak for ten minutes and I am now willing to give way to my colleagues.

Mr. J. Brady: With the Acting Chairman's permission, I wish to share three minutes of my time with Deputy Cassidy.

Mr. Durkan: And no more.

Acting Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Penrose: That is a good start. Good and short.

Mr. J. Brady: First, I welcome this Bill. It is a key part of the 2007 budget package, which, according to the ESRI, boosted overall household income by approximately €2.6 billion per year. The ESRI has indicated this was one of the most progressive budget packages in the past decade and a half. Poorer families gained substantially more in percentage terms than those at the middle and top of the income distribution. On average, the poorest one fifth of families gained close to 5% more from budget 2007 than they would have done from a neutral budget. In contrast, the gain for the top one fifth of families was 1%. While the cut in the top tax rate attracted attention, the sharp increases in welfare payment rates have given a greater boost to the incomes of poorer households.

This year's budget will see a rise of almost 5% in the incomes of the poorest one fifth of families. This rise has only been exceeded by budget 2006, when the large early child care subsidy gave rise to a particularly strong percentage increase in the incomes of low earners. When the incomes of low-income earners are growing faster than their high-income counterparts, the share of income going to low-income groups is rising and their incomes are rising in respect of average income.

This Social Welfare Bill will begin to put into effect the largest ever welfare budget package of €1.4 billion. This means the Government will spend almost €15 billion on social welfare in 2007. This is welcome expenditure that will make a great difference to many people's lives. The generous provisions include an increase of €20 for more than 565,000 recipients of lower welfare rates. It also delivers on the Government's commitment to bring State pensions to €200 per week, with the contributory pension increasing to more than €209 while an increase of €18 raises the non-contributory pension to €200. In total, more than 400,000 pensioners will benefit from the increases.

Overall, these substantial increases, which represent rises of up to three times the expected rate

of inflation, will directly benefit some 1 million people, including pensioners, low income and welfare families, carers and those with disabilities. When their dependants are included, a total of more than 1.5 million men, women and children will benefit.

I also want to congratulate the Minister on many features of the welfare package, which include a number of significant fundamental reforms of social policy shaped and targeted directly at tackling remaining child poverty numbers——

Mr. P. McGrath: Santa is coming early.

Mr. J. Brady: ——supporting carers through increased incomes and supports, increasing the status and incomes of women pensioners and enhancing the incomes of older people.

The Minister has often expressed his concern about child poverty, which I welcome. I also welcome that he is acting on his concern. Specific reform measures, backed up by substantial budget investments, include combining three levels of child dependant allowances payments into a new single high rate qualified child allowance of €22 per week, in addition to the child benefit increase of €10, for more than 340,000 children of welfare families. A second tier of payment for children in low income and welfare families could be a very effective method of tackling child poverty. This improved and targeted child dependant allowance represents a substantial move in that direction and this is why the budget is focusing on increased child supports in this area.

Increasing the income threshold for family income supplement by up to €185 per week will add from €9 to €111 to the weekly income of families that receive support for employees on low income with children. A 50% increase in the back to school clothing and footwear allowance will increase the lower rate for children aged two to 11 years by €60 to €180, and the high rate for children aged 12 to 22 years by €95 to €285. An estimated 172,000 children will benefit from the allowance in 2006. Raising the allocation for the school meals scheme by €3 million to more than €16 million will allow for an expansion in the number of schools participating. Undoubtedly, the Government is acting to help the worse off.

As for carers, I am delighted by the introduction for the first time of an entitlement to retain a full social welfare payment, which abolishes the rule that forbids two welfare payments, and in addition to receive up to a half-rate carers allowance. This is a real recognition of older people's caring duties. Under this new dual payment system, the Government will start to recognise the carers allowance as a support for caring duties, rather than as a welfare payment. I congratulate the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, on this reform. It is an

[Mr. J. Brady.]

important step forward and I welcome his determination to press ahead with other needed reforms in the caring area. Other excellent social welfare measures in the budget include an increase in the respite care grant by €300 to €1,500. This will benefit almost 40,000 carers.

My constituents in Kells and Oldcastle, or the new areas of north Westmeath such as Castlepollard, Delvin, Collinstown, Fore, Clonmellon or Drumcree, have complimented the Minister fully. I again compliment him on his actions.

Mr. Cassidy: I am sure Deputies Penrose and Paul McGrath will wish Deputy Brady well in his new constituency. Of course it is an area which is loyal to the three of us. Its people have put us here. He will continue the good work for the area, for which the three of us have been working so hard and where we have seen such changes in our time in this House.

I welcome the Bill. I have never seen such radical changes as those which occurred over the past number of years. Gone are the bad old days when one got an increase of £1.50 in social welfare. Now there are increases three times the rate of inflation, as has been stated here this evening.

Much hard work has been done on behalf of the carers by Deputy Penrose, and by Deputy McGrath, who is an expert in financial matters and deputy spokesperson for his party, to advise and assist the Minister, Deputy Brennan. He is a caring Minister who has brought in many serious reforms. Not since the days of Charles Haughey have we seen such serious reforming in the House to benefit the underprivileged and those most in need.

Mr. P. McGrath: There the similarity ends.

Mr. Cassidy: I welcome the increase in allowances for senior citizens to over the €200 threshold that was promised in the programme for Government and in the Fianna Fáil manifesto. I welcome all of the increases related to child care. I welcome the additional €4 in the fuel allowance, which will increase from €14 to €18.

Mr. P. McGrath: That is the weak spot.

Mr. Cassidy: I also welcome the €300 increase in the respite care grant.

I welcome the back to school allowance increases. Little was said about the back to school allowance, but this is a serious effort involving a substantial increase and I wholeheartedly welcome it. I say well done to the Minister on this 50% increase in the back to school clothing and footwear allowance, which increases the low rate for children aged two to 11 by €60 to €180 and the rate for children aged 12 to 22 from €95 to

€285. An estimated 172,000 children will benefit from these allowances in the coming year.

I want to say to the Minister and to the Government that we have seen bad times in this House in our privileged term as Members. I never thought we would see the day where there would be such expenditure on those most in need. We all know of constituents who come into our clinics making heartbreaking pleas that something be done and to intercede. Thankfully, this year's budget, under my neighbouring constituency colleague and Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen, and the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Brennan, must be acknowledged and welcomed, and they must be congratulated, by all sides of the House. As one who is here for quite a long time, I certainly do so here tonight. I look forward, with the help of God, to many more budgets in this particular vein, and especially for those on lower incomes who have been quite rightly uplifted over the past two or three budgets.

Mr. P. McGrath: I am delighted to have the opportunity to address the House on the Social Welfare Bill. As the officials who have heard me on many occasions are gathered here tonight again, a certain amount of my thunder has been stolen because the Minister on this occasion has managed to unify the child dependant allowance into one payment of €22 per week. It is a matter on which I used to rant and rave over a long period of time. Lo and behold, when I stand up today I nearly have nothing to say but will find something nonetheless.

Mr. Cassidy: Deputy McGrath is happy.

Mr. P. McGrath: It must be difficult for the poor Minister, Deputy Brennan, to come in here and have all this kudos heaped upon him. I could remind the Minister that a few years ago the esteemed Ceann Comhairle and former Deputy, Seán Treacy, was a bit surprised when he was stepping down and glowing tributes were paid to him from all sides of the House because the kind of bouquets thrown at him previously would not have been similar. When the speeches came to an end, he drew himself up to full height in his Chair and stated that, on listening to everybody in the House, he thought he must have passed away and had to kick himself to be assured he was still alive and able to hear what was been said. I am sure the Minister, Deputy Brennan, is wondering what has happened.

I compliment the Minister on introducing the single rate of child dependant allowance because many others acknowledged there was a gross injustice to some children who were discriminated against simply because of the category of social welfare payment their parents were receiving.

I will perhaps embarrass the Minister further. It is not the first time I have seen Deputy Brennan do something that was against the run of play. In the short time he was Minister for Education, Deputy Brennan sorted out an extremely difficult problem in my constituency with a contentious issue on which others had turned their back. It is not new that he would take steps like that and I applaud him.

That said, we on this side of the House welcome generally the measures in the Social Welfare Bill. We have a job to do as well. We must point out where we are going, where the next steps should be taken and what are the next areas to be addressed and examined. It is in that context that I will put a few points to the Minister. I am, of course, confident that Deputy Brennan will not be able to deal with these problems because he will have moved to this side of the House, but perhaps Deputy Penrose, Deputy Stanton or somebody else will be the Minister capable of implementing the reforms of which I will speak.

The first such reform, which is along the same lines as that of the child dependant allowance, relates to child benefit. There is a gross inequity in child benefit. The rate is €180 for the first and second child, and there is a much higher rate for subsequent children. That is not fair. Why should one discriminate against the third child? The ridiculous situation arises where when the first child getting a particular rate, the Department does not know what rate to give the twins who follow and, therefore, divides it between them so that they get a rate half-way between the rates applicable for a second child and a third child. The same level of payment for child benefit should apply across the board. There should not be different rates for first, second and third children.

It is important that the Minister managed to introduce a second tier of payments, to which he and others made reference. We need this second tier of payments whereby people on lower incomes will qualify for a higher rate of child benefit. It is important to go down that road and take a step towards working in that direction. I hope whoever is Minister on the next occasion — it will not be me — will start down that road.

The second issue I ask the Minister, or whoever will be the incumbent after the election, to examine is the terrible and grossly wrong discrepancy between long-term and short-term payments and the consequences flowing from being on one rather than the other. For example, a person on a long-term payment is entitled to the Christmas bonus whereas a person on the short-term payment is not. Unemployment benefit is a stamps-related payment. It is an insurance scheme into which one pays. When a person needs to draw unemployment benefit, he or she is entitled to draw down the stamps. A person who draws down his or her stamps does not get the

Christmas bonus. By comparison, a person on unemployment assistance, who perhaps does not have the same level of stamps, whose stamps are old or who does not have the same contributions, gets the Christmas bonus. That is not fair.

To project that further to the children of those on unemployment assistance or unemployment benefit who attend third level, where a child attends third level a parent on the long-term payment will get the dependant allowance but a parent on the short-term payment will not. That is not fair. The Minister is discriminating against those who have contributed to the social welfare fund and who are in their time of need.

A further disadvantage arises in the case of the higher education grant top-up for those on low incomes. If one is in receipt of unemployment benefit, which is stamp-related, and one's child is in higher education, one is not entitled to the top-up payment. However, if one is in receipt of unemployment assistance, which is not stamp-related, and one's child is in higher education, one is entitled to the top-up payment.

Debate adjourned.

Adjournment Debate.

General Practitioner Co-operatives.

Mr. Kirk: I do not intend to delay the House, other than to inquire with the HSE, via the Department of Health and Children, when the doctor on call scheme will be extended to all parts of County Louth. Many parts of the country now have this excellent service and where it is available, the service has enhanced patient care considerably. The elderly living in isolated areas have particularly benefited from the availability of doctors on a round the clock, seven days a week basis.

While the range of services provided for care in the community has grown significantly, there are pockets where the doctor on call scheme is not available. There may be local reasons and justifications for this or there may be no justifications for its not being available. County Louth has experienced a rapid population growth in the past five or six years as a result of the upturn in the economy and every part of the county needs a doctor on call service.

When the doctor on call service is available in other parts of the country, the pressure on accident and emergency departments is considerably reduced. The need for people to be rushed to hospital because of the unavailability of a doctor often means that family members must provide the transport. In turn, this brings people into accident and emergency departments who should be dealt with in a home setting. There is a clear need

[Mr. Kirk.]

to accelerate efforts to put in place a full doctor on call scheme countrywide.

My interest tonight is parochial and relates to County Louth. When can we expect to have a comprehensive doctor on call service available?

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The development of GP out of hours co-operatives throughout the country is an essential part of our health service policy of strengthening primary care services and ensuring that, to the greatest extent possible, care needs are met in the primary care setting. Out of hours co-operatives allow general practitioners to put in place arrangements to provide services to their patients while their surgeries are closed in the evenings, at weekends and on public holidays. These co-operatives offer responsive, high quality services, which are delivered by on duty doctors, nurses and secretarial staff in well equipped, modern clinical centres. The service can be accessed through a single lo-call telephone number in each region.

Organised co-operatives enable general practitioners to manage the provision of urgently needed care in a way that affords them reasonable off duty arrangements. This is an important resource which helps to maintain and sustain GP services provided by single-handed doctors and other smaller practices in rural and deprived urban areas. Out of hours co-operatives are now in place in all Health Service Executive areas providing coverage in all, or in part of all, counties.

Between 2000 and 2005, my Department allocated approximately €105 million to the HSE for out of hours GP co-operatives. Almost €34 million is available to the executive for these services in 2006. In 2007, a further €3 million has been allocated to meet the full-year cost of co-operative developments commenced in 2006.

North-eastern doctor on call, NEDOC, is a partnership between the HSE and participating general practices in the north east. There are 48 GPs with general medical service contracts in County Louth and 21 of these participate in the co-operative. NEDOC provides out of hours services to patients of participating practices from 6 p.m. to 8 a.m., Monday to Friday, and around the clock at weekends and on public holidays. The service was established in September 2000 and more than 400,000 care interactions have been provided to date. A recent patient satisfaction survey recorded extremely high satisfaction levels, with 96% of respondents saying they were satisfied with the service. Between 2000 and 2006, more than €15 million was allocated to the former North Eastern Health Board and the HSE for the expansion of the out of hours co-operative in the north-eastern area. This dedicated funding does not include fees paid to participating practitioners for attending patients.

There are four main treatment centres in NEDOC based in Castleblayney, Cavan, Drogheda and Navan. There are also ten peripheral centres where GPs can arrange to meet patients nearer to their homes when required. I have been advised by the HSE that the Dundalk area is not covered by NEDOC as the majority of GPs practising there have declined to join the NEDOC co-operative. There is also an insufficient number of GPs willing to participate in the co-operative to enable the executive to establish a treatment centre in Dundalk.

There is no contractual obligation on GPs to participate in these co-operatives and these GPs are providing out of hours cover to their public patients through agreed rota arrangements in accordance with their GMS contracts. The HSE has confirmed that it will continue to work towards the extension of the GP out of hours co-operative to all GP practices in the north east and, in particular, that it will continue to actively pursue the establishment of a NEDOC treatment centre for the Dundalk area.

Schools Building Projects.

Mr. Crawford: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for permitting debate on this important issue and the Minister of State for coming here to reply to it. The issue relates to the need for the Minister for Education and Science to announce immediate funding so that the go-ahead may be given to the extension at St. Mary's national school in Virginia.

The town of Virginia has dramatically increased in size over the past few years. Many of its new inhabitants have bought houses there and work in Dublin. It is bad enough for them that the M3 has not been built, but the fact that their children, and the children of families who have lived in Virginia all their lives, have no acceptable school accommodation is deplorable.

The existing school was built for approximately 190 pupils and there are 315 pupils on the roll today. There are seven teachers working in prefabs where they teach approximately 150 pupils. There is no longer a computer room or library. There is no storage for all the resources needed to fully implement what the principal accepts is a wonderful new child-friendly curriculum. The principal has no office and has to use part of an old building, while 17 female teachers are using a single toilet. The rental of prefabs for the past two years was €90,000 and at best will cost a minimum of €360,000 before a new school can be finalised.

If ever there was an example of failed consultation between the housing section in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and our education system, this is it. Surely we must not just plan for houses, but at

the same time for services such as schools. It is totally unacceptable that no senior Department official has stood on the site since the application for an extension consisting of four classrooms and three ancillary rooms was made in April 2004. While I appreciate that I received a commitment from senior Department officials on Monday that every effort is being made to assess projected needs to bring us up to 2011, it is difficult to explain to parents, teachers and management why the Minister, Deputy Hanafin, has not assured more progress on such a critical issue.

The management team met the Minister in June 2005 and it is still awaiting progress. I ask the Minister of State to make sure that the assessments are finished before the end of the year so that it is included in the new year programme as an urgent and emergency need. I hope that by the end of January the Minister for Education and Science will be in a position to allow her Department to bring this to the planning stage.

I compliment the parents' association, management, principal, teachers and all the staff for the delivery of an excellent service in an extremely difficult situation. It creates difficulties for teachers and pupils, both in class and at play, but it is clearly even more difficult for children needing resource-remedial or other support teaching. It is difficult to teach normal-sized classes in such accommodation but it is impossible when five of the classes have over 30 pupils and three have over 35.

This school has a waiting list for some of its classes. Some 49% of the pupils from first to sixth class have joined after junior infants, highlighting the influx of new people to the area. Of course, they came as a result of the increased housing, which itself came as a result of planning. Situations such as this should be dealt with in advance and planning taken into account by our education system.

The people of Virginia have the proud record of providing their own secondary school in very difficult times, when the State had no money. It is unacceptable that, with the State coffers bulging to the extent the Tánaiste says there is no need for all the taxes, teachers and children should have to survive in such structures. It is difficult to explain to the farming community and small shop owners how health and safety considerations can be ignored by the Department of Education and Science when they are subject to such on-the-spot inspections under the guise of so-called EU regulations.

The Minister of State's colleague, Deputy Brendan Smith, was at the meeting last night, as was Deputy Connolly. We saw at first hand the seriousness of the situation. The school does not even have computers, which is not the way young children should be taught in this day and age. I urge him to bring a message to the Minister that this is an urgent crisis.

Mr. Connolly: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for selecting this item for debate. As Deputy Crawford said, we and the Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food, Deputy Brendan Smith, attended a meeting last night at St. Mary's school, Virginia. It was a very well-attended meeting and was very constructive. The parents' committee had briefed us exceptionally well and handled the meeting well.

Deputy Crawford, the Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food, Deputy Brendan Smith and I made a promise to work as a team for the people of Virginia. I am sure other Oireachtas colleagues will join with us, so that it will not be allowed to become a political football. There was much debate about how the school had arrived at the situation in which it finds itself. A decision was made that that was historical and we had moved forward. The view of the meeting was that we should consider what is to happen in the future. There are reasons why the situation has got to where it is, such as the increase in population at a rate much more rapid than anybody had anticipated, the increase in new house building and poor planning by departments who did not interact and apply joined-up thinking. Difficulties that had arisen with the school were outlined and people were unhappy with the way the pupil-teacher ratio had been calculated. The school was regarded as having a ratio of 1:24 but in reality it is 1:29. With such a ratio the school would be entitled to an extra teacher. Not only were teachers taking classes but classroom assistants were brought in to make the picture look different. There are five classes with more than 30 pupils and three with 34 or more. Reference was made to the aeroplane seats into which the children were crammed, which is not a good teaching environment, whatever one might be teaching, as it is claustrophobic. The school was built for 190 pupils but there are now nearly twice as many.

Mention was also made of the external facilities, such as the way the portakabins took up the children's play space and the fact that the school faced a busy road. The primary schoolchildren can climb on to the wall, leading to a situation where three members of staff feel they must, for safety reasons, patrol the school yard daily, whereas in most schools one suffices.

It was also revealed that there was one toilet for 17 female staff, which presents health and safety difficulties and would not be accepted in any private industry, never mind in a public institution, which is supposed to be the upholder of such standards.

The collection and dropping off of children also causes difficulties. Approximately 90% of the children must cross the road at some time, because most live on the far side from the school. There is no school crossing, although Cavan County Council advanced many reasons why that

[Mr. Connolly.]

had to be so. It was suggested that primary school students be trained to teach the younger children how to cross roads. That is fine if a lollipop man or woman is there to supervise the training programme, but that is not the case and the issue needs to be addressed.

One of the big issues to arise during the night was the assessment process. It was generally known by all present that the Minister had sent an official to examine the case in May 2005. How much time does it take to assess a problem as obvious as children having to attend a cramped school which cannot accommodate its students? Everyone knows that Virginia is a growing commuter town of Dublin. A better road structure will be delivered in the near future and the school has a fair argument.

I wish I could share the optimism of the Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food, Deputy Brendan Smith, who said the assessment would be finished by late January or early February, when he appeared to expect positive news. I hope the Minister of State can add to that this evening.

Mr. S. Power: I thank both Deputies for raising these matters as it affords me the opportunity to outline to the House the Government's strategy for capital investment in education projects and, in particular, to outline the position regarding the proposed building project for St. Mary's national school in Virginia and the situation relating to its staffing levels. It is good to see two Deputies from the same constituency working together as a team. I wish them well in their efforts.

Modernising facilities in our 3,200 primary and 750 post-primary schools, as well as responding to emerging needs in areas of rapid population growth, is a major priority for the Government. Since taking office, this Government has shown focused determination to improve the condition of our school buildings and to ensure that the appropriate facilities are in place to enable the implementation of a broad and balanced curriculum.

As evidence of this commitment, approximately 1,300 building and modernisation projects are active in our primary and post-primary schools during 2006. This year alone some €500 million is being spent on primary and post-primary projects throughout the country, compared to approx €90 million in 1997. Indeed, funding has progressively been increased in recent years with an aggregate total of over €2 billion between 2000 and 2005 and a commitment to invest a further €3.9 billion up to 2010.

I am sure the Deputies will agree that this record level of investment is a positive testament to the high priority the Government attaches to ensuring that school accommodation is of the highest standard possible. On top of this, to

reduce red tape and allow projects to move faster, responsibility for smaller projects has been devolved to school level. Standard designs have also been developed for 8- and 16-classroom schools to facilitate speedier delivery of projects and to save on design fees. The design and build method is also used to expedite delivery where the use of standard designs is not possible. Taken together with the unprecedented level of funding available, these initiatives ensure that building projects are delivered within the fastest time-frame possible.

St. Mary's national school in Virginia is a co-educational primary school with a current enrolment of 309 pupils. In recent years an upward trend in enrolment at the school has necessitated a review by the Department of housing developments, demographic trends and enrolment trends in the area to ensure that any capital funding provided will deliver accommodation appropriate to the school's need into the future. On completion of this assessment, a decision will be taken by the Department and conveyed to the school on how best to provide for the school's long-term accommodation needs. A site visit will be required to inform the final brief for the project and the Department will be in contact with the school authority to arrange this at the appropriate time. Following the site visit, the brief will be completed and the project will be considered for progress in the context of the school building and modernisation programme from 2007 onwards.

I assure the House that school building projects are selected by the Department for inclusion in a capital programme on the basis of priority of need presenting, which is determined by published prioritisation criteria formulated following consultation with the education partners. The application of these criteria to capital funding submissions and the publication of the school building programme ensure that maximum openness and transparency applies to the school building and modernisation programme. Most importantly, this approach ensures that all schools applying for capital funding can know how their applications will be treated and when they are likely to progress.

The mainstream staffing of a primary school is determined by reference to the school's enrolment figures on 30 September of the previous year. The number of mainstream posts is determined by reference to a staffing schedule that is finalised for a particular school year following discussions with the education partners. The staffing schedule is set out in a circular that issues from the Department to all primary school boards of management. Accordingly, all boards are aware of the staffing position for their schools in any school year.

The general rule is that the schedule provides at least one classroom teacher for every 28 pupils

in the school. Schools with only one or two teachers have much lower staffing ratios, with two teachers for just 12 pupils in some cases and so on. Next year, this ratio will be reduced to 27 children per classroom teacher.

On 30 September 2005, St. Mary's national school had an enrolment of 278 pupils, which warrants a staffing for the 2006-07 school year of a principal and ten mainstream teachers. The school also has the services of one permanent learning support-resource teacher and one temporary language support teacher.

Within the terms of the current staffing arrangements for primary schools, there is provision for additional posts, referred to as developing school posts, to be assigned to schools on the basis of projected enrolments for the next school year. A developing school is defined as a school where the enrolment on 30 September of one year is projected to exceed the enrolment of 30 September of the previous year by a specified minimum numerical increase and by having an excess of five pupils above the required appointment figure.

I am pleased to inform this House that one such developing school post was sanctioned by the Department at St. Mary's national school for the 2006-07 school year based on an enrolment of 309 pupils. In the circumstances, the Department is satisfied that the school's staffing levels are consistent with its needs and nationally agreed protocols. I assure both Deputies that the Department is anxious to move ahead with the school's building project and every effort will be made to finalise an accommodation brief so that the project can move to the next stage.

Landslides Prevention.

Mr. Stanton: I thank the Ceann Comhairle's office and the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for this opportunity. I also thank the staff of the House and the Minister of State for staying late to hear what I have to say.

I do not know whether the Minister of State has been in the town of Cobh. If not, I invite him to visit. The town is built on a series of hills and, consequently, is susceptible to landslides. In the past 25 years, the town council has raised with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the potential danger to human life caused by landslides. To be fair, the Department has provided funding to Cobh Town Council to repair damage caused by landslides and to carry out works to stabilise slopes. While these substantial and recent works were funded 100% by the Department, a number of areas continue to give rise to concern.

In 2005, JODA Engineering Consultants prepared a report outlining some of the areas where it was believed that further work was necessary. The report has been forwarded to the Depart-

ment's officials. The town council understands that the opinion of the Department is that a full review of the landslide programme must be carried out before further funding can be sanctioned by the Department of Finance. While the council has no difficulties with a review of that nature, serious concerns have been expressed that it may give rise to a delay in dealing with the issues raised in the JODA report. The report identifies a number of locations where work is urgently needed, including Harbour Terrace, Harbour Road, Connolly Street and a number of smaller projects. Many of the necessary works have been costed and requests for sanction to carry them out have been submitted to the Department.

Since the report's completion, two further areas have experienced landslides. On 18 November, a serious landslide occurred on West View, resulting in the closure of the public road. JODA has reported to the council regarding the danger of further landslides with the potential to affect the safety of persons and property, including a number of houses. The council has also been advised of a rockfall on the grounds of Belview national school, giving rise to concerns about the safety of the children attending the school. It should be noted that neither West View nor Belview was prioritised by JODA in its report.

On foot of representations by concerned residents, members of Cobh Town Council have consistently raised this issue at council meetings. Councillor Paddy Whitty rang me this morning as I made my way here. Councillors are aware that a landslide in 1980 resulted in the tragic death of a child and are concerned that a similar occurrence is possible.

I do not know what is in the Minister of State's prepared script, but I ask that he take the matter seriously and ask the Department's officials to examine the case of Cobh. Having heard what I have said, he would agree that the matter needs urgent attention before a serious landslide resulting in injury or death occurs. We want to avoid such a situation if possible. Owing to the recent heavy rains, the issue is even more urgent because they can lead to further landslides, as the Minister of State knows. We have experienced tragedies in the past and I ask the Minister of State to use his good offices to prioritise this issue.

Mr. S. Power: I thank Deputy Stanton for raising this matter. I am standing in for my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Roche.

The urban area of Cobh is unique in terms of its geological and structural problems. The geology of the area is limestone shale, which has become unstable in certain areas following excavation and weathering. This instability has been exacerbated by the manner in which Cobh

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developed, particularly in the 19th century. As a result of the construction of the naval dockyard and supply port at Haulbowline, the population of the town grew from a few hundred at the beginning of the 1800s to 7,000 by 1837. Demand for accommodation meant that hillsides were excavated to create building space and access roads. This activity resulted in steep slope faces and rock faces of up to 90 degrees behind houses. The excavated stone was used to construct the houses, roads and retaining walls. Those retaining walls were generally substandard.

Following a fatality caused by a landslide in 1980, the Department has given considerable financial assistance towards remedial works undertaken by Cobh Town Council to strengthen areas susceptible to landslides. The assistance takes the form of 100% grants subject to prior approval of the remedial works by the Department. Since 1980, grants of more than €4 million have been paid to Cobh Town Council.

I assure the Deputy that while the Minister shares his concern about the situation in Cobh, he must also be satisfied that works to be undertaken from public funds are cost effective and properly prioritised. The existing Department of Finance sanction allows the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to recoup expenditure to a limit of €4,285,366.

As there has been an ongoing programme of works during almost a quarter of a century, periodic review is important. It is now desirable to quantify the number of projects left to be completed, the estimated completion date and the potential final cost. Cork County Council will take the lead in this review. I understand that a draft brief for the engagement of a specialist adviser in connection with the review has been endorsed by the Department subject to some adjustments. Cork County Council has also been advised that if it is of the opinion that immediate remedial works are essential in the interest of public safety, the Department is prepared to consider a proposal from it.

Cork County Council is free to commit its own resources to meet such works as it considers necessary. In this regard, the Minister has announced increased local government fund allocations of almost €948 million in general purpose grants to all local authorities, including Cork County Council and Cobh Town Council. Next year, Cork County Council will receive €54.8 million from the fund, an increase of more than 6%, while Cobh Town Council will receive more than €1.3 million, up almost 8% on its 2006 allocation.

The Dáil adjourned at 11.30 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 13 December 2006.

Written Answers.

The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].

Questions Nos. 1 to 11, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 12 to 42, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 43 to 50, inclusive, answered orally.

Local Authority Funding.

51. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of the local government fund general purpose grants which are being allocated to local authorities for 2007; the amount by which these grants have been increased over 2006; the amount of the grants represented by the proceeds of motor tax and by Exchequer contribution; the amounts by which these components of the grants are being increased over the 2006 allocations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42597/06]

53. **Mr. G. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on whether the increase in the local government fund in the Estimates 2007 is adequate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42529/06]

56. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the rate of income received from each local authority since 2000; the way they are expected to maintain services in view of the local government fund allocation for 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42569/06]

139. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will significantly increase funding to local government in view of cost increases due to pay

increases to local authority employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42563/06]

168. **Mr. McEntee** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will significantly increase funding to local Government in view of increased costs for maintenance of infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42564/06]

513. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has notified local authorities as to the amount they will be allocated through the Local Government Fund for 2007; the amount to be paid out to all local authorities; the way the Census 2006 Preliminary Report has impacted on the allocations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42266/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 51, 53, 56, 139, 168 and 513 together.

I refer to the reply to Priority Question No. 46 on today's Order Paper.

As already stated the funding that I will be providing to local authorities for 2007, through general purpose grants from the Local Government Fund, will continue the strong trend of increasing central government support for the local government sector.

Yesterday I announced the allocation of almost €958m to local authorities for 2007, increasing the level of general purpose grants by 8% over the final allocations for 2006. The 2007 allocations figure is 2.8 times the initial allocation provided in 1997. This funding will assist local authorities in framing realistic and reasonable budgets in the statutory time period available to them to complete their budgetary process.

[Mr. Roche.]

The Government has provided unprecedented increases in funding to local authorities since 1997. I am satisfied that with our commitment to local government, and increased income buoyancy generated from the greatly strengthened commercial base supported by the Government's successful economic policies, local authorities are in a very good position to respond to the public's need for quality services. I would also like to draw the House's attention to the increase in development contributions, which I mentioned in an earlier reply.

In allocating funding for 2007, I have taken into account the cost to each authority of providing its services, and factors including population increases, and the income from local sources.

The adoption of a budget is one of the most important reserved functions conferred on local authorities as it underpins their financial business for the following year. While I have no direct function in budgetary decision-making at local level, I have urged local authorities to continue to exercise appropriate restraint in setting any increases in commercial rates and charges. This is important to the long-term viability and competitiveness of commercial operations and to the overall competitiveness of the economy. Local authorities responded positively this year to my request in this regard and increases in rates and charges for 2006 were generally of a lower order than in previous years.

In this regard, I am also bringing forward an amendment this week, to the Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Bill 2006, to enhance the role of audit committees in local authorities and to provide for outside expert membership. Audit committees will in future review financial and budgetary reporting practices and procedures within a local authority; foster the development of best practice in the internal audit function; review auditor's reports and assess follow-up action by management; assess and promote efficiency and value for money; and review risk management systems.

Current expenditure in the local government sector in 2007 is likely to be some €4.5bn. Within this quantum of expenditure there is scope for efficiencies, innovation and further steps to ensure greater value for money. Elected members should examine their draft budget closely to ensure that every effort is made to get the maximum value for the expenditure proposed.

The funding accruing to the Local Government Fund comprises the proceeds of Motor Tax, an Exchequer contribution and interest earned on balances of the Fund. These are consolidated into the Fund; grants can not be attributed to specific elements of the Fund.

The following table shows, for each local authority, the allocations of general purpose grants from 2000 to 2007 and the percentage increases provided.

L.G.F. General Purpose Allocation 2000-2007 and % increases over previous years.

Local Authority	2000	% Inc.	2001	% Inc.	2002	% Inc.	2003	% Inc.
	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%
Carlow County Council	5,528,139	23.63	6,834,590	13.06	7,727,102	10.65	8,550,012	13.78
Cavan County Council	9,173,748	15.38	10,584,524	10.58	11,704,245	9.05	12,763,044	18.63
Clare County Council	7,324,318	20.58	8,831,743	7.85	9,524,638	19.57	11,389,001	15.20
Cork County Council	28,287,872	21.42	34,346,705	6.28	36,503,870	12.00	40,885,788	11.45
Donegal County Council	18,123,735	22.72	22,241,740	8.79	24,197,831	13.65	27,501,531	17.44
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	24,119,073	9.50	26,410,385	5.60	27,889,622	4.36	29,105,207	11.74
Fingal County Council	19,758,195	9.93	21,719,297	6.21	23,067,650	4.28	24,054,842	12.11
Galway County Council	18,176,264	22.33	22,234,413	6.99	23,788,328	10.60	26,308,990	11.80
Kerry County Council	12,669,228	24.66	15,793,578	7.80	17,025,044	10.73	18,851,104	14.14
Kildare County Council	11,810,017	13.85	13,445,469	13.82	15,303,344	8.09	16,541,890	17.93
Kilkenny County Council	9,228,658	25.06	11,541,052	9.81	12,672,851	9.31	13,852,731	17.29
Laois County Council	8,911,942	13.47	10,112,603	12.37	11,363,361	8.65	12,345,838	18.48
Leitrim County Council	7,270,916	18.65	8,626,795	10.11	9,498,936	10.40	10,486,848	13.25
Limerick County Council	13,898,596	9.50	15,218,963	8.20	16,466,828	12.64	18,548,018	12.20
Longford County Council	6,958,664	10.07	7,659,458	12.77	8,637,773	12.00	9,673,977	16.46
Louth County Council	6,696,872	9.50	7,333,073	13.01	8,286,979	14.21	9,464,262	13.47
Mayo County Council	17,807,062	12.86	20,097,045	10.15	22,136,892	14.43	25,330,464	17.46
Meath County Council	13,038,999	14.49	14,928,818	18.67	17,715,578	4.61	18,532,580	17.90
Monaghan County Council	7,546,154	12.87	8,517,483	10.84	9,441,027	11.13	10,492,148	13.23
North Tipperary County Council	8,634,713	24.36	10,738,079	9.64	11,773,642	8.23	12,742,525	18.29
Offaly County Council	7,627,532	14.43	8,728,140	7.68	9,398,295	10.35	10,371,348	18.47
Roscommon County Council	11,395,159	19.26	13,589,602	11.76	15,188,170	4.24	15,832,438	12.45
Sligo County Council	8,464,875	9.50	9,269,039	21.84	11,293,523	6.70	12,050,669	15.43

Local Authority	2000	% Inc.	2001	% Inc.	2002	% Inc.	2003	% Inc.
	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%
South Dublin County Council	15,184,106	9.50	16,626,595	12.18	18,652,158	4.54	19,498,244	12.17
South Tipperary County Council	11,460,468	14.66	13,140,265	8.69	14,282,421	10.13	15,729,880	15.56
Waterford County Council	10,131,985	18.12	11,968,195	11.29	13,319,771	15.19	15,342,673	14.43
Westmeath County Council	9,928,019	15.95	11,511,046	7.97	12,428,512	17.41	14,592,028	13.75
Wexford County Council	11,376,616	9.50	12,457,393	6.73	13,295,995	12.98	15,021,831	12.50
Wicklow County Council	9,267,974	21.77	11,285,211	8.96	12,296,360	13.49	13,954,952	12.63
Cork City Council	14,140,866	14.97	16,257,286	7.80	17,525,439	4.57	18,326,457	12.25
Dublin City Council	49,382,300	9.50	54,073,619	6.17	57,409,551	27.83	73,385,905	11.11
Galway City Council	5,439,512	9.50	5,956,265	7.80	6,420,782	5.56	6,777,613	14.57
Limerick City Council	6,053,333	15.27	6,977,429	9.20	7,619,444	11.53	8,498,080	13.79
Waterford City Council	4,276,163	9.50	4,682,398	15.46	5,406,076	12.94	6,105,503	14.94
Clonmel Borough Council	1,881,671	10.27	2,074,970	9.38	2,269,576	6.70	2,421,693	16.36
Drogheda Borough Council	2,405,658	21.81	2,930,275	27.03	3,722,263	-3.20	3,603,075	11.72
Kilkenny Borough Council	1,131,474	9.50	1,238,963	11.19	1,377,642	4.73	1,442,748	15.46
Sligo Borough Council	1,507,622	44.03	2,171,368	5.88	2,298,982	4.43	2,400,941	12.13
Wexford Borough Council	1,243,185	14.82	1,427,365	9.52	1,563,233	16.64	1,823,350	12.53
Arklow Town Council	891,801	9.50	976,522	13.87	1,112,004	4.90	1,166,484	12.60
Athlone Town Council	1,121,306	9.50	1,227,829	12.62	1,382,775	4.72	1,448,086	12.27
Athy Town Council	353,764	9.50	387,371	9.92	425,786	18.35	503,912	20.85
Ballina Town Council	813,382	9.50	890,653	7.14	954,232	17.05	1,116,909	18.68
Ballinasloe Town Council	524,840	9.50	574,700	8.31	622,481	5.61	657,380	16.77
Birr Town Council	376,772	9.50	412,565	18.74	489,878	18.04	578,258	18.07
Bray Town Council	2,854,840	9.50	3,126,051	5.61	3,301,399	5.23	3,474,089	11.46
Buncrana Town Council	452,709	24.49	563,565	16.54	656,785	5.52	693,056	13.77
Bundoran Town Council	303,269	21.51	368,513	17.68	433,667	6.31	461,014	15.22
Carlow Town Council	993,165	28.04	1,271,639	6.50	1,354,267	4.74	1,418,438	12.29
Carrickmacross Town Council	281,488	9.50	308,229	16.71	359,740	17.09	421,203	15.63
Carrick-on-Suir Town Council	541,631	21.87	660,084	15.73	763,946	5.44	805,527	13.37
Cashel Town Council	312,489	22.18	381,814	20.48	460,020	6.17	488,421	16.28
Castlebar Town Council	658,247	9.50	720,782	7.64	775,867	5.29	816,902	13.33
Castleblaney Town Council	231,695	9.51	253,729	12.51	285,462	19.50	341,136	22.75
Cavan Town Council	446,557	9.50	488,980	22.45	598,736	5.67	632,685	20.05
Clonakilty Town Council	294,184	20.23	353,701	25.66	444,449	6.25	472,227	15.12
Clones Town Council	302,360	9.50	331,084	10.93	367,283	6.72	391,974	15.99
Cobh Town Council	737,332	9.50	807,378	13.78	918,659	5.09	965,405	12.96
Dundalk Town Council	3,288,718	9.50	3,601,147	15.88	4,172,913	-0.82	4,138,586	11.37
Dungarvan Town Council	640,213	11.06	711,039	7.68	765,637	5.31	806,262	13.37
Ennis Town Council	1,317,473	16.51	1,534,941	7.96	1,657,136	16.60	1,932,278	11.92
Enniscorthy Town Council	594,326	39.41	828,545	9.55	907,640	6.39	965,667	12.96
Fermoy Town Council	366,377	28.61	471,213	20.85	569,464	10.32	628,253	20.07
Kells Town Council	232,216	9.61	254,541	26.62	322,291	16.29	374,777	16.22
Killarney Town Council	728,290	53.13	1,115,202	9.51	1,221,266	8.82	1,329,029	18.39
Kilrush Town Council	314,282	9.50	344,139	18.45	407,641	11.74	455,517	17.79
Kinsale Town Council	199,928	9.50	218,921	34.47	294,376	7.40	316,151	17.21
Letterkenny Town Council	730,228	9.50	799,598	7.38	858,624	5.16	902,969	13.10
Listowel Town Council	459,420	9.50	503,064	11.36	560,208	5.78	592,616	14.26
Longford Town Council	665,302	24.69	829,563	10.76	918,833	5.09	965,586	12.96
Macroom Town Council	275,126	9.50	301,263	23.62	372,429	18.69	442,018	21.41
Mallow Town Council	516,258	19.60	617,427	12.49	694,561	17.44	815,691	19.34
Midleton Town Council	299,421	9.50	327,866	11.09	364,232	6.75	388,801	16.03
Monaghan Town Council	691,676	9.50	757,386	16.13	879,573	4.44	918,660	13.06
Naas Town Council	547,152	9.50	599,132	37.92	826,340	17.21	968,554	18.95
Navan Town Council	301,610	9.50	330,263	22.54	404,697	6.47	430,885	15.53
Nenagh Town Council	644,156	9.50	705,352	13.65	801,600	8.61	870,607	13.27
New Ross Town Council	559,087	9.50	612,201	8.11	661,857	5.51	698,331	13.75
Skibbereen Town Council	230,906	16.45	268,893	18.54	318,755	7.14	341,505	16.74
Templemore Town Council	274,318	16.98	320,891	23.58	396,553	10.80	439,380	15.44

[Mr. Roche.]

Local Authority	2000	% Inc.	2001	% Inc.	2002	% Inc.	2003	% Inc.
	€	%	€	%	€	%	€	%
Thurles Town Council	565,623	17.47	664,413	7.87	716,680	5.40	755,347	13.53
Tipperary Town Council	445,199	12.68	501,639	17.70	590,438	5.69	624,056	14.09
Tralee Town Council	1,833,125	22.19	2,239,885	10.85	2,482,838	4.40	2,592,152	11.66
Trim Town Council	324,785	9.50	355,640	13.58	403,941	6.48	430,099	15.53
Tullamore Town Council	732,629	12.94	827,445	16.62	964,947	7.73	1,039,534	12.81
Westport Town Council	454,546	25.07	568,484	11.72	635,116	5.57	670,521	13.87
Wicklow Town Council	594,234	86.16	1,106,216	6.72	1,180,573	6.53	1,257,638	12.47
Youghal Town Council	567,870	29.58	735,837	16.13	854,504	5.17	898,684	13.11
Totals	469,148,008	15.26	540,738,573	9.56	592,406,833	11.32	659,443,488	13.99

Local Authority	2004	% Inc	2005	% Inc	2006	% Inc	2007
	€	%	€	%	€	%	€
Carlow County Council	9,728,045	9.81	10,682,438	10.39	11,791,970	6.31	12,536,458
Cavan County Council	15,140,507	11.10	16,821,425	7.46	18,075,814	8.03	19,526,749
Clare County Council	13,119,878	5.43	13,831,947	6.58	14,741,484	6.31	15,672,190
Cork County Council	45,568,050	7.64	49,050,276	5.11	51,554,596	6.31	54,809,504
Donegal County Council	32,298,892	10.57	35,713,379	7.94	38,547,272	7.81	41,556,957
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council	32,523,127	7.75	35,043,452	5.89	37,109,051	6.31	39,451,937
Fingal County Council	26,968,845	6.95	28,844,494	5.11	30,317,184	6.31	32,231,264
Galway County Council	29,413,192	10.89	32,616,878	8.22	35,296,907	9.05	38,490,666
Kerry County Council	21,515,805	8.75	23,399,482	8.97	25,497,932	8.25	27,600,743
Kildare County Council	19,507,617	11.75	21,799,170	9.61	23,893,115	10.81	26,476,801
Kilkenny County Council	16,247,569	10.04	17,878,074	7.54	19,226,389	8.33	20,827,594
Laois County Council	14,627,815	9.16	15,968,328	6.58	17,019,082	7.74	18,336,335
Leitrim County Council	11,875,969	10.00	13,063,981	8.46	14,168,597	9.15	15,465,369
Limerick County Council	20,810,886	8.18	22,513,686	7.32	24,160,987	8.03	26,101,406
Longford County Council	11,266,561	11.02	12,508,061	6.30	13,296,084	10.24	14,657,063
Louth County Council	10,739,283	7.05	11,496,518	5.11	12,083,486	10.81	13,390,136
Mayo County Council	29,752,341	9.47	32,568,821	7.99	35,170,634	8.08	38,012,273
Meath County Council	21,849,991	8.82	23,776,226	9.73	26,089,431	9.56	28,583,173
Monaghan County Council	11,880,507	11.84	13,287,104	8.10	14,363,459	9.43	15,718,151
North Tipperary County Council	15,073,723	9.16	16,453,791	8.03	17,775,415	8.90	19,357,349
Offaly County Council	12,287,077	13.66	13,965,967	4.99	14,662,707	10.69	16,230,539
Roscommon County Council	17,802,907	8.51	19,318,766	7.19	20,706,920	7.20	22,198,317
Sligo County Council	13,910,355	8.99	15,161,087	9.61	16,617,403	6.65	17,723,150
South Dublin County Council	21,870,507	7.19	23,442,061	5.11	24,638,923	6.31	26,194,505
South Tipperary County Council	18,176,993	9.00	19,813,401	9.24	21,643,602	9.49	23,696,915
Waterford County Council	17,556,648	7.66	18,900,701	9.09	20,618,871	10.81	22,848,496
Westmeath County Council	16,598,009	8.98	18,088,035	8.15	19,562,134	9.33	21,387,695
Wexford County Council	16,899,923	12.58	19,026,652	5.97	20,163,308	9.96	22,172,296
Wicklow County Council	15,717,095	10.94	17,437,258	7.77	18,791,404	8.09	20,311,251
Cork City Council	20,571,177	7.29	22,070,779	9.96	24,267,960	10.81	26,892,180
Dublin City Council	81,537,355	6.46	86,806,479	8.11	93,847,042	6.89	100,310,537
Galway City Council	7,765,314	6.97	8,306,487	5.53	8,765,669	6.75	9,357,649
Limerick City Council	9,670,037	7.57	10,401,855	5.99	11,025,361	6.31	11,721,449
Waterford City Council	7,017,618	7.43	7,538,868	6.52	8,030,490	6.31	8,537,496
Clonmel Borough Council	2,817,955	7.41	3,026,749	7.26	3,246,558	6.40	3,454,446
Drogheda Borough Council	4,025,247	6.97	4,305,655	5.11	4,525,485	9.32	4,947,336
Kilkenny Borough Council	1,665,800	7.54	1,791,342	5.11	1,882,801	6.31	2,001,672
Sligo Borough Council	2,692,269	7.58	2,896,281	8.33	3,137,649	6.31	3,335,745
Wexford Borough Council	2,051,811	7.62	2,208,137	5.11	2,320,876	6.31	2,467,405
Arklow Town Council	1,313,449	6.96	1,404,822	9.61	1,539,764	10.81	1,706,267
Athlone Town Council	1,625,701	7.74	1,751,512	9.13	1,911,434	6.31	2,032,113

Local Authority	2004	% Inc	2005	% Inc	2006	% Inc	2007
	€	%	€	%	€	%	€
Athy Town Council	608,994	6.98	651,493	9.61	714,073	8.90	777,620
Ballina Town Council	1,325,492	6.79	1,415,439	8.05	1,529,354	9.63	1,676,625
Ballinasloe Town Council	767,615	7.32	823,783	9.61	902,912	6.73	963,718
Birr Town Council	682,765	7.24	732,175	7.60	787,852	7.45	846,550
Bray Town Council	3,872,222	7.52	4,163,243	5.11	4,375,802	9.20	4,778,238
Buncrana Town Council	788,491	7.26	845,720	5.11	888,899	6.31	945,020
Bundoran Town Council	531,192	7.50	571,006	5.11	600,159	6.31	638,050
Carlow Town Council	1,592,826	6.99	1,704,188	6.92	1,822,194	6.31	1,937,239
Carrickmacross Town Council	487,049	8.87	530,247	7.96	572,465	9.84	628,815
Carrick-on-Suir Town Council	913,204	9.20	997,256	9.61	1,093,049	10.81	1,211,246
Cashel Town Council	567,942	7.35	609,661	9.61	668,223	7.42	717,796
Castlebar Town Council	925,816	6.45	985,490	5.11	1,035,805	6.31	1,101,201
Castleblaney Town Council	418,735	7.93	451,925	6.00	479,048	6.64	510,858
Cavan Town Council	759,510	7.56	816,951	5.11	858,661	6.31	912,873
Clonakilty Town Council	543,626	9.01	592,585	5.11	622,840	6.31	662,163
Clones Town Council	454,638	9.88	499,544	9.61	547,528	10.81	606,735
Cobh Town Council	1,090,484	7.45	1,171,706	5.11	1,231,529	7.82	1,327,858
Dundalk Town Council	4,609,045	7.34	4,947,412	5.83	5,235,951	6.95	5,599,979
Dungarvan Town Council	914,019	7.83	985,620	5.11	1,035,942	6.31	1,101,346
Ennis Town Council	2,162,594	6.89	2,311,619	5.11	2,429,641	6.31	2,583,037
Enniscorthy Town Council	1,090,773	7.48	1,172,357	5.11	1,232,213	6.31	1,310,009
Fermoy Town Council	754,330	7.41	810,242	6.35	861,728	6.31	916,133
Kells Town Council	435,569	6.97	465,921	5.79	492,876	7.12	527,987
Killarney Town Council	1,573,427	6.77	1,679,917	6.29	1,785,532	8.78	1,942,242
Kilrush Town Council	536,551	9.14	585,584	5.89	620,096	8.94	675,554
Kinsale Town Council	370,562	7.00	396,511	5.66	418,957	6.31	445,408
Letterkenny Town Council	1,021,252	7.57	1,098,543	6.96	1,174,987	6.31	1,249,170
Listowel Town Council	677,119	7.35	726,879	7.33	780,150	7.82	841,180
Longford Town Council	1,090,684	7.37	1,171,116	5.11	1,230,909	6.31	1,308,623
Macroom Town Council	536,650	6.99	574,137	7.50	617,174	6.31	656,139
Mallow Town Council	973,415	7.70	1,048,414	5.45	1,105,565	6.31	1,175,365
Midleton Town Council	451,120	12.96	509,574	11.15	566,376	6.31	602,134
Monaghan Town Council	1,038,651	7.66	1,118,222	5.71	1,182,079	6.31	1,256,710
Naas Town Council	1,152,089	12.64	1,297,736	9.61	1,422,392	6.31	1,512,195
Navan Town Council	497,784	7.76	536,408	6.86	573,212	7.53	616,374
Nenagh Town Council	986,146	7.17	1,056,881	5.68	1,116,928	7.24	1,197,754
New Ross Town Council	794,340	13.92	904,943	7.54	973,173	6.18	1,033,315
Skibbereen Town Council	398,676	7.45	428,360	5.11	450,230	6.31	478,655
Templemore Town Council	507,204	14.29	579,703	7.76	624,685	10.20	688,381
Thurles Town Council	857,562	7.58	922,598	7.24	989,427	8.06	1,069,192
Tipperary Town Council	711,980	10.27	785,111	9.91	862,904	6.31	917,384
Tralee Town Council	2,894,291	7.39	3,108,105	5.40	3,275,876	6.31	3,482,699
Trim Town Council	496,912	8.00	536,670	6.04	569,104	8.06	614,994
Tullamore Town Council	1,172,681	7.01	1,254,885	5.11	1,318,955	6.31	1,402,227
Westport Town Council	763,503	6.89	816,087	5.11	857,753	6.31	911,907
Wicklow Town Council	1,414,524	7.20	1,516,377	7.79	1,634,559	6.31	1,737,757
Youghal Town Council	1,016,500	8.07	1,098,495	5.49	1,158,759	6.31	1,231,917
Totals	751,712,404	8.68	816,987,264	7.40	877,413,776	8.01	947,657,947

Register of Electors.

52. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has received further communications from local authorities regarding the electoral register; the local authorities that have raised issues with

his Department; the nature of such difficulties raised by them; his response in relation to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42540/06]

59. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Govern-

[Aengus Ó Snodaigh.]

ment if he has satisfied himself that the register of electors is as close as possible to accurate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42467/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 and 59 together.

In law, the preparation of the Register of Electors is a matter for each local registration authority. It is their duty to ensure, as far as possible and with the cooperation of the public, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the Register.

In April 2006, I announced a package of measures to assist local authorities in their work on preparing the 2007/8 Register, which included the use of Census enumerators or other temporary personnel to support local authorities in preparing the Register; over 1,500 personnel were engaged in this work.

There has been regular contact with local authorities throughout this year's electoral registration campaign, particularly in relation to establishing the overall framework in which the campaign was carried out and the compilation of data related to the process and its outcome.

The agreed procedures included provision for ensuring that each household was visited at least twice and provided with forms and information, if necessary. In the event that this process did not satisfactorily register the household, written notification would then be given cautioning of the danger of being omitted from the Register.

I also committed to providing additional ring-fenced financial resources to support local authorities' own spending in respect of the register campaign and advised authorities that a contribution of some €6 million can be made available in this regard. To date, €3 million has been paid to local authorities and a further €2 million in register funding is being processed. Another €1 million was provided for a national publicity and awareness campaign involving TV, radio, press and outdoor advertising.

Local authorities have carried out an extensive and intensive campaign in respect of the Draft Register for 2007/8, with both large numbers of additions to, and deletions from, the Register. On this basis, I am satisfied there will be significant improvement in the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the Register.

The process is not finished. Following requests from three local authorities, I have provided an extension of time to all councils and county registrars to complete their work on the Register — up until the 2nd and 12th January respectively. The final date for entry into force of the new register remains 15th February 2007. If any person is omitted from the Final Register, they will still have the opportunity to apply for entry on to the Supplement to the Register up to 15 days before polling day.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 51.

Local Authority Funding.

54. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the substantial increases in charges at local government level for local customers in areas where both a water and waste water treatment service is provided; and if he will significantly increase funding to local government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42571/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Government's water pricing policy requires full and transparent cost recovery of water services — this covers both water and waste water services — supplied to the non-domestic sector. Cost recovery from the non-domestic sector is to be achieved by way of a consolidated meter based volumetric charge, derived from separate rates applicable to water and waste water services. If a non-domestic consumer does not discharge to the public network, for example, where waste water is discharged to the consumer's septic tank, no charge for waste water services will arise. In general, it is not envisaged that an increased burden will arise for non-domestic consumers, solely because water and waste water (where applicable) rates are separately identified. Increases may however arise where a local authority operating the pricing policy had not previously sought to secure cost recovery from their non-domestic consumers.

In relation to the funding of the operational cost of water services provision, yesterday I announced the general purpose grants from the Local Government Fund to local authorities for 2007. This continued the trend of increasing central government support for the local government sector. In addition, a special Local Government Fund allocation of €10m was made in the budget to assist local authorities with extra running costs incurred in the operation of new water services infrastructure that is supporting unprecedented new development in recent years.

Departmental Funding.

55. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 7 of 8 November 2006, if he has given further consideration to the provision of assistance to householders, outside of the social housing arena, to retrofit their homes against radon gas and who are not in a position to afford the cost of the retrofitting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42477/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): As stated in response to previous Questions, the Government has for many years, largely through the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland, committed significant resources to assessing the extent of the radon problem throughout the country and to highlighting public awareness of radon and the health risks associated with radon. In reply to Question No. 607 of 1 November 2006, I outlined the numerous initiatives undertaken by the RPII and my Department. Householders, particularly those in high radon areas, have been strongly encouraged to have their homes tested for radon and to undertake radon remediation works where necessary.

Increasing the awareness of the public is considered to be a more effective approach than the provision of State financial assistance schemes to householders for radon testing of their homes or for radon remediation works. Such schemes of assistance are not operated by the majority of EU Member States. It would be difficult for a demand led scheme of domestic radon grants to ensure appropriate and cost effective targeting of remedial action. Furthermore, such a scheme could require very significant public expenditure and administrative resources.

Government efforts and resources, together with the RPII, will continue to focus on highlighting public awareness of radon and on improving information to householders and employers so as to enable and encourage them to address monitoring or remedial requirements effectively and economically.

Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 51.

Library Projects.

57. **Ms Hoxtor** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the support his Department has given for the provision of library facilities over the past ten years; his plans to enhance the public library service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42622/06]

71. **Mr. Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the support his Department has given for the provision of library facilities over the past ten years; his plans to enhance the public library service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42502/06]

111. **Mr. Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the support his Department has given for the provision of library facilities over the past ten years; his plans to enhance the public library service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42627/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57, 71 and 111 together.

The Government has provided some €90.2 million, through my Department towards the local authority public library service over the years 1997 to 2006. On foot of this expenditure, supplemented by local authorities from their own resources, 57 new library buildings will have been opened by the end of 2006. In addition, the investment has also contributed to the provision and development of ICT including

- automation of the public library service,
- cataloguing,
- 1,400 public access Internet PCs,
- optical scanning facilities,
- colour printers to allow printing of OSI maps.

The development and population of the Ask About Ireland website and the digitisation of library authorities' local studies material has also been supported.

The library service was the subject of a major review in 1997/1998, which resulted in the publication of *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service* in 1998. This report put forward a series of recommendations designed to bring the public library service into the 21st century. One of the key recommendations in the report was that an eight-year capital programme be undertaken and that recommendation, along with the others in the report, was approved by Government.

A full review of *Branching Out*, in the light of Ireland's current economic and social climate, is currently nearing completion. On the basis of this review, I will be publishing an updated policy and vision for the public library service over the next 6 years early in the New Year.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

58. **Mr. Curran** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the way Ireland compares with other EU member states regarding their progress towards meeting their targets under the Kyoto protocol. [42648/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Kyoto Protocol requires that, the then 15 Member States in the European Union must reduce their aggregate emissions by 8% on 1990 levels during the 2008-2012 Kyoto commitment period. There is no equivalent joint commitment for the current 25 Member States. Under burden-sharing arrangements agreed by the EU in 2002, Ireland must limit its emissions to not greater than 13% above 1990 levels in the 2008-2012 period.

The latest report from the European Commission Progress Towards Achieving the Kyoto

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Objectives (COM (2006) 658), shows that, based on the latest available inventory data (2004), the EU-15 have a gap of almost 8 percentage points to close in order to reach the target, while Ireland's gap is slightly higher at 10 percentage points. Comparing recent progress, however, shows that Ireland has reduced the gap by 4 percentage points since 2001, while there was a slight increase in the gap in the EU-15 as a whole over the same period.

The report projects that the EU-15 will reach its target of reducing emissions to 8% below 1990 levels during the 2008-2012 period. This will be possible with additional measures, use of carbon sinks and use of the Kyoto Protocol flexible mechanisms to purchase allowances. Ireland will also meet its target under the EU burden-sharing agreement with existing and additional domestic measures, use of carbon sinks and use of the Kyoto Protocol flexible mechanisms.

Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 52.

Strategic Development Zones.

60. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will identify strategic development zones suitable for industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42544/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Under Part IX of the Planning and Development Act 2000, the Government may by Order, on foot of a proposal from the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, designate a site or sites as a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) to facilitate development considered, in the Government's opinion, to be of economic or social importance to the State. Before proposing the designation of a site or sites to the Government, the Minister must consult with any relevant development agency or planning authority on the proposed designation.

To date, four SDZs have been designated by Government: Adamstown in South Dublin (2001); Clonmagedden in Meath (2001); Hansfield in Fingal (2001); and Balgaddy-Clonburris in South Dublin (2006). A proposal for a further SDZ has very recently been received from a planning authority for residential, recreational and amenity development, and is being examined by my Department.

No proposal for an SDZ for industrial purposes is under consideration at present.

Rental Accommodation Scheme.

61. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will increase the amount local authorities can pay

to landlords under the rental accommodation scheme where average rents are significantly higher than RAS payments locally; the local authorities which have requested such increases; if he will introduce revisions to the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42562/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) is designed to cater for the accommodation needs of persons in receipt of rent supplement who have a long-term housing need. Funding is provided by the Department to local authorities to meet the cost of the scheme, including accommodation costs, through the transfer of resources from the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

The level of rents payable is determined by negotiations between the landlord and the local authority. Authorities have been advised that any agreement on rent levels should reflect local market conditions and the appropriate SWA rent supplement rent level for the area for the particular type of household. The setting of rent limits under the SWA scheme is a matter for the Minister for Social and Family Affairs and his Department is currently reviewing levels of rent limits to determine what limits should apply from January 2007 onwards. The aim is that any new rent limits reflect realistic market conditions throughout the country and that they will continue to enable the different categories of eligible tenant households to secure and retain suitable rented accommodation to meet their needs.

I am satisfied at this early stage that there is considerable scope and opportunities within the arrangements for local authorities to negotiate rents and secure accommodation within the financial model underpinning RAS.

Some local authorities have reported difficulties from time to time in finding good quality alternative accommodation, at a reasonable rent, for single persons and couples without children. Recent reports from local authorities indicate an acceleration in the transfer of households from rent supplement to RAS.

Electoral Spending Limits.

62. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he will make regulations increasing the spending limits for the 2007 General Election; the amounts to which spending limits will be increased; the persons he intends to consult regarding this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42598/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Section 32 of the Electoral Act 1997, as amended, specifies the maximum amounts of expenditure which may be incurred on behalf of a candidate at a Dáil elec-

tion. The amounts are €25,394.76 in a 3 seat constituency; €31,743.45 in a 4 seat constituency; and €38,092.14 in a 5 seat constituency. Section 3 of the Act provides that these amounts may be varied, by order of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, having regard to changes in the Consumer Price Index. Any such order must be laid before each House of the Oireachtas. No decision regarding an amending order has been made at this stage. I will consider any views that may be put forward in the matter.

Land Rezoning.

63. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of acres or hectares of agricultural land that have been rezoned for development nationally; and the breakdown by local authority area for each year since 2000 to date in 2006. [42606/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Section 10 (2) (a) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides that a planning authority's development plan shall include objectives for the zoning of land for the use solely or primarily of particular areas for particular purposes (whether residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational, as open space or otherwise, or a mixture of those uses). Also, Section 13 (1) of the Act provides that a planning authority may at any time, for stated reasons, decide to make a variation of a development plan. Accordingly, the details of land zoned from agricultural to development (which could be residential, commercial or industrial) would be set out in each planning authority's development plan. My Department does not seek or retain these details.

My Department does however carry out a survey, through the local authorities, of the total amount of serviced land zoned for residential purposes, owned both privately and by local authorities, at the end of June each year. This survey is valuable in assessing the overall stock of land at the same point each year, and the sufficiency of that stock to underpin required housing supply. Details from the survey are published annually in my Department's Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin, copies of which are available in the Oireachtas library, and on my Department's website.

While figures from the June 2006 survey are still being compiled, the results of the June, 2005 survey indicate that there were some 14,000 hectares of residentially zoned land available at that time to support future housing supply, with an estimated yield of about 460,000 housing units nationally.

e-Government Projects.

64. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the progress to date on e-Government within his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42554/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Substantial progress has been made in my Department on the implementation of e-Government.

Vehicle ownership and taxation represent my Department's largest area of direct service provision to citizens and, at an early stage, the Government's Information Society Action Plan identified motor tax as a priority area for electronic service delivery. The motor tax online service, available at www.motortax.ie (as Gaeilge — www.motarchain.ie), went live in 2004. In 2005, €168 million was collected in over 800,000 individual transactions on the site representing 30% of all eligible business nationwide, rising to almost 50% in Dublin. It is expected that these figures will be exceeded in 2006, with overall take-up running at 34% and forecast revenue approaching €250 million. In addition, a major new area of service was added to the site last year enabling vehicle owners to tax new vehicles for the first time online.

A project has been underway since September this year to enable motor dealers to use a secure electronic service to notify my Department of changes of vehicle ownership. This substantially enhances the service offered to those dealers and to owners and will improve the accuracy and currency of vehicle ownership records. This system will also handle notifications of end of vehicle life from Authorised Treatment Facilities (ATFs) as required under waste legislation.

The growing level of interest in local heritage and wildlife around the country is reflected in the enthusiastic response to the Department's www.buildingsofireland.ie site, which attractively presents highlights of our built heritage on a county by county basis as the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage is carried out. In the new year, I will be launching a site which will use Geographical Information System (GIS) technology to deliver readily accessible map-based information on archaeological sites and monuments. This service will later be extended to include information on our natural heritage.

Many of the services promoted by my Department are delivered by local authorities and partner agencies and I am pleased that they have also responded to the challenges and opportunities of electronic service delivery. Various local authorities around the country enable citizens to use the internet to perform activities such as viewing and downloading planning applications, accessing library catalogues and reserving books, paying service charges, and accessing a wide range of forms and information.

[Mr. Roche.]

A new IT Strategy is being developed by my Department for the period 2007-2010 and we will continue to look for new and innovative ways to deliver services conveniently to our customers while also striving to achieve efficiencies in our internal and back office processes.

Public Service Charges.

65. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position in relation to charges for water meters for farmers who have land holdings in more than one location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42576/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Local authorities are required to recover non-domestic water services costs from users including farm installation. Relevant costs to be recovered include marginal capital costs and operational, administrative and meter installation costs.

Following a pilot billing project in one local authority area, and having regard to discussions conducted with farming representatives, I am arranging for the billing guidance being prepared for local authorities to include a request that authorities consider the necessity for special discounting arrangements in the case of water meters on multiple fragmented small farm holdings when deciding their water charges. My Department will issue this guidance to local authorities shortly.

Sustainable Development Strategy.

66. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the plans to publish a National Sustainable Development Strategy; the matters that such strategy will address; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42595/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement, Towards 2016, includes a commitment to publishing a renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy by mid 2007.

Ireland's first sustainable development strategy, Sustainable Development — A Strategy for Ireland was published in 1997. A review of the Strategy, Making Ireland's Development Sustainable, was published in 2002, ahead of the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg. The renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy was adopted by the European Council at their meeting in June, 2006.

Ireland's renewed Sustainable Development Strategy will take account of the renewed EU Strategy and our specific circumstances including:

- the publication of the Lisbon Agenda-National Reform Programme 2005;
- the Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015, Towards 2016, and
- the National Development Plan 2007-2013 now being finalised.

My Department will lead in coordinating the preparation of this renewed strategy which will draw the range of relevant policies into a coherent framework, review progress and set directions for future action.

To oversee and guide this task I am setting up a High-Level Inter-Departmental Steering Group. Comhar, the National Council for Sustainable Development will also be supporting the process. Options for broader consultation, which will facilitate effective contributions by all stakeholders, are being examined.

Road Network.

67. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the strategy in place to ensure the network of roads where new housing estates are developed can accommodate the increased demand of the local population; the role of the development levy for infrastructural development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42480/06]

102. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will significantly increase funding for road restoration due to the significant increase in vehicles on the roads; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42566/06]

137. **Mr. McEntee** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will significantly increase funding to local government in view of the significant local road deterioration due to major housing and other economic development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42565/06]

165. **Mr. Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of funding provided by his Department for non-national roads for each of the years 1994 to date in 2006; and the progress made to address deficiencies in the non-national road network. [42626/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 67, 102, 137 and 165 together.

The provision and improvement of non-national roads is a matter for local authorities to be funded from their own resources supplemented by State grants provided by my Department.

There have been significant increases in recent years in the level of State aid provided to local authorities for the provision, improvement and maintenance of non-national roads. State aid in 2006 for non-national roads, at almost €558 million, is the highest ever level of funding available and represents a very substantial increase of 13% on last year's record allocation, or an increase of almost €62.5 million. The 2006 allocation also represents an increase of almost €419 million, or over 300%, on the 1994 grant payment and an increase of almost €332 million, or almost 150%, on the 1997 grant payment.

Details of total non-national road grants paid by my Department for each of the years 1994 to 2005 and the initial allocation for 2006 are set out in the following table:

Year	Grant Payment
	€
1994	139,036,319
1995	159,920,972
1996	186,476,274
1997	225,819,108
1998	261,112,576
1999	307,510,397
2000	341,229,407
2001	400,917,790
2002	435,457,000
2003	436,592,000e
2004	480,200,000
2005	501,270,000
2006 (allocation)	557,730,000

As regards my Department's pavement restoration programme, the results of a Pavement Condition Study on non-national roads, which was carried out by consultants and completed in 2005, show that there has been a very large growth in traffic volumes, including numbers of heavy goods vehicles, on our roads over the last 10 years and that the combination of growth in traffic volumes and damaging power has dramatically increased the structural loading on the non-national roads network. The study concludes that the economic boom, since the first study was carried out in 1996, has fundamentally changed the loading regime on the non-national roads network, with much higher and more frequent loading by heavier vehicles now being the norm.

The rate of occurrence of potholes and road disintegration has effectively halved since 1996 as a result of the €1.5 billion investment in Restoration Improvement and Maintenance works over the 1997 to 2004 period. However, the instance of other defects, such as rutting and edge cracking, has increased since 1996 as a result of growth in traffic on the network — particularly that of heavier and wider commercial vehicles.

On foot of the findings of the study, I have increased the grants available for Restoration Improvement works to €205.3 million in 2006, which is an increase of over €31 million, or almost 18%, on the 2005 allocation. This very substantial increase means that significant progress can be made in allocating funds to address the deficiencies identified by the Pavement Condition Study. I have also allocated grants totalling €75 million for Restoration Maintenance works this year. This represents an increase of €15 million, or 25%, on the 2005 allocation. I intend to announce non-national road grant allocations for 2007 early in the new year.

Insofar as development levies are concerned, under section 48 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, planning authorities may levy development contributions in respect of public infrastructure and facilities, provided by or on behalf of a local authority, that benefit development in the area, based on a scheme of contributions adopted for the area. The types of public infrastructure that can be funded by a development contribution scheme are:

- the acquisition of land,
- the provision of open spaces, recreational and community facilities and amenities and landscaping works,
- the provision of roads, car parks, car parking places, sewers, waste water and water treatment facilities, drains and watermains,
- the provision of bus corridors and lanes, bus interchange facilities (including car parks for those facilities), infrastructure to facilitate public transport, cycle and pedestrian facilities and traffic calming measures,
- the refurbishment, upgrading, enlargement or replacement of roads, car parks, car parking places, sewers, waste water and water treatment facilities, drains or water mains and
- matters ancillary to the above.

Based on information supplied to my Department by local authorities, €90.3 million of development contribution monies were applied to roads and car-parking in 2005. The equivalent figures for 2004 and 2003 were €70.2 million and €46.6 million, respectively.

The National Roads Authority, which operates under the aegis of my colleague the Minister for Transport, has overall responsibility for the planning and supervision of works for the construction, improvement and maintenance of national roads.

Wildlife Act.

68. **Mr. Stagg** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the

[Mr. Stagg.]

reason he has not given a commencement date for section 36 of the Wildlife Act 2000, six years after the Act was passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas; the reason for the delay; when he will make the necessary order to bring the section into force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42475/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Section 36 provides for the possibility of ministerial regulation of commercial shoot operators. This section, which is permission in scope, has not yet been commenced because of the increasing demands of other higher priority nature conservation requirements, in particular those associated with the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997.

Electoral Fraud.

69. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he is satisfied that the threat of electoral fraud at the next general election due to inaccuracies on the electoral register is sufficiently low; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42536/06]

154. **Ms O. Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will vary the stringent regulations for the readmission of voters to the supplementary voting register who were incorrectly removed from the register and still reside at the same address; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42539/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 and 154 together.

In law, the preparation of the Register of Electors is a matter for each local registration authority. It is their duty to ensure, as far as possible and with the cooperation of the public, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the Register; house to house or other sufficient enquiries must be made for this purpose.

In April 2006, I announced a package of measures to assist local authorities in their work on preparing the 2007/8 Register, which included the use of Census enumerators or other temporary personnel to support local authorities in preparing the Register; over 1,500 personnel were engaged in this work.

In addition, my Department worked with a group of local authority managers and senior officials to put in place an enhanced programme for improving the next Register. Detailed procedures for the carrying out of registration fieldwork were finalised and issued to local authorities in early July. The procedures included provision for ensuring that each household was visited and provided with forms and information at least

twice, if necessary. In the event that this process did not satisfactorily register the household, written notification would then be given cautioning of the danger of being omitted from the Register.

I also committed to providing additional ring-fenced financial resources to support local authorities' own spending in respect of the register campaign and advised authorities that a contribution of some €6 million can be made available in this regard. An initial allocation of some €3 million, based on the number of households in each local authority area, was made available in July to local authorities for registration work.

As regards publicity and awareness, a two-stage approach was developed, involving information notices followed by an intensive media campaign. Information notices were published in the national press on 19–21 August, urging co-operation with local register campaigns. In addition, a national publicity and awareness campaign involving TV, radio, press and outdoor advertising ran from 11 September.

An online register search facility was made available through local authority websites and a central website www.checktheregister.ie was also set up, containing direct links to each local authority's eReg enquiry screen, to facilitate people in checking that they are on the Draft Register.

New arrangements for the deletion of names of deceased persons from the Register are now in place: the new system allows for the efficient and timely deletion of the names of deceased persons from the Register using the Death Event Publication Service which has been developed by Reach in association with the General Register Office.

New guidance for local authorities on Preparing and Maintaining the Register of Electors was made available to authorities in electronic format on 31 May. Printed copies of the guidance were subsequently sent to all local authorities, returning officers and relevant Government Departments. In the final version of the guidance, the importance of local authorities cross-checking the Register with other databases available to them was stressed.

I provided an additional two weeks — from 25 November to 9 December — to allow persons not on the Draft Register to apply for inclusion on the Final Register to be published on 1 February 2007. That gave people over five weeks — from 1 November to 9 December — to check, and apply for entry on, the Register. Local authorities now have until 2 January to make corrections to the Draft Register; county registrars have until 12 January to make amendments to it and people interested have a legal right to be heard in this regard. I also advanced legislative provision so that lists of persons on the current register but not included on the Draft Register can be made available by local authorities. In addition, a person who is not on the Final Register may apply for inclusion on the Supplement to the Register

which closes on the fifteenth day before the next polling day.

Local authorities have carried out an extensive and intensive campaign in respect of the Draft Register for 2007/8, with both significant numbers of additions to, and deletions from, the Register. On this basis, and taking account of the other measures set out above, I am satisfied there will be significant improvement in the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the Register, with a consequent enhancement of the capacity of the Register to assist in the prevention of personation.

Electoral law provides that, at the polling station the returning officer or the presiding officer may, or if required by a personation agent shall, request any person applying for a ballot paper to produce a specified identification document. The range of documents includes commonly accepted forms of identification containing photographs such as a passport, a driving licence, an employee identity card and a student identity card. Other types of specified documents, such as cheque books or cards, and birth or marriage certificates, must be accompanied by further documentation which establishes the address of the holder in the constituency.

If a person fails to produce a required document, or if the returning officer or the presiding officer is not satisfied that the person is the person to whom the document relates, they are not to be permitted to vote. My Department has considerably strengthened the recommendations to returning officers and presiding officers about the frequency of document checking. Prior to 2002, the recommended frequency was 1 in 20; in 2002, this was increased to 1 in 4.

Electoral law also contains other provisions in relation to personation, including a range of offences and penalties in this regard; a new offence was provided for under the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2004 for the unlawful possession or use of a polling information card. I will continue to keep this important matter, including the scope for further improvements, under review.

Finally, there is a need to maintain a proper balance between the requirement to uphold the security and integrity of the electoral process and providing a necessary degree of flexibility. The Supplement to the Register provides an important opportunity for people, who would otherwise not be able to vote, to be included on the Register; at the same time, it is necessary to ensure that appropriate controls are in place in this regard. There are no proposals for amendment of the relevant legislative provisions.

Animal Welfare.

70. **Ms Hctor** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the progress made towards implementing his

report on the regulation of puppy farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42623/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Work on implementation of the majority recommendations of the Working Group which was established to review the management of dog breeding establishments is currently underway in my Department. The process includes the development of standards for relevant dog breeding establishments and the drafting of new Regulations under the Control of Dogs Acts 1986 and 1992. The work will be completed, and a new system of regulation will be put in place, as soon as practicable in 2007.

Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 57.

Public Service Charges.

72. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if, in view of the significant increase to local authorities of wage costs, chemical costs and energy costs he will significantly increase funding for water and waste water facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42572/06]

151. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the shortfall in funding to local authorities for water and waste water infrastructure which will have to be met by development levies, charges or further increases in the consolidated charge for water services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42568/06]

162. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the expected impact of the universal metering on non domestic water services customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42578/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72, 151 and 162 together.

Government policy envisages full and transparent cost recovery of water services supplied to the non-domestic sector. The policy also provides for the continued funding of the cost of providing water and waste water infrastructure to domestic users through the capital budget of my Department and, in the case of operational costs, through the Local Government Fund.

Cost recovery from the non-domestic sector is to be achieved by a consolidated citywide or countywide, meter based volumetric charge. The policy provides for cost recovery without profit, with charges based on actual metered consumption and no cross subsidisation of the domestic sector by non-domestic consumers. Where there

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is a mixture of domestic and non-domestic use, such as a farm, an allowance is made by the local authority for the domestic element, which is deducted from the overall charge to the consumer.

Local authorities, in line with the above policies, are moving towards the metering of all non-domestic water use. The effect of this will be to enable local authorities to measure the amount of water supplied to each non-domestic connection to the water service. This will provide a transparent and equitable cost recovery mechanism for water services in accordance with the polluter pays principle and should incentivise all non-domestic users to conserve their use of water and thus minimise this element of their running costs.

Under existing arrangements, the Exchequer makes no contribution towards the funding of non-domestic water services provision. However, the Exchequer fully funds the capital cost of water and waste water infrastructure for all existing domestic consumers and contributes to the funding of future domestic water services provision where this is incorporated in proposed schemes, with the balance of this portion being met from development levies. The marginal capital cost and operational costs for the non-domestic sector must be met through water charges and development levies.

The domestic element of the operational cost of local authority water services falls to be met through the Local Government Fund. The provision for this fund has increased from some €470m in 2000 to over €870m in 2006. Yesterday I announced general purpose grants of some €948m to local authorities for 2007, from the Local Government Fund. This represents an increase of 8% in the compared with the final allocations for 2006. The 2007 allocations figure moreover represents an increase of some 35% over the initial allocations provided in 1997. Additionally a special local government fund allocation of €10m has been made in Budget 2007 to assist local authorities with extra running costs incurred in the operation of new water services infrastructure.

Register of Electors.

73. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of people incorrectly removed from the electoral register in the recent drive to update it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42534/06]

101. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the status of the electoral register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42533/06]

115. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

the breakdown of costs that his Department has incurred and is expected to incur in relation to measures taken to update the current electoral register. [42609/06]

132. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of names that incorrectly remain on the electoral register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42535/06]

157. **Mr. Sherlock** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of names removed and added to the Electoral Register prior to the publication of the draft register; the number of persons notified that they were being removed from the draft register; the number of such persons who have, prior to 9 December 2006, requested to be included in the Electoral Register; the net position regarding deletions and additions following the 9 December 2006 deadline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42602/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 73, 101, 115, 132 and 157 together.

In law, the preparation of the Register of Electors is a matter for each local registration authority. It is their duty to ensure, as far as possible and with the cooperation of the public, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the Register; house to house or other sufficient enquiries must be made for this purpose.

In April 2006, I announced a package of measures to assist local authorities in their work on preparing the 2007/8 Register, which included the use of Census enumerators or other temporary personnel to support local authorities in preparing the Register; over 1,500 personnel were engaged in this work.

In addition, my Department worked with a group of local authority managers and senior officials to put in place an enhanced programme for improving the next Register. Detailed procedures for the carrying out of registration fieldwork were finalised and issued to local authorities in early July. The procedures included provision for ensuring that each household was visited and provided with forms and information at least twice, if necessary. In the event that this process did not satisfactorily register the household, written notification would then be given cautioning of the danger of being omitted from the Register.

I also committed to providing additional ring-fenced financial resources to support local authorities’ own spending in respect of the register campaign and advised authorities that a contribution of some €6 million can be made available in this regard. An initial allocation of some €3 million, based on the number of households in each local authority area, was made available in

July to local authorities for registration work and a further €2 million in register funding is being processed.

As regards publicity and awareness, a two-stage approach was developed, involving information notices followed by an intensive media campaign. Information notices were published in the national press on 19–21 August, urging co-operation with local register campaigns. In addition, a national publicity and awareness campaign costing €1 million and involving TV, radio, press and outdoor advertising ran from 11 September.

An online register search facility was made available through local authority websites and a central website www.checktheregister.ie was also set up, containing direct links to each local authority's eReg enquiry screen, to facilitate people in checking that they are on the Draft Register.

New arrangements for the deletion of names of deceased persons from the Register are now in place: the new system allows for the efficient and timely deletion of the names of deceased persons from the Register using the Death Event Publication Service which has been developed by Reach in association with the General Register Office.

New guidance for local authorities on Preparing and Maintaining the Register of Electors was made available to authorities in electronic format on 31 May. Printed copies of the guidance were subsequently sent to all local authorities, returning officers and relevant Government Departments. In the final version of the guidance, the importance of local authorities cross-checking the Register with other databases available to them was stressed.

I provided an additional two weeks — from 25 November to 9 December — to allow persons not on the Draft Register to apply for inclusion on the Final Register to be published on 1 February 2007. That gave people over five weeks — from 1 November to 9 December — to check, and apply for entry on, the Register. Local authorities now have until 2 January to make corrections to the Draft Register; county registrars have until 12 January to make amendments to it and people interested have a legal right to be heard in this regard. I also advanced legislative provision so that lists of persons on the current register but not included on the Draft Register can be made available by local authorities. In addition, a person who is not on the Final Register may apply for inclusion on the Supplement to the Register which closes on the fifteenth day before the next polling day.

Local authorities have carried out an extensive and intensive campaign in respect of the Draft Register for 2007/8, with the information available indicating both significant numbers of additions (379,394) to, and deletions (505,042) from, the Register. Some 170,000 people were written to asking them to contact their council to

confirm their details and warning of the danger of being omitted from the Register. Final figures regarding the number of additions to and deletions from the Register will not be known until authorities and County Registrars have completed their work and the final register is published in February. However, on the basis of the work already undertaken, I am satisfied there will be significant improvement in the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the Register.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

74. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will increase the level of grant funding from 30% to 35% of the cost of capital funding to local government for water and waste water treatment facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42575/06]

92. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will significantly increase funding to local authorities for the capital costs of constructing new water and waste water treatment facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42574/06]

105. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the full extent and location of sewerage schemes in respect of which approval has been sought, is awaited or is otherwise pending, by the respective local authorities throughout the country or where there is an evident need for such schemes; the way he proposes to accelerate this capital programme having particular regard to meeting the demands from the respective communities and prevent pollution arising from current, inadequate or non-existent facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42500/06]

159. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will significantly increase funding to local authorities for the capital costs of upgrading water and waste water treatment facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42573/06]

538. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number, location and extent of group water or regional water schemes submitted by the local authorities in County Kildare and awaiting approval in his Department; the extent to which examination or appraisal has been completed or is in hand; when he expects to approve and fund the schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42894/06]

539. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

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the number, location and extent of proposals for small, group or regional sewerage schemes or upgrading of existing schemes currently before his Department submitted by the various local authorities in County Kildare and awaiting his approval; when he expects approval to issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42895/06]

543. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of group or regional domestic water schemes currently before his Department, awaiting approval; when he expects progress in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42899/06]

544. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of group, small, medium or major sewerage scheme proposals awaiting approval in his Department; the extent to which these are expected to proceed in the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42900/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 74, 92, 105, 159, 538, 539, 543 and 544 together.

Details of water services schemes approved by my Department are set out in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 which is available in the Oireachtas Library. Earlier this year my Department asked all local authorities to provide updated assessments of their needs for additional water services infrastructure and to review their priorities in light of economic, demographic and other developments that had taken place since the last such assessments were produced in 2003. The latest assessments will inform the selection of new schemes for inclusion in the next phase of the Water Services Investment Programme. Information in relation to proposals included in the assessments for any particular area may appropriately be sought from the relevant local authority.

Funding of €3.7 billion is being invested in new and upgraded water and wastewater infrastructure under the current National Development Plan. A total of 337 schemes were completed under the Water Services Investment Programme in the period from January 2000 to mid 2006. These schemes have, inter alia, generated additional wastewater treatment capacity equivalent to the needs of a population of 3.1 million, seven times greater than the entire increase over the period of the previous National Development Plan, together with sufficient additional drinking water treatment capacity for a population of 660,000. The Exchequer capital provision for water services infrastructure next year is up 7%

on the 2006 provision and the new National Development Plan will continue the current focus on providing water services infrastructure to support strong economic and social development, while at the same time preserving the highest environmental standards.

The position with regard to the funding of individual schemes is that the capital cost of services to cater for the domestic sector is met by the Exchequer through the Water Services Investment Programme. Under Water Services Pricing Policy, and in accordance with the EU Water Framework Directive, the marginal capital cost of services for the non-domestic sector is recovered by local authorities from non-domestic consumers on a consolidated countywide basis over a period of up to twenty years. The proportion of overall costs represented by the non-domestic contribution varies from scheme to scheme, depending on general design parameters, the overall capacity of a scheme and the breakdown of domestic and non-domestic demand. Typically the level of capital support by my Department for new water service infrastructure is in the range 85% to 90%, and not 30% to 35% as implied in the Question.

I have introduced a number of measures to streamline the approval procedures and reduce administration at Departmental and local authority level in order to move projects to construction as soon as possible. I have reduced the number of stage approvals local authorities are required to obtain from my Department and also simplified Water Services Pricing Policy procedures and affordability criteria. Overall I am satisfied that the current levels of funding, together with the resources and administrative supports available to my Department and the local authorities, will ensure that projects under the Water Services Investment Programme will move ahead urgently.

Election Management System.

75. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if and when he expects electronic voting will be used in elections here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42528/06]

78. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the expenditure on electronic voting to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42527/06]

79. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the costs to date of the development roll-out, and promotion of the electronic voting and counting system; the costs to date of storage and maintenance of the system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42581/06]

82. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

his views on the recent report from the US National Institute of Standards and Technology which recommended optical scan systems which allow ballots to be recounted independently from a voting machine's software; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42561/06]

112. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of occasions since 31 July 2006 on which the Cabinet Committee on Electronic voting has met; if it has appointed a peer review group; when it expects to report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42582/06]

119. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the fact that another international report has cast doubt on the security of electronic voting (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42612/06]

141. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if there will be provision locally for local storage of electronic voting machines in the period immediately before and after each election on which they will be used, before these machines will be returned to central storage; the expected extra cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42549/06]

152. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the expected cost of providing central storage of electronic voting machines, including security costs, compared to the cost of storing such machines locally at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42548/06]

509. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that paperless electronic voting machines used throughout the US cannot be made secure and that a single programmer could rig an election; and if he will update the taxpayers here on this matter. [43170/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 75, 78, 79, 82, 112, 119, 141, 152 and 509 together.

The Commission on Electronic Voting concluded in its Second Report on the Secrecy, Accuracy and Testing of the Chosen Electronic Voting System, which was published on 4 July 2006, that it can recommend the voting and counting equipment for use at elections in Ireland, subject to further work it has recommended. The Commission made it clear that many of its recommendations involve only relatively minor modifications or additions to the system.

In response to the report, the Government has established a Cabinet Committee on Electronic Voting, which I chair, to consider the report in detail; report to the Government on the full implications of the Commission recommendations; consider the composition of a peer review group — drawn from international electoral reform bodies and the IT industry — to supervise any software redesign work; report to the Government on confidence building measures; and identify any other improvements that might be built into the system.

The Cabinet Committee, which also includes the Tánaiste and the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, met on 31 July 2006. Its work is underway and it will meet again in the near future. The issue of a peer review group will be considered by the Committee at the appropriate stage of its deliberations. The Committee will report to Government when its work is completed. As part of its work in this regard, my Department monitors ongoing and emerging developments at international level in relation to electronic voting.

The timing of the further use of the system will be related to the progress, of the cabinet committee's on the ongoing work, the associated decisions arising in this regard, and the dates at which future polls may be held.

The Government decision to proceed with the movement of the electronic voting equipment to centralised premises was made taking into account a range of factors, including costs of current and centralised arrangements and the likely benefits to be realised. In this regard, the Commission in its Second Report concluded that, as the current arrangements under which voting equipment is stored at 25 locations are likely to give rise to continuing variations in the implementation of security and related control measures, together with replication of similar costs of implementation of these measures which are not insignificant across individual centres, enhanced and more uniform security and greater economy of security costs could be achieved through the rationalisation of storage on a regional or centralised basis; preparatory work in relation to the planned use of Gormanston Aerodrome is advanced in this regard.

The total cost to date of the development and roll-out of the electronic voting and counting system is €51.3 million (including €2.6 million in respect of awareness and education initiatives). In addition, information provided by returning officers to my Department indicates that the annual storage costs for the electronic voting machines and ancillary equipment is currently some €705,000. It is not possible to detail conclusively at this stage the total costs which will be associated with the centralised storage arrangements, including costs relating to local storage of the electronic voting machines at election time. Arrangements are being made for the procure-

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ment of metal storage containers for Gormanston Aerodrome at a cost of €87,150 (excluding VAT); insulation of these containers will cost a further €10,290 (excluding VAT).

Recycling Policy.

76. **Mr. English** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will increase significantly the provision recycling infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42567/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Statutory responsibility for the implementation of the regional waste management plans, including the provision of recycling infrastructure, rests with the local authority (or local authorities) concerned and my Department has no function in this regard.

However, since 2002 my Department has allocated over €90 million in capital grants to assist local authorities in the provision of recycling and recovery services. The projects assisted include bring bank networks, civic amenity sites, materials recovery, composting and biological treatment facilities. In addition, my Department has allocated some €12 million since 2003 to local authorities to assist in the subvention of the operating costs of recycling facilities.

Proposed Legislation.

77. **Mr. Sherlock** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the primary legislation he will publish between now and the end of the current Dáil; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42603/06]

525. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the Bills he expects to publish before the end of 2006; and thereafter the Bills he expects to publish before the general election. [42650/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 525 together.

In addition to the Carbon Fund Bill 2006, which has just been published, I intend early in 2007 to publish

- a Housing Bill which will deal, inter alia, with revised tenant purchase arrangements (including sale of local authority apartments), the Rental Accommodation Scheme and local authority powers to deal with ant-social behaviour, and
- an Electoral Bill to address the issues arising from the recent Supreme Court judgement concerning assenting to the nomination of Non-Party candidates at Dail elections.

Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 75.

Question No. 79 answered with Question No. 75.

Planning Issues.

80. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the guidelines for planning authorities on residential density will be reviewed and updated; the considerations which are informing the review and update; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42584/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department published Residential Density Guidelines for Planning Authorities in 1999, aimed at improving the quality in new housing by supporting more compact and sustainable forms of residential development. The thrust of the Guidelines was to promote higher residential density at appropriate locations particularly in conjunction with improved public transport systems.

My Department intends to review the Guidelines with a view to up-dating them next year. The review will take account of experiences to date with the 1999 guidelines, the rapidly changing demographics and settlement patterns, the need for more compact urban development (particularly within the Greater Dublin Area) and the on-going policy of delivering sustainable communities and enhancing quality of life. The revised Guidelines will focus particularly on the quality of new developments. They will also take account of the extensive experience built up since the introduction of the Guidelines in the design, assessment and development of higher density proposals.

In light of the need to provide a wider housing/planning policy context for sustainable urban housing, my Department intends to produce a series of inter-related guidance documents, comprising:

- The new draft planning guidelines referred to above;
- a new best practice handbook on urban design and housing layouts, which will illustrate how the policies set out in the planning guidelines might be implemented, with examples drawn from current practice;
- guidance on design standards for apartments; and
- a revision of the 1999 Social Housing Design Guidelines.

Waste Management.

81. **Mr. Boyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of waste shipment verifications carried

out by each local authority, in accordance with Council Regulation (EEC) No. 259/93 of 1 February 1993, on the supervision and control of waste within, into and out of the European Community; and the number of irregularities uncovered for each of the years since 2000 to date in 2006. [42607/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): In Ireland, the thirty four county and city councils are the designated statutory competent authorities in respect of the export of waste from the State under Council Regulation (EEC) No. 259/93, the Waste Shipment Regulation. My Department does not compile data in regard to their specific enforcement activities, but is aware that verification of waste destinations is carried out by individual authorities. Ireland is actively engaged within the European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL), an informal network of environmental enforcement authorities, is chair of the IMPEL TFS cluster of authorities for 2006/2007 and has participated in two verification of waste destination projects to date and will be participating in further enforcement projects in 2007. The verification projects already carried out, and which have involved five local authorities during 2005 and 2006, have shown that all of the waste shipments checked have been recovered or disposed of at the country of destination in accordance with the required procedures.

Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 75.

Planning Issues.

83. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has satisfied himself with the level of co-operation on planning decisions and environmental impact assessments between the Environmental Protection Agency and An Bord Pleanála; and the discussions he has had with the European Commission on the issue since the Commission issued its reasoned opinion on the issue dated 25 July 2001. [42610/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I am satisfied that the co-operation between An Bord Pleanála and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in relation to environmental impact assessments (EIA) is effective and, furthermore, is fully in accord with the provisions of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive (337/85/EEC).

The interface between An Bord Pleanála and the EPA has been developed and refined over the years and is now provided for in the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2006; the Environmental Protection Agency Acts 1992 to

2005; the Waste Management Acts 1996 to 2005; and in Regulations made under those Acts.

Essentially, planning authorities or An Bord Pleanála deal with the planning and land use aspects of development proposals which also require IPPC licensing, whereas the EPA deals with the environmental aspects of emissions from the carrying out of the activity. However, a planning authority or the Board may also refuse planning permission for a proposed development in any case where it considers that the development, notwithstanding the IPPC licensing of the activity, is unacceptable on environmental grounds.

As the Reasoned Opinion issued by the EU Commission may result in litigation before the European Court of Justice (ECJ), it would not be appropriate for me to disclose the content of any correspondence or discussion between the EU Commission and Ireland on this subject.

Local Authority Funding.

84. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will provide funding for local authorities to meet the expected cost of flooding due to the effects of climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42546/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Adaptation to the inevitable impact of current and historic emissions of greenhouse gases is an integral part of national climate change policy, as reflected in the document "Ireland's Pathway to Kyoto Compliance" which I issued earlier this year, copies are available in the Oireachtas library. There is no evidence to link recent flooding or any future flooding in the short-term directly to greenhouse gas emissions and the issue of specific funding for climate change adaptation purposes does not arise. In the normal course, provision of financial resources to local authorities for flood-related works is a matter for the Office of Public Works.

National Spatial Strategy.

85. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the progress to date on the National Spatial Strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42541/06]

99. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the progress to date on the National Spatial Strategy; the results of the gateways priorities study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42558/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 85 and 99 together.

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At national level substantial progress is being made in implementing the National Spatial Strategy (NSS), which is having an increasing influence on policies and programmes across a range of Government Departments and agencies.

At regional level, a key policy bridge between national development priorities and local planning has been put in place with the adoption of Regional Planning Guidelines to provide a strategic framework for local planning.

At county and city level, strategic land use and planning frameworks for all the Gateways are almost complete. The potential impact of the Strategy in terms of achieving more balanced regional development has been underscored by the Government's decision in July 2005 that the regional dimension of the next National Development Plan, now in preparation, will be broadly based on the NSS. The priorities of the NSS and regional planning guidelines have also been recognised in the Government's 10-year investment plan for transport, Transport 21.

To support the development of the NSS Gateways, my Department in conjunction with Forfás, commissioned the Gateway Investment Priorities Study. This study has been completed and was jointly published on my Department's and Forfás's websites in October of this year. The study addresses the Gateway's potential for accelerated development in housing, commercial and employment terms and the key infrastructure priorities that will be necessary to facilitate such development. The study sets out relevant issues in each Gateway, such as economic infrastructure, enterprise and economy, quality of life and local capacity. It identifies short-term and long-term investment priorities for each of the Gateways and proposes mechanisms through which these can feed into the next NDP and other national policies and programmes. Similar work is also being undertaken in relation to the hubs identified in the NSS.

In addition, I launched the Atlantic Gateways Initiative in September 2006; this is aimed at having Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford collaboratively creating a critical mass for future economic development as a counter-balance to Dublin and the East. The report, with recommended actions and timescales, explores how the four gateways can become an increasingly interconnected and developed network of co-operating and complementary cities. This can, in turn, enhance the development potential of all four gateways and invigorate development in the hub towns and the wider urban and rural catchment areas.

Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Development Plans were published for public consultation last April. These Guidelines emphasise the importance within such plans of creating a clear strategic framework for the proper planning and sustainable development of the relevant

area consistent with the longer-term aims set out in the National Spatial Strategy and regional planning guidelines. Comments on the Draft Guidelines are currently being considered by my Department with a view to finalising the Guidelines in the near future.

My Department, in co-operation with other relevant Departments, is also pursuing measures to enhance cooperation on spatial planning and infrastructural investment across the island of Ireland, as endorsed by the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. As announced following a meeting of the Conference on 2 May, my Department, working in conjunction with the Department of Regional Development in Northern Ireland, is preparing a framework for collaborative action between the NSS and the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland to assist in creating conditions that will facilitate enhanced competitiveness on the island.

Residential Tenancies Board.

86. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the policy advice he has received to date from the Private Residential Tenancies Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42551/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern):

The functions of Private Residential Tenancy Board under the Residential Tenancy Act 2004 include research and the provision of information and policy advice in relation to the private rented sector. The PRTB is in the process of developing this role alongside its core functions of dispute resolution and tenancy registration. For this purpose, it has entered into a partnership arrangement with the Centre for Housing Research, which is managing a number research projects that should make a valuable contribution to development of policy in relation to the sector. I have also asked the PRTB to participate in the Action on Private Rented Accommodation Standards, which was announced in September, including input to the review of the minimum standards regulations for rented accommodation.

Social and Affordable Housing.

87. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the way he proposes to address the issue of long waiting lists for social and affordable housing, having particular regard to the fact that some applicants are on waiting lists for ten years or more, notwithstanding, the housing boom; if he will set an objective to meet the housing requirements of all such applicants on an ongoing basis within a two year period; if he will further ensure the availability of housing options for such families who are currently often forced into rely-

ing on subvented rental accommodation with obvious negative consequences for themselves, their families and the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42501/06]

545. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of people on housing waiting lists, those awaiting social housing or affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42901/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87 and 545 together.

The statutory assessment of housing need is undertaken by local authorities on a triennial basis. The most recent assessment of need for social housing, undertaken by local authorities in March 2005, indicated that there were 43,684 households on local authority waiting lists compared with 48,413 in March 2002. In the context of affordable housing it is not possible to provide a national figure as many authorities do not maintain a waiting list and simply advertise when schemes are coming on stream.

National data available on the duration that applicants spend on waiting lists for social housing is as follows:

Length of Time	2005	% of need
Less than 1 year	17,664	40
Between 1 & 2 years	8,872	20
Between 2 & 3 years	6,733	15
Between 3 & 4 years	3,725	9
More than 4 years	6,690	15
Total	43,684	100

My Department has successfully promoted a range of measures to provide additional social housing in recent years, and is committed to maintaining a strong programme of social housing provision into the future. In the three year period 2007-2009 we are specifically committed to increased investment in social housing with 27,000 new units to be started over the period. This will include the commencement/acquisition of an additional 4,000 new housing units through a combination of local authority, voluntary and co-operative housing and RAS long-term contractual arrangements for new supply as provided for under Towards 2016.

Government has been and will continue to be resolute in its determination to address issues of housing affordability. A range of targeted schemes to assist first time buyers has been put in place in recent years. These include the Shared Ownership Scheme, the 1999 affordable housing scheme, affordable housing through Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2006 and

the Affordable Housing Initiative under Sustaining Progress. Output under the various schemes is projected at some 3,000 homes this year. For the period 2007-2009 we have set ourselves an even more ambitious target of some 17,000 homes to meet continuing need.

Finally, arising from commitments set out in the Housing Policy Framework document — Building Sustainable Communities and the new Partnership Agreement, Towards 2016, a new, more objective, approach to the assessment of housing needs is being developed. Under the new approach housing assessment will provide the basis for access to a wide range of housing support options.

Motor Taxation.

88. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount by which motor taxation will be increased in 2007; the estimated increase in revenue which is expected in motor taxation in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42588/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): On Budget day (6 December) I announced new proposals which will provide an incentive through the motor tax system for the motoring public to drive cleaner cars. The new proposal will use CO₂ emission ratings, in addition to the normal engine c.c. value, in the calculation of motor tax and will rebalance tax payments in favour of cars with lower CO₂ emission levels, at the expense of cars with high emission levels. This rebalancing will be applied to any new or pre-owned imported vehicle, registered in this country on or after 1 January, 2008 and taxed within the 'Private Car' motor tax class, which make up about 75% of vehicles registered each year. Cars, which are registered prior to 1 January 2008, will continue to be taxed under current arrangements and CO₂ ratings will not apply to these vehicles. A public consultation paper on motor tax rebalancing is available on my Department's website www.environ.ie and I have invited interested parties to make submissions by 1 March 2007.

Current motor tax rates have remained unchanged since 2004; receipts up to the end of November 2006 show an increase of 10% compared with last year, against a background of a 6% increase in the national vehicle fleet.

Recycling Policy.

89. **Mr. Carey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the development of recycling facilities here over the past ten years; the increase there has been in recycling rates in the same period; if the progress made has reached targets set; the role his Department is playing in

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facilitating recycling; his plans for further development of recycling in the years ahead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42628/06]

125. **Mr. O'Connor** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will report on progress made on increasing recycling rates here over the past ten years; the support that has been provided by his Department over that period to support recycling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42518/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 125 together.

There has been a radical transformation in recycling rates in Ireland in the last ten years. Recycling is a significant element of the Government's overall integrated policy framework on

waste management — which is based on the internationally recognised waste hierarchy — prioritising waste prevention, minimisation, reuse, recycling, energy recovery and the environmentally sound disposal of residual waste which cannot be recycled or recovered.

This significant emphasis on recycling is reflected in the 1998 policy statement *Changing Our Ways* which provided a national policy framework for the adoption and implementation by local authorities of strategic waste management plans under which specific national objectives and targets would be achieved. Specifically, *Changing our Ways* set ambitious recycling targets to be achieved over a fifteen year timescale — i.e. by 2013 — including a recycling target of 35% of municipal waste recycling. Government policy on recycling was further elaborated in the policy statements *Delivering Change* in 2002 and *Taking Stock and Moving Forward* in 2004.

The following table sets out the targets for recycling and associated deadlines and progress achieved in recent years.

Year	Landfilled (tonnes)	Recovered (tonnes)	Recovery Rate	National Targets
1998	1,685,766	166,684	9.0%	35% recycling by 2013
2001	1,992,050	305,554	13.3%	
2002	1,901,864 (down 4.5% on 2001)	496,905	20.7%	
2003	1,832,625 (down 3.6% on 2002)	726,763	28.4%	
2004	1,818,536 (down 0.8% on 2003)	918,995	33.6%	

Household Waste

Year	Landfilled (tonnes)	Recovered (tonnes)	Recovery Rate	National Targets
1998	1,125,698	37,518	3.2%	50% diversion from landfill by 2013
2001	1,254,857	74,887	5.6%	
2002	1,294,061	132,602	9.3%	
2003	1,231,109 (down 4.9% on 2002)	185,753	13.1%	
2004	1,214,908 (down 1.3% on 2003)	295,134	19.5%	

Packaging Waste

Year	Recovered (tonnes)	Recovery Rate	National Targets
1998	93,259	14.8%	25% recovery by end July 2001 rising to 50% recovery by end December 2005 & to 60% recovery by 2011
2001	221,266	27.0%	
2002	296,389	35.0%	
2003	419,600	44.2%	
2004	479,540	56.4%	

Infrastructure Provision

Year	Bring Banks	Civic Amenity Sites	Households with Segregated Collection	Landfills accepting Municipal Waste
1998	837	30	70,000	76
2001	1,436 (up 71.8% on 1998)	46 (up 53.3% on 1998)	200,000 (up 185.7% on 1998)	50 (down 34.2% on 1998)
2002	1,636 (up 13.9% on 2001)	49 (up 6.5% on 2001)	300,000 (up 50% on 2001)	39 (down 22% on 2001)
2003	1,692 (up 3.4% on 2002)	60 (up 24.5% on 2002)	564,000 (up 86.7% on 2002)	35 (down 10.3% on 2002)
2004	1,929 (up 14.0% on 2003)	69 (up 15.0% on 2003)	—	34 (down 2.9% on 2003)

This table is based on national waste statistics, collated and published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The dramatic increases in recycling rates for household waste have been driven by successful Government policies including:

- the provision of segregated collections for dry recyclables to over 540,000 households by 2003;
- the continued expansion of the numbers of bring facilities. Since 2002, some €90 million has been allocated to assist local authorities in the provision of greatly expanded recycling facilities. This has facilitated an increase in Bring Banks from 837 in 1998 to 1,929 in 2004 and in Civic Amenity sites from 30 in 1998 to 69 in 2004. In 2006, additional Exchequer funding of €10m has also for the first time been made available. This reflects the importance which the Government attaches to supporting local authorities in the provision of these very important facilities;
- the roll out of pay-by-use by public and private sector waste operators in recent years; and
- raising awareness through campaigns such as the Race Against Waste.

In order to provide further impetus in this area, a range of further measures have also been, or are in the process of being, undertaken:

- successful producer responsibility initiatives are in place to support the achievement of recycling targets for certain waste materials e.g the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) scheme introduced in August 2005 has led to a five-fold increase in recycling of this waste stream while the European Union 2005 target of 50% recovery rate for packaging waste was exceeded in 2003 and reached 56.4% in 2004;
- the National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste was published in April 2006. In 2004, almost three quarters of municipal (household and commercial) waste sent to landfill was biodegradable. The Strategy

sets out measures aimed at the separate collection, recovery and recycling of biodegradable waste with a view to achieving the progressive diversion of biodegradable municipal waste from landfill by 2016 to 35% of the amount of biodegradable municipal waste generated in the baseline year of 1995; and

- the Market Development Group was established in 2004 to oversee the development of a Market Development Programme which will identify new applications and markets for recyclable material and secondary recycled products. The Group has been asked to identify barriers to the use and marketing of recyclable material and to develop strategies to address these. The Market Development Programme is being finalised at present for publication early in the New Year.

I am confident on the basis of the strong track record in improving recycling in recent years, the sound policies put in place by the Government and the enthusiasm of the general public for recycling that Ireland will enjoy continued success in meeting the targets set out in Changing Our Ways.

Waste Management.

90. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the location and expected cost of remediating existing landfills; the funding that will be provided in each case to each local authority; the views expressed by the EPA and EU Commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42556/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Following a European Court of Justice judgment in April 2005 which found that Ireland had not properly transposed the 1975 Waste Framework Directive, the European Commission indicated its wish to see progress in relation to landfill sites which had not been subject to the regulatory approach provided for in the Directive in the period to the enactment of the Waste Management Act in 1996. In the context of Ireland's formal response

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to the judgement, prepared in consultation with the EPA and other relevant bodies, a systematic approach is being applied to dealing with these historic or legacy sites.

It is important to note that there are a number of different categories of landfill including currently operating licensed local authority landfills, local authority landfills that operated for a period as licensed landfills under the licensing regime established by the 1996 Act, but are now closed, and local authority landfills which were never licensed, but which operated during their lifetime within the then national legal arrangements.

In regard to currently operating licensed facilities it is a matter for the local authority concerned to determine a gate fee which has regard to the costs of operating the facility and of meeting the aftercare provisions contained in the relevant EPA waste licence. However, the Government recognises that local authorities will face major challenges in meeting the costs of necessary remediation works in respect of closed facilities for which financial provision was not made during their operation. In 2006 my Department provided an initial €10 million to assist certain local authorities to begin the remediation process in regard to sites which, while closed, had been the subject of a licence and as a consequence have determined aftercare requirements.

In the context of the preparation of the new NDP my Department has proposed additional funding for the period 2007-2013 to permit continued phased remediation of the local authority landfill legacy on the basis of co-funding with the local authorities concerned. As each such site, not previously licensed, will be required to undergo a risk assessment, a statutory requirement under the EPA Act, all funding will be allocated on the basis of these assessments. In September 2006 I approved a draft Code of Practice for the Environmental Risk Assessment of Unregulated Waste Disposal Sites prepared by the EPA, on which the Agency then carried out a public consultation. During 2007 this Code will be used to begin the process of systematically assessing the historic landfills concerned to permit a coherent and uniform approach to addressing remediation requirements and funding.

Nuclear Safety.

91. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the distribution of his Department's leaflet Safeguarding Ireland from Nuclear Accidents to all households here. [42478/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Question No. 45 of 8 November 2006. The position is unchanged.

Question No. 92 answered with Question No. 74.

Climate Change Strategy.

93. **Mr. McCormack** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will introduce a national plan to deal with the expected effects of climate change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42545/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Ireland's Pathway to Kyoto Compliance, published in July 2006 for the purpose of public consultation in the context of the ongoing review of the National Climate Change Strategy, sets out work currently underway to assess the impacts of climate change in Ireland. The report proposes the development of a national policy on adaptation to climate change to provide policy-makers with a framework to factor potential future climate change impacts into policy making. A copy of this report is available in the Oireachtas Library. Work on the review of the National Climate Change Strategy will be completed as soon as possible.

Recycling Policy.

94. **Mr. Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if the market development group will publish its report on markets for recycled products before the end of the 2006 as previously stated. [42613/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Question Nos. 21 and 78 of 8 November 2006.

Social and Affordable Housing.

95. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on whether more could be done to provide seed capital to voluntary housing bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42525/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Earlier this year I announced a record level of funding for the voluntary and co-operative capital schemes. I also substantially increased the capital funding limits for individual housing projects. Funding is also provided by my Department to approved voluntary and co-operative housing bodies towards administrative and operational costs.

My Department, in consultation with the voluntary and co-operative sector, is considering the future policy and operation of the capital funding schemes. Relevant proposals by the voluntary

and co-operative sector will be examined in this context.

National Water Study.

96. **Mr. Coveney** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the estimated volume and cost of water lost through leakages in the water pipe network nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42532/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department's National Water Study audited 91 water supply schemes outside the Greater Dublin Area serving more than 5,000 consumers and operated by some 38 local authorities. The study reported on all aspects of water supply, including availability of raw water, treatment capacity, water distribution systems and associated management issues. The study report published in 2000 found, *inter alia*, that unaccounted for water levels varied significantly between regions but were generally in the range of between 40% to 50%. The corresponding figure in the Dublin region in 1996 was 42.5%.

There are variations in the production costs of water between local authorities. In addition, not all unaccounted for water is lost through leakage. Heretofore, a significant proportion would have related to unauthorised or unrecorded connections. However, the universal metering of all non-domestic consumers, which is expected to be completed in 2007, coupled with ongoing improvements in local authorities' water management systems, will, in addition to further reducing unaccounted for water levels, significantly improve the range of data available in this area. In the meantime, detailed information in relation to the cost of water leakage nationally is not available in my Department.

In 1996 capital funding was introduced under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme to help reduce unaccounted for water levels in local authority distribution networks, to improve the quality of supply to consumers, to lower operating costs and to maximise the value of investment in new treatment works. A series of pilot schemes to identify potential improvements, as well as some network rehabilitation, was undertaken. Project locations included Dublin, Cork, Galway, Waterford, Limerick, Athlone and Clonmel. Capital funding of €63m was provided by my Department. The results showed that the levels of unaccounted for water were reduced considerably. For example, in Dublin they fell from 42.5% to 28.7%, in Donegal from 59% to 39%, in Meath from 47% to 34% and in Kilkenny from 45% to 29%.

A further €281m is now available to local authorities to identify and reduce unaccounted for water in public supply networks. The bulk of this allocation, €194m, is for network rehabilitation or

replacement works by authorities that have already carried out water management system studies under the earlier pilot phase. The balance of €87m will enable the remaining authorities to complete water management system studies as a necessary precursor to structural rehabilitation works. In November 2005, I increased the recoupment available to local authorities from my Department for certain water conservation activities from 75% to 90% to encourage and facilitate greater progress on water conservation generally. Details of current allocations to individual authorities for water conservation measures are set out in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 which is available in the Oireachtas Library.

Social and Affordable Housing.

97. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the Government's commitment to provide 4,000 voluntary housing units will be met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42523/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The voluntary and co-operative housing sector has an important role in the provision of social housing. By working in close partnership with local authorities, it supplements the social housing effort in areas where particular housing needs have been identified. It is supported by my Department through two separate funding schemes, the Capital Assistance Scheme and the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme.

The main strategy for delivery of the Government's social and affordable housing programme is through the local authority 5-year Action Plans for social and affordable housing. The Action Plans, now at their midway stage are currently being reviewed. The reviews are focussing on examining how targets have been met in the first two years of the plan and on incorporating any adjustments required for the remaining years of the plan, in light of outcomes including expected 2006 outputs, and the results of the recent Housing Needs Assessment. To date, over 19,000 units have been provided by the Voluntary Sector, some 8,000 of which have been provided over the period 2000-2005.

The Government is committed to providing additional investment over the period 2007-2009 in order to ensure the delivery of an additional 1,000 housing units. In accordance with the policy objectives contained in the Partnership Agreement Towards 2016 my Department is actively engaging with the Voluntary and Co-operative Sector to ensure that the necessary supports and resources are in place to enable it to deliver on needs. Proposals are also being advanced for an early rationalisation of the administrative and

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funding arrangements with a view to ensuring the earliest possible delivery of projects.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

98. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when his proposals regarding the essential repairs grant scheme and the special housing aid for the elderly scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42465/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The review of the Disabled Persons Grant scheme, which incorporates the conditions governing the Essential Repairs Grant scheme and the Special Housing Aid for the Elderly scheme, was recently finalised within my Department. Proposals for the future operation of the schemes are being prepared and are expected to be announced early next year in the context of a new Housing Policy Statement.

Question No. 99 answered with Question No. 85.

Homelessness Policy.

100. **Mr. Costello** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of persons who have been deemed by local authorities to be homeless; the number of persons who are sleeping rough; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42587/06]

109. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on whether the target of ending homelessness set out by the Make Room campaign is achievable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42526/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 109 together.

I have noted the recent launch of the MakeRoom campaign by Focus Ireland, the Simon Communities of Ireland, the Society of St Vincent de Paul and Threshold. The stated aim of the MakeRoom campaign is to end homelessness by 2010 and in this context indicates this to mean “nobody will sleep rough; nobody will stay in emergency accommodation for longer than is absolutely necessary and nobody will become homeless because of a lack of appropriate services”.

The social partnership agreement Towards 2016 contains a commitment to the elimination of the long-term occupancy of emergency homeless

accommodation by 2010. This is well aligned with the goals of the MakeRoom campaign. It should also be noted that the Homeless Agency, which is the partnership body which coordinates homeless services in Dublin, has already defined as its overarching goal the elimination of long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough in Dublin by 2010.

The Independent Review of Implementation of Homeless Strategies, published earlier this year, examined the implementation of the Government's Integrated and Preventative Homeless Strategies and concluded that they should be amalgamated and updated. The Government have accepted the broad thrust of the recommendations of the Review and work is underway on the preparation of a revised and updated Strategy on Homelessness. As part of this process, a National Homeless Consultative Committee, including representatives from homeless service providers, will be established to provide input into the development of the revised homeless strategy and ongoing government policy on addressing homelessness. Very significant resources are being made available to address the issue of homelessness at national level in a comprehensive and co-ordinated manner. Since 2000, the Government through my Department and the Department of Health & Children, have provided over €450 million in capital and current funding nationally for the provision of accommodation and care related services for homeless persons.

Recent assessments indicate that there has been a welcome decrease in rough sleeping in Dublin over recent years. According to Counted In 2002, the assessment of homelessness in the Dublin area undertaken by the Homeless Agency in March 2002, 312 people self-reported that they had slept rough for four nights or more in the previous week. The number of persons self-reporting as having slept rough for four nights or more in the most recent assessment, Counted In 2005, undertaken by the Homeless Agency in March 2005, was 185 — a decrease of 40%.

In relation to the overall number of homeless persons in Dublin, Counted In 2005 recorded that the number of homeless households in the Dublin area was 1,361 comprising some 2,015 persons and this represented a 19% reduction in the number of homeless households since the 2002 assessment. This was comparable with the experience of the Dublin Homeless Persons Unit which saw a 20% decrease in the number of households presenting as homeless in the same period.

Nationally, through the vital work of the local homeless fora, there has also been significant progress in reducing the numbers of homeless persons. In the Housing Needs Assessment 2005, local authorities recorded a 46% fall in the numbers of homeless persons nationally, from 5,581 persons in 2002 to 3,031 persons in 2005. In terms of rough sleeping, local authorities

reported some 41 people sleeping rough outside of the Dublin area in the Housing Needs Assessment. Including the 185 people sleeping rough reported in the Dublin area, this would indicate that there were 226 people sleeping rough nationally in March 2005.

Question No. 101 answered with Question No. 73.

Question No. 102 answered with Question No. 67.

Planning Issues.

103. **Mr. Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his view on the report entitled *Urban Sprawl in Europe the Ignored Challenge* from the European Environmental Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42520/06]

107. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the fact that Dublin's planning was recently cited as a worst case scenario by the EEA report, *Urban Sprawl in Europe the Ignored Challenge*; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42605/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 107 together.

Ireland is experiencing huge levels of population growth across all counties, with the national population rising by over 8% in the last four years alone. This unparalleled growth, together with unprecedented economic expansion have placed large demands on housing and associated infrastructures. This represents a new challenge for the regional balance of development across the country, and for dealing with increasing pressures in the urban environs of Dublin.

The Government has acted swiftly and on a broad front to ensure that the provision of new houses and apartments is undertaken in a manner that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. A key policy response has been the National Spatial Strategy (NSS), which was published in November 2002.

The NSS calls for a more balanced spread of economic activity in Ireland, but recognises that we must support and enhance the competitiveness of the Greater Dublin Area so that it continues to perform at the international and national level as a driver of national development. The NSS also accepts that it is not sustainable that Dublin should continue to spread outwards into counties on its periphery and beyond. To address this, the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) for the Greater Dublin Area emphasise that it is necessary to consolidate the

physical growth of the Dublin metropolitan area, the city and suburbs, while at the same time concentrating development in the hinterland into strategically placed, strong and dynamic urban centres.

The principles of the RPGs are now reflected in city and county development plans in the Greater Dublin Area and the effects of these policies are being seen in more integrated and strategic planning policies at local level. Moreover, the 1999 Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Residential Density included specific objectives for more compact urban development by seeking to assist planning authorities in achieving high quality residential density at appropriate locations, in conjunction with improved public transport systems. These guidelines are currently being reviewed and updated to take account of changing population and settlement patterns and the extensive experience built up since the introduction of the 1999 guidelines in the design, assessment and development of higher density proposals.

I am confident that the continuing implementation of the policies outlined above will have a positive influence on bringing about more compact urban design and sustainable development into the future.

Special Areas of Conservation.

104. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps he will take to extend the closing date for special area of conservation appeals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42248/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Question No. 48 on today's Order Paper.

Question No. 105 answered with Question No. 74.

Air Quality.

106. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his view on the fact that environmental air quality as monitored by the Environmental Protection Agency indicates that the allowable annual limits as defined by EC Directive for PM10 were exceeded at the majority of sites which represents no improvement since 2002; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42616/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): EU Directive 1999/30/EC set limit values for particulate matter (PM10), currently in force from 1 January 2005. These are the first mandatory national air quality standards for particulate matter PM10 and are transposed into Irish law by the Air Quality Stan-

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dards Regulations 2002. The air quality standards in force for particulate matter (PM10) including annual limits, have never been breached.

Question No. 107 answered with Question No. 103.

Residential Tenancies Board.

108. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the progress to date in operating the Private Residential Tenancies Board and the operation of a national tenancy registration system; the cost of operating the Private Residential Tenancies Board to date; if there has been a request for more funding and staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42550/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): It is a matter for the Private Residential Tenancy Board to keep the effectiveness of their operations and the adequacy of their resources under review. There is no request with my Department from the Board at present for additional operational funding or staff. A request was, however, received from the Board this week for a grant to fund the fitting-out of proposed new office accommodation and this is being considered.

Question No. 109 answered with Question No. 100.

Nuclear Safety.

110. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if the European Commission has agreed to meet with Ireland's international legal team on Sellafield in relation to clarification of the dispute over Sellafield and the elements which fall within and outside the European Court of Justice jurisdiction. [42476/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Questions Nos. 22, 84 and 126 of 8 November 2006. The position is unchanged.

Question No. 111 answered with Question No. 57.

Question No. 112 answered with Question No. 75.

Social and Affordable Housing.

113. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the social housing design guidelines which are currently being reviewed by his Department

will be published as was previously outlined by him in reply to Parliamentary Question No. 525 of 20 June 2006. [42460/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): It is anticipated that the revised social housing design guidelines will be published in early 2007.

Environmental Policy.

114. **Mr. Gormley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has satisfied himself with the monitoring of environmental threats to human health; and the discussions his Department has had on the issue with the Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive since the Environmental Protection Agency's secretary general made it clear in 2003 that responsibility for monitoring human health effects of environmental issues was not a job for the EPA. [42611/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Environmental Protection Agency has a wide range of statutory duties and powers under the Environmental Protection Agency Act. The protection of human health is a primary consideration of the Agency.

In granting Integrated Pollution Protection and Control (IPPC) and Waste licenses, the Agency sets stringent emission limit values for pollutants and potential pollutants, to meet the accepted EU standards and guidelines as a minimum requirement. In addition, the Agency evaluates the potential impact of the maximum licensed emission on the environment surrounding any facility, to ensure that all EU standards for the environment and World Health Organisation guidelines will be met.

In continued recognition of the interaction between the environment and human health, formal links have been established between the Environmental Protection Agency and the Health Services Executive. This has resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding between the two bodies, signed in October 2006, affirming their commitment to on-going cooperation, in the interest of the protection of health and the environment. The Agency has also advertised for a Post Doctoral Research Fellow in its Environmental Research Centre whose remit will include developing a framework and initiatives to advance the interface between environmental protection and human health protection.

Question No. 115 answered with Question No. 73.

Building Regulations.

116. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he will make the European Communities (Energy Performance of Buildings) Regulations; when the regulations will take effect; the exemptions that are provided for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42596/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I intend to make the European Communities (Energy Performance of Buildings) Regulations shortly. The Regulations will become operative on a phased basis, over a 3 year period from 1 January 2007 to 1 January 2009.

The Regulations will specify the exempted building categories, which will be broadly as outlined on page 14 of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive in Ireland, published in August 2006. A copy of this action plan is available in the Oireachtas Library.

Waste Water Treatment.

117. **Mr. Callanan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of waste water schemes built since 1997 to date in 2006; the expenditure involved in providing this infrastructure; and the environmental improvements which have resulted. [42629/06]

153. **Mr. Carty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of waste water schemes built since 1997 to date in 2006; the expenditure allocated to provide this infrastructure; the number of people who have benefited nationwide and in County Mayo; the environmental benefit of such schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter which has resulted. [42634/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 117 and 153 together.

224 wastewater schemes have been completed since 1997 under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme at an Exchequer cost of €2.3bn. These schemes have provided additional wastewater treatment capacity equivalent to the needs of a population of 3.3 million, including a population equivalent of some 64,000 in County Mayo.

There has been clear progress in relation to the protection and improvement of environmental standards. This progress includes:

- an increase in compliance with the requirements of the EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive from 25% in 2000 to 90% now: all remaining schemes necessary for

full compliance with the Directive are included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007

- a reduction in the pollutant load from municipal discharges to rivers, lakes and seas of 45,000 tonnes per annum in a period of unprecedented economic growth
- an increase from 67% to 70% in the length of unpolluted river channel between 1997 and 2003: this represents the first reversal of a downward decline that had persisted for decades
- more Blue Flag beaches: in 2006, 81 Blue Flags were awarded to Irish bathing areas: this is the highest number ever, and compares with 70 in 1997
- massive investment and rapid progress in the elimination of substandard drinking water supplies in the group scheme sector.

These achievements will continue to be built on throughout the term of the next National Development Plan 2007 to 2013.

Local Authority Housing.

118. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the fact that local authorities are often unable to provide funding to manage, maintain and improve their rented housing stock; his further views on the fact that these works are not covered by the remedial works scheme as they are not major refurbishment works; and the measures he will introduce to provide this necessary funding to local authorities. [42461/06]

120. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has plans to review and expand the remedial works scheme as it does not cover general repairs to rented houses that local authorities can not afford to carry out as they lack the required funds to do so. [42462/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 118 and 120 together.

Local authority housing construction and improvement works programmes, including planned maintenance, regeneration and remedial works are discussed with each local authority as part of the preparation and review of their Housing Action Plans. Arising out of this, authorities may seek Exchequer support for improvement works under a number of schemes. Some €133 million was assigned for improvement works undertaken by local authorities in 2006. Local authorities may also apply, on approval by the Department, Internal Capital Receipts from the

[Mr. N. Ahern.]

sale of local authority houses to the undertaking of improvement works, which includes planned maintenance programmes.

Discussions will take place with housing authorities early in 2007 regarding their improvement works programmes for the period 2007 to 2009.

Question No. 119 answered with Question No. 75.

Question No. 120 answered with Question No. 118.

Waste Management.

121. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the general location of each of the municipal waste incinerators, that it is proposed to build in the State; the approximate planned dates for the coming into operation of each of these incinerators; the status of each planned incinerator; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42601/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Under the Waste Management Acts, responsibility for the determination and implementation of waste management plans rests with the local authority (or local authorities) concerned and my Department has no direct involvement. Thermal treatment with energy recovery in accordance with the internationally accepted waste management hierarchy is a key element of Irish waste management policy and this is reflected in the relevant regional waste management plans.

The identification and delivery of necessary waste infrastructure, including waste to energy plants, is a matter for the local authorities in each region and the private sector. The timing of plant development is a matter for individual public and private promoters, having regard also to the requirements of the applicable planning and environmental licensing regulatory processes.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

122. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government further to the fact that the local authorities of Fingal, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown and Wicklow have agreed local area plans which would require 60% reductions in CO₂ emissions, his views on whether it is time that his Department produced regulations that would require all local authorities to set such targets for local area plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42615/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): It is not pro-

posed at present to make it mandatory for local authorities to set targets in local area plans for reductions in CO₂ emissions.

National Spatial Strategy.

123. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the framework for joint action in implementing the cross border aspects of the National Spatial Strategy and its equivalent in Northern Ireland, the Regional Development Strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42559/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): There are many complementary elements within the National Spatial Strategy and its equivalent in Northern Ireland — the Regional Development Strategy. These include the recognition of the attractiveness for inward investment of the Dublin-Belfast corridor and the role of the Letterkenny-Derry gateway as a driver for the wider northwest region. Both Governments have been actively supporting ongoing capital investments and spatial planning initiatives to implement those complementary and interdependent elements of both spatial strategies such as the M1-A1 road link, the Newry-Dundalk Twin City Initiative and the Northwest Gateway Initiative.

Recognising that there is further potential to strengthen co-operation in implementing both spatial strategies on the island, my Department, working in conjunction with the Department of Regional Development in Northern Ireland, is preparing a non-statutory framework for collaborative action on spatial policy between the National Spatial Strategy and the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland. This was endorsed by the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and was announced in a joint communiqué following the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference last May.

The aim of the collaborative framework is to facilitate strategic, forward-looking spatial planning and appropriate investment in infrastructure which will help to create enhanced, globally competitive and dynamic economic conditions on the island of Ireland.

To support the development of the collaborative framework, InterTrade Ireland commissioned the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) to carry out a study aimed at identifying the best means of taking the project forward. ICLRd is a consortium involving NUI Maynooth, the University of Ulster and Harvard College. The study, titled Spatial Strategies for the Island of Ireland towards a Collaborative Approach, was formally launched at a conference in Newry on 9 November.

It is intended that a draft report on the collaborative framework will be ready for consideration by the two Governments shortly.

Social and Affordable Housing.

124. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the maximum loans that local authorities are approved by his Department for social and affordable housing options by applicants in their catchment areas; the way these amounts reflect market conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42481/06]

511. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if as a result of Budget 2007 the ceiling in relation to shared ownership loans has been increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43096/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 124 and 511 together.

The maximum loan which may be advanced by a local authority for social and affordable housing schemes is €185,000 and subject to this limit, a loan of up to 95% of the price of the house may be made available. It is a matter for local authorities to determine the amount on the loan in each case up to the limit and subject to the borrower's ability to repay. In order to ensure the optimal use of resources, the prioritisation of funding for lower income groups and to avoid any significant impact on house process in their areas, authorities may apply lower limits to reflect local market conditions.

The existing loan limit is currently under review having regard to movement in house prices and the effectiveness of the various schemes in meeting the needs of target groups.

Question No. 125 answered with Question No. 89.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

126. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps he will take over the next year to enable the State to meet its Kyoto obligations and to reduce CO₂ emissions; and the date on which he will publish a revised climate change strategy. [42466/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Question No. 4 of 8 November 2006.

A number of additional measures have been announced by the Minister for Finance in his

Budget statement on 6 December 2006. These include:

- a commitment to purchase up to €270 million Carbon Credits;
- proposals for linking VRT and motor tax to carbon dioxide emissions and for enhanced mandatory emissions labelling;
- introduction of VRT relief for electric cars on a one year pilot basis;
- abolition on excise reductions for kerosene and liquid petroleum gas used in home heating;
- extension of the SEI Greener Homes Scheme by €20 million between 2007 and 2009;
- expansion of the SEI Commercial Bioheat Scheme to cover the installation of technologies such as solar panels in commercial premises and for buildings in the non-commercial sector such as community centres and sports facilities;
- provision of an additional €3m to enable SEI to support small and medium enterprises to assess their energy usage and introduce measures to enhance energy efficiency;
- extension of corporation tax relief for investment in renewable energy for a further 5 years;
- new establishment grants for willow and miscanthus bioenergy crops;
- introduction of support for €80 per hectare for qualifying energy crops in addition to an EU support of €45 per hectare; and
- grant aid support for biomass harvesting machinery.

Work on the review of the National Climate Change Strategy will be completed as soon as possible.

Local Authority Funding.

127. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the way he will fund local government in view of the predicted shortfall of €1.5 billion by 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42560/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Review of Local Government Financing by Indecon Economic Consultants estimated, on the basis of different methods of projecting expenditure, that by 2010 local authority expenditure would increase by €1 billion to €2 billion in nominal terms over 2004 levels.

[Mr. Roche.]

Funding this expenditure would be met by a combination of the buoyancy in the existing funding system, some additional funding and the achievement of efficiencies over the period.

As regards the existing funding system, there is significant natural buoyancy in the current revenue sources of local authorities. The valuation bases of local authorities are growing substantially as a result of continued economic growth. In addition revenue from motor taxation — which is paid directly into the Local Government Fund — continues to increase without any increases in the rates of this taxation; in 2006, motor tax revenues are running at 10% above 2005 levels.

I was in a position to announce record levels of General-Purpose Grants to local authorities from the Fund amounting to some €875m for 2006. Taking account of global valuations, this was an increase of some 8% on the 2005 allocation or 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ times the 1997 level. I am also increasing the general-purpose grant allocations to local authorities for 2007 by 8% and I am confident that this level of funding will be adequate to meet ongoing local authority needs.

To supplement the existing income sources, a number of initiatives are being pursued. In the Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Bill 2006, which is before this House today, I am making new commercial properties liable to a levy, similar to rates, effective from the date that the valuation of the property is placed on the valuation list, rather than from the commencement of the next rating year as is the case at present. Measures to combat motor tax evasion are being continued and stepped up. I am also considering ways of bringing planning fees, which are fixed by Regulations, into line with the economic cost of dealing with planning applications.

Additional revenues will be complemented by a range of efficiency initiatives. In partnership with local authorities:

- I am developing a standard costing system for the sector to deliver enhanced management information, particularly in relation to unit costs,
- In the Local Government (Business Improvement Districts) Bill 2006, I am proposing to enhance the arrangements for local audit committees in line with best practice, and
- I will pursue the scope for greater sharing of services between authorities.

I will also continue to ensure that the Value for Money Unit in my Department undertakes in-depth analyses of local authority activities and identifies “best practice”.

The availability of good information is a key to good decision-making and I have published key financial data on my Department’s website.

Social and Affordable Housing.

128. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the impact of development contributions on affordable housing; if he has given consideration to exempting those houses that are subject to a claw back from this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42579/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Development contributions allow local authorities to recoup some of the costs to public funds of servicing land for private development. Without them, this servicing could not proceed or the full cost would have to be borne by the taxpayer. They are also a way of recouping some of the “betterment”, which local authorities add to the value of land when it is serviced.

Under the Planning Acts, the money is ring fenced to pay for facilities servicing new development, for example, roads, water and sewerage services and other amenities including community facilities, landscaping and public transport infrastructure provided by or on behalf of a planning authority.

Development contributions are imposed on all types of new development that relies on the services mentioned in particular, housing. Development contributions are attached as a condition of planning permission, and are therefore paid by the person carrying out the development in advance of construction starting.

Affordable homes attract development contributions, as such homes are private homes, but sold at a discount to the market value and subject to a clawback on re-sale. The clawback provision is in place to protect the State’s interest in the house and to ensure that there is no short-term profit taking on the resale of an affordable house. It is not proposed to exempt such houses from the requirement of development contributions.

129. **Mr. Walsh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when work will commence on an affordable housing scheme at Darrara, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42246/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Cork County Council advertised for expressions of interest from consultants on 22 September 2006, for the preparation of the relevant documentation required for the Part 8 planning process, and for the preparation of cost

plans, tender documentation and the construction contract in respect of the site at Darrara. Following a shortlisting exercise, further details on prices and proposals have been sought from six applicants and the closing date for receipt of this additional information is 20 December 2006. The Council confirmed that interviews with the shortlisted candidates will be held in January next year, with the successful consultant appointed immediately.

It is proposed to commence construction as early as possible in 2007, subject to the successful completion of the planning process. My Department continues to keep in close contact with Cork County Council to ensure that the project is progressed as quickly as possible.

Special Areas of Conservation.

130. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to a planning application which has been submitted by Ballina Town Council for a site in Ballina which is a green area at Canalside and which is protected as part of SAC 002298; his views on whether due to the SAC status on this site, this application is viable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42647/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department was notified on 14 November 2006 by Ballina Town Council under Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, of a proposed development that includes the site in question. The proposal is being examined by my Department from the point of view of its potential impact on the built and natural heritage and our views will be communicated to the Council as soon as possible.

Local Authority Housing.

131. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the reason the targeted 35,500 local authority housing units envisioned in the National Development Plan 2000 to 2006 were not all built; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42524/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Cumulative expenditure under the local authority housing measure of the NDP will reach some €5 billion at the end of 2006 which is 13% ahead of NDP forecast. While output levels have been less than anticipated, more than 31,000 local authority houses will be completed or acquired by the end of the programme period. The shortfall in achieving targets can be

attributed largely to higher than anticipated unit costs.

Question No. 132 answered with Question No. 73.

Proposed Legislation.

133. **Mr. G. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when legislation to regulate property management companies and agents will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42530/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The Government Legislation Programme provides for the publication in 2007 of a Property Services Regulatory Authority Bill, which is being developed by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to give effect to recommendations in this area by the Auctioneering/Estate Agency Review Group. It is proposed that this legislation will provide for the regulation of property services, including the establishment of a Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA). I understand that proposed functions of the PSRA include licensing, regulating and dealing with complaints relating to managing agents. These commercial firms, which provide property management and maintenance services in various developments, are a significant element of the property management sector.

Management companies, which are composed of the property owners in a particular development, are generally constituted under the Companies Acts and are required to comply with the provisions of company law. I understand that the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment is developing proposals for a Company Law Reform and Consolidation Bill, which, it is expected, will include provisions to help alleviate certain problems in relation to management companies in the context of company law.

The Director of Corporate Enforcement is launching a consultation paper today on the Governance of Apartment Owners' Management Companies. I understand that this paper contains draft guidance focused on improving the governance of such companies, which should help owners to ensure effective management of the assets that are in company control.

The Law Reform Commission (LRC) is currently examining legal aspects generally regarding the management of multi-unit structures and I understand that a consultation paper will be available within a few weeks. In light of the LRC report, the Departments concerned will consider the need for any further measures to be taken in this area.

[Mr. N. Ahern.]

Obligations of property owners in relation to management companies are the subject of private contracts and buyers should obtain adequate legal advice and information when signing contracts. A recent report and booklet published by the National Consumer Agency provides useful consumer information on property management arrangements.

Local Authority Funding.

134. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of funding provided by his Department to each local authority for each year between 2002 and 2006 inclusive, for the installation of central heating in their housing stock. [42463/06]

534. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his Department will initiate a scheme or provide funding for the provision of central heating for senior citizens residing alone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42814/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 134 and 534 together.

My Department introduced a programme in July 2004 for the installation of central heating in existing local authority rented dwellings with priority given to houses occupied by elderly people. Grants totalling some €42 million were paid to local authorities by my Department in 2004 and 2005. Capital allocations of almost €32 million were notified to local authorities for 2006. The following table gives a breakdown of the funding provided and allocated by local authority under the Central Heating Programme.

Prior to this initiative, my Department has required since 1994 that central heating be provided during construction in new local authority dwellings and included in the overall cost of schemes. Where capital funding is provided under regeneration and remedial programmes operated by my Department for upgrading of local authority dwellings, the provision of central heating may form part of the work undertaken.

More generally, the management, maintenance and improvement of their rented dwellings, including the installation of central heating is, in general, the responsibility of local authorities to be financed from their own resources. The present initiative is an important enhancement of local authorities' own measures and will lead to the continued upgrading of the local authority housing stock.

Funding may also be available from my Department for senior citizens for the provision

of heating systems under the Improvements Works in Lieu Scheme, Disabled Persons Grant Scheme and Essential Repairs Grant Scheme.

Central Heating Programme

Local Authority	Total Grant Paid Up To 31 December 2005	Allocation For 2006
Carlow County Council	296,000	252,000
Carlow Town Council	416,288	310,000
Cavan County Council	431,200	392,000
Cavan Town Council	280,000	168,000
Clare County Council	888,550	560,000
Ennis Town Council	202,664	196,000
Kilkee Town Council	5,600	
Kilrush Town Council	85,606	0
Cork City Council	1,549,733	2,800,000
Cork (North) County Council	334,800	1,120,000
Fermoy Town Council	60,268	106,400
Macroom Town Council		112,000
Mallow Town Council	321,523	369,600
Cork (South) County Council	1,496,729	1,433,600
Kinsale Town Council		84,000
Midleton Town Council		283,200
Youghal Town Council		150,000
Cork (West) County Council		520,800
Clonakilty Town Council		89,600
Cobh Town Council	147,497	16,800
Skibbereen Town Council	39,200	33,600
Donegal County Council	984,651	795,200
Ballyshannon Town Council		22,400
Buncrana Town Council	112,618	151,200
Bundoran Town Council	135,122	0
Letterkenny Town Council	253,448	0
Dublin City Council	5,107,280	
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown	2,554,302	2,800,000
Fingal County Council	1,549,075	1,232,000
South Dublin	3,958,598	0
Galway City Council	656,823	1,064,000
Galway County Council	1,677,258	1,086,400
Ballinasloe Town Council	117,098	157,500
Kerry County Council	444,278	286,272
Killarney Town Council		0
Listowel Town Council	196,235	104,000
Tralee Town Council	396,400	448,000
Kildare County Council	150,792	225,000
Athy Town Council	103,727	94,500
Naas Town Council		0
Kilkenny County Council	565,185	280,000
Kilkenny Borough Council	128,942	270,000
Laois County Council	775,865	280,000
Leitrim County Council	560,000	225,000
Limerick City Council	670,161	675,000

Local Authority	Total Grant Paid Up To 31 December 2005	Allocation For 2006
Limerick County Council	1,021,089	1,120,000
Longford County Council	569,600	739,200
Longford Town Council	442,240	224,000
Louth County Council	145,600	392,000
Drogheda Borough Council	542,661	225,000
Dundalk Town Council	862,981	784,000
Mayo County Council		0
Ballina Town Council	106,400	196,000
Castlebar Town Council	449,056	280,000
Westport Town Council		291,200
Meath County Council	681,279	547,200
Kells Town Council	140,000	0
Navan Town Council		0
Trim Town Council	16,163	0
Monaghan County Council	365,109	0
Carrickmacross Town Council	68,000	27,000
Castleblayney Town Council	70,000	50,400
Clones Town Council	75,627	0
Monaghan Town Council	86,097	100,000
Offaly County Council	529,748	201,600
Birr Town Council		140,000
Tullamore Town Council	126,000	112,000
Roscommon County Council	688,825	560,000
Sligo County Council	385,423	318,000
Sligo Borough Council	201,600	201,600
North Tipperary County Council	155,547	450,000
Nenagh Town Council	115,009	145,600
Templemore Town Council	98,547	100,800
Thurles Town Council	215,600	0
South Tipperary County Council	246,400	380,800
Carrick-On-Suir Town Council		168,000
Cashel Town Council	147,177	0
Clonmel Borough Council	40,375	235,000
Tipperary Town Council	214,353	112,000
Waterford City Council	872,308	891,000
Waterford County Council	387,151	208,000
Dungarvan Town Council	217,642	0
Westmeath County Council	768,576	800,000
Athlone Town Council		0
Wexford County Council	669,726	851,200
Enniscorthy Town Council	291,200	280,000
New Ross Town Council	366,400	235,200
Wexford Borough Council	263,580	280,000
Wicklow County Council	664,466	560,000
Arklow Town Council	250,000	200,000
Bray Town Council	430,765	225,000
Wicklow Town Council	228,400	168,000
Overall Total	41,870,236	31,993,872

Property Management Fees.

135. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the action he has taken to implement the recommendations of the National Consumer Agency relating to management fees and service charges levied on owners of property on multi-unit dwellings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42599/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Question No. 115 of 8 November 2006.

Fire Services.

136. **Mr. Haughey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on involving the fire services more closely with local communities as outlined in the Farrell Grant Sparks report; and if he will give consideration to linking the fire service to the developing first response movement. [42619/06]

146. **Mr. Kelly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans for linking the fire services more closely with local communities as outlined in the Farrell Grant Sparks Report; and his views on developing links between the fire service and the emerging first response movement. [42503/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 and 146 together.

In February 2005, I announced a Fire Services Change Programme to implement the key fire services and fire safety recommendations of the Review of Fire Safety and Fire Services in Ireland. This Programme includes measures addressing the development of community fire safety programmes and the development of a competency based approach to recruitment, retention and career progression in the fire services. A number of community fire safety programmes are now being implemented including schemes aimed at increasing smoke alarm ownership and an educational programme for primary school children.

First Responder Training has been provided to fire-fighters by individual fire authorities over the last five years, with most fire authorities having completed this training. First Responder Training is being considered as a standard module for inclusion in the recruit programme being developed under the competency element of the Fire Service Change Programme.

Question No. 137 answered with Question No. 67.

Development Plans.

138. **Mr. Broughan** asked the Minister for the

[Mr. Broughan.]

Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the proposed guidelines for planning authorities on development plans will be finalised; the matters expected to be included in the guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42583/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Development Plans were published for public consultation last April. The draft Guidelines aim to ensure that all development plans are prepared to the highest possible standards on a consistent basis across planning authorities in terms of setting clear aims and objectives. This includes the process of drafting, public consultation, presentation and adoption of plans. The draft Guidelines also emphasise the importance within such plans of creating a clear strategic framework for the proper planning and sustainable development of the relevant area consistent with the longer-term aims set out in the National Spatial Strategy and regional planning guidelines.

The draft guidelines flesh out the role and nature of high quality development plans in terms of:

- their need to be strategic;
- their role as a catalyst for positive change and progress;
- their objective anticipation of future needs;
- their role in protecting the environment and heritage;
- their consistency with other plans and policies;
- their need to address diverse community needs; and
- their broad ownership by elected members, sectoral interests and the community.

Other key issues addressed in the draft Guidelines is the format of development plans and the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of their implementation, and the key role that elected members play in the overall process. Comments and submissions received during the public consultation period are currently being considered by my Department with a view to finalising the Guidelines early in the new year.

Question No. 139 answered with Question No. 51.

Noise Pollution.

140. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has satisfied himself that the measures currently in place to combat noise pollution are sufficient; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42538/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Significant powers are available to local authorities and to individuals to deal with environmental noise issues. I am also aware from the recent Second Stage debate on the Noise Bill 2006 of a shared concern to ensure that legislation in this area is adequate and to strengthen existing provisions if that is found to be necessary. The Government did not oppose the Bill and the sufficiency of existing measures will therefore be the subject of further examination in Committee in due course.

Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 75.

Local Authority Housing.

142. **Mr. Coveney** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of extra housing units that will be completed in 2007 on foot of the 10% increase in the local authority and social housing programme in the Estimates 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42531/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): It is estimated that more than 7,000 households will benefit in 2007 from new social housing provided by local authorities and the voluntary and co-operative housing sector and through long-term contractual commitments for new supply under RAS. In addition, further households will benefit from the implementation of RAS involving contractual arrangements with landlords for existing properties transferring from rent supplement. The funding available in 2007 will support the first year of an accelerated programme of social housing in accordance with the commitments in Towards 2016; in all, the needs of some 60,000 households will be addressed in the 2007-2009 period.

Playground Facilities.

143. **Mr. O'Connor** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to support the provision of playgrounds and skateboard parks; the progress to date in rolling out this important infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42517/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Ready, Steady Play: A National Play Policy, which was published in 2004, provides a framework for the development of public play facilities in Ireland, with the overall aim of ensuring that children have access to a range of quality play opportunities to enrich their childhood. As part of the implementation of this policy, my Department has allocated funding of over €8 million to County and City Councils for the development of new, or refurbishment of existing, playgrounds

over the period 2004-2006. The location of the playgrounds which benefit from these moneys is a matter for the local authority to decide.

In May 2005, I introduced a new initiative for the provision of skateboard facilities by local authorities. Each City and County Council was invited to submit expressions of interest for grant assistance towards the provision of a skateboard park in its area. Applications were assessed in my Department in conjunction with the National Children's Office and some 21 projects in 21 different local authority areas were recommended for grant aid. A sum of €1 million had initially been earmarked for the scheme in 2005 but, in light of the number and quality of submissions received, I approved all 21 projects in November 2005 and increased the funding allocation to over €2 million which is expected to be spent over a two year period.

The position regarding the provision of the 21 approved projects is being monitored by my Department and the question of inviting further proposals from local authorities will be kept under review in the light of progress with the 2005 scheme.

	1998	2001	2002	2003	2004
Municipal Waste	1,685,766	1,992,050	1,901,864	1,832,625	1,818,536
Household Waste	1,125,698	1,254,857	1,294,061	1,231,109	1,214,908
Construction & Demolition (C&D) Waste*	1,533,386	1,250,297	N/A	N/A	N/A

* These figures relate to the amounts of C&D waste disposed of to landfill.

There has been significant progress in recovery and recycling of waste in Ireland in recent years. The Government policy document Waste Management: — Changing Our Ways (1998) set a target of 35% recycling for municipal waste by 2013. The EPA's National Waste Report 2004 shows that the recycling rate for municipal waste in that year was 32.6%. In addition, the diversion of household waste now stands at 19.5%, up from 3.2% in 1998 while the recovery rate for C&D waste is reported as a provisional 85.2% equating to an estimated 9,513,962 tonnes.

Increases in recycling have been achieved as a result of a range of policies introduced and supported by my Department including the provision of recycling facilities, 1929 brings banks and 69 civic amenity sites, the roll-out of segregated waste collection services, greater use of pay-by-use charging for waste management services and awareness raising measures such as the Race Against Waste.

Social and Affordable Housing.

145. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the consultation he has had with the voluntary and co-operative housing sectors, regarding the possible introduction of a pilot tenant purchase scheme; when he will make a decision on this

Waste Management.

144. **Mr. M. Higgins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has received estimates for the amounts of municipal, household and C and D wastes which were land-filled in 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42590/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The detailed information sought is not available in my Department. National waste statistics for all waste streams are published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). National Waste Reports have been published in respect of the years 1998, 2001 and 2004 with interim reports published in respect of 2002 and 2003. An interim report will be issued by the Agency early in the New Year in respect of 2005.

The following table sets out the position in relation to the amount of the wastes specified in the Question that have been landfilled in each of the respective years since 1998 for which data is available:

matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42585/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): There is no provision at present in the voluntary housing schemes for the purchase of individual houses by tenants. However, it was agreed under Housing Policy Framework — Building Sustainable Communities that consideration would be given in consultation with the voluntary and co-operative sector, to pilot a tenant purchase scheme for some new voluntary homes under the scheme.

The modalities of such a scheme have been the subject of ongoing discussion between my Department and representatives of the voluntary and co-operative housing sector including the Irish Council for Social Housing and National Association of Building Co-operatives. Submissions recently received from a number of these organisations with regard to a pilot tenant purchase scheme are currently being examined in my Department. The introduction of such a scheme including any legislative element, will be determined in the coming months.

Question No. 146 answered with Question No. 136.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

147. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when Listowel Town water supply scheme will receive approval to proceed to contract document stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42443/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Listowel Town Council Upgrade Water Supply Scheme is included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 to start construction in 2007.

My Department is awaiting submission of a countywide strategic water supply study being prepared by Kerry County Council to facilitate further consideration of the Council's Design Review Report for the Listowel scheme.

Litter Pollution.

148. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the policy of his Department regarding littering and the dumping of household refuse and waste on the roadside and throughout the countryside; the action his Department is taking and the funds made available to reduce same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42617/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Under the Litter Pollution Acts 1997 to 2003, primary responsibility for developing and implementing responses to litter lies with local authorities. Local authorities are required, so far as is practicable, to ensure that public roads in their functional areas are kept free of litter. They are also required to take all practicable measures for the prevention, control and disposal of litter in their functional areas.

Each local authority determines its level of expenditure on individual local services, including anti-litter and clean-up operations. Statistics available to my Department show that local authorities have substantially increased expenditure on road/street cleaning services. In 2005 local authorities spent €74 million on road/street cleaning, compared to €43 million in 2000 — an increase of 72%.

To support more effective local authority action against litter my Department has allocated over €5.7 million since 1997 to local authorities for public education and awareness initiatives against litter. My Department also provides financial support for two national anti-litter initiatives i.e. the An Taisce-led project, National Spring Clean and the Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) National Litter League, and has developed the National Litter Pollution Monitoring System (NLPMS) currently being

implemented by local authorities. The NLPMS, which measures the extent and severity of litter pollution nationally, shows that there has been an improvement in litter pollution levels country-wide in recent years. The positive trend shown by the Monitoring System is also reflected in the IBAL League results, which record that cleanliness levels in the 53 participating towns and cities are generally improving.

Litter enforcement statistics are available in the Oireachtas Library and show that local authority performance on enforcement of the litter laws continues to improve. More litter wardens have been employed and there have been substantial increases in the number of prosecutions taken and on-the-spot fines issued annually.

Under the Waste Management Act 1996 persons holding, transporting recovering or disposing of waste may not do so in a manner which causes, or is likely to cause, environmental pollution. Enforcement is a matter for the local authorities and the EPA's Office of Environmental Enforcement.

My Department has provided €7.5 million this year to local authorities from the Environment Fund, to assist them in their waste enforcement activities generally. The funding is part of a programme of additional law enforcement in relation to waste activities. The purpose of the grant assistance is to provide highly visible on-the-ground enforcement staff and to help create a culture of compliance.

I am satisfied that existing anti-litter actions and waste enforcement activities by local authorities, together with my Department's support for the above initiatives, provide an effective and appropriate basis for tackling litter pollution and illegal dumping nationally.

Environmental Policy.

149. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on the establishment of an all-Ireland environment protection agency in view of the OECD recommendations that environmental issues should be dealt with on an island wide basis; and if he will raise this issue when he meets his Six Counties counterpart in the North during their next meeting. [42464/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): There is already good collaboration between the EPA and the relevant Northern Ireland authorities in relation to certain functions, especially environmental research and monitoring.

The question of the establishment of new North/South Bodies was addressed in the St. Andrews Agreement which provides that the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive under the auspices of the NSMC would

carry out a review of the North/South implementation bodies, including an examination of the case for additional bodies in areas of co-operation where mutual benefit would be derived.

Constituency Boundaries.

150. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the correspondence, which he has received relating to constituency boundaries, arising from the publication of the preliminary 2006 Census figures; if he has enquired from the Central Statistics Office as to when the final census figures will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42593/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Following the publication by the Central Statistics Office of the Preliminary Report on Census 2006, I sought the advice of the Attorney General on 21 July 2006 in relation to census results and constituency boundaries. The Attorney subsequently advised that constituencies can only be revised on the basis of the final Census figures. My Department also received a limited amount of other correspondence associated with this process and more generally on the issue concerned.

The publication of the final Census 2006 figures is a matter for the Central Statistics Office.

Question No. 151 answered with Question No. 72.

Question No. 152 answered with Question No. 75.

Question No. 153 answered with Question No. 117.

Question No. 154 answered with Question No. 69.

Waste Disposal.

155. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will introduce a waiver system for local refuse charges to people on low incomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42547/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Waste management services have traditionally been provided at a local level, with individual arrangements being locally determined and tailored to local circumstances. The present legal framework, as determined by the Oireachtas, reflects this. In accordance with section 52 of the Protection of the Environment Act 2003, the determination of waste management charges, and any associated waiver scheme, is a matter for the relevant local

authority, where it acts as the service provider. Similarly, where a private operator provides the collection service, it is a matter for that operator to determine charges. However, my Department has asked local authorities to engage with commercial waste collectors to agree on arrangements to assist lower income households by offering alternatives to periodic lump-sum payments.

In August this year, I published a consultation paper on options for future regulation of the waste sector. Submissions were invited on whether there is a need for a regulator for the sector, if so on what model of regulator might be most appropriate and on what powers any such regulator should be given. Among the possible powers discussed in the paper is the power to impose a public service obligation so that services can be provided where they would not otherwise be economically feasible. Following consideration of the submissions received, which is currently under way, I intend to finalise further policy proposals.

Environmental Policy.

156. **Mr. Crawford** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the action he will take on foot of the publication of the European Pollutant Emissions Register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42521/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The European Pollutant Emission Register (EPER) is published on foot of a requirement in the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive. In Ireland, the EPER is compiled by the Environmental Protection Agency every three years, and gives details on emissions to air and water from activities licensed under the above Directive where emissions of specific chemicals exceed a reporting threshold as set out in Annex I to the EPER Council Decision 2000/47/EC.

The general purpose of the EPER is to collect and report on emissions from individual installations across Europe. The objectives of the EPER are to:

- collect comparable emission data from around 20,000 individual industrial sources and activities throughout Europe as specified in the IPPC Directive;
- store the reported data in a register, which is publicly accessible over the Internet;
- disseminate the registered data to the public by written reports and the Internet.

For the general public, it is intended that the EPER will enhance awareness, accessibility and comparability of information on emissions to the environment. As the EPER is not a register of

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breaches of IPPC licences, no action is required on foot of its publication.

Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 73.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

158. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on providing funding to overcome the deficiencies in group water schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42620/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department funds comprehensive range of grants and subsidies which are available from local authorities under the devolved Rural Water Programme to bring quality deficient group water schemes up to a satisfactory standard. These include including a 100% capital grant for new water treatment and disinfection plants.

Last February, I announced a capital allocation of €133m for the 2006 Rural Water Programme, the biggest ever annual allocation for the Programme. The bulk of this funding was earmarked for the provision of water treatment and disinfection facilities for group schemes with quality deficient sources. Upgrading projects are now being progressed for 282 group schemes throughout the county. By the end of this year, some 100 new water treatment plants will be operational and delivering treated water to over 26,000 rural households. New treatment projects to serve a further 17,000 rural consumers have been advanced through the planning stages and construction has already commenced on a number of these. Group scheme connections to local authority public water supply networks will benefit up to 10,000 more rural households.

A strong partnership has been forged between my Department, the local authorities and the

group schemes sector. I envisage that this partnership, together with the unprecedented levels of grant aid being provided under the Rural Water Programme, will ensure early elimination of any remaining deficiencies in the quality of drinking water supplied to group scheme consumers.

Question No. 159 answered with Question No. 74.

Local Authority Funding.

160. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the level of charges in each local authority since their introduction; if his attention has been drawn to substantial proposed increases in development charges at local government level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42577/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Priority Question No. 46 on today's question paper.

The increase in development contributions in recent years reflects the large rise in construction activity which has led in its turn to increased demands for infrastructure, a fairer application of contributions across all development sectors and more accurate estimates by local authorities of their anticipated expenditure on infrastructure works; the latter is a requirement in advance of adopting a development contribution scheme under the Planning and Development Act 2000. In addition the 2000 Act for the first time provided that development contributions could be levied for local community infrastructure, such as playgrounds and parks.

The following tables set out the development contributions collected by planning authorities for the period 1983 to 2005. My Department does not have figures for development contributions collected prior to 1983.

Development Contributions

Area	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
	€	€	€	€	€	€	€
Carlow	33,623	28,784	38,994	6,190	21,027	8,298	31,997
Cavan	2,539	3,682	4,105	6,412	2,933	9,543	28,760
Clare	32,456	40,812	56,491	28,620	45,265	76,729	120,044
Cork	657,402	633,338	690,678	565,667	653,736	709,819	836,623
Donegal	69,899	46,151	21,233	43,087	273,921	84,354	281,596
Dublin County	3,843,252	3,307,618	3,563,441	2,346,099	2,808,649	3,889,010	4,979,410
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Fingal	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Galway	141,798	265,492	194,498	74,127	53,486	55,767	109,732
Kerry	80,320	108,221	85,180	67,503	55,297	55,799	133,425
Kildare	284,993	342,194	500,055	631,135	543,949	479,369	172,248

Area	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
	€	€	€	€	€	€	€
Kilkenny	55,039	47,482	199,278	108,899	117,450	109,651	153,887
Laois	63,271	71,867	102,582	53,880	61,322	100,614	43,463
Leitrim	16,349	9,960	16,888	3,492	14,665	31,742	23,099
Limerick	180,954	384,155	1,168,702	378,500	83,560	182,992	232,653
Longford	0	0	2,539	1,270	0	18,322	8,954
Louth	36,689	56,510	48,231	168,375	80,094	133,019	163,212
Mayo	42,645	48,980	46,947	45,257	66,811	116,253	189,884
Meath	109,604	141,635	209,973	137,560	186,888	263,777	572,229
Monaghan	0	0	0	34,067	0	0	0
Offaly	68,450	119,298	63,652	44,674	35,327	111,662	90,240
Roscommon	11,707	3,504	3,466	0	3,301	7,511	190
Sligo	12,375	65,793	56,849	26,135	32,273	90,300	105,839
South Dublin	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Tipperary North	46,789	79,204	65,215	69,232	47,242	70,834	77,792
Tipperary South	113,141	102,208	95,317	85,230	131,832	120,266	119,496
Waterford	7,204	21,319	14,610	0	42,282	128,308	82,831
Westmeath	185,753	67,000	27,345	50,718	54,968	39,673	66,782
Wexford	52,999	125,500	96,605	123,501	92,459	93,453	123,511
Wicklow	307,705	192,872	159,419	86,936	78,931	153,488	250,378
Sub Total	6,456,956	6,313,580	7,532,293	5,186,568	5,587,668	7,140,476	8,998,277
Cork City Council	221,959	200,010	195,447	139,690	213,203	172,733	223,761
Dublin City Council	30,423	50,788	53,367	131,615	121,068	0	1,060,344
Galway City Council	0	0	0	182,172	247,235	456,977	662,633
Limerick City Council	128,425	163,521	55,615	198,631	239,701	257,871	268,734
Waterford City Council	46,409	107,532	89,984	87,515	170,352	162,565	235,463
Sub Total	427,216	521,851	394,412	739,624	991,559	1,050,146	2,450,935
Total	6,884,172	6,835,431	7,926,706	5,926,191	6,579,227	8,190,698	11,449,212

Note: a number of authorities, mainly Urban District Councils, did not make complete returns in the years 1983 to 1989; therefore the figures for these years are not complete.

Development Contributions

Area	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
	€	€	€	€	€	€
Carlow	76,994	62,964	58,515	36,558	87,574	76,005
Cavan	24,837	105,991	42,098	67,728	46,281	103,277
Clare	198,502	249,582	260,699	228,681	230,696	462,126
Cork	923,630	1,008,548	1,285,405	677,273	1,330,414	1,671,806
Donegal	225,370	189,261	258,305	396,368	547,765	462,921
Dublin County	5,185,254	6,073,199	8,069,856	7,844,848	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	4,244,680	2,197,218
Fingal	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	2,094,736	3,411,729
Galway	146,761	126,119	280,733	263,486	207,206	464,854
Kerry	292,300	303,150	477,237	531,865	390,144	390,960
Kildare	1,560,098	1,435,977	3,047,059	2,721,378	2,592,594	3,015,413
Kilkenny	191,023	202,370	162,868	157,329	261,870	305,654
Laois	50,536	83,348	55,377	155,352	92,246	200,174
Leitrim	6,031	13,153	15,713	13,956	45,156	54,517
Limerick	215,091	257,474	195,161	137,089	276,405	314,918
Longford	16,593	38,017	71,297	105,569	37,996	30,310

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Area	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
	€	€	€	€	€	€
Louth	334,507	395,951	427,344	478,381	717,664	857,836
Mayo	82,624	75,746	222,181	173,354	162,926	170,884
Meath	437,241	373,355	657,105	725,569	676,535	1,209,687
Monaghan	5,803	8,355	11,936	13,662	22,728	19,078
Offaly	105,768	146,082	133,083	136,466	218,749	379,962
Roscommon	22,525	0	0	7,618	38,981	0
Sligo	150,458	140,076	131,624	118,488	189,494	182,602
South Dublin	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	3,191,728	3,828,065
Tipperary North	89,729	54,294	89,496	105,071	790,064	85,048
Tipperary South	149,281	193,269	145,794	183,772	345,847	384,508
Waterford	56,615	175,700	46,904	219,624	871,628	164,162
Westmeath	133,575	104,618	109,548	121,505	136,757	206,678
Wexford	109,501	422,749	373,978	334,604	269,507	429,899
Wicklow	404,892	368,502	565,225	476,232	920,210	1,181,067
Sub Total	11,195,538	12,607,852	17,194,542	16,431,826	21,038,582	22,261,359
Cork City Council	190,007	211,457	199,824	302,634	810,513	943,875
Dublin City Council	1,027,936	1,279,600	1,127,087	1,531,355	2,576,634	2,674,660
Galway City Council	773,743	882,497	782,550	613,944	713,339	1,049,252
Limerick City Council	216,833	416,238	594,665	389,788	601,326	984,053
Waterford City Council	170,569	281,882	284,068	390,113	345,748	527,244
Sub Total	2,379,088	3,071,674	2,988,194	3,227,834	5,047,561	6,179,084
Total	13,574,626	15,679,526	20,182,736	19,659,661	26,086,143	28,440,443

Development Contributions

Area	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
	€	€	€	€	€	€
Carlow	113,882	240,069	106,257	591,351	866,523	721,492
Cavan	58,544	165,729	479,851	725,459	980,322	985,723
Clare	423,227	679,284	1,005,647	1,626,640	1,337,848	1,342,238
Cork	2,744,498	4,501,977	5,534,894	7,378,054	10,101,535	9,803,819
Donegal	605,515	846,313	985,011	2,456,995	2,003,808	3,011,577
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	3,228,941	2,049,879	2,475,687	4,911,559	5,978,272	6,067,832
Fingal	5,229,046	5,710,981	8,466,367	12,162,025	13,612,511	14,764,631
Galway	454,679	968,328	386,172	1,501,752	2,854,366	3,688,593
Kerry	830,791	1,356,647	1,508,441	1,406,502	1,659,268	1,902,843
Kildare	8,875,524	8,894,331	7,474,678	5,072,816	6,428,683	6,078,742
Kilkenny	248,316	424,305	885,965	719,227	952,403	2,949,594
Laois	171,002	300,024	428,803	781,079	1,732,248	1,511,250
Leitrim	87,232	91,231	58,725	218,636	643,846	427,771
Limerick	456,048	544,198	971,444	1,646,977	1,632,093	2,277,417
Longford	78,065	179,367	61,571	202,166	670,007	866,501
Louth	1,238,194	752,618	1,866,824	3,048,278	4,270,854	5,174,232
Mayo	224,958	344,212	700,050	1,810,172	1,933,749	1,301,687
Meath	2,150,759	2,051,824	3,215,831	3,598,443	6,028,640	12,861,534
Monaghan	605,094	28,455	85,974	222,776	28,760	1,039,145
Offaly	230,297	358,306	457,224	863,673	1,411,426	983,783
Roscommon	119,876	258,735	437,749	473,625	1,173,977	798,832
Sligo	187,763	379,174	108,271	66,788	543,721	1,286,519
South Dublin	6,094,743	8,380,271	7,999,350	9,523,036	10,901,971	10,704,857
Tipperary North	195,848	1,933,996	489,988	453,330	643,638	1,092,348

Area	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
	€	€	€	€	€	€
Tipperary South	633,189	686,127	573,791	944,826	1,346,763	1,204,065
Waterford	171,812	400,753	577,445	1,324,309	2,018,991	1,659,281
Westmeath	457,715	770,579	1,296,834	1,187,396	1,942,817	2,067,964
Wexford	639,396	438,890	1,441,606	3,345,130	4,517,652	5,096,974
Wicklow	1,886,892	2,347,153	2,346,500	3,572,917	3,095,139	5,236,242
Sub Total	38,441,845	46,083,757	52,426,947	71,835,936	91,311,830	106,907,486
Cork City Council	705,679	766,213	1,174,270	1,739,116	1,924,379	1,820,076
Dublin City Council	3,878,684	6,641,007	7,646,575	9,127,950	10,563,548	7,606,758
Galway City Council	1,451,420	2,226,624	2,689,035	2,785,661	3,523,296	3,815,743
Limerick City Council	650,908	843,658	1,265,119	838,300	1,255,950	1,214,372
Waterford City Council	810,586	1,251,893	1,124,147	844,969	1,801,139	611,577
Sub Total	7,497,276	11,729,396	13,899,146	15,335,996	19,068,312	15,068,526
Total	45,939,121	57,813,153	66,326,093	87,171,931	110,380,142	121,976,012

Development Contributions

Area	2002	2003	2004	2005
	€	€	€	€
Carlow	527,526	4,108,871	5,423,712	4,782,745
Cavan	1,250,997	1,726,563	2,443,668	3,463,676
Clare	1,848,373	5,030,619	15,012,318	8,459,942
Cork	13,650,879	18,640,420	23,372,801	42,277,686
Donegal	2,886,599	4,077,770	5,408,421	5,133,251
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	7,761,776	8,248,405	12,005,514	24,197,857
Fingal	16,338,872	22,828,194	36,418,076	50,499,281
Galway	3,472,987	6,283,355	10,192,308	12,589,385
Kerry	3,540,009	4,142,871	8,414,791	12,331,312
Kildare	9,249,082	9,681,082	21,553,713	27,446,483
Kilkenny	3,242,523	3,990,300	8,104,213	13,072,063
Laois	2,531,622	4,058,654	4,846,814	12,679,478
Leitrim	763,472	1,904,028	2,177,356	4,254,073
Limerick	2,896,451	3,246,640	5,102,569	7,812,743
Longford	1,438,301	1,306,556	2,840,998	2,724,196
Louth	8,993,794	11,621,455	13,576,797	19,816,995
Mayo	786,940	1,266,487	4,156,144	8,690,858
Meath	9,506,636	21,223,966	23,739,581	38,569,452
Monaghan	1,021,967	1,187,936	1,684,053	2,610,452
Offaly	1,194,923	2,440,985	5,077,802	4,141,990
Roscommon	1,958,157	3,449,130	3,679,966	6,405,252
Sligo	2,416,388	2,527,829	2,669,171	7,419,691
South Dublin	11,243,420	2,397,997	20,759,303	31,581,698
Tipperary North	1,014,080	15,249,361	5,227,791	6,083,430
Tipperary South	2,003,725	3,751,818	5,342,596	6,976,825
Waterford	1,596,213	1,663,166	3,519,316	5,125,913
Westmeath	1,819,521	3,793,639	5,274,025	6,984,991
Wexford	6,507,272	8,043,630	11,591,327	33,916,182
Wicklow	7,929,194	8,951,778	11,541,145	18,341,470
Sub Total	129,391,699	186,843,506	281,156,288	428,389,368

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Area	2002	2003	2004	2005
	€	€	€	€
Cork City Council	3,094,378	7,521,882	10,831,391	11,043,286
Dublin City Council	8,654,092	11,378,014	27,571,393	63,572,817
Galway City Council	5,142,663	5,795,645	7,358,804	5,249,281
Limerick City Council	2,493,006	2,521,556	4,592,920	7,812,743
Waterford City Council	2,219,625	1,388,454	5,807,685	3,367,703
Sub Total	21,603,764	28,605,551	56,162,193	91,045,830
Total	150,995,463	215,449,057	337,318,481	519,435,198

Building Regulations.

161. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the anomalous situation contained in the Building Control Bill 2005 as amended at committee stage whereby persons who receive the qualification MRIAI after the Bill comes into force will be recognised in Europe but not here and persons who do not hold that qualification will be able to practice here but will not be recognised under the European Architects' Directive. [42459/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Section 12 of the Building Control Bill 2005, as amended at Committee Stage, sets out a number of ways in which a person may be eligible for registration as an Architect. These include academic and practical experience options. It also provides that a person who is a fellow or member of the registration body (RIAI) on the date of the passing of the Act will automatically be eligible for registration. Persons who become members of RIAI subsequent to that date may apply for registration under the alternative routes provided for in the Bill.

The Architects Directive 85/384/EEC now incorporated in Directive 2005/36/EU on Mutual Recognition of Qualifications recognises graduates in Architecture from UCD and DIT together with “membership” or “associate membership” of the RIAI.

The Report by the Competition Authority on Competition in Professional Services (Architects) recommended that, following enactment of the Bill, an amendment should be sought to Directive 2005/36/EU, referred to above to provide that the existing criteria (in Annex V) of “membership” or “associated membership” of the RIAI be replaced with “registration” by the registration body. This would entitle all persons registered in the statutory register to recognition in the European Union, should the amendment be accepted. I would propose to seek such an amendment following enactment of the Bill.

It should be noted that Section 12 of the Bill also provides that all registered professionals are eligible for membership of the registration body. Pending an amendment of the Directive 2005/36/EU (Recognition of Professional Qualifications), this provision would enable registered Architects who are not graduates of UCD or DIT, to be registered under the Directive.

Question No. 162 answered with Question No. 72.

Water Quality.

163. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the progress made in responding to concerns regarding Ireland's water quality, as expressed recently by the European Environment Agency. [42621/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): By any objective standard, there has been remarkable progress over the lifetime of this Government in relation to the protection and improvement of water quality. This progress includes —

- since 2000 an increase in waste water treatment capacity equivalent to the needs of a populations of 3.1 million
- since 1997 an increase from 20% to 90% in the level of compliance with the relevant EU Directive on waste water treatment
- an increase from 67% to 70% in the length of unpolluted river channel between 1997 and 2003: this represents the first reversal of a downward decline that had persisted for decades
- more Blue Flag beaches: in 2006, 81 Blue Flags were awarded to Irish bathing areas: this is the highest number ever, and compares with 70 in 1997
- massive investment and rapid progress in the elimination of substandard drinking water supplies in the group scheme sector.

These achievements in relation to our water quality standards will continue to be supported by large scale investment under the Water Services Investment Programme and by implementation of the Nitrates Action Programme.

Every implementation deadline set to date by the Water Framework Directive have been achieved on time by Ireland. My Department provides 100% funding for river basin management projects to support implementation of the Water Framework Directive and has committed over €68 million for this purpose. INTERREG funding is also available in relation to cross-border projects. The river basin management plans, which are being developed for adoption by 2009, will set out the specific environmental objectives to be achieved together with a programme of measures to deliver those objectives by the deadline of 2015. I am satisfied with the progress made so far in implementing the Directive and I expect that we will continue to see significant improvements in the quality of our fresh and coastal water resources, which will be reflected in EPA and EEA Water Quality Reports over the coming years.

Local Authority Housing.

164. **Ms Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the local authorities who are now operating the rental accommodation scheme; the number of tenants who have been transferred to RAS for each local authority; the average cost per tenant to each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42586/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Nearly all housing authorities are now mobilised in relation to RAS and most have begun to transfer households to RAS. In some cases the County Council is managing the scheme for the County at large. A total of 2,648 households have been transferred to RAS. The number of cases transferred by each local authority; estimated average cost and monthly rent per tenant, based on available information, are detailed in the following table. A further 1,900 households who were recipients of Rent Supplement have been provided with local authority housing.

Table: Number of tenants transferred to RAS, estimated average cost per tenant and estimated average monthly rent per tenant.

Local Authorities (Housing)	Preliminary Total transfers to end November	Average Cost per tenant in 2006 (to end October)	Estimated Average Cost per tenant per month
		€	€
Carlow County Council	28	344	194
Cavan County Council	39	879	238
Clare County Council	76	1,535	190
Cork City Council	215	1,509	139
Donegal County Council	65	1,790	111
Dublin City Council	650	2,587	478
South Dublin County Council	145	2,120	976
Fingal County Council	15	3,033	1,104
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	21	1,368	177
Galway City Council	175	2,361	421
Galway County Council	58	541	189
Kerry County Council	32	1,082	148
Kilkenny County Council	100	1,980	200
Laois County Council	43	782	178
Limerick City Council	103	2,040	324
Limerick County Council	103	201	202
Longford County Council	28	243	243
Louth County Council	34	3,002	333
Mayo County Council	68	264	168
Meath County Council	25	970	137
Monaghan County Council	34	1,828	208
Offaly County Council	49	1,014	267
Roscommon County Council	42	558	134
N. Tipperary County Council	44	261	228
Sligo County Council	81	523	523
South Tipperary Co. Co.	43	1,357	122

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Local Authorities (Housing)	Preliminary Total transfers to end November	Average Cost per tenant in 2006 (to end October)	Estimated Average Cost per tenant per month
		€	€
Waterford City	179	1,361	174
Westmeath Co. Co.	47	1,931	213
Wexford County Council	74	1,119	160
Wicklow County Council	32	986.00	213
Total	2,648		

Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 67.

EU Directives.

166. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the parts of the Aarhus Convention Agreement and its associated EU Directives 2003/4/EC and 2003/35/EC which have been ratified or transposed into Irish law to date; if he will set each part of the Aarhus Convention Agreement and its associated EU Directives 2003/4/EC and 2003/35/EC which have been ratified or transposed into Irish law; the date on which this occurred; the legislative instrument used to do this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42594/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Ireland signed the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters on 25 June 1998. Progress towards ratification of the Convention is closely aligned with work at EU level. To date, the European Union has adopted two directives as part of the ratification process for the Convention. These deal with public access to environmental information (2003/4/EC) and public participation in certain environmental decision-making procedures (2003/35/EC). Ratification of the Convention will take place after these Directives have been transposed into Irish Law.

Work is continuing in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government with regard to the transposition of these two Directives and will be completed as soon as possible. When the above work on transposition is completed, the instrument of ratification of the Aarhus Convention will be submitted to Government and laid before the Dáil.

Anti-Social Behaviour.

167. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the action he will take to tackle anti social behaviour in public and private housing estates; and if

he will make a statement on the matter. [42552/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): A number of legislative measures have been put in place to ensure that local authorities have the capacity to fulfil their responsibilities under the Housing Acts for the management and maintenance of their housing stock. These measures are kept under continuous review in my Department.

The tenancy agreement, which is the legal basis of the relationship between the local authority and its tenants, will generally contain provisions in relation to behaviour which is acceptable and that which is not. The local authority is empowered under section 62 of the Housing Act 1966, to initiate proceedings to secure an eviction where a tenant has breached the conditions of the tenancy agreement.

The primary purpose of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1997 is to provide for a range of measures to assist local authorities in addressing problems arising on their estates from drug dealing and serious anti-social behaviour. The Act gives recognition to the role of local authorities in actively promoting the interests of tenants and other occupiers in their housing estates and also in working towards the avoidance, prevention and abatement of anti-social behaviour. One of the main provisions of the 1997 Act enables a local authority tenant, or the local authority itself in certain circumstances, to apply to the District Court for an excluding order against an individual member of the household who is believed to be engaging in anti-social behaviour. The measures contained in the 1997 Act are essential to ensure that local authorities have the capacity to take effective action in this area.

In fulfilment of commitments in the Housing Policy statement — Building Sustainable Communities, I am reviewing the provisions of this Act with a view to strengthening their powers.

The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 contains a number of provisions to address the issue of anti-social behaviour in private rented accommodation and also extends the local authority

power to obtain excluding orders in respect of the occupants (other than the owner) of tenant purchased houses. It also extends the local authority power to refuse to sell a house to a person under the Tenant Purchase Scheme it has reason to believe may engage in anti-social behaviour to the Shared Ownership Scheme, the Affordable Housing Scheme and affordable houses deriving from Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

In addition, the Centre for Housing Research, which is funded by my Department and local authorities, has produced good practice guidelines on preventing and combating anti-social behaviour. The Centre has also organised training courses for local authorities in this regard. In this wider context, my Department has put in place a Housing Management Initiatives scheme which includes funding for programmes to improve estate management, tenant liaison and training initiatives.

Further issues, including matters of a criminal nature, come within the remit of An Garda Síochána and my colleague the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Question No. 168 answered with Question No. 51.

Social and Affordable Housing.

169. **Mr. G. Mitchell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the measure of provision of social housing on an individual local authority basis for each year since 2000 to date in 2006; the number of homes planned and the number subsequently delivered by each local authority for each year since 2000 to date in 2006; if his Department has expressed views to each such local authority which has not reached its targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42542/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Data on the number of social houses delivered in each local authority for each year, and for the first 6 months of 2006, are published in the Housing Statistics Bulletins, which are available in the Oireachtas Library and on the Department's website at www.envirion.ie.

From 2000 to 2003, the local authority four-year multi-annual programme included target starts over the whole period for authorities on their main construction and acquisitions programme. However, this programme did not include targets for other social housing options. Details of the programme at individual local authority level are also available on my Department's website.

In 2004, building on the positive experiences from the multi-annual approach to the local auth-

ority housing construction programme, I requested local authorities to set about the preparation of action plans to cover all aspects of social and affordable housing. This initiative provided a framework for the integrated and cohesive planning and delivery over the following years of specific social and affordable housing measures in each local authority area. The action plans were based on the overall analysis of need as established by the local authority housing strategy, and outlined the proposed response in terms of new social and affordable housing, addressing regeneration and remedial works together with the proposed arrangements for management and maintenance of the stock. Details of the Action Plans are published on individual local authorities' websites.

On agreeing the Action Plans with each local authority I provided for a mid-term review to be carried out this year. The review is now nearing completion and the report will be made available on my Department's website in due course. It has focused on examining how targets have been met in the first two years of the plan and on incorporating any adjustments required for the remaining years of the plan, in light of outcomes including expected 2006 outputs, and the results of the recent Housing Needs Assessment. Officials from my Department met with each local authority to discuss progress, including identifying reasons for under performance where relevant.

Authorities which did not reach their planned activity in 2004 and 2005, have generally revised targets for 2006 to 2008 to achieve the same overall output over the five year period.

My Department and local authorities both agree that the process of developing housing action plans is very beneficial and it is proposed to continue using the process as the main strategy for delivery of social and affordable housing.

Energy Conservation.

170. **Mr. Boyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the details of research, correspondence or advice that his Department has received relating to the possibility that different measurements resulting from the use of the overall heat loss method and the elemental method of measuring compliance with Part L may be leading to different outcomes depending on the method used. [42608/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I assume that the Question refers to a report (30 May 2006) by the UK based Building Research Establishment (BRE). The report sets out a calculated comparison of the above two methods of achieving compliance with Part L for a small sample of two English dwellings. My attention was drawn to this

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report in correspondence from the timber frame manufacturer who commissioned it.

In its conclusion, the BRE report claims that houses built to comply with the elemental method will use about 30% less energy for space heating than those complying with the Overall Heat Loss (OHL) method.

My technical advice is that the two methods referred to in the Question undoubtedly give different results. The differences depend on the type, size and shape of the building and on the actual areas of the main external elements, i.e. roofs, walls, floors, windows and doors. However, I am advised that the differences between the two methods should be significantly less than claimed for the two English examples. The BRE Report does not contain sufficient information to allow independent review and validation of its assumptions and calculations.

The May 2006 edition of Technical Guidance Document L includes both methods of demonstrating compliance with Part L (Conservation of Fuel and Energy) of the Building Regulations. The primary reason for allowing both methods is to provide options for:

- some flexibility in how heat loss through the building fabric is limited, via the OHL method, and
- a simple method — the Elemental method — of demonstrating compliance which suits those who do not wish to deal with the complexity of additional calculations.

Part L standards for Dwellings are due for revision in 2008 at the latest, as required under the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. In this context, the appropriateness of continuing the two methods will be considered.

Local Authority Funding.

171. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the support his Department is giving to each local authority by way of the local authority fund in each year from 2003 to date in 2006 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42618/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The following table sets out all funding provided to every local authority from the Local Government Fund for 2003 to 2005 and payments to date in 2006.

Local Government Fund Payments 2003 to 2006

Local Authority	2003	2004	2005	2006
Carlow County Council	14,119,303	15,013,519	15,825,157	15,849,389
Carlow Town Council	1,658,438	2,124,826	2,250,188	1,800,037
Cavan County Council	30,014,467	32,340,715	34,538,405	34,302,102
Cavan Town Council	872,685	1,012,510	1,076,951	849,569
Clare County Council	29,057,088	32,165,625	34,379,857	35,977,040
Ennis Town Council	2,420,278	2,694,594	2,857,619	2,357,261
Kilrush Town Council	624,517	714,551	768,584	620,056
Cork City Council	24,252,483	31,469,927	30,011,889	27,787,068
Cork County Council	78,731,501	81,393,068	86,950,210	95,931,120
Fermoy Town Council	868,253	1,007,330	990,717	1,056,867
Macroom Town Council	611,018	714,650	757,137	603,450
Mallow Town Council	1,055,691	1,226,415	1,308,414	1,101,942
Kinsale Town Council	485,151	548,562	579,511	416,996
Midleton Town Council	628,801	704,120	769,574	535,591
Youghal Town Council	1,138,684	1,269,500	1,341,817	1,374,399
Clonakilty Town Council	641,227	721,626	775,585	619,717
Cobh Town Council	1,151,111	1,343,484	1,431,706	1,220,513
Skibbereen Town Council	510,505	576,676	611,360	645,804
Donegal County Council	47,095,939	62,133,576	65,745,632	67,149,056
Buncrana Town Council	933,056	1,041,491	1,105,720	887,077
Bundoran Town Council	630,014	709,192	754,006	599,258
Letterkenny Town Council	1,142,969	1,531,252	1,623,543	1,328,292
Dublin City Council	80,547,615	95,372,969	96,772,767	98,915,060
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council	34,244,616	40,637,668	41,954,720	40,378,159
Fingal County Council	28,728,498	32,582,507	34,035,900	34,711,519
Sth. Dublin County Council	25,065,984	27,324,836	27,808,092	27,708,684

Local Authority	2003	2004	2005	2006
Galway City Council	9,255,284	10,497,266	10,685,214	10,308,543
Galway County Council	51,274,957	54,096,379	59,755,588	56,714,906
Ballinasloe Town Council	897,380	1,020,615	1,079,094	982,917
Kerry County Council	37,616,772	41,721,709	45,666,330	46,973,005
Killarney Town Council	1,569,029	1,826,427	1,939,917	1,914,518
Listowel Town Council	781,616	855,119	909,879	896,046
Tralee Town Council	3,405,689	3,730,111	3,654,105	3,681,714
Kildare County Council	27,003,527	31,252,454	33,723,371	34,875,286
Athy Town Council	743,912	861,994	880,077	987,709
Naas Town Council	1,445,387	1,874,226	1,879,852	1,333,476
Kilkenny County Council	24,547,296	27,275,782	29,784,248	26,962,726
Kilkenny Borough Council	1,956,639	2,205,350	2,338,452	2,441,908
Laois County Council	20,418,490	22,715,599	23,947,824	24,848,478
Leitrim County Council	22,105,269	23,390,413	25,071,794	25,232,063
Limerick City Council	10,839,290	12,845,679	15,018,092	15,177,605
Limerick County Council	33,961,997	36,797,195	39,193,414	39,379,115
Longford County Council	16,527,394	18,806,500	20,157,613	19,751,477
Longford Town Council	1,205,586	1,343,684	1,431,116	1,501,083
Louth County Council	15,048,086	17,766,828	18,016,824	16,588,227
Drogheda Borough Council	4,170,920	4,549,790	4,906,655	4,444,502
Dundalk Town Council	4,660,586	5,159,045	5,512,412	5,805,449
Mayo County Council	48,746,039	57,473,969	58,453,081	62,724,059
Ballina Town Council	1,356,909	1,578,492	1,675,439	1,793,496
Castlebar Town Council	1,156,902	1,428,816	1,445,490	1,215,720
Westport Town Council	910,521	1,016,503	1,076,087	1,124,102
Meath County Council	32,454,975	35,964,475	37,821,720	38,222,131
Kells Town Council	543,777	688,569	725,921	485,296
Navan Town Council	670,885	1,029,784	1,082,408	563,795
Trim Town Council	670,099	749,912	796,670	847,002
Monaghan County Council	26,233,953	26,870,896	29,308,041	26,877,085
Carrickmacross Town Council	590,203	665,049	713,247	766,087
Castleblaney Town Council	510,136	596,735	634,925	474,999
Clones Town Council	560,792	631,002	682,544	659,183
Monaghan Town Council	1,158,660	1,291,651	1,378,222	1,179,841
North Tipperary County Council	26,167,046	26,625,681	26,577,914	26,716,111
Nenagh Town Council	1,110,607	1,239,146	1,316,881	1,116,928
Templemore Town Council	608,380	685,204	762,703	681,223
Thurles Town Council	995,347	1,110,562	1,182,598	1,264,590
Offaly County Council	18,086,472	20,894,342	23,172,732	24,038,628
Birr Town Council	818,258	935,765	992,175	1,066,307
Tullamore Town Council	1,279,534	1,425,681	1,514,885	1,269,126
Roscommon County Council	29,283,996	31,388,680	33,134,469	35,040,104
Sligo County Council	22,950,445	25,024,540	27,620,464	29,879,924
Sligo Borough Council	3,550,846	3,724,750	4,029,071	3,476,180
South Tipperary County Council	25,980,142	28,735,653	31,968,669	34,691,844
Carrick-on-suir Town Council	1,045,527	1,166,204	1,257,256	1,363,780
Cashel Town Council	657,421	745,942	792,661	667,748
Clonmel Borough Council	2,925,113	3,584,105	3,988,629	3,792,443
Tipperary Town Council	864,056	964,980	1,045,111	1,139,396
Waterford City Council	8,600,112	19,083,111	10,858,872	9,022,046
Waterford County Council	24,844,626	27,307,065	29,854,155	30,823,130
Dungarvan Town Council	1,046,262	1,167,019	1,245,620	1,298,082
Westmeath County Council	22,063,106	24,845,225	29,712,862	27,160,728

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Local Authority	2003	2004	2005	2006
Athlone Town Council	1,936,086	2,185,614	3,596,610	2,349,521
Wexford County Council	28,417,688	30,987,489	33,504,892	33,884,338
Enniscorthy Town Council	1,205,667	1,343,773	1,432,357	1,228,489
New Ross Town Council	938,331	1,047,340	1,164,943	973,086
Wexford Borough Council	2,313,390	2,573,441	2,727,091	2,883,876
Wicklow County Council	22,868,375	25,310,361	28,960,246	27,865,247
Arklow Town Council	1,406,484	1,566,449	1,664,822	1,803,795
Bray Town Council	3,995,523	4,612,222	4,728,243	4,278,399
Wicklow Town Council	1,497,638	1,667,524	1,776,377	1,840,037

Local Authority Housing.

172. **Mr. Crawford** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of vacant local authority dwellings here on a county basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42522/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern):

The management and maintenance of their rented dwellings, including the control of vacant dwellings, is the responsibility of the housing authority concerned.

The following table, based on local authority returns to my Department, indicates the most recent figures available on vacant dwellings.

Local Authority Vacant Dwellings (as at 31 December 2005)

County (including Borough and Town Councils)	Total Vacant Dwellings	Vacant for planned maintenance/regeneration	Balance of Vacant Dwellings
Carlow	11	3	8
Cavan	53	5	48
Clare	112	22	90
Cork	218	42	176
Donegal	51	3	48
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown	173	147	26
Fingal	39	0	39
Galway	17	16	1
Kerry	200	47	153
Kildare	96	0	96
Kilkenny	39	23	16
Laois	33	0	33
Leitrim	25	9	16
Limerick	33	8	25
Longford	77	11	66
Louth	95	34	61
Mayo	64	3	61
Meath	89	8	81
Monaghan	50	9	41
North Tipperary	42	7	35
Offaly	45	13	32
Roscommon	58	1	57
Sligo	113	43	70
South Dublin	163	2	161
South Tipperary	103	0	103
Waterford	25	4	21
Westmeath	36	11	25
Wexford	114	33	81
Wicklow	41	12	29

County (including Borough and Town Councils)	Total Vacant Dwellings	Vacant for planned maintenance/regeneration	Balance of Vacant Dwellings
<i>City Councils</i>			
Cork	400	323	77
Dublin	2,493	1,952	541
Galway	56	13	43
Limerick	295	119	176
Waterford	80	4	76
Countrywide Total	5,539	2,927	2,612

Building Regulations.

173. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the concerns raised by the Irish Wheelchair Association and Disability Federation of Ireland on the Building Control Bill 2005 with specific reference to the amendments they have proposed on the Bill; if he will take these amendments into account and incorporate their recommendations during report stage of the Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42458/06]

518. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has received a submission from the Irish Wheelchair Association in relation to the Building Control Bill; if he will favourably consider same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42369/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 173 and 518 together.

I have received the submission referred to in the Question and will give it careful consideration before the Report Stage of the Building Control Bill 2005.

Recycling Policy.

174. **Dr. Twomey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the funding sought for recycling and recovery infrastructure from the Environment Fund in 2006; the amount granted in each case; the estimated cost to meet these demands in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42557/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Since 2002 my Department has allocated over €90 million in capital grants to assist local authorities in the provision of recycling and recovery infrastructure, including bring bank networks, civic amenity sites, materials recovery, composting and biological treatment facilities. This is provided from a number of sources including the Exchequer, the European Regional Development Fund and the Environment Fund, and is normally on the basis

of my Department meeting 75% of the cost and the relevant local authority funding the balance.

Projects for which grants have been allocated can take a number of years to complete as they go through the various project stages, e.g. design, planning, construction, and consequently claims will be submitted and monies paid typically over a number of years. In 2006, in respect of projects for which moneys have been drawn down from the Environment Fund, a total grant allocation of €11,813,836 has been provided by my Department.

Local Authority Services.

175. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he expects the next report on the 42 national service indicators for local authorities; the plans he has to review those indicators; the arrangements that will be made to involve consumers of local authority services in the review of the indicators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42591/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Question No. 55 of 8 November 2006. The position is unchanged.

Waste Management.

176. **Mr. M. Higgins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will establish a regulator for the waste sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42589/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): In August this year, my Department published a consultation paper on options for future regulation of the waste sector. Submissions were invited on whether there is a need for a regulator for the sector, if so on what model of regulator might be most appropriate and on what powers any such regulator should be given. Following consideration of the submissions received, which is currently under way, I intend to finalise further policy proposals.

Barron Report.

177. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Taoiseach his views on the latest Barron Report and the issue of collusion; and if he will work with the British Government on this matter. [42298/06]

The Taoiseach: On 29 November, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights published their Final Report into the Bombing of Kay's Tavern in Dundalk in 1975. This is the last of Judge Barron's Reports to be considered by the Committee.

The findings in this Report are deeply troubling and a matter of most serious concern. They paint a very disturbing picture. The Joint Oireachtas Committee has called for a full debate in the Dáil and Seanad on collusion, which I support.

I have consistently raised the issue of collusion with the British Government. I again raised it with Prime Minister Blair when I met him on 4 December in London.

I have made it clear that I want the British Government to examine the findings of all of these reports, as well as the forthcoming MacEntee Report. I appreciate that there are many issues on all sides arising from the past but I have consistently emphasised, and I believe Prime Minister Blair understands, the very deep anxiety and widespread concerns arising from these reports and the need for the British Government to play its part in addressing these concerns.

It is in everyone's interests to now try and secure closure with clarity in respect of these dark and troubling cases.

Northern Ireland Issues.

178. **Mr. Sargent** asked the Taoiseach his views on whether it is necessary and prudent to engage opposition parties in formal briefings with regard to any plan B that may be initiated in the absence of the restoration of power-sharing in Northern Ireland. [42345/06]

The Taoiseach: The focus of both Governments is fully on the implementation of the proposals agreed at St. Andrews, with a view to full restoration of the power-sharing institutions in March.

It has been the practice that senior officials have provided formal briefings to opposition leaders on progress in the Northern Ireland Peace Process at key moments.

I remain happy to facilitate further such briefings in the future, including on any Plan B if such a plan emerges as a necessity.

Departmental Staff.

179. **Mr. Allen** asked the Taoiseach if his attention has been drawn to the position arising from the 2006 Assistant Parliamentary Counsel (Grade

2) Competition where only three Irish lawyers out of 40 were declared qualified by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. [42652/06]

180. **Mr. Allen** asked the Taoiseach if his attention has been drawn to the fact that offering a place to an Irish lawyer in the 2006 Assistant Parliamentary Counsel (Grade 2) competition was conditional on the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel losing a foreign contract drafter in that office. [42653/06]

181. **Mr. Allen** asked the Taoiseach his views on whether the 37 lawyers who did not qualify at the 2006 Assistant Parliamentary Counsel (Grade 2) competition organised by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, deserve to be independently reconsidered before the posts are re-advertised. [42654/06]

182. **Mr. Allen** asked the Taoiseach the number of candidates who applied for the 2006 competition for Advisory Counsel (Grade 3) positions in the Office of the Attorney General; and the number declared qualified. [42655/06]

183. **Mr. Allen** asked the Taoiseach the statutes enacted since 2003 that were drafted in whole or in part by foreign contract drafters without naming the individual drafters involved. [42656/06]

184. **Mr. Allen** asked the Taoiseach if his attention has been drawn to the media reports to the effect that morale in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel is down to the floor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42657/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 179 to 184, inclusive, together.

I refer the Deputy to my replies to Written Questions No. 132 to 136 from Deputy Rabbitte on 5 July, 2006, Written Question No. 221 from Deputy Gormley on 27 September, 2006, Written Questions Nos. 177 and 178 from Deputy Sargent on 14 November, 2006 and Written Questions Nos. 165 to 169 from Deputy Allen on 28 November, 2006.

The Assistant Parliamentary Counsel (Grade II) competition was organised on behalf of the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government by the Public Appointments Service. Neither the Office nor the Public Appointments Service have been informed of any unhappiness in relation to the running of the competition or its outcome. There is absolutely no question of any applicant being branded a failure.

The original sanction from the Department of Finance did specify that, based on the Government's decision on Public Service numbers, any increase in permanent positions would have to be offset by a reduction in contract positions.

The 2006 competition to recruit Advisory Counsel (Grade III) staff attracted 48 applicants, of whom 21 were shortlisted for interview, 18 presented themselves for interview and 9 of these were placed on a panel. Six have taken up duty to date.

In the course of previous replies, I pointed out that many drafting projects are undertaken by more than one drafter. Contract drafters, like permanent staff, collaborate with colleagues in training and peer review of draft legislation. It would not be possible to give an accurate figure as to how many Acts of the Oireachtas contract staff drafted in whole or in part.

The Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to the Government does not accept that there is a morale problem in the Office.

Departmental Staff.

185. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42733/06]

186. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42748/06]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 and 186 together.

The number of staff broken down by grade in my Private Office and Constituency Office, in the Office of the Minister of State and Government Chief Whip and the Office of the Minister of State for European Affairs and the annual costs in terms of salaries and expenses of each such Office are detailed as follows.

Costings for Staff of Taoiseach's Private Office

- 1 Private Secretary, Assistant Principal
- 1 Assistant Principal
- 2 Higher Executive Officers — Assistant Private Secretaries
- 1 Personal Assistant
- 1 Staff Officer
- 1 Executive Officer
- 5 Clerical Officers
- 1 Usher.

The estimated total cost of salaries including allowances and overtime for my Private Office is €675,217, while expenses total €2,508.

Costings for Staff of Taoiseach's Constituency Office

- 2 Personal Assistants
- 1 Personal Secretary
- 1 Executive Officer
- 1 Staff Officer
- 4 Clerical Officers.

The estimated total cost of salaries including allowances and overtime for my Constituency Office is €291,442. No expenses are incurred.

Costings for Staff of Office of the Minister of State and Government Chief Whip

- 1 Private Secretary, Higher Executive Officer
- 1 Executive Officer
- 2 Staff Officers
- 1 Staff Officer
- 1 Clerical Officer
- 1 Personal Assistant
- 1 Personal Secretary.

The estimated total cost of salaries including allowances and overtime for the staff of the Office of the Minister of State and Government Chief Whip is €389,430, while expenses total €7,312.

*Costings for Staff of the Office of the Minister of State for European Affairs**

- 1 Private Secretary, Higher Executive Officer
- 1 Clerical Officer.

* Does not include Department of Foreign Affairs staff.

The estimated total cost of salaries including allowances and overtime for the staff of the Office of the Minister of State for European Affairs is €96,430, while expenses total €1,196.

There is one non Civil Servant in my Constituency Office. There are two non Civil Servants in the Government Chief Whip's Office.

Child Protection.

187. **Mr. Callely** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the mechanisms in place to protect children from offensive, age inappropriate or dangerous multimedia activities that are easily accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42365/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): As the Deputy will be aware, I have no function in the regulation of broadcast media but can advise him as to the child protection arrangements in place in respect of a number of other media formats. Insofar as Films and Video/DVD are concerned, the position is that these must be classified by the Irish Film Censor for sale, exhibition or rental. The age appropriateness of each work is then displayed in cinemas and all video/DVD works must carry the age classification on the packaging and tape/DVD.

With regard to video games, the position is that Ireland is a member of the Pan European Games Information (PEGI) system. Video games are classified by age appropriateness at the following levels; 3+: 7+ 12+; 15+ and 18+. The categorisation is then indicated on product packaging. Under these arrangements, video games are categorised according to a robust and consistent system and subject to independent non-industry verification.

A key component of both the Film/DVD and video game arrangements is that the classification systems are designed to provide useful information as to the content of the product. In particular, the intention is to assist parents in making informed choices concerning the media they acquire for their children or which they permit their children to use.

The Deputy will also be aware that Internet access has expanded considerably in recent years and that developments in communications technologies now allow for internet access by new means. This is a largely positive development but, by its very nature as an international phenomenon with no single controlling authority, the internet presents challenges for those charged with combatting its illegal or harmful use.

With this in mind, an Internet Advisory Board (IAB) was established in Ireland in February 2000. As well as overseeing a self-regulatory regime for the Irish Internet Service Providers, it encourages best practice procedures, provides advice to parents and others and facilitates research on internet-related issues including child safety. My Department provides secretarial and other supports for the Board's work. Combatting illegal, harmful and predatory use of the Internet requires responses at national, EU and international levels and Ireland is fully committed to playing its part at home and internationally on all of these fronts.

Steps taken within Ireland to date include the introduction of a hotline (www.hotline.ie) which accepts and investigates reports from the public in relation to child pornography and other illegal material on the Internet, as well as an industry Code of Practice and Ethics setting out the duties and responsibilities of each Internet Service Provider. The Irish Code of Practice and Ethics is recognised throughout Europe as a model of its

type. The IAB has also produced a very helpful booklet for parents which gives advice on how to recognise if a child is using new media technologies in a potentially dangerous way and what steps a parent can take to prevent or stop this. The Deputy may also wish to note that, in its role of encouraging best practice and formulating advice, the IAB is currently evaluating the use of electronic technology which can be used to block access to specific websites and is preparing a report on this matter.

Visa Applications.

188. **Mr. Connaughton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be given on an application by a person (details supplied) for a visa to enter the country; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this file arrived in Dublin on 27 November 2006; if his attention has further been drawn to the urgency of reuniting these persons in time for Christmas 2006; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42780/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the visa application in question was approved on 7th December, 2006.

189. **Ms Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 230 of 14 November 2006, if he will expedite the holiday visa of a person (details supplied) who wishes to visit Dublin for Christmas 2006. [42241/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the visa application in question has now been approved.

Crime Levels.

190. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he has read the log as submitted to him on 21 November 2006 from a person (details supplied) outlining the events to which they have been a witness in the period of 8 September to 20 November 2006; if his attention has been drawn to the number of events contained in that log which details events in one small part of the Moyross estate, in comparison to the number of incidents reported by the Limerick Garda division; his views on the log; and if, in view of the number of incidents contained within of the log, he stands by his written response to Parliamentary Question No. 68 of 9 November 2006 in which he states that there have been four incidents involving a petrol bomb in the Limerick Garda division to date in 2006. [42242/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that Garda management in the Limerick Division has examined the log referred to and is satisfied that all incidents reported to the Gardaí have been properly recorded in accordance with regulations.

When recording incidents on the crime recording system, PULSE, it is not a mandatory recording requirement to indicate if a petrol-bomb was used as a weapon in an incident, it may in fact be a *modus operandi*. The type of incident may be recorded as arson and reference may be made to a petrol-bomb in the narrative accompanying an incident. For crime recording and statistical reasons narrative descriptions are not used or searched to produce crime statistics.

An Garda Síochána in Limerick Division has an unrivalled record in the successful investigation of serious crime and a significant effort has been made to address the most recent outburst of criminal activity including the allocation of additional Garda resources and extra patrols being performed in the affected areas. Local Garda management and personnel have the full support and confidence of the Limerick law-abiding citizens and will continue to deliver a quality policing service in targeting those involved in criminal activity.

191. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, in view of the wide discrepancy in actual and reported incidents of violence and serious crime in the Limerick Garda division, steps are being or will be taken to determine the reason for non-reporting of crime; if that is the issue, the efforts being made to address the reasons or issues relative to the under reporting of crime in some areas; if there are attempts being made to record actual incidents, other than from official complaints, in order to insure accuracy of statistics; and the resources being made available to the Limerick Garda division to address the escalation of violence in some areas of Limerick. [42243/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that all incidents reported to An Garda Síochána are recorded and investigated. An Garda Síochána cannot comment on incidents which have not been reported. The Garda authorities urge everyone to report all criminal offences and encourage any person with information relating to criminal activity to report same to any member of An Garda Síochána.

An Garda Síochána in Limerick has an unrivalled record in the successful investigation of serious crime. A significant effort has been made by local Garda management to address the ongoing serious crime situations that have

developed in some areas during the past few months and additional resources have been deployed to community policing duties in the Moyross area. Additional resources have also been deployed to perform additional patrols in both the Moyross and Southill areas to target criminality.

I am further informed that Garda initiatives are continually being planned to target the activities of criminal elements in Limerick City and this is evident from the results that have been achieved during 2006. In excess of 70 firearms and ammunition have been seized and quantities of drugs including cocaine, heroin, cannabis resin and ecstasy have been recovered.

Local Garda management and personnel have the full support and confidence of the law abiding citizens of Limerick and will continue to deliver a quality policing service in targeting those involved in criminal activity.

Garda Strength.

192. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of community Gardaí in Donegal; the number of juvenile liaison officers; and the details of Garda youth diversion programmes in the county. [42249/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the personnel strength (all ranks) of An Garda Síochána increased to a record 13,000 on Thursday, 16 November, 2006, following the attestation of 299 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997 and represents an increase of 2,298 (or 21.5%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The induction of 280 new Garda recruits to the Garda College on 6 November, 2006 resulted in a combined strength, of both attested Gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,137. The personnel strength of An Garda Síochána (all ranks) as at 4 December, 2006 was 12,990. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3 billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms.

I have been further informed by the Garda authorities that there are currently 5 (all ranks) full time Community Gardaí attached to Donegal Division, all of whom are based in Letterkenny.

In addition, I have been informed by the Garda authorities that there are three Juvenile Liaison Officers in Donegal Division based in Buncrana, Letterkenny and Donegal Town. There is one Garda Youth Diversion Programme in the county, the LEAF Project in Raphoe.

Services for People with Disabilities.

193. **Mr. Perry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will re-assess the application for funding under enhancing disability services project funding for the parents and friends of a school (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42304/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I understand that 119 applications were received for funding under the Enhancing Disability Services (EDS) Project Funding 2007/08. The applications were appraised by Pobal, following which Pobal recommended 10 applications for funding. These recommendations were accepted by an independent expert group and approved for payment by the Accounting Officer of my Department. The total expenditure approved in respect of the ten applications is €3,285,672.

The applications were appraised using standard criteria based on the EDS Guidelines supplied to organisations. The application to which the Deputy is referring was not recommended for funding. Any queries individual applicants have on the assessment of their proposal should be directed to the Enhancing Disability Services Team in Pobal who can be contacted at 01-2400700.

Garda Deployment.

194. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if personnel from the Defence Forces at the nearby McKee Barracks, Dublin 7 will be utilised to provide security at Áras an Uachtaráin in order that the Gardaí currently doing these duties could be made available for normal policing duties in the community. [42306/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The Garda Síochána's policing activity involves certain protection duties. The Garda authorities request the assistance of the Defence Forces in the performance of such duties, as and where appropriate.

Asylum Applications.

195. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of an application to remain in the State on humanitarian grounds in the name of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will expedite a positive response. [42315/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The person concerned arrived in the State on 1 May, 2002 and applied for asylum. His application was refused following consideration of his case by the Office

of the Refugee Applications Commissioner and, on appeal, by the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

Subsequently, in accordance with Section 3 of the Immigration Act, 1999, as amended, he was informed by letter dated 12 September, 2003, that the Minister proposed to make a deportation order in respect of him. He was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why he should be allowed to remain temporarily in the State; leaving the State before an order is made or consenting to the making of a deportation order. Representations have been received on behalf of the person concerned.

Following consideration of his case under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999, as amended, I signed a deportation order in respect of the person concerned on 10 December, 2004. Judicial Review proceedings were instituted and this deportation order was subsequently quashed by order of the High Court on 4 October, 2006. The person concerned has been invited to submit further representations for consideration.

This person's case file, including all representations submitted, will be considered under Section 3(6) of the Immigration Act, 1999, as amended, and Section 5 of the Refugee Act, 1996 (Prohibition of Refoulement). I expect the file to be passed to me for decision in due course.

Citizenship Applications.

196. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the waiting time for the processing of naturalisation applications, in view of the fact that applicants must have residency for at least five years; if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties these long delays can have on families and in particular education access for their children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42316/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The statutory requirements for naturalisation are set out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. This provides that applicants for naturalisation, other than spouses of Irish citizens, must have been resident for five years of the nine year period prior to the date of application. Resident in this context means residence for which the applicant had the permission of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and where such permission was not granted for the purposes of study or seeking asylum.

The average processing time for applications for certificates of naturalisation is approximately 24 months and this is primarily due to the significant increase in the volume of applications received in the last number of years.

As the Deputy has not elaborated on any particular difficulties experienced by applicants or their families, I cannot respond fully to his question. However, I should point out that having Irish citizenship is not a prerequisite for accessing education in Ireland.

Garda Stations.

197. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of hours the Garda station at Burnfoot Garda Station, County Donegal opens per week; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42335/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities that Burnfoot Garda Station is currently open 21 hours per week, between the hours of 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. each day.

Garda Deployment.

198. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Gardaí stationed in towns (details supplied) in South Tipperary; the number of extra Gardaí allocated to each town since 1997; the number of Gardaí taken away from each town since 1997; and the number of Gardaí located in each of the towns listed per thousand citizens. [42359/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the personnel strength (all ranks) of An Garda Síochána increased to a record 13,000 on Thursday, 16 November, 2006, following the attestation of 299 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997 and represents an increase of 2,298 (or 21.5%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The induction of 280 new Garda recruits to the Garda College on 6 November, 2006 resulted in a combined strength, of both attested Gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,137. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3 billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms.

I have been further informed that the personnel strength of Clonmel, Carrick-On-Suir, Tipperary Town, Cahir, Fethard and Cashel Garda Stations as at 31 December, 1997 and 7 December, 2006 was as set out in the table hereunder. Figures for the number of Gardaí per 1,000 population as at 7 December, 2006 are also included in the following table. These figures are based on the 2002 Census of Population.

Station	31/12/97	07/12/06	No. per 1,000 population
Clonmel	38	51	2.53
Carrick-On-Suir	16	17	2.33
Tipperary Town	31	32	4.00
Cahir	22	34	6.63
Fethard	3	1*	0.26
Cashel	12	14	2.78

* In addition a Garda from Clonmel District has been appointed to the Fethard sub-district, and is working late and early tours of duty, pending the allocation of a replacement Garda to Fethard Station.

Garda Management also state that the personnel strength (all ranks) of the Tipperary Garda Division as at 31 December, 1997 and 7 December, 2006 was 297 and 339, respectively, representing an increase of 42 (or 14%) in the number of Garda personnel allocated to the Division during that period.

The Tipperary Division's resources are further augmented by a number of Garda National Units such as the Garda National Drugs Unit, the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) and other specialised units, all of which have had increased resources to provide a comprehensive policing service to the community.

I should add that it is the responsibility of Garda management to allocate personnel to and within Divisions. These personnel allocations are determined by a number of factors including demographics, crime trends, administrative functions and other operational policing needs. Such allocations are continually monitored and reviewed along with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy. This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and that the best possible service is provided to the public.

Garda Stations.

199. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of Garda stations in South Tipperary that have lost their allocation of a full-time Garda presence in the period 1997 to date in 2006; and the stations which have lost their allocations. [42360/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I have been informed by the Garda authorities, who are responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, that the personnel strength (all ranks) of An Garda Síochána increased to a record 13,000 on Thursday, 16 November, 2006, following the attestation of 299 new members. This compares with a total strength of 10,702 (all ranks) as at 30 June, 1997

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and represents an increase of 2,298 (or 21.5%) in the personnel strength of the Force during that period. The induction of 280 new Garda recruits to the Garda College on 6 November, 2006 resulted in a combined strength, of both attested Gardaí and recruits in training, of 14,137. The personnel strength of An Garda Síochána (all ranks) as at 4 December, 2006 was 12,990. The Garda Budget now stands at €1.3 billion, a 13% increase on 2005 and an 85% increase since 1997 in real terms.

I have been further informed by the Garda authorities that local Garda Management report that all Garda Stations in the South Tipperary Districts of Cahir, Clonmel and Tipperary Town which had a full time Garda presence in 1997 still have a full time Garda presence at present.

It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division. These personnel allocations are determined by a number of factors including demographics, crime trends, administrative functions and other operational policing needs. Such allocations are continually monitored and reviewed along with overall policing arrangements and operational strategy. This ensures that optimum use is made of Garda resources, and that the best possible service is provided to the public.

Decentralisation Programme.

200. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the progress made on the decentralisation of sections of his Department to Tipperary Town in the past twelve months; and when the decentralisation of sections of his Department to South Tipperary will be completed. [42361/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Under my Department's decentralisation programme, one hundred and eighty-six posts from the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (I.N.I.S.) are scheduled to move to Tipperary town in 2008.

I understand that the Office of Public Works has completed the purchase of a site in Tipperary town. They are now in the process of deciding on the appropriate development of the site to accommodate the staff involved who will transfer to I.N.I.S. under the Central Applications Facility.

In addition, the Deputy will be aware that the Private Security Authority, currently comprising 29 staff, has since its establishment in 2004 been located in Tipperary Town.

Visa Applications.

201. **Ms Enright** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will confirm that all relevant documentation has been submitted in relation to an application for a

tourist visa by a person (details supplied); when the application will be processed; when a decision is expected in relation to the application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42389/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Visa Office on 27th November, 2006. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the visa application was approved on 7th December, 2006.

Citizenship Applications.

202. **Mr. Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when applications for naturalisation by persons (details supplied) in Dublin 22 will be processed. [42426/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Applications for naturalisation from the individuals in question were received in the Citizenship Division of my Department on 21 December 2004. I understand that processing of these applications has commenced and that the case files will be forwarded to me for a decision in the near future. I will inform the Deputy and the persons concerned when I have reached a decision on these applications.

Probation and Welfare Service.

203. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he has received representations from a centre (details supplied) who provide accommodation for up to 15 people, mainly young men, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the support granted through the probation and welfare service is inadequate to meet recognised need; if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that the National Wage Agreements have not been granted to staff for three years; if the recent audit of the facility is available to him; and if he will ensure that sufficient funding will be made available to enable this important resource to remain open. [42436/06]

204. **Mr. Perry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties being experienced by an establishment (details supplied) in County Sligo; if he will facilitate them by providing a letter of commitment that will allow them to seek assistance from their bank which will enable them to exist until their new tranche of funding is made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42440/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 and 204 together.

As the Deputy will be aware my Department provides financial support to a wide variety of community/voluntary groups which support the Probation Service with their work in the community. A request from the project in question for supplementary funding was received in my Department in recent days. I understand that this application is currently being examined and additional information has been sought from the Board of Management of the Project. On clarification by the Board of the issues raised by my Department, I will be better placed to make a decision on the request for supplementary funding.

Visa Applications.

205. **Mr. Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will be made on a visa application for a person (details supplied). [42446/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Dublin Visa Office on 30th November, 2006. A decision in respect of the application in question will be made in the coming weeks.

Prison Staff.

206. **Ms Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of persons currently employed in the information technology section of the prisons headquarters in Clondalkin; the grades they hold; if consultants are employed in this section; if so, the number of same and the length of time they have been employed; the cost of the consultants; the length of time it is intended to employ them; the duties on which each person employed as a consultant or otherwise is engaged; the amount spent in the past five years on human resource related IT systems which were never implemented; and the reason for same. [42447/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am advised that the Irish Prison Service (IPS) currently has 31 people in the Information Technology Directorate in its headquarters in Clondalkin. The grades are 1 Assistant Principal Officer, 7 Higher Executive Officers, 3 Executive Officers and 1 Clerical Officer. In addition there are currently 19 IT contract staff working in the IT Section on foot of a contract which was awarded to Rescon Ltd in April, 2006 following an EU tender. The annual cost of the contract is €1,685,000. The contract duration is for two years with the option to extend the contract for an additional year. The contractors provide ongoing and essential IT services across both the system and infrastructure

sides of Information Communications Technology within the Prison Service.

As part of the Civil Service wide HR Management System implementation, the Irish Prison Service decided to approve the development and implementation of a Human Resource Management System (PeopleSoft HRMS) in 2003. As the Deputy will be aware a decision was taken to suspend the usage of the system because of the difficulty in matching many of the business and operational requirements of the Prison Service at that time. The IPS contribution to the developments of the suite of programmes was approximately €557,000 which includes the purchase cost, implementation consultancy requirements, licences and necessary changes to the core system.

In the interim, significant upgrading and customisation of the PeopleSoft HRMS and the IPS network infrastructure and architecture have taken place and €60,787 has been spent on consultancy fees related to this development need. During this time the IPS have developed an updated set of HR business needs and have been re-evaluating its options in respect of a Human Resources Information System. The IPS is currently preparing to re-engage with Human Resources Information Systems providers with a view to progressing the implementation of a revised Human Resources System building on the work done on the original system and the updated set of HR business needs now to hand.

Freedom of Information.

207. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will invoke Section 40 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and instruct the Garda Commissioner to provide all information and records relating to the contract assessment for the previous Garda video interview recording contract in view of the review carried out by the Information Commissioner which concluded that the records could now be provided if they were requested by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42686/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): Section 40 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 provides that the Secretary General of my Department can request information, including documentation, from the Garda Commissioner as part of the process whereby the Garda Commissioner accounts to me as Minister and to the Government for his functions.

The circumstances surrounding the Deputy's question arise from a Freedom of Information request to my Department for access to records created and held by An Garda Síochána, which as the Deputy appreciates is not subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts. The Information Commissioner concluded in this case that the records in question were not held

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by or under the control of my Department, and that therefore the requester did not have a right of access to them. In coming to this conclusion, the Information Commissioner took into account the provisions of section 40.

I do not believe the power on the part of the Secretary General under section 40 to request documents from the Garda Commissioner was ever intended to be exercised for the purpose of bringing Garda documents, which would otherwise lie outside the scope of the Freedom of Information Acts, into the possession of the Department so as thereby to bring them within that scope. The right of access to the documents in question under the Freedom of Information Acts was very fully considered by the Information Commissioner, and her decision must be respected.

The Deputy may also be aware that the subject matter of the documentation has already been reported on by the Comptroller and Auditor General and was examined by the Public Accounts Committee in 2003.

Crime Levels.

208. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if his attention has been drawn to reports of an increase in the level of anti-social behaviour in the area of Fethard, County Tipperary; if there are plans to provide extra Gardaí in the town to deal with this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42719/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I am informed by the Garda authorities that there has been no discernible increase in the number of anti-social/public disorder incidents in the Fethard area and the number remains small. I am also informed that one Sergeant and one Garda are currently allocated to the Garda sub-district of Fethard. I am further informed that local Garda management has an initiative to address the issue of public disorder and other anti-social type behaviour in place in the Clonmel Garda District including the Fethard area, which includes high visibility patrols by uniform and plain-clothes personnel from the Clonmel District with additional patrols by the Divisional Traffic Corps targeting this type of criminality.

In general I can inform the Deputy that strong provisions are in place to combat public order problems including anti-social behaviour. The primary basis for the law regarding public order offences is the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994, which modernised the law in this regard. The Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 2003 has also been enacted, the main purpose of which is to provide the Garda Síochána with additional powers to deal with late night street violence and anti-social conduct attributable to

excessive drinking. The Act provides for the making of exclusion orders on individuals to prohibit that person from entering or being in the vicinity of specified premises between such times, and during such a period, as the Court may specify. The Act also provides for the making of closure orders on specified premises, requiring that premises to close at a specified time or between specified times on a specified day or days during a specified period. A closure order may also require a premises to close for a maximum of 7 days in respect of a first order or for a minimum of 7 days and a maximum of 30 days in respect of a second order. Furthermore, because of my concerns about the abuse of alcohol and its contribution to public order offending and broader social problems, I brought forward tough provisions to deal with alcohol abuse and its effect on public order in the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003.

More recently, I brought forward additional provisions in the Criminal Justice Act 2006 to deal with public order offences and anti-social behaviour. In the case of anti-social behaviour the Act empowers a senior member of the Garda Síochána to apply to the District Court by way of a civil procedure for an order which will prohibit an adult from behaving in an anti-social manner.

Separate provision is being made in relation to young people. The Act introduces provisions for behaviour orders for children aged 12 to 18 years into the Children Act 2001 and the protections of that Act will apply. There will be a series of incremental stages, with parental involvement, preceding an application for a behaviour order. These include a warning, a good behaviour contract and referral to the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme. Only after these stages can a behaviour order be sought through the courts.

The provisions on anti-social behaviour of the Criminal Justice Act, 2006 will be commenced soon, following the consultations required under the Act between my Department, the Office of the Minister for Children and the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána. These consultations are currently ongoing. The purpose of this is to ensure that these provisions will commence as soon as the Commissioner has made the necessary internal arrangements to ensure the smooth introduction of these new procedures.

Departmental Staff.

209. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42731/06]

210. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42746/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 and 210 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out as follows:

Civil Servants

Private Office	Constituency Office
1 Private Secretary	2 Executive Officers
2 Executive Officers	3 Clerical Officers
1 Clerical Officer	

Political Appointees

Private Office	Constituency Office
2 Special Advisers	1 Personal Assistant
	1 Personal Secretary

By virtue of my appointment as Tánaiste a Programme Manager has recently been appointed. In 2006 the total cost at the end of November (including salaries, overtime and expenses) of political appointees and civil servants employed in my private and constituency offices was €523,485.

Minister of State, Mr. Frank Fahey, T.D.

Civil Servants

Private Office	Constituency Office
1 Private Secretary	3 Clerical Officers
1 Staff Officer	
3 Clerical Officers	

Political Appointees

Private Office	Constituency Office
	1 Personal Assistant
	1 Personal Secretary

In 2006 the total cost at the end of November (including salaries, overtime and expenses) of political appointees and civil servant employed in the Minister of State's private and constituency offices was €359,647. The total cost of civil ser-

vants employed in these offices is in accordance with the appropriate pay rates set out for the relevant grades by the Department of Finance.

Visa Applications.

211. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when a decision will issue on a visa application submitted by a person (details supplied) who wishes to pursue a course in ATC language and travel which commences on 7 January 2007. [42795/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The application referred to by the Deputy was received in the Dublin Visa Office on 11th December, 2006. A decision in respect of the application in question will be made in the coming weeks.

Residency Permits.

212. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the status of an application for long term residency for a person (details supplied) who had been told to expect a decision in late November 2006; and when a decision may now be expected. [42796/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The position in relation to granting long term residency is as follows: Persons who have been legally resident in the State for over five years on the basis of work permit/work authorisation/work visa conditions may apply to the Immigration Division of my Department for a five year residency extension. In that context they may also apply to be exempt from employment permit requirements. The dependants of the aforementioned, who have been legally resident in the State for over five years may also apply for long term residency. This particular long term permission does not grant an exemption from employment permit requirements to any such dependants. Time spent in the State on student conditions cannot be counted towards long term residency.

While applications for long term residency are under consideration, the person concerned should ensure that their permission to remain in the State is kept up to date. An application for long term residence from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in July 2006. I understand that applications received in May 2006 are currently being dealt with.

Citizenship Applications.

213. **Mr. Costello** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when he will make a decision regarding the application for naturalisation of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42797/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's question was received in the Citizenship Division of my Department in June 2004. Processing of the application has commenced and it has been determined that although the applicant did not satisfy the residency requirements for Citizenship at the date of application, she now fulfils that requirement. An application form will be sent to her by the Citizenship Division in the near future which will enable her to make a fresh application under her existing reference number. When that application form is returned to the Citizenship Division, it will be dealt with under its existing reference number thus ensuring the applicant will not incur any undue delay.

214. **Dr. Upton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will report on the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 10. [42820/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's question was received in the Citizenship Division of my Department on 3 May 2006. The average processing time for such applications is approximately 24 months. If her application is successful, the applicant may then apply for an Irish passport. In the meanwhile, it is her responsibility to ensure that she holds a valid passport while in the State. Should her current passport expire while her application is being processed, the applicant should contact her Embassy to seek to have this renewed.

Prison Committals.

215. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of young people below the age of 18 currently in detention in the State; the number in each adult prison; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42935/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): I would like to inform the Deputy that there are a number of legislative, operational and administrative changes under way which will see the transfer of responsibility for the detention of young offenders under 18 years of age, ordered to be detained by the Courts, from the Department of Education and Science and the Irish Prison Service to the Irish Youth Justice Service in my Department. The Irish Youth Justice Service has been established as an executive office of my Department and is to, *inter alia*, manage detention services for young people under the age of 18 years.

The net effect of these reforms to the detention services will be to end the practice of using adult prison places for the detention of children. It will also see the extension of the children detention school model to all offenders, male and female, under the age of 18 years. This will require the construction of children detention school places, with the requisite facilities to provide care and education, which can accommodate all 16 and 17 year olds ordered to be detained by the Courts. The legislation, once commenced, includes arrangements for the use of St. Patrick's Institution on an interim basis. To facilitate this, work is well underway in St. Patrick's Institution for the separation of the majority of those under the age of 18 years from the older age groups.

The transfer of the children detention schools, currently within the remit of the Department of Education and Science, to the Irish Youth Justice Service is intended to take place on the 1st of March, 2007. Currently the Irish Prison Service has responsibility for 16 and 17 year old children who have been ordered to be detained by the Courts. In practice the majority of young offenders being detained are male and are detained in St. Patrick's Institution, which is the designated detention centre for male offenders aged between 16 and 21 years of age. In addition, current legislation allows all prisons in the State to accommodate persons aged 17 years and over. The number and location of offenders, aged 16 and 17 years, in detention on 8 December, 2006, are set out in the following table.

Location	Number
St. Patrick's Institution	55
Cloverhill Prison	2
Cork Prison	6
Dóchas Centre, Mountjoy (Female)	2
Total	65

45 of those detained in custody (69%) were male young offenders aged 17 years. A further 18 (28%) were male young offenders aged 16 years who were detained in St. Patrick's Institution. Female young offenders (2) in custody accounted for the remaining 3% of the total number of juveniles detained on that date.

I understand that my colleague the Minister for Education and Science will furnish the Deputy with information regarding the children detention schools currently under the remit of that Department.

Road Safety.

216. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when will he announce the candidates listed for pre-qualification status for the provision and operation of speed cameras; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42955/06]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. McDowell): The procurement process for a service provider to provide and operate safety cameras throughout the State is taking place under national and EU rules. On 24 November a Request for Information, seeking Candidates interested in providing the service, issued on the government and public procurement website www.etenders.gov.ie and a notice was published in the Official Journal of the EU. The Contracting Authority is An Garda Síochána. The latest date for receipt of responses from interested parties is 16 January 2007.

All responses received will be evaluated on an individual basis in accordance with the criteria set down in the Request for Information document. A number of candidates will be awarded pre-qualification status and short-listed to proceed to the next stage shortly thereafter. A Request for Tender will be made to the short-listed candidates. The successful candidate will be selected on the basis of the tender received.

I attach a very high priority to the outsourcing and expanding the speed camera network and to ensuring that there will be no undue delay in the procurement process.

Garda Stations.

217. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of money spent on the refurbishment works at Burnfoot Garda Station, County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42335/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): I have been informed by the Garda authorities that Burnfoot Garda Station is currently open 21 hours per week, between the hours of 10 am to 1 p.m. each day.

Tax Code.

218. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Finance if he will abolish rates for crèches; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42470/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The Valuation Act 2001, which came into effect on 2nd May 2002, provides that commercially operated child care facilities such as play schools, preschools, crèches and Montessori schools are liable for rates unless specific criteria for exemption are met. This is a continuation of the pre May 2002 situation. In regard to the Valuation Act, 2001, I should point out that the Commissioner of Valuation is independent in the exercise of his duties under the Act, and that I, as Minister for Finance, have no function in decisions in this regard.

It was not intended that the Valuation Act 2001 would expand or contract the valuation base. The effect of removing any category of property such as commercially operated childcare centres from the valuation base would be to increase the rates

burden on other ratepayers. At the time of drafting the Valuation Act 2001 it was considered that where Exchequer assistance to certain sectors was desirable it should be direct assistance rather than interfering with local authority funding by way of rates relief. Schedule 4 of the Valuation Act 2001 outlines the categories of property and the various uses that are deemed to be non rateable under the Act. Paragraphs 10 (education) and 16 (charitable purposes) are two areas in that schedule which may be relevant to the rateability of preschool facilities.

In the area of education, paragraph 10 Schedule 4, exemption is limited to educational institutions, not established and not conducted for making profit or funded wholly or mainly from funds provided by the Exchequer and in either case is open to the general public. Paragraph 16 Schedule 4 provides exemption for charitable organisations that occupies and uses its facility exclusively for charitable purposes and otherwise than for profit. Therefore crèches/preschool/ playschool facilities established on a non-profit generating basis and/or operated by a charitable organisation for charitable purposes are not liable for rates.

The rateable valuation of commercial property is based on the net annual value (NAV) i.e. the rental value of the property. Any ratepayer dissatisfied with the rateability of a property, the valuation assessed on a particular property or the method of calculation can appeal to the Commissioner of Valuation in the first instance and subsequently to the independent Valuation Tribunal. There is a further right of appeal to the High Court and ultimately to the Supreme Court on a point of law.

Rating legislation, as distinct from valuation legislation, and issues arising from it are matters for my colleague the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The core objective of Government policy in the area of child support is to provide assistance which will offer real choice to parents and which will benefit all children. Following on from increases in Child Benefit in Budget 2006, this policy has seen a further increase of €10 per month announced in Budget 2007. This increase will come into effect in April 2007 and will bring the monthly rate of Child Benefit to €160 for the first and second child and €195 for the third and subsequent child.

Budget 2006 also marked the introduction of a National Childcare Strategy costing a cumulative €2.65bn over five years to address the supply and the cost of childcare. This strategy included the introduction of the Early Childcare Supplement worth €1,000 annually for each child up to his/her sixth birthday. A four week extension to both paid and unpaid maternity leave was introduced in 2006 and a further four week increase to both paid and unpaid maternity leave becomes effective in 2007, bringing the duration of paid

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maternity leave up to 26 weeks at that time and the duration of unpaid leave to 16 weeks.

A major new multi-annual National Childcare Investment Programme, running from 2006-2010, will support the creation of an extra 50,000 childcare places. To date, over 900 capital grant applications, amounting to more than €170m, have been received. To complement the roll-out of these new places, a total of 17,000 childcare workers will be trained over five years. Under the EU co-funded Equal Opportunities Programme 2000-2006, more than 32,000 new places have been created and a further 24,500 places have been supported with grant-aid allocations amounting to almost €500m over the last six years. I would also mention that in December 2005, the Government established the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) to bring greater coherence to policy making for children.

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government published Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Childcare Facilities in June 2001. The Guidelines indicate that planning authorities should ensure that their Development Plans and Local Area Plans should include policies in relation to the provision of childcare facilities. The Guidelines state that planning authorities should require the provision of at least one childcare facility for new housing areas unless there are significant reasons to the contrary, for example, development consisting of single bedroomed apartments or where there are adequate childcare facilities in adjoining developments. For new housing areas, a threshold of one childcare facility for each 75 dwellings is suggested as being appropriate.

Garda Stations.

219. **Mr. Carey** asked the Minister for Finance if the contract for the building of a new Garda station in Finglas has been awarded; if so, when it is expected that construction of the station will begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42687/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): Tenders will be invited for the construction of a new Garda station in Finglas by the end of the year. It is expected that a contract for the erection of this Garda station will be placed in the Spring of 2007.

Flood Relief.

220. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to clean, drain or upgrade various rivers or waterways throughout the country with a view to alleviation of ongoing flooding; the number and location of such schemes that have been undertaken in the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42891/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance

(Mr. Parlon): The Office of Public Works has a programme of flood relief schemes, which are at different stages of development and which are designed to alleviate flooding in specific, mainly urban, locations. The details of this programme are as follows:

- River Suir (Clonmel) Drainage Schemes
- Munster Blackwater (Mallow) Drainage Schemes
- Munster Blackwater (Fermoy) Drainage Schemes
- River Fergus (Ennis) Certified Drainage Schemes
- John's River (Waterford) Drainage Schemes
- Barrow River (Carlow) Certified Drainage Schemes
- River Slaney (Enniscorthy) Drainage Scheme
- Avoca River (Arklow) Drainage Scheme
- River Mall (Templemore) Drainage Scheme
- Mornington River (Mornington) Drainage Scheme
- River Slaney (Tullow) Drainage Scheme
- River Pil (Pilltown) Drainage Scheme
- Portarlington, Co. Laois
- Rye Water, Leixlip, Co. Kildare
- Harry's Mall, Limerick
- River Lee, Cork City,
- River Tolka, Dublin and Meath
- New Ross, Wexford
- River Dodder, Dublin

In addition, a number of other locations are currently being considered. The following is a list of works completed to date:

- Mulkear River, Newport, Co. Tipperary
- Nanny River, Duleek, Co. Meath
- Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare
- Gort Town, Bridge Street, Co. Galway
- Lacken (Ardrahan), Co. Galway
- Mulkear River, Cappamore, Co. Limerick
- Maam Valley, Co. Galway
- Bridgend, Co. Donegal
- Shinkeen Stream, Hazelhatch, Co. Kildare
- Bandon River, Dunmanway, Co. Cork
- Suir River, Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary

- River Nore (Kilkenny City) Drainage Scheme.

There has also been a number of minor works completed in conjunction with Local Authorities:

- Drumcollogher, Co. Limerick
- Belhavel, Co. Leitrim
- Avoca, Auhtrim & Baltinglass, Co. Wicklow
- Morrell River, Co. Kildare
- Lyreen-Meadowbrook Rivers, Co. Kildare
- Al River, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
- Freemount, Co. Cork
- Scotch Quay, Waterford City
- Mullinahone, Co. Tipperary
- Kinvara, Co. Galway
- Clancy's Strand, Limerick City.

In addition, OPW is promoting a range of non-structural measures, aimed at raising awareness of flood risk and thereby improving management of the risk to try to prevent future flooding and to minimise damage and other consequences where prevention is not feasible. Expenditure on the above flood relief programmes will be €32 million in the coming year.

OPW also has a rolling programme of maintenance of Arterial Drainage Schemes which it carried out under the Arterial Drainage Act 1945 and which, in addition to providing improved out-fall for agricultural land drainage, also provides some level of protection in built-up areas. Expenditure on this programme next year will be approximately €18 million.

Departmental Properties.

221. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Finance when offices (details supplied) will be opened in a town in County Mayo. [42245/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is currently evaluating a short-term property proposal for an OPW advance office in Claremorris, Co. Mayo. A decision to proceed with this property will depend on acceptable terms being agreed with the Landlord. Subject to acceptable terms being agreed on the lease, the completion of an office fit out scheme would have a target completion date in March 2007. OPW is also currently acquiring a site for the permanent OPW offices in Claremorris and it is expected that the decentralised office, with some 150 posts, will be ready for occupation in early 2009.

Tax Code.

222. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the tax allowances and reliefs currently allowed for the building of park and ride faci-

ties; the maximum allowed per building project; if a rate per parking space applies; the criteria attached to awarding such allowances; the cost to the Exchequer of such allowances in each of the years in this century; the number of parking spaces provided under such allowances in each of these years; the number of projects that availed of these allowances in each of these years; the details of projects by location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42263/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): A scheme of tax relief in the form of capital allowances has been available since 1 July 1999 aimed at encouraging the establishment of park and ride facilities in larger urban areas. In addition to park and ride facilities, the scheme made provision for allowances in respect of expenditure incurred on certain commercial premises and residential accommodation to be located at park and ride facilities subject to certain limits. Entitlement to relief is dependent on local authority certification that a park and ride development meets detailed requirements set out in Guidelines drawn up by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Capital allowances are available for expenditure on the construction or refurbishment of a park and ride facility. The rate at which the expenditure can be written off depends on whether the person claiming the allowances is operating the park and ride facility or leasing the facility to an operator. An owner-operator can claim allowances of up to 100% in a single year while a lessor can claim allowances of up to 50% in a single year. Any remaining expenditure can be written off at the rate of 4% per annum.

Apart from some restrictions on relief applying to commercial premises and residential accommodation at a park and ride facility, there is no limit on the amount of construction or refurbishment expenditure that can qualify for tax relief. There is no provision for a maximum amount per parking space provided. However, the guidelines stipulate that a park and ride facility must provide a certain minimum number of parking spaces if it is to be a qualifying park and ride facility for tax relief purposes.

Although there have been a number of planning approvals granted by local authorities in respect of park and ride facilities, there has been limited take up of this scheme with only two certified projects proceeding since 1999. I have no details available to me about these certified projects.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that for the tax year 2003 and earlier years claims for the relief mentioned in the question were aggregated in tax returns with other claims and could not be distinguished from the reliefs claimed in respect of different schemes. Accordingly, the specific information on costs for 2003 and earlier years is not available to Revenue. Pro-

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visions were included in the Finance Act 2004 to allow this data to be obtained separately for the tax years 2004 *et seq.* Based on the information that has been received and collated to date in respect of the tax year 2004, a total of approximately €0.3 million was included in the relevant income tax returns for that year as claims relating to the park and ride scheme. This figure would correspond to a maximum Exchequer cost for 2004 of some €0.1 million in terms of income tax forgone. These figures are preliminary estimates and may change as further returns are processed.

Data for the tax years 2005 and 2006 is not yet available as the income tax returns for those years are due for filing in October 2006 and October 2007 respectively. The income tax returns for 2005 which have been received since October 2006 have yet to be processed.

Like other property incentive schemes, the park and ride scheme has been extended on a number of occasions but is due to end on 31 July 2008. This extended deadline applies where a valid application for full planning permission was received by the relevant local authority by 31 December 2004 and work to the value of at least 15% of the actual construction or refurbishment costs is carried out by 31 December 2006. Any expenditure incurred up to 31 December 2006 will qualify for full tax relief. However, any expenditure incurred during 2007 or between 1 January 2008 and 31 July 2008 is restricted to 75% and 50% relief, respectively.

Credit Union Regulation.

223. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Finance if the group established to review the powers of credit unions in respect of loans and mortgages has reported to him; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42358/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The Group established to review the limits on longer term lending set out in Section 35 of the Credit Union Act, 1997 is expected to conclude its deliberations shortly. I will consider the matter further in light of the report of the group.

Flood Relief.

224. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the Ennis flood relief scheme; the finances he has provided for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42376/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The River Fergus (Ennis) Certified Drainage Schemes were formally exhibited in October 2005. Detailed design of the Fergus Upper Scheme is currently underway and it is hoped to commence the procurement of a civil engineering contractor early in the new year. Fol-

lowing the tender process the scheme will be sent to the Minister for Finance for confirmation, as required under the Arterial Drainage Acts, under which the scheme is being progressed. Subject to the scheme being confirmed, it is expected that construction will commence in the second half of 2007.

225. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Finance the criteria used to carry out the cost benefit analysis on the proposal to provide funding for works to prevent flooding of the main Tramore to Waterford road; the calculations that were used to determine the cost benefit ratio for this proposal; the value assigned to each element that was used in the calculation of the cost benefit ratio; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42415/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The cost benefit analysis in respect of the Tramore Road phase of the proposed flood relief scheme for John's River (Waterford City) follows the same criteria used in relation to the evaluation of the economic benefits of all flood relief schemes. The benefits are equal to the damages avoided. The key benefits that are taken into consideration are tangible benefits (direct property damage averted; indirect property, community and business loss avoided; disruption of road traffic avoided) and intangible benefits (avoidance of anxiety, inconvenience and ill health). This is a complex process and requires collation of extensive data on the physical quantification and economic valuation of damages and loss.

The accepted standard methodology for assessing the costs of flood damage and benefits of flood relief schemes is based on extensive research carried out in the UK by the Flood Hazard Research Centre (FHRC) at Middlesex University leading to standardised unit loss figures for particular types of building or property. This research has been published in a series of reports known as the Flood Loss Assessment Information Reports (FLAIR). This flood damage cost data, which has been updated by Middlesex, has been accepted as the basis for damage estimation in Ireland and has also been converted to euro values and updated for inflation.

The Department of Finance discount rate for public investment is 5%. The life of the works over which the benefits are discounted is taken as 50 years. For computation purposes, it is assumed that the residual value of the works at the end of this period is nil. This may be regarded as somewhat conservative since the works should have a design life of 100 years. However, it is in accordance with standard methodology for economic appraisal of flood alleviation proposals developed in other countries.

The proposed works in the Tramore Road phase of the scheme involve approximately 3 km

of new road construction and associated road-works and the realignment of several short sections of the John's River. The benefit area is the section of the Tramore Road where the works would be undertaken. However, there are no properties in this area and the only benefit accruing would be in relation to avoidance of costs associated with traffic disruption. The calculated benefit was €0.35 million (economic benefits for 100 year return period flood measured over 50 year discount at 5% per annum discount rate). As the estimated cost of the proposed work is €7 million, this gave a benefit to cost ratio of 0.05 and was therefore not deemed to be economically viable. The decision was therefore taken to omit the Tramore Road phase from the proposed flood relief scheme as it did not meet the Department of Finance requirement that a flood relief scheme be economically viable.

Disabled Drivers.

226. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Finance the position in relation to the appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Kildare for tax relief in relation to vehicles purchased for use by people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42429/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): As the Deputy may be aware, I have answered a Parliamentary Question from him, relating to this person, on 3 October 2006. As I stated then, the person concerned applied for the tax concessions under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme and that the application has been unsuccessful at first instance and on appeal to the Medical Board of Appeal for the Scheme. I have no direct responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the Medical Board of Appeal for the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme. Queries regarding individual cases may be addressed to the Secretary of the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, c/o the National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dún Laoghaire, County Dublin or alternatively by telephone at 01 2355279.

The Deputy will also be aware that the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which determines appeals from a refusal of a Primary Medical Certificate under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme, is independent in the execution of its functions.

In relation to extending the scope of the Scheme, the operation of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme was reviewed by a special Interdepartmental Review Group. The terms of reference of the Group were to examine the operation of the existing scheme, including the difficulties experienced by the various groups and individuals involved with it, and to consider the feasibility of alternative schemes, with a view to assist-

ing the Minister for Finance in determining the future direction of the scheme.

The Group's Report, published on my Department's website in July 2004, sets out in detail the genesis and development of the scheme. It examines the current benefits, the qualifying medical criteria, the Exchequer costs, relationship with other schemes and similar schemes in other countries. The Report also makes a number of recommendations, both immediate and long-term, encompassing the operation of the appeals process and options for the possible future development of the scheme. The short-term recommendations in respect of the appeals process have been implemented. The main change arising from these was that an increased number of members could be appointed to the Appeal Board, which facilitated a far greater number of appeal hearings than had been the case prior to the Report's publication.

In respect of the long-term recommendations, including the qualifying disability criteria, given the scale and scope of the scheme, further changes can only be made after careful consideration. For this reason, the Government decided that the Minister for Finance would consider the recommendations contained in the Report of the Interdepartmental Review Group in the context of the annual budgetary process having regard to the existing and prospective cost of the scheme. This consideration is undertaken on a regular basis.

Flood Relief.

227. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Finance if he will instruct the Office of Public Works to arrange for the cleaning of a section of river (details supplied) in County Mayo to alleviate the local flooding problem in that area. [42506/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The channel in question is not an OPW maintainable channel. The Mayour River forms part of the Mayour Drainage District for which Mayo County Council has a maintenance responsibility.

Departmental Funding.

228. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide more funding to an organisation (details supplied). [42511/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that, in my recent Budget Statement, I allocated additional funding of €250,000 to St. Joseph's School for the Visually Impaired, Drumcondra.

Tax Code.

229. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Finance if, bearing in mind the significant risk that tax revenues may have to be increased to reflect

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changes in the age structure of the population arising from increasing life expectancy, it is feasible for the PAYE system to be adjusted to ensure that persons investing in pension funds at present will not face the risk of higher marginal rates of PAYE on the annuities they receive when they retire by recording the total amounts of PAYE they save as a percentage of the amounts they invest and by subsequently capping their PAYE liabilities appropriately on any pension annuities they receive. [42696/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The Deputy will appreciate that taxation policy is a matter for the Oireachtas to lay down in law from time to time in the public interest and in line with the wishes of the electorate. In these circumstances, Governments cannot effectively bind their successors in this regard nor would it be appropriate to try to do so. I regret therefore that I cannot give the sort of assurances envisaged by the Deputy in his question on the tax rate to be paid on annuities in the future.

Garda Stations.

230. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Finance the amount that has been spent by the Office of Public Works in replacing, upgrading and refurbishing Garda stations in County Cork in each of the towns of Killeagh, Cloyne, Ballycotton, Carrigtohill, Whitegate in each year from 2003 to date in 2006 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42699/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): Killeagh G.S. — €21,792.00 has been spent to resurface the station yard in 2005. Cloyne G.S. — €25,537.50 was spent on roof repairs in 2006. Ballycotton G.S. — This station is a newly constructed one man basic unit and was provided at a cost of €170,000.00. This development was completed in October 2004. Carrigtohill G.S. — This station was completely refurbished in 2000. There has been no request for upgrading works since. Whitegate G.S. — A contract has recently been awarded to undertake works to replace the windows and doors and some general repair works at a cost of €28,000. These works will be completed and paid for in early 2007.

Departmental Staff.

231. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Finance in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42728/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The staffing of the office of the Minister of State in my Department is set out as follows:

Minister of State's Office

Grade	Number	Salary Range
Higher Executive Officer	1	€46,078 -€56,999
Clerical Officer	1	€22,102-€35,838

Both of these staff members are permanent civil servants. To date in 2006, allowance payments amount to €17,245. The amount paid in expenses for the same period amounts to €1,228. There have been no overtime payments to date in 2006.

The Office of Public Works, for which the Minister of State in my Department holds responsibility, has provided the following details of the staffing in that office:

Minister of State's Private Office (OPW)

Grade	Number	Salary Range
Executive Officer	1	€30,027-€49,520
Executive Officer Level	1	€38,722-€49,889
Staff Officer	1	€31,656-€42,268
Clerical Officer	2	€22,102-€35,838

Minister of State's Constituency Office (OPW)

Grade	Number	Salary Range
Personal Assistant	1	€43,445-€55,147
Personal Secretary	1	€402.49-€776.55 weekly

The five staff in the Private Office are permanent civil servants. The two staff serving in the Constituency Office are each employed on an unestablished contract basis for the duration of the tenure of the Minister of State. In addition two civilian drivers are employed on an unestablished contract basis with an annual salary of €31,552. In addition, a pension contribution of 11% of basic salary is being paid to an approved pension provider as part of the remuneration of the Personal Assistant.

An annual Private Secretary allowance of €20,319 is payable to the Executive Officer in the Minister's Private Office while an annual allowance of €3,322 is payable to his personal secretary in his Constituency Office. To date in 2006, overtime payments in respect of the Minister of State's Private Office (OPW) amount to €1,341.47. Overtime payments to staff in the Constituency Office (OPW) for the same period

amount to €7,870.50. The amount paid in expenses, travel — foreign and domestic — official entertainment and miscellaneous this year to date is €8,706.92 in respect of the permanent staff and €39,328.69 in respect of the Constituency Office.

232. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Finance the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42743/06]

Minister for Finance (Mr. Cowen): The staffing of my private office and constituency office is set out as follows:

Minister's Private Office

Grade	Number	Salary Range
Administrative Officer	1	€32,783-€58,052
Executive Officer	2	€28,523-€45,262
Staff Officer	2	€31,656-€42,268
Clerical Officer	3	€22,102-€35,838

Minister's Constituency Office

Grade	Number	Salary Range
Executive Officer	1	€28,523-€45,262
Staff Officer	1	€31,656-€42,268
Clerical Officer	1	€22,102-€35,838
Personal Assistant	1	€43,445-€55,147
Personal Secretary	1	€21,632-€41,736

To date in 2006, overtime, salary related allowances and allowance payments amount to €59,699. The amount paid in expenses, travel — foreign and domestic — official entertainment and miscellaneous for the same period amounts to €62,692.

In addition to the above, there are 3 Clerical Officers, (Salary Range €22,102-35,838) who provide typing and administrative support services to my private office, the constituency office and to the Department of Finance Press Office. 1 of these Clerical Officers workshares.

The Personal Assistant and Personal Secretary in my Constituency Office are employed on an unestablished contract basis for the duration of my tenure as Minister for Finance. All of the other staff in my Private Office and Constituency Office, as set out above, are permanent civil servants.

Flood Relief.

233. **Mr. O'Shea** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 233 of 5 December 2006 the number of visits the Flood Policy Review Group made to the Tramore Road while the road was flooded; the dates of these visits; if he will publish the reports of these visits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42819/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The Flood Policy Review Group was concerned with the review of Government policy on flooding in general. It was not mandated to examine individual flood relief schemes and therefore had no reason to visit Tramore Road in Waterford.

Drainage Schemes.

234. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the position in regard to the various drainage schemes in County Kildare in respect of which he has been in contact with Kildare County Council or where the local authority has made a submission seeking his approval; the extent to which such schemes are expected to progress in the near future; if this will include the Mill Lane drainage proposals in Leixlip, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42906/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Parlon): The Commissioners of Public Works carried out a Flood Relief Scheme on the Shinkeen Stream in Hazelhatch in County Kildare which was completed in 2002. In addition, works were funded and carried out by the OPW on behalf of Kildare County Council on the Lyreen and Meadowbrook Rivers in Maynooth together with the Morrell River in the Kill/Johnstown area in 2003. Works were also carried out on the River Slate in 2003 with the OPW acting as agents for Kildare County Council.

Kildare County Council and OPW agree that the existing information in relation to flooding at Ardclough is insufficient to address the flooding problem. The existing study indicates that surface water problems are a major factor in the flooding of this area. In relation to flooding at Straffan, this is a surface water problem and therefore a matter for the Local Authority.

The Commissioners of Public Works met with Kildare County Council in November 2006 and it was agreed that a flood relief scheme could be provided for the Rye River if the County Council has the necessary planning processes complete in early 2007. The proposed works would be funded by the OPW with the Commissioners of Public Works prepared to undertake them as agents for the Local Authority. The flooding at Mill Lane, Leixlip was also discussed and we are continuing to work with the County Council and their Con-

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sulting Engineers to establish a solution to the flooding in this area.

Child Care Services.

235. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will sanction a staffing grant to a group (details supplied) in County Mayo. [42296/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. B. Lenihan): As the Deputy will be aware, I have responsibility for the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 (EOCP) and the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP), which are being implemented by the Office of the Minister for Children. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the Group in question has recently been approved a staffing grant under the EOCP, subject to the conclusion of a contractual agreement with Pobal, which administers the grants on behalf of the Office of the Minister for Children. I understand that the Childcare Directorate of my Office has informed the Group of the decision.

Services for People with Disabilities.

236. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for Health and Children if publicly funded speech therapy is available to children with Down's syndrome; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42706/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

237. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the autism team coordinator has not responded to a request for help from a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny in view of the fact that a response was promised in a correspondence of September 2006 from the Health Service Executive; the reason correspondence and telephone calls to the same office in October and November 2006 from the person have not been responded to; if a programme for intervention will be put in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43464/06]

303. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the autism team co-ordinator has not responded to a request for help from a person (details supplied) in County

Kilkenny in view of the fact that a response was promised in correspondence of 20 September 2006 from the Health Service Executive; the reason correspondence and telephone calls to the same office from the person in October and November 2006 have not been responded to; if a programme for intervention will be put in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42824/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 and 303 together.

My Department has been informed by the HSE that a response has issued to the person (details supplied) in Co. Kilkenny.

Health Services.

238. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the persons who were appointed as a review group in relation to the examination of the Leas Cross Report from the date it was first received from Professor O'Neill to its ultimate publication; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42236/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

239. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will report on the progress to date in implementing the local recommendation of Professor O'Neill in the Leas Cross Review (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42237/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

240. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will carry out a investigation into the operation of nursing homes (details supplied) which were identified to this Deputy in a letter from the former South Western Area Health Board of 31 May 2001 as homes

where significant breaches of the regulations were noted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42238/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular cases raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

241. **Ms F. O'Malley** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of people who have an acquired brain injury receiving treatment in the health service. [42239/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Inquiries.

242. **Mr. O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children if, in view of the significant adverse nursing home inspection reports received by Bedford House and Leas Cross Nursing Homes, she will set up an inquiry into all aspects of the operation of both homes from their first registration, including the decision of the health board to move patients from St. Ita's Hospital, Portrane to Leas Cross Nursing Home and Bedford House Nursing Home; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42240/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): I am currently considering whether the establishment of an inquiry is the appropriate course of action in relation to the particular cases raised by the Deputy.

Health Services.

243. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will intervene and have a persons (details supplied) in County Sligo called for their angioplasty in view of the fact that their condition has deteriorated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42260/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive

under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this case investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

244. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the Health Service Executive southern area have refused a person (details supplied) in County Cork financial support towards the €200 per week they are spending on night-time care. [42275/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Medical Cards.

245. **Mr. O'Connor** asked the Minister for Health and Children the payments from her Department to general practitioners in respect of the medical card scheme and practice support payments, by GP on county basis. [42281/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): In 2006, total health funding is €13.147 billion, which represents an underlying increase of 12.04% over 2005. The vast bulk of this funding is provided under the vote of the Health Service Executive (HSE) which has statutory responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services. This continuing high level of investment by the Government provides the Executive with considerable capacity to address the healthcare needs of the population in the most effective manner.

As the Health Service Executive has the operational and funding responsibility for payments to GPs in respect of the medical card scheme and practice support, it is the appropriate body to provide the information sought by the Deputy. My Department has therefore requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to address this matter and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Services.

246. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Health

[Mr. Quinn.]

and Children if she will complete the answer to Parliamentary Question No. 256 of 28 November 2006; if she will give an undertaking that the medical and accommodation facilities already existing on the site of St. Luke's Hospital, Dublin 6 will be retained and developed for other medical and health purposes, such as step down facilities for patients in acute hospitals or similar support services to existing overcrowded hospitals when the existing services in St. Luke's are transferred to the new facility at St. James Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42294/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

As I indicated in response to a question from the Deputy on 28 November last, the decision to transfer St. Luke's Hospital to St. James's Hospital, Dublin was taken by the Government as part of the National Plan for Radiation Oncology. The decision was taken in the best interests of cancer patients and is based on expert medical, scientific and management advice. It is designed to ensure that radiation oncology is available on site with all other aspects of cancer care, including surgery and medical oncology. It is in line with best international practice. This is the model that exists at Cork University Hospital and University College Hospital Galway and which is being developed at Beaumont and St. James's Hospitals, Dublin. A transfer on similar lines took place earlier this year in Northern Ireland when radiation oncology services transferred from a stand alone facility to Belfast City Hospital, which is a major academic teaching hospital.

My Department is working closely with the HSE and the National Development Finance Agency to progress the delivery of the Plan. The Agency has assembled a team to progress the financial and procurement aspects of the Plan, to be provided mostly by PPP. The HSE has appointed a Project Manager and support team. The Clinical Output Specifications are being finalised and technical advisors will be appointed shortly to advise on the construction and other technical aspects of the project. Pending the full roll-out of the Plan, six new linear accelerators will be provided by traditional procurement in the Eastern Region. I am pleased to say that two of these will be provided at St. Luke's Hospital Dublin in late 2007. In addition two each will be provided in St. James's and Beaumont Hospitals by early 2009.

The Government and I are anxious to build on the expertise and ethos of St. Luke's Hospital. It is held in great affection by the Irish people. Many thousands of Irish patients and their families from every part of the country have experienced high quality cancer care at St. Luke's Hospital. The Board of St. Luke's Hospital and its Executive Management Team are fully committed to supporting the Government's decision.

In preparation for the transfer of services to St. James's Hospital, discussions have commenced between the Boards of both Hospitals, with the twin goals of ensuring continuity of expertise and ethos in the care of cancer patients and the effective integration of multi-disciplinary patient care at the one site. I am confident the transition will be managed with great sensitivity and skill by the two hospital Boards to achieve those objectives.

No decision has yet been taken on the future use of the site and facilities at St. Luke's Hospital. However my objective is to ensure that these resources are utilised in the best interests of the health services. I will discuss this issue in due course with the Health Service Executive and the Hospital Board.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

247. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she is committed to the provision of sheltered housing as an option for older people to remain living in their community despite her Department providing only €928,000 in 2006 for housing associations for the care aspects in sheltered housing; her views on whether this was inadequate to meet the demand of non-profit sheltered housing providers who require the necessary funding to ensure a proper standard of support and care in sheltered housing projects for older people; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42299/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): I understand the question relates specifically to funding to the Irish Council for Social Housing. Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular funding issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Sheltered housing can play a significant role in allowing older people to remain in their own community. There is potential to expand sheltered housing provision in Ireland, and it is one of the issues to be explored arising from the work of the Long Term Care Group.

Health Services.

248. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will intervene on behalf of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42301/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this case investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

249. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will arrange an early appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [42310/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

250. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny will be referred from Waterford Regional Hospital to the Wellstone Clinic, Kilkenny, which is much more convenient for this 80 year old; and if she will expedite a positive response. [42311/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. The information sought by the Deputy relates to matters within the area of responsibility of the Executive. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Irish Blood Transfusion Service.

251. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the report of the international panel of experts on the Irish Blood Transfusion Service published in September 2002 was not acted upon; the reason a further review

was ordered and by whom; the status of this review; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42312/06]

252. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children when it is proposed to commence building the new facility at the Cork University Hospital to replace the Munster Regional Transfusion Centre at St. Finbarr's Hospital; if the required independent financial evaluation has been completed; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that one third of all blood donations come from the quarter of the population living in the Munster area; her views on whether the current facility at St. Finbarr's needs replacing; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42313/06]

253. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the proposed Munster Regional Transfusion Centre at the Cork University Hospital will have the capacity to provide a full back up service in the event of an emergency shutdown of the Dublin centre; the back up plan in the event of an emergency shutdown of the Dublin centre; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42314/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 251 to 253, inclusive, together.

The Expert Panel on Testing of Blood for Transfusion, which reported in September 2002, made 11 recommendations and each of them either has been or is in the course of being implemented by the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) or other relevant body, as appropriate. I am aware of the inadequacies of the existing Transfusion Centre at St Finbarr's Hospital and accept the need for it to be replaced. Pending its replacement, the IBTS has invested over €3 million in its refurbishment to ensure compliance with Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) standards. I am also aware of the fact that 30% of donations come from the Munster area.

In relation to the review mentioned by the Deputy, I take it that this is a reference to a Cost Benefit Analysis of the proposed new Transfusion Centre for the Munster area. This is required to be carried out by the IBTS under the Department of Finance's Guidelines for the Appraisal and Management of Capital Expenditure Proposals in the Public Sector because the estimated cost of the new Centre is in the region of €30 million. I have recently received from the IBTS a copy of a report from consultants who were commissioned to undertake this analysis. I will meet the Chairperson and members of the Board shortly to discuss the report.

One of the issues dealt with in the report is that of back-up arrangements between the centres in Cork and Dublin in the event of emergency shut-down of either centre. I might add that arrange-

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ments are in place with the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service to carry out Nucleic Acid Testing (NAT) on all blood samples. The Scottish Service provided NAT testing on Irish blood until this test was introduced in Dublin in July 2004.

Health Services.

254. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be provided with a long stay bed. [42322/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

255. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Mayo has not been approved for home help in view of the fact that they urgently need it. [42333/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities.

256. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason children with autism are not automatically entitled to a medical card; the reason people with autism and on gluten free diet are not given financial help; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42334/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): Under the 1970 Health Act, the Health Service Executive may arrange for the supply, without charge, of drugs, medicines and medical and surgical appliances to people with a specified condition, for the treatment of that condition and medical and surgical

appliances to people with a specified condition, through the Long Term Illness Scheme (LTI). The LTI does not cover GP fees or hospital co-payments. The conditions are: mental handicap, mental illness (for people under 16 only), phenylketonuria, cystic fibrosis, spina bifida, hydrocephalus, diabetes mellitus, diabetes insipidus, haemophilia, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophies, Parkinsonism, conditions arising from thalidomide and acute leukaemia. There are currently no plans to extend the lists of eligible conditions. Products which are necessary for the management of the specified illness are available to LTI patients. Other products are available according to the patients eligibility.

The Deputy's question also relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

257. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support The Irish Chronic Pain Association with proper funding in 2007; and if they will be given them the maximum support. [42339/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

258. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will take action to end noise in an area in Dublin 3; and if she will resolve this serious complaint. [42340/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004.

My Department is advised that, following previous questions in relation to this matter, the HSE has sought to address the complaints of the person concerned, having regard to the health needs of its client. My Department has asked the Executive to make further efforts to try to resolve the situation.

Hospital Accommodation.

259. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will invest in new beds in the health service here as a strategy to end the patients on trolleys crisis; and the number of new beds that will come on stream in 2007. [42341/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has informed my Department that the following additional in-patient beds and day treatment places are due to be brought into use in 2007:

Midland Hospital Tullamore — 27 in-patient beds and 30 day treatment places in the new hospital

Wexford General Hospital — 19 in-patient beds

St. Vincent's University Hospital, Elm Park — 12 day treatment places and 4 intensive care beds

Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin — 7 oncology day treatment places

University College Hospital Galway — 3 in-patient beds in the new burns unit.

In addition, the HSE is fast-tracking the provision of admission units to alleviate pressures in a number of A & E departments. Admission lounges have been developed at St. James's Hospital (15 beds), Connolly Memorial Hospital (8 beds), St. Vincent's Hospital (20 beds), Tallaght Hospital (40 beds), Cork University Hospital (10 beds) and the Mercy Hospital in Cork (4 beds). These admissions lounges enable patients awaiting admission to an acute hospital bed to be managed safely while preserving their right to dignity and privacy. Further admission lounges are scheduled to come on-stream in 2007.

The HSE has introduced a broad-based Winter Initiative. Its purpose is to ensure that the services required to address the particular demands of the winter season are in place and operating optimally. It encompasses not just hospital services but also primary and community care services. The actions and initiatives being taken by the HSE are designed to deliver the sustained improvement in hospital services that patients and their families deserve.

A Steering Group under the chairmanship of the National Director of the National Hospitals Office is reviewing our acute hospital bed requirements up to the year 2020. The Group includes representatives of the Health Service Executive, my Department, the Department of Finance and the Economic and Social Research Institute.

Health Services.

260. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a person (details supplied) in

County Mayo will be given an appointment to see an occupational therapist. [42347/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

261. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the Health Service Executive has not arranged a continuation of the Meals on Wheels service in the Marino area and are proposing to charge people for an alternative service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42370/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Services.

262. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a unit (details supplied) in County Donegal will be opened; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42371/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Government's sustained high level of investment in health care has enabled the completion and commissioning of numerous new facilities in both the acute and the non-acute sectors. This year, the sum available for expenditure in health under the Health Service Executive's capital plan is €555 million.

The HSE has responsibility for the planning and management of capital projects in the health sector, including the development referred to in the Deputy's question. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

263. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a person (details supplied) in County Meath can be transferred to Navan

[Mr. Durkan.]

General Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42372/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists.

264. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position in relation to a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if they will be seen in Carlow as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42405/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

265. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the speech therapy service will be available in Baltinglass as children from west Wicklow have to travel to Naas for this service; if same will be reinstated as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42406/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

National Treatment Purchase Fund.

266. **Mr. N. O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will arrange an appointment for a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will consider having this

person referred to the National Treatment Purchase Fund in view of their priority medical needs and the period of time they have been waiting. [42410/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Patients waiting more than three months on a surgical waiting list may qualify for treatment under the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF). It is open to the person in question or anyone acting on her behalf to contact the Fund directly in relation to this case.

Care of the Elderly.

267. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason for the delay in assessing the application for domiciliary care allowance for the parents of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if it will be expedited in view of the hardship being suffered by the family. [42416/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

268. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the issue of additional funding to secure the future of the Osteoporosis Society of Ireland, in view of the fact that there is a lot of concern among people who are affected by this condition. [42417/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Irish Osteoporosis Society (IOS) received funding from the Health Service Executive (HSE) of €130,000 in 2005. The IOS sought further funding of €128,000 during 2006. Following a series of meetings and checking of documentation, the HSE provided this amount to the IOS on the 22nd of September 2006.

Representatives from the Population Health Directorate, HSE met with the Irish Osteoporosis Society on 28th November to discuss funding. It was clarified at the meeting that future funding for osteoporosis will be provided in the context of the estimates process. Subsequently, funding of €250,000 was allocated in Budget 2007 for the Irish Osteoporosis Society.

Youth Services.

269. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 155 of 26 April 2006, if she has a recreation policy for young people in place; if a proposal (details supplied) to fund a youth worker in Tramore, County Waterford will receive funding; her further views on using the proposed project as a pilot scheme for the Government's recreational strategy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42418/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. B. Lenihan): There is no funding at the disposal of my Office under which financial assistance can be made available to support the employment of a youth worker in Tramore, County Waterford and in the circumstance I regret that I am not in a position to be of assistance at the present time. However, I understand that this service is currently in receipt of €72,223 from the HSE towards the running of the project.

In addition, the Deputy might note that the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education and Science administers the Special Projects for Youth Scheme. Under this Scheme, grant-in-aid is made available on an annual basis to organisations and groups for specific projects which seek to address the needs of young people who are disadvantaged due to a combination of factors e.g. social isolation, substance misuse and inadequate take-up of ordinary educational opportunities. It would be open to the organisation in question to submit an application for funding under this Scheme in the 2007 round of grants and in this regard.

The Deputy might also wish to note that the promotion of positive recreational opportunities is being actively pursued by my Office in the context of the development of a national recreation policy for young people aged 12 to 18. Key issues on the measures necessary to facilitate improved access to recreation, including specific actions to develop and expand recreational opportunities for young people, are being considered by my Office in the context of the finalisation of the policy which I expect to publish in the near future.

Cancer Screening Programme.

270. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Health and Children if general practitioners sending

specimens for smear test should be charged by the Cork University Hospital. [42433/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the matter raised.

Departmental Correspondence.

271. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will confirm receipt of a letter from this Deputy's office of 9 October 2006 (details supplied); when she will be in a position to respond to same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42434/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): I have received the documentation referred to by the Deputy. Officials from my Department have examined the matter. A written response will issue to the individual in the near future.

272. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will confirm receipt of correspondence from a person (details supplied) in County Offaly; the action she has taken in relation to same; the progress made from the first correspondence received from this Deputy's office in January 2006; if she has arranged for officials from her Department to meet with the person to discuss their case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42435/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): I have received the documentation referred to by the Deputy. Officials from my Department are currently examining the matter and will be in a position to meet the individual concerned. Written confirmation of this will issue in the near future.

Hospital Staff.

273. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Health and Children the instruction she has given to the Health Service Executive in relation to the appointment of a nephrologist for Sligo; her plans to improve on the current visiting service from Letterkenny and to ensure that patients in the Sligo area receive the care they deserve; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42439/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all

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health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular issues raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Care of the Elderly.

274. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she plans to provide new public elderly care beds for Limerick in the near future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42455/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Government's sustained high level of investment in health care has enabled the completion and commissioning of numerous new facilities in both the acute and the non-acute sectors. This year, the sum available for expenditure in health under the Health Service Executive's capital plan is €555 million.

The HSE has responsibility for the planning and management of capital projects in the health sector. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Accommodation.

275. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the proposed private hospital co-location plan for Letterkenny General Hospital and Galway University Hospital will not be proceeding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42504/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Health Service Executive (HSE) informed my Department on 4th December that the co-location initiative will not be proceeding at Galway University Hospitals and Letterkenny General Hospital, at this time, as the relevant pre-qualified bidders have decided, for commercial reasons, not to continue in the procurement process in respect of those sites.

The HSE is aware of ongoing private sector interest in these two locations and intends to initiate a further procurement exercise to address the needs of the two hospitals.

Hospital Services.

276. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Health and Children when she expects radiotherapy services to be made available to public patients at Waterford Regional Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42507/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

My Department is working closely with the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) to progress the National Radiation Oncology Plan announced by Government in July 2005. The plan consists of large centres in Dublin (at Beaumont and St. James's Hospitals), Cork and Galway and two integrated satellite centres at Waterford Regional Hospital and Limerick Regional Hospital.

The NDFA has assembled a team to progress the financial and procurement aspects and the HSE has appointed a Project Manager and support team. A Clinical Output Specification Group is well advanced in specifying the clinical aspects of the development. Technical advisors will be appointed shortly to advise on the construction and other technical aspects of the project. I have also appointed the Chairman of St. Luke's Hospital to chair a National Radiation Oncology Oversight Group to advise me on progress on the implementation of the plan.

I have approved the provision of two additional linear accelerators at St. Luke's Hospital to provide much needed interim capacity pending the roll out of the national plan. I expect these services to commence late next year. I recently also announced the approval of two radiation oncology facilities at Beaumont and St. James's Hospitals, comprising of two linear accelerators and associated treatment planning at each site, to be delivered in early 2009. These are key elements of the delivery of the National Plan.

The HSE has advised my Department that its planning and procurement processes, which have been developed in conjunction with the NDFA, are designed to ensure the earliest possible delivery of radiotherapy nationally, including at Waterford Regional Hospital. Potential providers will be asked to specify detailed delivery time-scales for all sites as part of the competitive bidding process. While the HSE has developed indicative timelines for planning purposes, it considers, for commercial reasons, that this information should not be made public at this stage in the process.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

277. **Mr. N. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding an application under the housing aid for the elderly which was submitted on 17 May 2006 by a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [42659/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive (HSE) under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. The HSE's responsibility includes the oper-

ation of the Housing Aid Scheme for the Elderly, on behalf of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Child Care Services.

278. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children when she proposes to introduce the legislation required as a matter of urgency for the independent inspection of residential care facilities for children with intellectual disabilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42666/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): The Health Bill 2006 will provide for the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and the Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services, within HIQA, with specific statutory functions. The Chief Inspector's functions will include the inspection and registration of residential centres for people with disabilities. As indicated to the Deputy previously, I intend to publish the Bill before the end of the month.

Services for People with Disabilities.

279. **Ms Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the National Disability Authority Standards will be implemented as these standards were presented to her in April 2004; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42667/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): My Department, in partnership with the National Disability Authority (NDA), has developed draft National Standards for Disability Services (NSDS) in consultation with people with disabilities, their families, carers, service providers, health services providers and other stakeholders. These standards are designed to ensure that services are provided to an agreed level of quality and that the level of quality is consistent on a national basis. It is proposed that the standards will apply to a range of services for people with disabilities as funded by the Health Service Executive.

The draft NSDS are being considered within the framework of the Health Services Reform Programme. A critical element in this process is the establishment of the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA). The new Health Bill which will be published in the current Dail session will include provision for the establishment of HIQA on a statutory basis. The establishment of HIQA as a key part of the architec-

ture of planning and developing health and personal social services in Ireland will promote a continuous quality improvement ethos in the health system. The development and implementation of the NSDS is a central element of the process.

Meanwhile, the draft NSDS have been forwarded to the interim HIQA for its consideration. The implementation process for the NSDS will necessarily involve an incremental process of planning, training and implementation over the coming years.

Health Services.

280. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the child and adolescent psychiatric waiting lists as forwarded to RTE under Freedom of Information. [42670/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the matter raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists.

281. **Mr. N. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will assist in having a person (details supplied) in County Cork admitted to hospital in order to undergo eye surgery. [42685/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Services.

282. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of patients from the south east who received radiotherapy treatment each year since 2002; the number of patients that will be provided with radiotherapy treatment each year at the Whitfield Clinic in Waterford; if the Health Service Executive has reached agreement with the Whitfield Clinic for the provision of radiotherapy treatment for public patients; the number of public patients who will be treated

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each year under this agreement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42710/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the matter raised.

Nursing Home Charges.

283. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children the timeframe for repayment of nursing home costs in cases where the person cared for is now deceased and the claim is being made by family members or the deceased person's estate. [42711/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The Health (Repayment Scheme) Act 2006 came into effect on 30 June 2006. The repayment scheme was launched publicly by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the scheme administrator KPMG/McCann Fitzgerald on 14 August 2006. A national advertising campaign and a helpline also commenced on this date.

Under the scheme all those fully eligible persons who were wrongly charged and are alive will have their charges repaid in full. The estates of all those fully eligible persons, who were wrongly charged for publicly funded long term residential care and died since 9 December 1998 will have the charges repaid in full. The scheme does not allow for repayments to the estates of those who died prior to that date.

The Scheme Administrator has commenced scanning the records of long stay facilities around the country and to date more than 50 locations have been visited for this purpose. These records will form the basis for the calculation of the majority of the repayments.

In relation to dates of repayments to applicants, the HSE has informed the Department that over 21,000 forms have been submitted to the scheme administrator applying for repayments and these applications are being processed at present. The timeframe for repayment is predicated primarily on whether the applicant is alive or whether the application is being made by the estate of a deceased person. Living people who were wrongly charged will be the first to receive payments under the scheme. It is estimated that there are now in the region of 15,000 people within this category.

The HSE has advised that offers of repayment have commenced and that the first payments have issued with further payments continuing in subsequent weeks. It is expected that the bulk of

payments to estates will commence in the Spring of 2007.

Provision has been made for applications to be received up to 1 January 2008.

Health Services.

284. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will approve the provision of a place at the Wellstone Clinic, Kilkenny for a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and if she will expedite the matter. [42712/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists.

285. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason for the delay in arranging an appointment for a hearing test for a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; the number on the waiting list; if an early appointment will be made in view of the urgency of the case; if she will expedite the matter. [42713/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Medical Cards.

286. **Mr. McCormack** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will clarify the situation whereby all people over 70 years with a medical card have to in some cases pay a general practitioner for a medical certificate to enable them to renew their driving licence; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that some GPs do not charge medical card holders for this service while other GPs charge a fee ranging from €25 to €50; if this service should be provided free to medical card holders aged 70 as this is putting an unnecessary burden on old age pensioners with medical cards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42718/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

In making arrangements for the provision of publicly funded GP services, under the General Medical Services (GMS) Scheme, an agreement was negotiated between the Department of Health and Children and the GP representative body, the Irish Medical Organisation (IMO). The provisions of this agreement took the form of the current GMS GP Capitation Contract. This contract is a treatment based contract and gives effect to the statutory requirement to provide free GP medical and surgical services to eligible people which includes people aged 70 and over who are automatically entitled to a medical card. The contract stipulates that the fees paid to GMS GPs are not made in respect of certain certificates which may be required for example “under the Social Welfare Acts or for the purposes of insurance or assurance policies or for the issue of driving licences”. As these non-treatment type services are outside of the GMS GP contract it is a matter between the GP and the person seeking the particular services to agree a fee.

While certificates for driving licence applications are provided by medical practitioners they are not a medical treatment service and are not considered a core aspect of public health service provision. Requiring such services to be provided with the terms of the GMS GP contract would more than likely lead to costly counter-claim by GPs which if allowed would not represent appropriate or best use of resources in terms of current health policy.

Departmental Staff.

287. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Health and Children in respect of each Minister of State within her Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42730/06]

288. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of staff broken down by grade employed within her private office and her constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42745/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

I propose to answer Questions Nos. 287 and 288 together.

The following tables detail the number and grade of staff presently employed in my private and constituency offices. All staff are permanent civil servants except for Special Advisers, Press

Officer, HSE Liaison Officer, Personal Assistants and Personal Secretary.

Private Office

Grade	Number of Officers (Wholetime Equivalents)
Special Advisers	2
Press Officer	1
HSE Liaison Officer	1
Personal Assistant	1
Higher Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1
Executive Officer	2
Staff Officer	1
Clerical Officer	5

Constituency Office

Grade	Number of Officers (Wholetime Equivalents)
Personal Assistant	1
Personal Secretary	1
Clerical Officer	2.5

The following tables detail the number and grade of staff presently employed in the private and constituency offices of the Ministers of State. All staff are permanent civil servants except for Special Adviser, Personal Assistants, Personal Secretary and Civilian Drivers.

Minister of State, Brian Lenihan T.D. — Private Office

Grade	Number of Officers (Wholetime Equivalents)
Special Adviser	1
Higher Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1
Executive Officer	1
Clerical Officer	3
Civilian Driver	2

Minister of State, Brian Lenihan T.D. — Constituency Office

Grade	Number of Officers (Wholetime Equivalents)
Personal Assistant	1
Personal Secretary	1
Clerical Officer	2.8

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Minister of State, Tim O'Malley T.D. — Private Office

Grade	Number of Officers (Wholetime Equivalents)
Administrative Officer (Private Secretary)	1
Executive Officer	1
Staff Officer	0.5
Clerical Officer	2.6
Civilian Driver	2

Minister of State, Tim O'Malley T.D. — Constituency Office

Grade	Number of Officers (Wholetime Equivalents)
Personal Assistant	1
Personal Secretary	1
Executive Officer	1
Staff Officer	0.8
Clerical Officer	1

Minister of State, Seán Power T.D. — Private Office

Grade	Number of Officers (Wholetime Equivalents)
Higher Executive Officer	1
Executive Officer	1
Clerical Officer	3
Civilian Driver	2

Minister of State, Seán Power T.D. — Constituency Office

Grade	Number of Officers (Wholetime Equivalents)
Personal Secretary	1
Executive Officer	1
Clerical Officer	2

In the time available it has not been possible to collate the information requested in terms of salary, overtime and expenses. The information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Ambulance Service.

289. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Health and Children if all staff employed by private ambulance services are vetted through the Garda clearance system as per the public service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42750/06]

290. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a company (details supplied) receive moneys from the Health Service Executive for ambulance services; if the HSE or Statutory Ambulance Service have the authority to inspect, assess and set standards of ambulance services offered by private ambulance companies; if the service has been inspected or spot checked by the State authorities for the purpose of establishing that they operate within the protocols and standards; if so when, and if a report exists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42751/06]

291. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Health and Children if any person or persons made a complaint to the Health Service Executive, Department of Health and Children or the State Ambulance Authorities regarding the conduct of staff or operation of a company (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42752/06]

292. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Health and Children if all ambulance staff in private ambulance companies, including a company (details supplied) qualified to the expected statutory standard as set down by pre-hospital emergency care council to Irish protocol; the way this is enforced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42753/06]

293. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for Health and Children if non-national staff employed by a company (details supplied) are qualified to Irish standards and are fully conversant in the English language; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42754/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I propose to answers Questions Nos. 289 to 293, inclusive, together.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has advised that when private ambulance services are contracted to deliver services on its behalf, they must comply with the requirements as laid down by the National Ambulance Office. Private ambulance services carrying out emergency transport duties on the Executive's behalf are required to have two crew members who are Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) registered with the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council. The Council is responsible for the development of professional and performance standards for the ambulance services and for the accreditation of institutions providing training for ambulance personnel.

In relation to non-emergency hospital transfers, the minimum requirement is that a registered EMT, a registered nurse or a clinician (where required), travel with the patient.

My Department has asked the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the HSE and the Director of

the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council to arrange to have the other issues raised by the Deputy investigated and to have a reply issued to her directly.

Hospital Staff.

294. **Mr. Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will appoint an occupational therapist to Kerry General Hospital. [42758/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Services.

295. **Mr. Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health and Children the extent of the oncology services at Naas Hospital; the level of funding being allocated for such services; the level of staff providing such services; and the numbers of patients expected to avail of this service on an annual basis. [42792/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in relation to the matter raised.

Hospitals Building Programme.

296. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children when construction will commence on a bedded unit for a hospital campus (details supplied); the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42793/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular matter raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Medical Cards.

297. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children if an application to the Health Service Executive to grant a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow will be reviewed, in view of the fact that income to the household has been reduced and the medical needs of the applicant; and if she will expedite a positive response. [42794/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Medical cards are made available to persons and their dependants who would otherwise experience undue hardship in meeting the cost of General Practitioner (GP) services. In 2005 the GP visit card was introduced as a graduated benefit so that people on lower incomes, particularly parents of young children, who do not qualify for a medical card would not be deterred on cost grounds from visiting their GP.

Since the beginning of 2005 substantial changes have been made to the way in which people's eligibility for a medical card is assessed and these apply equally to the assessment process for a GP visit card. The income guidelines have been increased by a cumulative 29% and in addition allowance is now made for reasonable expenses incurred in respect of mortgage/rent, child care and travel to work costs. In June 2006 I agreed with the Health Service Executive a further adjustment to the assessment guidelines for GP visit cards and these are now 50% higher than those in respect of medical cards.

As the Health Service Executive has the operational and funding responsibility for these benefits, it is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Cancer Screening Programme.

298. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children when funding will be provided to ensure that the age limit attached to BreastCheck screening be removed and that all applicants can have such screening on request; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42815/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I am committed to ensuring that the BreastCheck service is rolled out to the remaining regions in the country as quickly as possible. I have approved additional revenue funding of €8 million for 2007 to meet the additional costs involved, bringing BreastCheck's revenue budget to €21.7 million in 2007. I have also made available an additional €26.7 million capital funding to BreastCheck for the construction of two new clinical units, five additional mobile units and the provision of state of the art digital equipment. I

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am pleased that screening will commence in the South and West in the Spring of next year.

When the national roll-out of the programme is sufficiently developed and it is assured that a quality service is being delivered at national level, consideration will be given to including older women and thereby continuing the screening of women in the programme who have reached 65 years of age. Any woman irrespective of her age or residence who has immediate concerns or symptoms should contact her GP who, where appropriate, will refer her to the symptomatic services in her area.

299. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children her plans to overcome the major difficulties persons (details supplied) have in accessing mobile BreastCheck units; if she will provide funding for such persons to ensure that they obtain such screening; [42816/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): BreastCheck has informed my Department that all BreastCheck mobile units are designed to accommodate persons in wheelchairs by providing access by means of a special lift which is installed in every mobile unit.

Nursing Home Subventions.

300. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the options open to a person (details supplied) in County Laois to meet the cost of nursing home costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42817/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

301. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Kildare has been allocated only a nursing home subvention payment of €45 in view of the fact that the person is a widow, is a medical card holder and resides alone; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42818/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned

to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Services.

302. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she proposes to provide support for early arthritis clinics in the Dublin area; if so, the level of funding proposed and the timeframe in relation to same; if she proposes to make funds available for early arthritis clinics outside of the Dublin area; if so, the level of funding and the timeframe in relation to same; if her attention has been drawn to the consequences, medically and financially, of the delay in diagnosing arthritis; if her further attention has been drawn to the significant benefits of early diagnosis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42822/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): In September 2002, Comhairle na nOspidéal initiated a review of Rheumatology Services. Its report, which was published in December 2005, examines the provision of services and makes recommendations on the organisation and development of rheumatology services in the future.

Responsibility for the implementation of these recommendations rests with the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities.

303. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason the autism team co-ordinator has not responded to a request for help from a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny in view of the fact that a response was promised in correspondence of 20 September 2006 from the Health Service Executive; the reason correspondence and telephone calls to the same office from the person in October and November 2006 have not been responded to; if a programme for intervention will be put in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42824/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): My Department has been informed by the HSE that a response has issued to the person (details supplied) in Co. Kilkenny.

Health Services.

304. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to a response issued by the Health Service Executive on 10 October 2006, the reason local officials have not met with the management of a house (details supplied) in County Kilkenny, as promised in view of the urgency of the situation and the need for immediate financial assistance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42825/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular case raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Ambulance Service.

305. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of funding provided for ambulance services in County Mayo in each of the past five years; the amount by which spending in this sector exceeded the amount budgeted for this service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42828/06]

306. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children the budget for ambulance services in Mayo, Galway and Roscommon in each of the past five years; and the amount by which spending in this sector has exceeded the budgeted costs.. [42829/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 305 and 306 together.

Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

307. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health and Children when a reply will issue from the Health Service Executive to Parliamen-

tary Question No. 327 of 7 November 2006. [42830/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney):

The Health Service Executive issued a reply directly to the Deputy in respect of his above question on Monday, 11th December, 2006.

Services for People with Disabilities.

308. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that patients living in centres for people with an intellectual disability are charged for personal items of clothing and for social outings; if she has satisfied herself that such patients are being charged; and the costs of administering such a scheme. [42885/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. T. O'Malley):

The charging for long stay care under the Health (Amendment) Act, 2005 is being implemented by way of the Health (Charges for In-Patient Services) Regulations 2005. These Regulations were signed on 14 June 2005 and reinstated charges for in-patient services and provided for the levying of a charge in respect of the maintenance of persons in receipt of in-patient services. The Regulations were prepared following extensive consultation with the HSE and others.

Section 53 of the Health Act, 1970, as amended by the Health (Amendment) Act, 2005 provides, inter alia, for the levying of a charge where in-patient services have been provided for a period of not less than 30 days or for periods aggregating not less than 30 days within the previous 12 months.

The Regulations, in keeping with Section 53 of the Health Act, 1970, as amended, have provided for two different classes of persons on whom charges can be levied.

Class 1 refers to people in receipt of in-patient services on premises where nursing care is provided on a 24 hour basis on those premises. In this case, a weekly charge can be levied of €120 or the weekly income of that person less €35 or 80% of the weekly income of that person, whichever is the least.

Class 2 refers to people in receipt of in-patient services on premises where nursing care is not provided on a 24 hour basis on those premises. In this situation, a weekly charge can be levied of €90, or the weekly income of that person less €55 or 60% of the weekly income of that person, whichever is the least.

In this regard, charging of patients in long-term care commenced on 14 July 2005, which was after the expiration of 30 days after the Regulations were signed.

These regulations provide for the maximum charge to be levied on either class of person. The actual charge will vary from person to person depending on individual circumstances and under

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the legislation the Health Service Executive can waive or reduce the charges to avoid undue financial hardship.

The Deputy's question also relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have this matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists.

309. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is an 18 month waiting list for children waiting to see an ear and throat consultant in Waterford Regional Hospital; and when a person (details supplied) in County Carlow can expect an appointment with an ear and throat consultant in Waterford Regional Hospital. [42886/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

310. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of funding her Department provides to cancer hospices in South Tipperary on an individual basis annually; and if she supports the hospice movement. [42887/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the Health Service Executive under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular funding issue raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Cigarette Smoking Statistics.

311. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the estimated number of young people by gender below the age of 18 who smoke;

and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42936/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. S. Power): The Office of Tobacco Control (OTC) monitors cigarette smoking prevalence and behaviour on a monthly basis to give a detailed picture of smoking patterns in Ireland and to identify trends. Information regarding smoking prevalence can be found at the OTC website www.otc.ie. The overall prevalence of cigarette smoking in Ireland is approximately 24% at June 2006, with an almost even split among male/female smokers: 18% of 15-18 year olds report as being smokers.

Three recent developments are relevant in the context of addressing the problem of smoking among young people.

Firstly, last week, I announced that from 31 May 2007, it will no longer be legal to sell cigarettes in packs of less than 20.

Secondly, the Minister for Finance decided to increase the tax on a packet of twenty cigarettes by fifty cent in the context of Budget 2007: this increase was coupled with a decision to plan for further increases in tobacco excises for a period ahead, so as to keep the level of tax increasing in real terms and with a call on the Social Partners to discount some or all of the effect of such price increases in fixing on the relevant inflation benchmark.

Finally, the HSE has announced that they are to step up enforcement activity on sales to minors.

This package of measure should ensure a reduction in smoking prevalence among young people in particular but also among the general population. I welcome these developments.

Health Services.

312. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children below the age of five who have not been inoculated against each of the diseases for which inoculations are available and are routinely administered; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42937/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): The Primary Childhood Immunisation Programme (PCIP) provides immunisation for all children against BCG, Diphtheria/Polio/Pertussis/Tetanus/Haemophilus influenza (Hib), Meningococcal C, Measles, Mumps and Rubella.

Vaccine uptake statistics are collated on a quarterly basis by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre. The most recent report published in November 2006 for the second quarter 2006 reported the following vaccine uptake rates: BCG at 12 months 92%; Diphtheria/Polio/Pertussis/Tetanus/Haemophilus influenza (Hib) children at 12 months 86%, children at 24 months 91%; Meningococcal C — children at 12 months

86%, children at 24 months 90%; Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) — children at 24 months 86%.

Vaccine uptake figures have shown a steady increase since 2001. I am concerned about the immunisation uptake rates because of the risk of unimmunised children contracting the potentially serious diseases concerned. However, I am encouraged by the fact that the immunisation uptake rates are improving. The Health Service Executive (HSE) is now targeting areas of low vaccine uptake with specific strategies to increase the national figures.

313. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Minister for Health and Children her plans for improving neurological services here; the number of new neurological posts she is sanctioning; the number which will be filled in 2007; the provision for neurological services at present in the Limerick region; her plans for their improvement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42943/06]

Minister for Health and Children (Ms Harney): Development funding of €3m was provided in 2006 to develop neuroscience services, which includes neurology, and the recently published Estimates for the Health Service Executive includes a further €4m to continue these developments during 2007.

My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to have a more detailed reply issued directly to the Deputy in relation to the application of this funding.

Child Care Services.

314. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children nationally in need of secure care; the number of such children each year since 2000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42949/06]

315. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of high support units nationally; their capacities; the number of children resident in each of them; and the number who are catered for in each on an annual basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42950/06]

316. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the breakdown of boys to girls who are resident in secure units nationally; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42951/06]

319. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of children nationally who are in need of high support care; the number of such children each year since 2000; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42954/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. B. Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 314 to 316, inclusive, and 319 together.

The Deputy's questions relate to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive under the Health Act, 2004. Accordingly, my Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have these matters investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

317. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of homeless children residing in the greater Dublin area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42952/06]

318. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of homeless children, by region or county, residing outside the greater Dublin area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42953/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Mr. B. Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 317 and 318 together.

The latest statistics available to my Department are the Child Care Interim Dataset 2004. These statistics show that the numbers of children presenting as homeless in 2004 were as follows:

Former Health Board Area	No. of Children who appeared to be Homeless
Eastern Regional Health Authority	213
Midland Health Board	18
Mid Western Health Board	43
North Eastern Health Board	15
North Western Health Board	5
South Eastern Health Board	23
Southern Health Board	132
Western Health Board	46
National Total	495

Question No. 319 answered with Question No. 314.

Ministerial Taskforces.

320. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources when he will establish the Task-Force on Bio-Energy to develop an integrated national policy on the area of energy efficiency as he has outlined in a reply to a previous parliamentary question; and if this Task-Force on Bio-Energy will have an all-Ireland dimension to it. [42632/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I established a Ministerial Bio Energy Task Force on Bio-energy in July. Its members include An Tánaiste, and the Ministers for Finance, Agriculture and Food, Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Transport and Enterprise Trade and Employment. The Taoiseach's office is also represented. The primary objective of the Task Force is to draw up a cohesive national bio-energy strategy by the end of the year, which will set targets for deployment of bioenergy, identify priority areas for development and the necessary support measures to encourage supply and demand. This strategy will also take account of EU developments, and the views of key stake holding the Energy Green Paper consultation process.

Fisheries Protection.

321. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if he will consider the request from the Donegal County Council Islands Committee to allow islanders to continue drift net salmon fishing which in their view will not damage the levels of salmon stock but would ensure a sustainable livelihood for those involved in salmon fishing on islands here; if he will meet this committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42338/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. Browne): International best practice for the management of North Atlantic Salmon requires the adoption of the precautionary approach and the cessation of indiscriminate mixed stock fisheries. These are the recommendations of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation and the International Council for the Exploitation of the Sea. Moreover, if we do not end mixed stock fishing in 2007, the EU Commission will unquestionably proceed in their action against Ireland under the Habitats Directive.

In future the harvest of salmon, by any means, will be restricted to those stocks of rivers that are meeting their conservation limits. This means there will be no indiscriminate capture of fish. Commercial fishing and recreational angling can continue only on the scientifically identified exploitable surplus.

The Government's primary motivation is the conservation of the wild salmon species. It is vital to afford every protection to the remaining salmon stocks and to clearly prioritise conservation over catch.

The current imperative must be to maintain stocks above conservation limits or at the very least halt the observed decline. If we do not take action now the relentless decline in stocks will continue, leading to the inevitable demise of wild

salmon, valued as a cultural, recreational and economic resource.

I am aware of the concerns of Donegal County Council Islands Committee and recognising the implications of alignment with the scientific advice for the commercial salmon fishing sector in 2007 and beyond, the Government will put in place a fund to address any financial hardship that may be experienced by the sector. It is proposed to provide a measure of relief to each individual in line with the level of hardship likely to be experienced based on the recent catch history of the individual licence holder.

An additional fund will be available for a community support scheme. The focus of this measure should primarily be those communities where drift-net fishing has been a well-established activity and where its withdrawal demonstrably impacts on their economic and social fabric, e.g. Gaeltacht areas and island communities formerly involved in the drift-netting sector.

Multimedia Activities.

322. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the mechanisms in place to protect children from offensive, age inappropriate or dangerous multimedia activities that are easily accessible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42364/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The Deputy is interested in the protection of children from the inappropriate use of multimedia activities, which is a very broad and encompassing term, but I understand his interest relates particularly to the internet, video games and mobile phones.

I have no function in relation to malevolent internet activities or video games — these areas come under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Justice, Equality & law reform.

Obviously the role of parents in these matters cannot be emphasised enough, and their supervision is key.

In so far as mobile phones are concerned, the Deputy may be aware that the Irish Cellular Industry Association (ICIA), an alliance of mobile operators and handset manufacturers, has taken many steps to promote the safe and responsible use of mobile phones, including publishing a Parent's Guide to Mobile Phones, which aims to inform parents of some key safety tips that will encourage responsible and secure use of mobile phones by their children.

Energy Resources.

323. **Mr. Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the progress made on the report to review the security of access to oil here and the all island

study assessing Ireland's long term security of gas supplies both of which were referred to in the Green Paper on Ireland's sustainable energy future. [42377/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): My Department is finalising the Terms of Reference of the proposed review of the security of Ireland's strategic access to oil.

The tender process has been completed for the joint study by my Department with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for Northern Ireland on a common approach on natural gas storage and liquefied natural gas on an all-island basis. The two Departments are jointly finalising the selection of consultants. Both reports are expected in mid-2007.

Electricity Generation.

324. **Mr. Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if he will provide the estimate as to the potential for co-firing of biomass in the Moneypoint power station; and the research that has been carried out in this regard. [42378/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The primary focus in relation to the Moneypoint plant at present is the completion of the Moneypoint Environmental Retrofit Project (MERP) in time to meet the obligations under the Large Combustion Plant Directive (in relation to NO_x, SO₂ and Dust emissions) by 1 January 2008. Any consideration of co-firing will be made after this project installation has been completed.

In relation to co-firing with biomass generally, the Green Paper on Energy outlines a target of 30% co-firing at Ireland's three peat stations by 2015.

Energy Efficiency.

325. **Mr. Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources when he expects to publish an action plan on energy efficiency; and the main components that would be included in such a plan. [42379/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): Under the Energy End-Use Efficiency and Energy Services Directive, Ireland, as with all Member States of the European Union, must submit by 30 June 2007 a first Energy Efficiency Action Plan showing how it will achieve the indicative target of 9% improvement in energy efficiency by the end of the nine year period up to 2016. A joint working group of my Department, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Commission for Energy Regulation and Sustainable Energy Ireland is drawing up an action plan which will include measures to achieve a

20% improvement in energy efficiency by 2020 as proposed in the Green Paper on Energy Policy. The Action Plan, which will take account of the objectives of recently published EU Energy Efficiency Action Plan, will be finalised in early 2007.

Foreshore Licences.

326. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the fact that fishermen who had lost their licences before drift netting was legalised and who were unable to obtain a new licence due to the reduced numbers that were then issued, will not be covered by the compensation scheme being introduced; and if his attention has further been drawn to the fact that many of those in this position had been fishing for more than 30 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42414/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. Browne): The scheme recommended by the Independent Group in their report is aimed at alleviating hardship which is related to loss of income derived from salmon harvesting in recent years caused, in turn, by the cessation of mixed stock fishing in the interest of conservation. It is not a compensation scheme. The cessation of mixed stock fishing for wild salmon could not be said to cause hardship to people who ceased such fishing many years ago.

Communications Masts.

327. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the status of his Department's recommendations of June 2005 regarding non ionising radiation; and if any of the recommendations have been implemented, particularly in regard to citizens suffering from reaction to this radiation due to the proximity of their homes to mobile phone masts. [42485/06]

337. **Mr. Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if the Houses of the Oireachtas Report published in June 2005 acknowledges that Irish citizens are suffering ill health due to the fact that they reside near a phone mast or due to the use of a mobile phone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42756/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 327 and 337 together.

I am guided in these matters by the advice from international expert bodies, such as the World Health Organisation and the International Commission for Non-Ionising Radiation Protection. These bodies continually examine the totality of

[Mr. N. Dempsey.]

the scientific and medical evidence available to provide the most up to date and accurate information in regard to the potential health effects, if any, of electromagnetic fields. The advice to date is that there is no causal connection with any health effects.

The Government approved the establishment of an inter-Departmental committee on the health effects of electromagnetic fields in September 2005. The committee is chaired by my Department and will provide advice to the Government on the appropriate action to be taken on foot of recommendations contained in the report “Non-Ionising Radiation from mobile phones handsets and masts”, published in June 2005 by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

This committee has overseen the establishment of an expert group on the health effects of electromagnetic fields, which has undertaken a thorough review of the latest scientific reports and will report to the inter-departmental committee on the current scientific consensus and science-based policy. The inter-Departmental committee expects to report to Government in the near future.

Fisheries Protection.

328. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the research on which the EU report recommending further cuts in Irish quota for hake and monkfish was based. [42486/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. Browne): The proposed Total Allowable Catches (TACS) and Quotas regulation was published by the EU Commission on the 5th of December, 2006. The scientific advice for the stocks covered by this regulation was made available by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) on the 20th October, 2006. The Commission’s Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) then met from the 6th-10th November, 2006 to examine and consider this advice. The Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) have also examined the reports from the stakeholders perspective and have advised the Commission on the outcome of their deliberations. The EU Commission have brought forward proposals taking account of these advices.

The advice from ICES on both hake and monkfish was positive and the EU Commission proposal has recommended increases of 15% in the TAC for hake and 6% for monkfish. The proposed regulation will be further considered at the December Fisheries Council which commences on the 19th December, 2006 and will adopt TACs and quotas for 2007.

Mobile Telephony.

329. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if the State has jurisdiction over the operation of mobile phone operators based in the State and operating premium rate text services. [42487/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I have no function in this matter. Premium Rate Services are commercial products in a commercial market.

Responsibility for the regulation of the content and promotion of Premium Rate Text Services is a matter for Regtel, an independent self regulatory body established in 1995 to regulate these services.

Regtel does not report to me as Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

The area of consumer protection within which RegTel operates falls mainly under the remit of my colleague the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs.

Neither my Department nor the Commission for Communications Regulation, ComReg has a role in relation to complaints regarding premium rate call and text charges.

Broadband Services.

330. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the applications for group broadband schemes received in the first phase of funding in County Westmeath; the schemes approved for grant aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42660/06]

331. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the applications for group broadband schemes received in the first phase of funding in County Longford; the schemes approved for grant aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42661/06]

332. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the applications for group broadband schemes received in the second phase of funding in County Westmeath; the schemes approved for grant aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42662/06]

333. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the applications for group broadband schemes received in the second phase of funding in County Longford; the schemes approved for grant aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42663/06]

334. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources when phase two of the group broadband schemes closed to new entrants; the reason there is a delay in claiming the full grants from phase two; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42664/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 330 to 334, inclusive, together.

The closing date for receipt of applications under the second call of the group broadband scheme was end of April 2005. There are currently no delays in processing fully complete claims for grant aid under either the first or second call of the scheme. Full details of projects approved under the scheme are published on my Department's website at www.gbs.gov.ie

Regarding Counties Westmeath and Longford in particular, the following projects were approved for these areas.

First Call — Granard, Co. Longford and Kilbeggan, Kinnegad and Rochfortbridge, Co. Westmeath.

Second Call — Ballymahon, Edgesworthtown, Keenagh, Drumlish, Ballinalee and Killoe, Co. Longford and Castlepollard, Coole, Clonmellan and district, Moate town centre and hinterland, Rathowen, Streete, Ballinalack and Ballinacargy, Co. Westmeath.

I am aware of the importance of the roll out of broadband in rural areas and smaller communities. Ultimately, my aim is to ensure that the most effective and efficient mechanisms are put in place to assist in the roll out of broadband nationally as quickly as possible. Options for the delivery of nationwide broadband are currently being considered by a Steering Group comprising officials from my Department and representatives from ComReg. I expect to finalise proposals shortly.

Departmental Staffing.

335. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42722/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): There is currently a staff of 4 employed in the private office of the Minister of State at my Department, details as follows:

- One Higher Executive Officer, one Executive Officer and two Clerical Officers, all of whom are permanent civil servants, and also
- Two civilian drivers, who are appointed directly by the Minister of State.
- The current annual salary cost of the Minister of State's private office is €216, 626. In the last 12 months overtime costs amounted to €1,133.

There are four people employed in the constituency office of the Minister of State at my Department; details as follows:

- One Personal Assistant and one Personal Secretary, who are political appointees, and
- One Clerical Officer, who is a permanent civil servant and one temporary Clerical Officer, who is a non-established civil servant.

The current annual salary cost of the Minister of State's constituency office is €1,118,591. In the last 12 months, overtime costs amounted to €2,477. Expenses for both private and constituency office of my Minister of State in the last 12 months amounted to €138,943.

336. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42737/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): There are currently 10 staff employed in my private office; details as follows:

- One Administrative Officer, three Executive Officers and five Clerical Officers, all of whom are permanent civil servants, and
- One Special Adviser who is a political appointee.

The current annual salary cost of my private office is €394,099. In the last 12 months, overtime costs amounted to €1,878.

- There are five people employed in my constituency office; details as follows:
- One Executive Officer and two Clerical Officers, all of whom are permanent civil servants, and
- One Personal Assistant and one Personal Secretary who are political appointees.

[Mr. N. Dempsey.]

The current annual salary cost of my constituency office is €173,891. In the last 12 months overtime costs amounted to €1,412.

Expenses for the last 12 months for both my private and constituency offices amounted to €97,946.

Question No. 337 answered with Question No. 327.

Broadcasting Services.

338. **Mr. Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources the person who bears the cost of television signal disturbance caused by a wind farm; the way this compares to the treatment of ESB lines and buildings which cause similar signal disturbance; and the implications this has for wind farm developers. [42782/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): I have no statutory function in this matter.

Broadband Services.

339. **Mr. J. O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources if he will arrange to substantially extend the availability of wired broadband in West Cork and in particular if he will ensure initially that all towns and villages are connected. [42803/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The provision of telecommunications services, including wired broadband, is a matter in the first instance for the private sector companies operating in a fully liberalised market, regulated by the independent Commission for Communications Regulation, ComReg.

Despite private and public investment in broadband infrastructure there are still some parts of the country where the private sector will be unable to justify the commercial provision of broadband connectivity. Options to address these gaps in broadband coverage are currently being considered by a Steering Group comprising officials from my Department and representatives from ComReg. In order to assist with this, the Steering Group is currently seeking the views of Service Providers across all technology platforms.

I expect to finalise proposals shortly.

340. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources further to the fact that approximately a quarter of all telephone subscribers connected to enabled exchanges are unable to obtain broadband internet service, amounting to over 20% of all telephone subscribers and with at least a further 15% who are not even connected to enabled exchanges, the grounds for his numerous state-

ments in the recent past that he is urgently progressing measures to ensure the availability of broadband to the remaining 10 to 15% of people who can not receive broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42940/06]

Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (Mr. N. Dempsey): The provision of telecommunications services, including wired broadband, is a matter in the first instance for the private sector companies operating in a fully liberalised market, regulated by the independent Commission for Communications Regulation, ComReg.

The enabling of telephone exchanges for the provision of broadband is an operational matter for Eircom and I do not have any function in the matter.

Despite private and public investment in broadband infrastructure there are still some parts of the country where the private sector will be unable to justify the commercial provision of broadband connectivity. Options to address these gaps in broadband coverage are currently being considered by a Steering Group comprising officials from my Department and representatives from ComReg. In order to assist with this, the Steering Group is currently seeking the views of Service Providers across all technology platforms.

I expect to finalise proposals shortly.

Overseas University Courses.

341. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Irish consul in California donated funding to a course on revisionist history run by the British Studies Department in the University of California, Berkeley and has refused funding to a course on traditional Irish music proposed to be run under Celtic studies at the same university; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42346/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): A small grant has been given through the Irish Consulate in San Francisco for an Irish Speakers series at the University of California, Berkeley. Speakers in the series have included Paul Sweeney of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Professor Jane Helen Ohlmeyer, Dean of Graduate Studies, Trinity College, and poets Greg Delanty and Liam Ó Muirthile.

I am aware of a suggestion for a traditional Irish music course in the Celtic Studies Department at the University of California, Berkeley, and am informed that an early meeting is being arranged by the Consul General in San Francisco to discuss the idea. The question of a decision having been taken on any funding for such a course does not arise at this stage, given that an actual application has not been made.

Dual Citizenship.

342. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the criteria which apply for US citizens to obtain dual citizenship. [42432/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): Depending on the circumstances a person, including someone who is a United States citizen may (a) automatically be an Irish citizen; (b) be entitled to Irish citizenship by descent; or (c) become an Irish citizen through naturalisation.

Ireland has no difficulty about our citizens holding dual nationality, nor have we restrictions in place in this regard. It may well be, however, that other countries may object to, or may have restrictive requirements in place in relation to dual nationality. It would be important, therefore, to check the position in a specific case with the relevant authorities of the country in question — in this case that of the United States.

Irish Overseas Aid.

343. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he has responded to the request of Irish Aid to assist in the retention of the Comhlámh office in Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42469/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Mr. C. Lenihan): There has been no such request to me by Irish Aid, which is a Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Neither would it be appropriate for Irish Aid to approach Comhlámh in the matter, nor has it done so. The issue of how Comhlámh wishes to organise its activities and all related administrative decisions, including the closure of the Cork office, is solely a matter for Comhlámh.

Currently Comhlámh is the recipient of substantial multi-annual funding from Irish Aid. Comhlámh carries out, with Irish Aid support, very valuable development education and volunteer-related activities in the Cork region, as it does throughout Ireland. I am assured that these activities will not be affected by the closure of the Cork office of Comhlámh.

Undocumented Irish.

344. **Mr. J. Breen** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he has made representations to Senator Charles Schumer and Mr. Bruce Morrison, who are leading the plight of the undocumented Irish in the US; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42684/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): The welfare of the undocumented Irish in the United States is an issue of the highest priority for the Government. In all of my dealings with key figures in the US Congress and Administration, I emphasise our strong support for

measures that would enable the undocumented to regularise their status and have open to them a path to permanent residency.

Following the recent mid-term Congressional elections, I wrote to a number of senior US legislators, including Senator Charles Schumer. In writing to the Senator, I took the opportunity to reiterate to him the Government's concerns about the situation of the undocumented Irish and our deep appreciation of his keen interest in this issue. Our Ambassador in Washington is in regular contact with Senator Schumer on this issue, and the Embassy keeps in close contact with his office in Washington, as the Consulate General does also with his office in New York.

I maintain very close contact with our community in the United States. I had another meeting in New York on 10 November with the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform (ILIR), an organisation that is proving highly effective in communicating the Irish dimension to this issue on Capitol Hill and elsewhere, and which the Government is happy to support financially.

Bruce Morrison, who is based in Washington, is also a very well established and regular contact of the Embassy, and a close adviser to the ILIR.

Both Senator Schumer and Bruce Morrison addressed ILIR's well supported rally in New York on 1 December. I very much welcome their strong engagement on this issue and will continue to maintain close contact with them in the critical period ahead.

I look forward to a further intensification of the Government's efforts on behalf of the undocumented, in particular when the incoming Congress is convened in the New Year.

Departmental Staffing.

345. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42729/06]

346. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42744/06]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern): I propose to take questions numbers 345 and 346 together.

The following tables set out the grades, numbers and remuneration of the personnel in

my private and constituency offices and those of the two Ministers of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs:

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Dermot Ahern, T.D.

Private Office

Grade / Position	Number	Remuneration
Special Adviser (non-established)	1	Principal Officer Standard Scale €80,408-€99,457
Personal Secretary (non-established)	1	Executive Officer (Higher) Scale €28,523-€47,039
Private Secretary	1	First Secretary Standard Scale €61,755-€77,003
Higher Executive Officer	1	Higher Executive Officer Standard Scale €43,445-€55,147
Executive Officer	1	Executive Officer Standard Scale €28,523-€45,262
Clerical Officer	5 (1 of whom work-shares)	Clerical Officer Full PRSI Scale €22,102-€35, 838
Total	10	

Constituency Office

Grade / Position	Number	Remuneration
Personal Assistant (non-established)	1	Higher Executive Officer Standard Scale €43,445-€55,147
Executive Officer	1	Executive Officer Full PRSI Scale €30,027-€47,641
Clerical Officer	1	Clerical Officer Higher Standard Scale €21,974-€34,786
Clerical Officer	2	Clerical Officer Full PRSI Scale €22,102-€35,838
Total	5	

Minister of State, Mr. Conor Lenihan, T.D.

Private Office

Grade / Position	Number	Remuneration
Private Secretary	1	Executive Officer Full PRSI Scale €30,027-€47,641
Executive Officer	1	Executive Officer Standard Scale €28,523-€45,262
Clerical Officer	3 (1 of whom work-shares)	Clerical Officer full PRSI Scale €22,102-€35,838
Total	5	

Constituency Office

Grade / Position	Number	Remuneration
Personal Secretary (non-established)	1	Appointed at Minimum Point HEO Standard Scale: €43,445
Personal Assistant (non-established)	1	Higher Executive Officer Standard Scale €43,445-€55,147
Clerical Officer	2	Clerical Officer Full PRSI Scale €22,102-€35,838
Clerical Officer	1	Clerical Officer Standard Scale €20,995-€34,050
Total	5	

Minister of State, Mr. Noel Treacy, T.D.

Private Office

Grade / Position	Number	Remuneration
Special Adviser (non-established)	1	Principal Officer Standard Scale €80,408-€99,457
Private Secretary	1	Higher Executive Officer Standard Scale €43,445-€55,147
Clerical Officer	1	Clerical Officer Higher Standard Scale €21,974-€34,786
Clerical Officer	2 (1 of whom work shares)	Clerical Officer Standard Scale €20,995-€34,050
Total	5	

Constituency Office

Grade / Position	Number	Remuneration
Personal Secretary (non-established)	1	Secretarial Assistant Scale €21,002-€40,520 (Plus a 10% allowance)
Executive Officer	1	Executive Officer Standard Scale €28,523-€45,262
Clerical Officer	2 (1 of whom work-shares)	Clerical Officer Standard Scale €20,995-€34,050
Clerical Officer	2	Clerical Officer Full PRSI Scale €22,102-€35,838
Total	6	

The employment contracts of the non-established officers referred to in the tables are coterminous with the appointment of the relevant Minister. It did not prove possible to provide a detailed breakdown of salary, overtime and expenses in respect of the staff of each of the offices. However, I can confirm that these were paid in accordance with normal Civil Service regulations.

Sports Funding.

347. **Mr. McHugh** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his attention has been drawn to the plans by a college (details supplied) for the development of sports facilities at their campus; if he will provide adequate funding to enable the project to be brought to fruition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42282/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, allocates funding to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. The programme is advertised on an annual basis.

Applications for funding under the 2007 programme were invited through advertisements in the Press on October 15th and 16th last. The closing date for receipt of applications was Friday November 24th last. All applications received before the deadline, including a joint application from the organisation in question and three local sports clubs, will be evaluated against the programme's assessment criteria, which are outlined

in the guidelines, terms and conditions of the programme. I intend to announce the grant allocations for the programme as soon as possible after the assessment process has been completed.

Services for People with Disabilities.

348. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if there are sanctions against travel companies that do not live up to their responsibilities in relation to people with disabilities and holiday packages. [42430/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I have no responsibility in relation to the regulation of travel companies.

Arts Funding.

349. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his attention has been drawn to media reports claiming that the National Library had paid €1.17 million to buy certain James Joyce manuscripts of Finnegans Wake in 2005 (details supplied); if he is investigating the matter; the steps he will take to ensure that the State does not pay more than necessary for the purchase of manuscripts; the measures he is taking to ensure that the State receives value from such transactions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42448/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The National Library of Ireland became an autonomous statutory body under the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997 on 3rd

[Mr. O'Donoghue.]

May 2005. The Board of the National Library is statutorily responsible for the acquisition of material to enlarge its collection.

The purchase in question occurred subsequent to that date. Accordingly, I have no statutory function in the matter.

I understand from the National Library that the material was formally offered to the National Library through Sotheby's in late 2004. The NLI reached agreement on a price with Sotheby's in March 2005 and a contract for sale was signed in June 2005. At the Library's request, the AIB Group facilitated the purchase of the manuscripts by the Library, as it had done with the purchase of the Leon Collection in 2003 and 2004.

The manuscript material in question was donated to the National Library under the provisions of section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 (the "tax credit scheme"). The manuscript was acquired by AIB Group from the vendor and subsequently donated to the Library. All of the relevant procedures were followed in relation to the donation. AIB Group applied for and received a tax credit equivalent to the purchase price under the tax credit scheme.

Independent assessments and valuations were obtained by the National Library and the agreed value of the donation was settled based on those valuations. The donation was also assessed by the Selection Committee that examines proposed donations under the Tax Credit Scheme. The Committee made a favourable determination in relation to the donation and it is understood that the Revenue Commissioners also commissioned an independent valuation of the material.

At no stage was the material on offer to the National Library at a lower price than was subsequently agreed.

The National Library has no knowledge as to what price the vendor paid for the material.

350. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the sum of money paid by the State or State agencies over the past six years to a person (details supplied); the context in which such payments were made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42449/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): My Department was established on 1st October 2002. I will deal with information in respect of the period from that date.

The person named has had a number of contracts with this Department in respect of consultancy, and commemorative festival management and staffing. The payments in respect of the years 2003 to 2006 and as follows:

2003: in respect of Planning and coordinating the Rejoyce festival which ran in 2004.

Fees and staffing and employee costs and expenses €50,058.59.

2004: in respect of Coordinator of the Rejoyce Festival, Fees, Festival staffing and employee costs and expenses: €125,563.58.

2005: in respect of, consultation on Beckett Festival, commencement of Beckett Festival planning and finalisation of Rejoyce. Fees and festival expenses €12,846.18.

2006: in respect of co-ordination, management and staffing of the Beckett Centenary Festival Fees, festival staffing and employee costs and expenses: €92,828.36.

In the period up to the establishment of the National Library on an independent statutory basis (May 2005) payments by the National Library of Ireland to the person in question amounted to €1,001.70 in respect of the transport costs of Joyce material loaned to the Library.

351. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the amount of money paid by the State or State agencies coming under the auspices of his Department for the acquisition of James Joyce manuscripts since 2000; the identity of the persons from whom such manuscripts have been purchased; the amount paid by the National Library for such documents in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42450/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The National Library of Ireland is an autonomous statutory body under the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997 since 3rd May 2005. Since that date the Board of the National Library is statutorily responsible for acquisitions.

Joyce related acquisitions by the National Library of Ireland in the period from 2000 to May 2005 are detailed beneath:

Acquisition of James Joyce manuscripts by the National Library of Ireland 2000-2005: Circe Manuscript. Bought at auction December 2000. Purchase price IR£1,384,953.81. 2002 *Ulysses*, *Finnegan's Wake*, etc. Vendor; Mr and Mrs Alexis Leon. Funded by the Heritage Fund and Section 1003 (tax credit scheme). Total agreed price £STG8m. Details as follows: 2002 Heritage Fund (€4,207,952.04); 2003 Heritage Fund (€894,454.48) and Section 1003 (AIB Group)(€2,984,877.40); 2004 Heritage Fund (€1,196,866.39) and Section 1003 (AIB Group) (€2,796,004).

I am informed by the National Library that it acquired a further Joyce Manuscript (of *Finnegan's Wake*) in June 2005.

Following the precedent of the Leon purchase, in order to facilitate the acquisition by the National Library, this manuscript was acquired by AIB Group from the Vendor — Ms Laura Barnes — and subsequently donated by the Group to the National Library. A.I.B. Group applied for and

received a tax credit equivalent to the purchase price of €1,170,794.86 under Section 1003 of the Taxes (Consolidation) Act, 1997.

352. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism who has the responsibility for sanctioning expenditure by the State or State agencies on the acquisition of Joycean manuscripts by the National Library; the extent to which the sanctioning of such purchases and the processes adopted are reviewed by the accounting officer of his Department to ensure that best value is being obtained by the State and all necessary issues of probity and procurement are being respected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42451/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I have no statutory function for the matters in the Question as the NLI is an autonomous statutory body under the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997 since 3rd May 2005. The Board of the National Library is statutorily responsible for acquisitions.

Departmental Staff.

353. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42721/06]

354. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42736/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 353 and 354 together.

There are currently 7 staff employed in my private office:

1 Special Adviser at Principal Officer level

1 Private Secretary at Higher Executive Officer level

1 Personal Assistant at Higher Executive Officer level

2 Executive Officers

2 Clerical Officers.

There are currently 6 staff employed in my constituency office:

1 Executive Officer

1 Personal Secretary at Oireachtas Secretarial Assistant level

4 Clerical Officers.

All of the above staff with the exception of my Special Adviser, Personal Assistant and Personal Secretary are permanent civil servants and are paid at the appropriate civil service rates. In addition, my Private Secretary is paid an allowance at the rate of €18,742 per annum for these duties. My Special Adviser and Personal Assistant who are political appointees are paid at the relevant civil service rates and my Personal Secretary who is also a political appointee is paid at the Oireachtas Secretarial Assistant rate with a 10% attraction allowance in respect of her position.

The expenses and overtime paid to staff in these Offices for the year ended 31 December 2005 is as follows:

	Overtime	Expenses
	€	€
Constituency Office	453.89	Nil
Private Office	4,007.87	32,304.55

The staffing of both my private and constituency offices is in line with Department of Finance guidelines on this matter.

As the Deputy is aware, there is no Minister of State at my Department.

Sports Funding.

355. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his Department received an application for a lottery grant from a club (details supplied) in County Carlow; if his attention has been drawn to the urgent need for funding by the club for their new clubhouse and playing pitches; and when he expects a decision on same. [42831/06]

356. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his Department received an application from a club (details supplied) in County Carlow for lotto funding; and when he expects a decision on same. [42832/06]

357. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his Department received an application for lottery funding from a club (details supplied) in County Carlow; and when he expects a decision on same. [42833/06]

358. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his Department received an application for lottery funding for a club (details

[Mr. Kehoe.]

supplied) in County Carlow; and when he expects to make a decision on same. [42834/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): I propose to take Questions Nos. 355 to 358, inclusive, together.

The sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, allocates funding to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. The programme is advertised on an annual basis.

Applications for funding under the 2007 programme were invited through advertisements in the Press on October 15th and 16th last. The closing date for receipt of applications was Friday, November 24th last. All applications received before the deadline, including those which have been received from each of the organisations in question, will be evaluated against the programme's assessment criteria, which are outlined in the guidelines, terms and conditions of the programme. I intend to announce the grant allocations for the programme as soon as possible after the assessment process has been completed.

359. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if his Department received an application for lotto funding from a centre (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; and when he expects a decision on same. [42835/06]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Mr. O'Donoghue): The sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, allocates funding to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country. The programme is advertised on an annual basis.

Applications for funding under the 2007 programme were invited through advertisements in the Press on October 15th and 16th last. The closing date for receipt of applications was Friday November 24th last. My Department has no record of an application from the organisation in question. The applications which were received before the deadline will be evaluated against the programme's assessment criteria, which are outlined in the guidelines, terms and conditions of the programme. I intend to announce the grant allocations for the programme as soon as possible after the assessment process has been completed.

Proposed Legislation.

360. **Mr. Stagg** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if his attention has been drawn to errors in the drafting of S.I. 405 of 2006 which means that offences are not prosecutable. [42329/06]

361. **Mr. Stagg** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the reason for the delay in signing the ADR European

Agreement in view of the fact that the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Roads Act was passed in 1998. [42336/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): I propose to take Question Nos. 361 and 360 together.

The ADR is an international agreement drawn up by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Its main purpose is to secure the safety of international transport of dangerous goods by road. Ireland's formal accession to the ADR took effect from 12 November 2006.

The Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 405 of 2006) came into operation on 31 July 2006. The Regulations apply to the carriage, in tanks, in bulk and in packages, of dangerous goods by road, including the packing, loading, filling and unloading of the dangerous goods in relation to their carriage. They apply the provisions of the Annexes A and B to the "European Agreement Concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road" (ADR) 2005.

The Regulations also place duties on the various participants associated with the carriage of the dangerous goods. They contain requirements for the vehicles, tanks, tank containers, receptacles and packages containing the dangerous goods during their carriage. They require that the drivers, and others involved in the carriage of the dangerous goods by road, be adequately trained and, in the case of drivers, hold certificates of such training. They also contain provisions on an EC harmonised approach to the road checks aspect of their enforcement.

EU Directive 94/55/EC as amended and adapted to technical progress, requires national legislation to be in line with the Annexes to ADR, which are updated and replaced every 2 years. S.I. 405 of 2006 reflects the 2005 update.

The Department's attention has been drawn to a number of errors in S.I. No. 405 of 2006, relating inter alia, to certain provisions of the Regulations concerning the application of some payment in lieu of prosecution provisions relating to some minor offences. I am informed, however, that these do not affect the overall initiation of any necessary prosecution proceedings under the Regulations by the Health and Safety Authority, which is responsible for the monitoring and enforcement of standards under the Statutory Instrument.

The latest adaptation to technical progress of Directive 94/55/EC, which reflects the 2007 update of the ADR, is through Commission Directive 2006/89/EC of 3 November 2006, which is due to be transposed into national legislation by 1 July 2007. Work has already commenced by the Health and Safety Authority on the development of proposals for new Regulations to implement the 2007 version of the ADR to ensure that it is transposed by the due date.

National Minimum Wage.

362. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of inspections that have taken place in the retail sector to ensure that established pay rates are not being undermined by employers recruiting foreign staff to work at below the agreed rates; the number of cases where evidence was found that workers were not receiving their full entitlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42273/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The Labour Inspectorate of the Department is responsible for monitoring certain employment conditions for all categories of workers in Ireland, including migrant workers. The Inspectorate operates without any differentiation with regard to worker nationality as statutory employment rights and protections apply to migrant workers in exactly the same manner as they do to native Irish workers. Inspectors pursue allegations of worker mistreatment and when evidence of non-compliance with the relevant employment rights legislation is found, the Inspectorate seeks redress for the individual/s concerned and, if appropriate, a prosecution is initiated.

In many instances the wages and employment conditions of workers employed in the retail sector are governed by Employment Regulation Orders or Registered Employment Agreements, which are enforced by the Labour Inspectorate.

The Retail Grocery and Allied Trades Joint Labour Committee sets down the rates of remuneration and conditions of employment by way of Employment Regulation Orders. Persons whose employment is covered by these Employment Regulation Orders are entitled to the terms and conditions therein. The number of inspections undertaken by the Labour Inspectorate under the Order in 2006 was 44. Breaches were detected in the case of 20 inspections. Inspections undertaken under the Order in 2005 amounted to 84 and breaches were detected in 37 instances.

The Registered Employment Agreement (Dublin and Dún Laoghaire) Drapery, Footwear and Allied Trades sets down the rates of remuneration and conditions of employment of workers covered by the Agreement. The Labour Inspectorate undertook five inspections under the Registered Employment Agreement in 2006 and breaches were detected in the case of 4 inspections. Inspections undertaken under the Registered Employment Agreement in 2005 amounted to 9 and breaches were detected in 2 instances.

In addition to the inspections undertaken under the Retail Grocery and Allied Trades Employment Regulation Order and the Registered Employment Agreement (Dublin and Dún Laoghaire) Drapery, Footwear and Allied Trades, a substantial number of inspections were undertaken in retail outlets whose employees are

covered by the National Minimum Wage Act 2000. In 2006 the Labour Inspectorate undertook 1,015 inspections under the Act. Breaches were detected in the case of 45 inspections. Inspections undertaken under the Act in 2005 amounted to 481 and breaches were detected in 92 instances.

Finally, the Social Partnership Agreement "Towards 2016" provides for the establishment of an Office of the Director for Employment Rights Compliance (ODERC) which, in addition to the provision of employment rights information and the prosecution of offences, will also have responsibility for the Labour Inspectorate.

The number of Labour Inspectors under this Office will be progressively increased from 31 to 90 by end-2007 while existing arrangements in relation to the investigation of particular employments in relation to employment rights and compliance will be strengthened. The revised arrangements will also provide that, in certain cases, the ODERC may take cases to the Courts with a view to securing convictions by way of prosecutions for summary or indictable offences, notwithstanding any redress actions that may be taken. Where the employer fails to make good the amounts of money which are owed to the employee under employment rights legislation redress will be obtained via the Rights Commissioner Service.

Provision will also be made for improved record keeping in order to protect workers' employment rights and to ensure consistency between statutory employment records and record keeping requirements for employers in relation to, for example, taxation and social welfare. Employers will have clear responsibilities in relation to the maintenance and production of up-to-date statutory records.

In addition, the ODERC will be empowered to join with the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Revenue Commissioners to work together in the Joint Investigation Units.

"Towards 2016" also provides for the deployment of the Labour Inspectorate on a regionalised basis. Proposals in this regard are being prepared at present and will be finalised following the appointment of the Director of the Office for Employment Rights Compliance.

Work Permits.

363. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of work permits which are currently outstanding and their distribution across the main sectors of economic activity; and if there are sectors in respect of which his Department is unwilling to issue work permits currently. [42274/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The Work Permits Section of my Department has informed me the number of outstanding permits awaiting decision is 2,812. However the section does not identify separately, for permits awaiting decision, the distribution across the main sectors of economic activity.

[Mr. Martin.]

In the aftermath of EU Enlargement, it is Government policy that employers should be able to source nearly all of their workforce needs from within the EU. Accordingly, only in cases where exceptional levels of skill and qualifications are needed for the job, and the employer has made meaningful attempts to find EEA nationals first, will my Department now consider work permit applications.

An ineligible list category is available on our Departments website, which sets out the ineligible sectors.

Foreign Direct Investment.

364. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the efforts made in 2006 to attract investment into South Tipperary; and the action taken in relation to finding a tenant for a factory (details supplied) in Tipperary Town. [42357/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): IDA Ireland is the agency with statutory responsibility for the attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI) to Ireland and its regions. While I may give general policy directives to the Agency under the Industrial Development Acts, I am precluded from giving directives regarding individual undertakings or from giving preference to one area over others.

For an area to successfully compete with other locations, nationally and internationally, in attracting sustainable foreign investment it is vital that the requirements of potential investors are met. It is the investor who ultimately decides where to locate. What they are indicating to IDA is that they are seeking an urban base close to third level educational facilities that provides infrastructure and services that are international in focus. The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) provides a framework for meeting these requirements through the prioritisation of investment in the Gateway and Hub locations. A key task for IDA Ireland is the achievement of balanced regional development in tandem with the NSS.

IDA Ireland's strategy for Tipperary is to primarily concentrate future economic development in Clonmel and to develop the town as a first-class location for overseas investment. This strategy has been agreed with the South Tipperary County Development Board and is already achieving results. Last September, I was pleased to officially open a €90 million high-value drug-eluting stent manufacturing operation for Abbott Vascular, one of the world's leading healthcare companies. The expansion involves 500 new jobs.

Following discussions with South Tipperary Co. Council, IDA Ireland purchased circa 50 acres of land in the Council owned Ballingarrane Estate in Clonmel to develop a Business and Technology Park. The future development of the Ballingarrane Estate in Clonmel, incorporating

the IDA Business Park and Tipperary Institute of Technology, will be a key asset in attracting further overseas investment into the County.

While the primary focus of IDA activities is on promoting and marketing Clonmel, the Agency continues to promote all available facilities in the County, including its 10 acre serviced site at Knockenrawley in Tipperary Town, which has been upgraded to a Business Park. A 16,000 sq ft advance factory (BES funded) has been constructed on the park and IDA continues to actively promote this advance manufacturing facility through their network of overseas offices. In marketing Tipperary for new foreign direct investment, IDA Ireland is focused on attracting overseas companies in the services and knowledge based industries (including advanced manufacturing). Key sectors of focus for IDA in Tipperary are international services, healthcare and pharmaceuticals.

I am satisfied that the policies and strategies being pursued by IDA Ireland are the most appropriate ones to attract and grow foreign direct investment in the County and that these will, in turn, contribute to balanced regional development and the growth of sustainable, quality employment into the future.

Property Disposal.

365. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment further to Parliamentary Question No. 121 of 30 November 2006, if he accepts that premises (details supplied) in County Donegal were sold on 1 December 2006 at a time that Enterprise Ireland had not received the up to date accounts it sought in October 2005; if a full repayment of preference shares has been made to Enterprise Ireland; if not, the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42428/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): Grant agreements between Enterprise Ireland and companies are a matter for those parties and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment does not have a direct function in this area.

All funding provided by Enterprise Ireland is subject to a legal grant agreement between the company and Enterprise Ireland. Enterprise Ireland grant aided companies must meet the obligations to creditors and employees in the event of closure or liquidation.

Clubman Omega Limited ceased manufacturing in December 2005, following which, in line with its normal policy, Enterprise Ireland revoked and sought repayment of certain Employment Grants and of the Preference Shares that Enterprise Ireland had invested in the development of the company.

An offer of repayment of the preference shares was made by the company to Enterprise Ireland but, this offer cannot be properly considered by Enterprise Ireland until the agency has actually

received up-to-date accounts from the company. The latter have been repeatedly sought by Enterprise Ireland but have not yet been furnished by the company.

The situation regarding grant liabilities is disputed by the company. Enterprise Ireland is considering its response, including possible legal action to recover those liabilities, but in order to duly consider the matter, the agency will need to have sight of the company's accounts.

As regards the factory premises, Enterprise Ireland has no charge over the building and the agency's consent is not required for the sale of the building by the company.

Enterprise Ireland continues to pursue the company to provide it with up-to-date accounts to enable the situation regarding the repayment of preference shares and outstanding grant liabilities to be resolved.

Proposed Legislation.

366. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the Bills he expects to publish before the end of 2006; and thereafter the Bills he expects to publish before the general election. [42509/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): As the Deputy is aware my Department published the Industrial Development Amendment Bill last month. Preparation of a number of additional Bills is at an advanced stage and I expect that the following Bills will be published by my Department before or during the first half of 2007:

Consumer Protection Bill

Control of Exports Bill

The Protection of Employment (Exceptional Collective Redundancies) Bill

Employment Agency and Employment Business Regulation Bill

Intellectual Property (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

Work Permits.

367. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the position, in relation to a work permit, whereby a person from Tunisia wishes to come here with their partner who is an Irish citizen, and who has available to them at least a six month working contract; the position in relation to visa requirements and so on, for such a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42681/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The current spousal scheme is confined to the spouses of certain work permit and work authorization/visa holders. From the information supplied by the Deputy it appears that the above named individual would not qualify under this scheme. An application for a work permit for this individual would have to comply with the normal work permit policy of highly skilled and highly paid, and would have to undergo an economic needs test through an advertisement with FÁS of the job on offer.

Departmental Staff.

368. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42726/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The breakdown of staff by grade currently employed in the two Ministers of State Offices at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

	Number
<i>Office of the Minister for Labour Affairs (Mr. Tony Killeen TD)</i>	
Departmental Office	1 Higher Executive Office 1 Executive Officer 2 Clerical Officers
Constituency Office	1 Personal Assistant (Political appointee) 1 Personal Secretary (Political appointee) 1 Clerical Officer
<i>Office of the Minister for Trade and Commerce (Mr. Michael Ahern TD)</i>	
Departmental Office	1 Higher Executive Officer 1 Executive Officer 2 Clerical Officers
Constituency Office	1 Personal Assistant (Political appointee) 1 Personal Secretary (Political appointee) 1 Clerical Officer

[Mr. Martin.]

Each Minister of State also employs 2 Civilian Drivers. The drivers work alternate weeks on a week on/week off basis. The current salary for a Civilian Driver is €31,551.68 per annum. There are 5 permanent civil servants and 4 political appointees, which includes the 2 Civilian Drivers in each Minister of State's Office. The salary

costs, overtime and expenses for each of the Minister's Offices from 1st December 2005 to 1st December 2006 are set out in Table 2. It should be noted that the salary costs are inclusive of overtime payments and the Civilian Driver salaries. The expenses refer to travel and subsistence costs and mobile phone costs.

Table 2

	Salaries	Expenses
	€	€
<i>Office of the Minister for Labour Affairs</i>		
Departmental Office	162,045.19	13,069.11
Constituency Office	180,051.73	35,812.78
<i>Office of the Minister for Trade and Commerce</i>		
Departmental Office	170,594.30	9,205.41
Constituency Office	179,054.62	30,395.94

369. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42741/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The information in relation to staffing of my Office is set out in the tables:

Staffing of Private Office

	Number
Higher Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1
Executive Officers	2
Clerical Officers	5
Total	8

The staff in the table above are civil servants.

Constituency Office

	Number
Clerical Officers (Civil Servants)	2.8
Personal Assistants (non-civil servants)	1.5
Personal Secretary (non-civil servant)	1
Total	5.3

Additional staff include: 1 Special Adviser, 1 Policy Adviser and 1 Press Adviser (Salary & expenses in relation to these staff are included

in the overall Private Office figure). My Special Adviser is a civil servant whilst my Policy Adviser and Press Adviser are non-civil servants. The total annual cost of running the Private and Constituency Office from 1st December 2005 to the 1st December 2006 was €599,095.36 and €165,180.91 respectively.

Work Permits.

370. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if his attention has been drawn to the application under highly qualified and skilled category and subsequent appeal for a work permit for a person (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that their employer has attempted to employ local or EEA national labour through FÁS and other media outlets but to no avail; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the person possesses qualifications in both business administration and fine arts which would be adequate for the highly qualified and skilled category of the work permit application; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the person is willing to return to Pakistan in order to change their student status to that of full-time employee; and his views on reviewing the case and in doing so grant a work permit for the person. [42790/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The Work Permits Section of my Department informs me that this application was refused on the basis that the above named individual entered the State to pursue a course of studies and is therefore not entitled to enter full time employment. I am also informed that having heard an appeal in this case the Work Permit Section upheld the original decision. However, it

should be noted that students attending recognized programmes of study are entitled to work twenty hours per week during term time and forty hours per week during holidays without, at present, the need for a work permit.

Company Closures.

371. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that former employees at a company (details supplied) in County Limerick have received no redundancy payments other than their statutory entitlement; if he has satisfied himself that the company does not have assets other than the plant to enable them to pay redundancy; the steps he is taking to ensure that the redundant workers receive alternative employment at an early date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42942/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Killeen): The company referred to went into liquidation in October 2006 and in accordance with the provisions of the Redundancy Payments Acts 1967 to 2003, lump sum payments were paid directly to 45 employees of the company concerned, in November this year out of the Social Insurance Fund. This Department is not in a position to say what assets the company has other than the plant. There are no legislative provisions in operation for this Department to compel the company to pay amounts over and above the statutory redundancy lump sums to redundant workers.

In a collective redundancy situation employers are required to notify the Minister at least 30 days before the redundancies commence. In this instance, as the company went into liquidation, no notification was received by the Department. In liquidation situations the person responsible for the affairs of the business need notify the Minister only where the Minister so requests. However, the local FÁS Office has been informed of the redundancies, as is the normal practice in collective redundancy cases. The resources of FÁS are available to all redundant workers. FÁS provides workers with information and advice and places workers on training programmes, which generally lead to further employment.

Work Permits.

372. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of work permits that have been issued in each of the past five years to non-EEA nationals for chefs. [42948/06]

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Mr. Martin): The Work Permits Section of my Department has informed me that the follow-

ing are the figures for work permits issued to chefs in the past five years to date.

Year	New Permits	Renewals	Issued
2006	719	1,997	2,716
2005	822	2,370	3,192
2004	667	2,357	3,024
2003	1,684	2,004	3,688
2002	1,596	1,390	2,986

Pension Provisions.

373. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he has satisfied himself with the present arrangements for the supervision of occupational pension schemes and analogous private pension schemes in view to the fact that the cost to the Exchequer in tax and PRSI foregone on pensions contributions is in excess of €3 billion per annum, the high levels of fees imposed by the industry, the appearance of potential conflicts of interest in the way that employees are steered into arrangements selected by employers, the failure of many pension funds to match the returns achieved by the stock markets generally, and the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are investing in pensions now at a time of relative economic prosperity but will be drawing their pension benefits at a time when the demographic situation will be vastly different leading to a significant possibility that the marginal tax rates they will face then could be significantly above the marginal rates of tax they face at present leading to increasing numbers investing in property outside Ireland as a hedge against the risks involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42694/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): There is a comprehensive system of regulation in place through the Financial Regulator, The Pensions Board and the Pensions Ombudsman to deal with the various types of pension arrangements which are available and the different aspects of these products.

The Pensions Board itself is at present carrying out a review of its operations to see how it might perform its role more effectively in the current pensions environment. Broadly, I understand that the Board plans to take a more pro-active approach to the supervision of schemes and PRSAs, in line with international best practice and EU requirements and the Department would support such an approach. The Board will shortly present its proposals in this regard and the associated requirement for additional resources to the Department and these will then be considered in detail in conjunction with the Department of Finance.

The trustees of a pension scheme have a duty under the Pensions Act to manage the scheme in

[Mr. Brennan.]

line with the prudent person principle which takes account of the particular nature of the scheme. The funding standard under the Act, sets out the requirements regarding assets and liabilities in a wind-up situation so as to ensure that the fund can meet its liabilities in such a situation. With regard to the issues raised in relation to conflicts of interest, trustees of schemes are required to at all times act in the best interests of scheme members. The Pensions Board is not aware of any situation involving employers or trustees where conflicts of interest have arisen in relation to the administration of schemes.

There is little information on general wealth in the country and the alternative ways in which people intend to provide for their retirement, including investing in property. However, in so far as is possible, it is hoped to address this information deficit in research to be undertaken in the context of the Green Paper on Pensions which it is expected will be published by the end of March next year. The Green Paper will also deal with issues in relation to the various tax incentives that are available to support and encourage private and occupational pension provision and the future costs and financing.

374. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if, in view the substantial amounts, estimated to exceed €3 billion per annum, foregone in revenues by the Exchequer and the Social Insurance Fund and the risks that the State will have to increase the old age contributory pension in the years ahead if such funds are administered with maximum efficiency, he will bring forward legislation permitting and authorising the Comptroller and Auditor General to conduct at least one detailed annual value for money audit on at least one significant scheme or firm covering all aspects from contributions made to the payment of annuities on the arrangements for pensions funds that are subject to the remit of the Pensions Board; and if he will ensure that the necessary staff are provided speedily for this purpose. [42695/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): My Department has no role in relation to specifying the duties appropriate to the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and it would not be appropriate for me to initiate legislation as suggested. Tax foregone through reliefs provided for pension contributions and investment gains is a very significant investment by the State in the voluntary supplementary pensions system. It is important that the State receives value for money for this investment and that the reliefs provided are effective in encouraging and maintaining supplementary pension provision. As the House is aware, the Government will, under the terms of Towards 2016, produce a Green Paper on pensions and this will include an exam-

ination of all relevant aspects of the system of tax reliefs which are in place to support private pension provision as well as an assessment of future pension costs and how they can be met. The Green Paper is due to be published by the end of March 2007.

Social Welfare Benefits.

375. **Mr. Haughey** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he will abolish the means test for the carer's allowance; if eligibility will be determined on the basis of the amount of care needed by the person being cared for instead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42250/06]

376. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if the spouse of a person who is on a rural social scheme and are claiming for their spouse as an adult dependent, can apply for a carer's allowance in their own right. [42291/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 375 and 376 together.

Supporting and recognising carers in our society is and has been a priority of the Government since 1997. Over that period, weekly payment rates to carers have been greatly increased, qualifying conditions for carer's allowance have been significantly eased, coverage of the scheme has been extended and new schemes such as carer's benefit and the respite care grant have been introduced and extended. In line with other social assistance schemes, a means test is applied to the carer's allowance so as to ensure that limited resources are directed to those in greatest need. This means test has been eased significantly over the years.

Following Budget 2006, the earnings disregard for a couple has been set at €580 per week which is equivalent to gross average industrial earnings. As a result of further improvements which I announced in the Budget 2007 this disregard will increase to €640 per week for a couple from April 2007. When this increase is in place a couple with two children will be able to earn up to €36,240 and still qualify for the maximum rate of carer's allowance as well as the associated free travel and household benefits. This measure surpasses the commitment in Towards 2016 to ensure that those on average industrial earnings can continue to qualify for a full carer's allowance.

I understand that eligibility for the Rural Social Scheme which is administered by Pobal is generally linked to eligibility for a social welfare payment. As a general rule only one weekly social welfare payment is payable to an individual. Persons qualifying for two social welfare payments always receive the higher payment to which they are entitled.

From June 2005, however, the annual respite care grant was extended to all carers who are pro-

viding full time care to a person who needs such care regardless of their income. Those persons in receipt of other social welfare payments, excluding jobseeker's assistance and benefit, are entitled to this payment subject to meeting the full time care condition.

In the recent Budget I provided for a very significant reform which will enable people in receipt of a social welfare payment other than carer's allowance or benefit who are providing full time care and attention to retain their main payment and receive another payment up to a maximum of a half rate carer's allowance. The improvements for carers which I announced in Budget 2007 are further evidence of the Government's commitment to improving the position of family carers and those they care for.

377. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if an appeal can be opened and on oral hearing scheduled immediately for a person (details supplied) in County Mayo in relation to their claim for carer's allowance in view of the serious medical condition of their care recipient. [42319/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The person concerned was refused the Carer's Allowance on the grounds that full time care and attention as prescribed in regulations is not required in this case. On 27 November 2006 he was notified of the decision, the reason for it and of his right to appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. The arrangements for an appeal are now being made. Under Social Welfare legislation decisions in relation to claims must be made by Deciding Officers and Appeals Officers. These Officers are statutorily appointed and I have no role in regard to making such decisions.

378. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason persons in receipt of disability benefit payments from his Department are not entitled to the Christmas bonus payment from his Department, as is the case for other social welfare recipients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42453/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): A special Christmas Bonus payment was first introduced in December, 1980, for social welfare pensioners and people who depend solely on their social welfare payments for income support. There have been a number of developments in this scheme since its inception, including changes in the level of the bonus payment, the introduction of a minimum payment and the extension of the categories of eligible claimants.

The Christmas Bonus has again been paid this year to all recipients of long-term social welfare payments, at a rate equivalent to 100% of the person's normal weekly payment, subject to a minimum payment of €30. The cost of this measure is an estimated €157 million this year,

and it benefited some 1.25 million persons comprising 855,000 recipients and 394,000 dependants. The focus of the bonus has always been on persons who rely on the social welfare system for financial support over the long term. These include recipients of State pension (transition), State pension (contributory and non-contributory), widow's, widower's and invalidity pensions, one-parent family payment, carer's allowance, disability allowance, long-term jobseeker's allowance, farm assist and people in receipt of employment support payments.

As carer's benefit is now payable for up to 2 years, the bonus was, for the first time this year, paid to recipients of this benefit. The bonus is also payable to participants in the rural social scheme, which was introduced in 2004, and operates under the aegis of the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. There are no plans at present to amend or extend entitlement to the bonus payment to short-term schemes, and any such extension could only be considered in a budgetary context having regard to the resources available and the significant cost which would be involved. In relation to illness benefit, it is open to persons who have been in receipt of illness benefit for at least a year to apply for invalidity pension, and, if they qualify for the pension they would also qualify for the Christmas Bonus payment.

379. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position in relation to disability benefit in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42495/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The person concerned applied for disability allowance on 19 September 2006. Qualification for disability allowance depends on an applicant passing a means test and fulfilling certain medical conditions. An applicant must be substantially restricted by reason of a specified injury, be suffering from an injury, disease, illness or physical or mental disability that has continued or may be expected to continue for at least one year and, as a result, substantially restricted in undertaking suitable work.

The applicant concerned was examined by a Medical Assessor of my Department and the file was referred to a Social Welfare Investigator for determination of his means. The person's file, including the investigator's report on the person's means, is being forwarded to a Deciding Officer for a formal decision on the application. The person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

380. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be approved and awarded the full fuel allowance. [42514/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The pensioner referred to in this case is in receipt of the maximum rate of state pension (non contributory) of €192.00 weekly, for a person aged over 80 and is also in receipt of living alone increase of €7.70 weekly. His application for fuel allowance has been forwarded to a Social Welfare Inspector of the Department for investigation. The Social Welfare Inspector will be in touch with him in the near future regarding this claim. On completion of the necessary enquiries a decision will be made and the pensioner will be notified of the outcome without delay.

Pension Provisions.

381. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the amount in relation to pensions schemes for which the Pensions Board has oversight provided in recent years to finance the Pensions Board as a percentage of the total amounts contributed or invested by all contributors in the schemes in question, the value of PAYE, PRSI and other tax concessions including exemptions of net income of approved superannuation funds on the contributions and funds to and in such schemes, the estimated costs of administration and fees imposed by the fund managers, and any other firms or agents receiving commissions, fees or other payments, out of or arising from contributions and the management of the funds in such schemes. [42697/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): Much of the information requested by the Deputy is not available. However, in order to give an indication of the position, such estimates that are available are used in the following together with published statistics. Fees received from occupational pension schemes and providers of Personal Retirement Savings Accounts largely finance the Pensions Board. Details of the expenditure incurred by the Board together with its income from fees in each of the last three years is set out as follows:

Cost of Income Tax relief relating to pension contributions

Type of Pension Contributions	2001	2002	2003
	€ million	€ million	€ million
Employees' Contributions to approved Superannuation Schemes	389	563	622
Employers' Contributions to approved Superannuation Schemes	498	623	564
Exemption of Net Income of approved Superannuation Funds (Contributions plus Investment Income less Outgoings)	938	1,272	1,434
Retirement Annuity Contracts (RACs)	185	251	264
Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs)*	N/A	N/A	6
Total	2,010	2,709	2,809

*Figures for PRSAs reflect the relative early stage of the scheme which was introduced in 2002.

It should be noted in relation to the tax year 2001, that as PAYE taxpayers were charged to tax on their earnings in the period from 6 April to 31

Year	Expenditure	Fees from Occupational Pension Schemes	Fees from providers of Personal Retirement Savings Accounts*
	€m	€m	€m
2003	4.5	3.95	0.130
2004	5.0	4.10	0.205
2005	5.6	4.10	0.341

* The figure provided relates to fees relevant to the year in question but not necessarily received in that year.

The remainder of the income of the Board includes payment from the Department to cover the cost of the National Pensions Awareness Campaign, sale of publications and a temporary subvention in respect of the costs of developing and regulating PRSAs. The last mentioned was put in place to cover costs pending the development of an adequate PRSA fee base.

The Pensions Board does not maintain statistics on the assets of occupational pension schemes or contributions made to such schemes. However, the Irish Association of Pension Funds in its Asset Allocation Survey 2005 estimated that at year end the volume of assets under management was €77.9 billion.

With regard to contributions to schemes, work undertaken in connection with the National Pensions Review, published in January this year, estimated that in 2006 contributions to defined benefit and defined contribution schemes by employers and employees would amount to about €4.3 billion. At this stage, the Pensions Board is estimating total expenditure for 2006 at about €5.7 million and this represents about 0.1% of estimated contributions to schemes.

There is no recent information available on the fees and administration charges incurred by pension schemes. With regard to the cost of tax forgone on pension contributions, this information is provided for the three income tax years 2001 to 2003, the latest year for which it is available.

December 2001 and self-employed taxpayers were assessed to tax for that short year on 74% of the profits earned in a 12 month accounting

period, the cost figures will not be directly comparable with those of later years. It should also be noted that these costs are tentative and that efforts are being made to improve information on the cost of tax relief for pensions.

382. **Mr. Stanton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs his views on increasing the representation of workers and other contributors to the pensions funds on the Pensions Board to reflect the fact they have the most vital interests in the effective oversight of the pensions industry; his views on reducing the appearance of potential bias in the representation by vested interests that may not be aligned with the interests of workers, the self-employed and pensioners; and his further views on whether nominations to the board in question should become subject to review by the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs to ensure that the interests of workers are adequately represented on the board. [42698/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The Pensions Board is a representative Body, comprising a chairperson and sixteen ordinary members which is appointed by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, under the provisions of the Pensions Act, 1990. It is important that the Pensions Board membership should comprise a diverse range of skills dealing with the different aspects of pensions schemes, while at the same time ensuring that the interests of all stakeholders in this area are represented. The Pensions Act requires that the ordinary members of the Board consist of 1 representative of each of the actuarial, accounting and legal professions with other interested groups represented by 2 union representatives (including 1 scheme trustee), 2 employer representatives (including 1 scheme trustee), 2 representatives of occupational pension schemes, 1 representative of pensioners, 1 representative of consumer interests, 1 representative of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and 1 representative of the Department of Finance. In addition, there are 3 direct nominees of the Minister. Overall, I am satisfied that the current representation of the Board and the manner of its appointment is comprehensive and balanced and ensures that the views of all interests are well represented in the regulatory and policy advice work of the Board. I will, however, keep the matter under review.

Social Welfare Benefits.

383. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs his plans to restore the full adult dependant allowance to pensioners on reduced contributory pension rate who had initially been granted a full adult dependant allowance which has subsequently been reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42715/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): In order to qualify for the maximum rate of the state pension (contributory) a person must, amongst other qualifying conditions, achieve a yearly average of at least 48 contributions paid or credited on their social insurance record. Reduced pensions are paid to those with yearly averages as low as 10 contributions and arrangements are also in place for the payment of pro-rata pensions to those with mixed rate insurance records or contributions from different countries.

Reduced rate or *pro rata* pensions are paid at a fixed percentage of the full rate payment in order to reflect the level of contribution which individuals make and this principle also applies to the increase for qualified adults. However, in the case of some reduced rate contributory pensions the qualified adult increase was being paid at a higher rate than that being paid in respect of the pensioner. In these reduced rate cases the personal rate is reduced to reflect the average level of contributions paid but in some cases the maximum increase for qualified adults was being paid.

In Budget 2001 the Government began a process the object of which is to increase the payment for qualified adults (age 66 or over) to the same level as the personal rate of the state pension (non-contributory). Accordingly, it was decided to standardise increases for qualified adults by ensuring that they reflect the level at which the personal rate is paid as was already the case with most reduced rate contributory pensions being paid. The new arrangements applied to claims made after April 2001. Special arrangements were, however, introduced for reduced rate cases where the full qualified adult increase was already being paid. No reduction in payment was made in 2001 and a Budget increase has been applied to this group each year since then.

Departmental Staff.

384. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42732/06]

385. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42747/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 384 and 385 together.

There are ten staff employed in my private office. These include 8 administrative staff, a Press Adviser and a Special Adviser. The 8 administrative staff are all established civil servants, one Higher Executive Officer, 1.5 Executive Officers and 5.5 Clerical Officers.

The Higher Executive Officer is on a payscale of €42,180 to €53,541 with a Private Secretary allowance of €18,742 per annum. The Executive Officers are on a payscale of €27,692 to €43,944 adjusted proportionally in the case of the work sharing officer. 1 Clerical Officer is on a pay scale of €21,974 to €34,786 (Clerical Officer Higher Scale) adjusted accordingly to take account of work sharing. 3 of the Clerical Officers are on a pay scale of €20,996 to €34,049 (Class B rate of PRSI contribution applies). The other 2 Clerical Officers are on a payscale of €22,102 to €35,838 (Class A rate of PRSI contribution applies as they commenced employment after 6 April 1995). The total overtime costs and expenses incurred to date in 2006 for the administrative staff in this office are €16,165 and €6,862 respectively.

The Press Adviser and Special Adviser were appointed by me on a contract basis for my term of office. The Press Adviser is on a personal salary of €103,563 together with a private pension contribution of 11% of salary. The Special Adviser is on a Principal Officer payscale of up to €90,770. The total expenses incurred to date in 2006 by my Press Adviser and Special Adviser are €21,747 and €12,452, respectively. No overtime costs have been incurred by these officers who are on call on a seven day per week basis.

There are a total of six full-time administrative staff assigned to deal with matters in my constituency office. There are four established civil servants, one Executive Officer on a payscale of €27,692 to €43,944 and three Clerical Officers on a payscale of €22,102 to €35,838. The total overtime costs incurred to date in 2006 for the administrative staff in this office are €3,357. No expenses have been incurred to date in 2006 by these officers.

I have also appointed, on a contract basis for my term of office, two non-established civil servants, a Personal Secretary and a Personal Assistant. The annual salary for my Personal Secretary is €40,520. My Personal Assistant is on secondment from the Department of Education and Science. That Department will recoup from my Department on an annual basis the cost of a replacement teacher's salary, allowances, PRSI contributions and superannuation contributions. This will be in the region of €44,800. The total expenses incurred to date in 2006 by my Personal Assistant and Personal Secretary are €840. No overtime costs have been incurred to date in 2006 by these officers. The rates of pay shown are exclusive of the 3% pay increase provided for

with effect from 1 December 2006 under the social partnership agreement Towards 2016. There is no Minister of State in my Department.

Social Welfare Benefits.

386. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the reason child benefit is not awarded to families who are affected by habitual residence status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42888/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The requirement to be habitually resident in Ireland was introduced as a qualifying condition for certain social assistance schemes and child benefit with effect from 1 May 2004. It was introduced in the context of the Government's decision to open the Irish labour market to workers from the new EU Member States without the transitional limitations which were being imposed at that time by many of the other Member States.

The effect of the condition is that a person whose habitual residence is elsewhere is not paid social welfare payments on arrival in Ireland. EU Regulations provide that migrant workers who are EEA nationals, i.e. EEA nationals who have been employed since coming to this country, are entitled to payment of family benefits under the same conditions as Irish nationals and the habitual residence condition does not apply in their case. The effect of the condition in relation to child benefit, therefore, is principally in relation to claims by non-EEA nationals. Approximately 15% of such claims, received since the introduction of the condition, were refused on the grounds that the habitual residence condition was not satisfied. Those who are refused are mainly persons whose claim to asylum has not yet been decided, who do not have a work permit or who have a minimal attachment to the workforce in Ireland.

The reason for the introduction of the habitual residence condition in May 2004 — to ensure that persons who have not worked in Ireland or who have not established their habitual residence in Ireland should not avail of assistance schemes or child benefit — continues to be relevant.

387. **Mr. S. Ryan** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the estimated cost to the insurance fund of removing the earning limits for all recipients of deserted wife's benefit. [42889/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The earnings limits for deserted wives benefit were set in 1992. From 1992 entitlement to benefit at full rate was subject to an earnings limit of £10,000 (approx €12,000) and reduced rates were payable up to an earnings limit £14,000 (approx €17,800) after which there was no entitlement. When the one parent family payment was

introduced in 1997, the deserted wives benefit scheme was discontinued for new claims from January that year. Existing recipients could, however, retain their payment subject to continuing to fulfil the qualifying conditions.

From May 2007, under provisions made in the Budget, a new single earnings limit of €20,000 gross earnings will be introduced for recipients of deserted wives benefit. Once claimants' earnings go over this limit, they will be entitled to a new half-rate, transitional payment for 6 months to ease the impact of losing entitlement to the payment. This revised upper limit and new transitional payment bring the payment more into line with the one parent family payment. Over 2,300 deserted wives benefit claimants will benefit from these revisions to the scheme. The estimated cost of this increase in the earnings limit is €0.87million in 2007 and €1.3million for a full year. To remove the earnings limit would cost in the region of €3m to €6m per annum depending on assumptions.

Child Poverty.

388. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of children estimated to be living in poverty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42934/06]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr. Brennan): The results of the 2005 EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), which were recently published by the CSO, indicate that about 10% of children under 14 years of age experience consistent poverty. This figure has to be seen against the backdrop of the substantial progress on remaining child poverty delivered by a range of measures across a number of Departments and agencies over recent years which has resulted in more than 250,000 people being lifted out of consistent poverty, including an estimated 100,000 children.

However, an unacceptable number of children remain in consistent poverty and the Government remains focussed on further substantially reducing child poverty. The level of commitment in this area was particularly prominent in last week's Budget in which I announced a range of targeted measures and supports, costing over €240 million, specifically to benefit children in low income families and families on welfare.

I have long held the view that implementing a targeted second tier of payment for children in low income and welfare families is the most effective method of tackling child poverty. The significantly improved and targeted measures I announced last week represent a substantial move in that direction and that is why I took the decision to deliberately focus the increased child supports in the areas where we know child poverty exists. The measures in Budget 2007 include, for the first time in over a decade, reform of the Qualified Child Allowance (formerly Child

Dependant Allowance), which is seen as an important welfare weapon in tackling child poverty levels. The three existing rates of QCA have been combined into a new single high rate of €22 per week that will benefit over 340,000 children of families on welfare. I am also increasing the rate of Child Benefit by €10- bringing new rates to €160 and €195 per month. The Child Benefit increases will apply to all children, benefiting over 560,000 families in respect of approximately 1.1 million children.

The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance provides additional income support for the poorest families at a particularly difficult time of the year. With this in mind, I am increasing the allowance by €60 for children aged 2 to 11, and by €95 for children aged 12 to 22, bringing the rates of payment to €180 and €285 respectively. I have also made provision for additional funding of €3 million to extend the School Meals Programme. Other budgetary measures, such as the €20 per week increase in the lowest social welfare rate to €185.80 and increases in the earnings thresholds for One Parent Family Payment and Family Income Supplement, will also indirectly benefit children living in low income households.

The package of measures for children and families in Budget 2006 is in addition to recent initiatives such as the €1,000 a year early childcare supplement for all children under 6 years and the creation of additional childcare places. An example of how these Budget measures will significantly benefit low income and welfare families is the case of a Lone Parent, which is an area where child poverty is particularly prevalent, who is earning €20,000 a year and who has one child aged 5. The additional income from social welfare entitlements, supports and allowances will further increase this families income in 2007 by €9,646, with the increases announced in the Budget accounting for €3,754 of that.

In addition, preparation of a new National Action Plan for Inclusion is currently being coordinated by the Office for Social Inclusion in my Department for launch early in the new year. Building on the social inclusion provisions in the partnership agreement, Towards 2016, the Plan will adopt a lifecycle approach by assessing the risks which individuals face at each stage of the life cycle and the supports they need to effectively meet these risks. The groups focused on using this approach are Children, People of Working Age, Older People and People with Disabilities. This strategic framework is also being designed to create more coherent and integrated structures that will greatly assist in achieving more effective implementation of the plan. It is also expected to facilitate better and more effective reporting and monitoring across the spectrum of government activity in the area of social inclusion.

Rail Network.

389. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport if, in context of the positive submission made to the Department of Transport and to his Department, in relation to the reopening of the Mullingar to Athlone railway line, he will take steps to ensure that funding is provided for same and in particular the said plan to reopen this important infrastructural link, which is extremely important in the context of the National Spatial Strategy and the western region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42683/06]

390. **Mr. Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport if his Department has carried out an evaluation of proposals submitted by a group (details supplied) who presented a comprehensive and positive submission to his Department seeking that approval be given to the reopening of the Mullingar to Athlone railway line; if in this context, a decision will be immediately made thereon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42692/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 389 and 390 together.

I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 41572 of 5 December 2006 regarding this matter. The position remains the same as I outlined in that reply.

Road Traffic Offences.

391. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the persons against whom penalty point offences committed by a driver with a foreign driver's licence driving a commercial vehicle owned by their employer are recorded, the number so recorded in each of the years since the commencement of the penalty points regime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42269/06]

392. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the action he is taking to address the anomalous position of drivers with foreign driver's licences *vis-à-vis* the application of penalty points and other road traffic penalties; if his attention has been drawn to the competitive disadvantage this places on Irish commercial drivers; the action he will take to regulate this sector to address this problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42271/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 391 and 392 together.

Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006) the Road Safety Authority has responsibility for ensuring that penalty points are endorsed on a licence record. Data in relation to penalty points is held on the National Driver File, which is administered by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The data does not include information relating to the vehicle or the ownership of the vehicle.

Under EU legislation any driver with an EU licence is entitled to drive the categories of vehicle in respect of which that licence is granted throughout the EU without restriction. Drivers with non EU driving licences are entitled, under the International Circulation Order made under the 1949 Geneva Convention, to drive for a period of up to 12 months after which they are required to obtain an Irish licence if they have taken up residence. All drivers are subject to road traffic law and it is a matter for An Garda Síochána to enforce the law. As foreign licence holders have no Irish driving licence penalty points are recorded against that person on a separate record in the National Driver File.

Public Procurement Contracts.

393. **Mr. J. Breen** asked the Minister for Transport the criteria used to assess applications for the catering contract at Shannon Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42325/06]

394. **Mr. J. Breen** asked the Minister for Transport if the catering contract has been awarded, for Shannon Airport, to a company which only registered as a company on 4 December 2006, despite the fact that tenders were invited long before this time; if the company has been started by three existing management staff at Shannon Airport; if that company has assets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42326/06]

395. **Mr. J. Breen** asked the Minister for Transport the number of applications received under the tendering process for catering facilities at Shannon Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42327/06]

396. **Mr. J. Breen** asked the Minister for Transport if €2.5 million or any State funding has been provided to help the start up expenses of the successful applicant for the catering contract at Shannon Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42328/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 393 to 396, inclusive, together.

The management and operation of Shannon Airport is a day to day matter for the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) and accordingly I have no function in relation to the issues raised by the Deputy. I should also point out that the Exchequer provides no financial support to any of the State Airports.

Company Licensing.

397. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Transport if he will clarify the situation in relation

to a person (details supplied) who is unable to obtain trade plates as they do not pay rates on business premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42330/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The trade licence/plate system for motor dealers is a matter for the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Public Transport.

398. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport the amount spent to date on integrated ticketing; the parties that are subject to integrated ticketing; the measures he proposes to take to include private sector providers who have been granted licences under the 1932 arrangements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42351/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): Some €10.5 million has been paid out by the Exchequer on Integrated Ticketing since the commencement of the project. Another sum for approximately €0.5 million has been approved for payment and is currently in the process of being paid. The Integrated Ticketing Project Board, which is responsible for integrated ticketing, is chaired by Mr. David O'Callaghan, a former Secretary General at the Department of Defence. The Board also comprises the Chief Executives of the Railway Procurement Agency (RPA), Dublin Bus, Irish Rail, Bus Éireann and a representative of licensed private bus operators nominated by the Coach Transport and Tourism Council. An Assistant Secretary from my Department is also on the Board and a senior representative of the Department of Social and Family Affairs also attends as required.

Rail Services.

399. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport the action he has taken to deal with the excessive overcrowding at peak times on the northern Drogheda-Connolly rail line; the service and safety standards set down by his Department in relation to overcrowding on rail carriages; the measures he has taken to ensure that Iarnród Éireann complies with these; and the amount of funding provided to Iarnród Éireann in the Estimates 2007 to alleviate this problem. [42438/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The day to day operation of railway services is a matter for Iarnród Éireann. I am informed by Iarnród Éireann however that train services on the Drogheda-Connolly line have been considerably expanded in recent years in response to growing passenger demand. There are now a total of 59 daily services on the route compared to 42 in 2000. Overall capacity has also been significantly increased with the introduction of 136 diesel mul-

tiple units between 2003 and 2005 which has almost doubled carrying capacity on the route.

During 2007 the introduction of new Intercity railcars (for which funding has been included in the 2007 Estimates) on the Sligo line will enable further commuter railcars to be transferred to operate out of Drogheda to add further capacity to commuter services. I am informed by Iarnród Éireann that services at peak times on the Drogheda-Connolly line can cause some discomfort and inconvenience to passengers but does not give rise to safety concerns. Commuter railways throughout the world operate safely fully laden with standing passengers. There are no national or EU regulations in relation to the number of passengers that can be carried on an individual railway carriage. Irish Rail advises that it operates its rolling stock to approved design standards.

Road Safety.

400. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for Transport if he will introduce laws similar to those that pertain in the USA which requires motorists to stop when a school bus stops to off-load or pick up children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42702/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The Department of Education and Science, in conjunction with Bus Éireann, initiated a School Bus Flashing Lights pilot scheme in Ennis in January 2005 and I understand that it was proposed to then extend the pilot initiative to other areas to test out various options for the activation of flashing light units while a school transport vehicle stopped on a public road to pick up or set down school children. Consideration of the creation of a road traffic requirement of the nature suggested by the Deputy will be informed by the outcome and evaluation of these pilot measures.

Departmental Staff.

401. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Transport in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42734/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The table provides the information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of staff broken down by grade employed within the private office and constituency office in respect of the Minister of State. The salary costs are based on current salary scales. The annual cost of the Minister of State's office in terms of salary, overtime and

[Mr. Cullen.] expenses, over the past year (January 2006 to date) is approximately €476,522. This includes

travel and subsistence costs for staff and all other associated office costs.

Office	Grade/Job Title	Total staff	Status Permanent or Political	Salary scale/cost per annum
Private Office	Private Secretary	1	Permanent	€44,399-€56,361 plus allowance of €18,015 per annum
Private Office	Executive Officer	1	Permanent	€29,152-€46,253
Private Office	Clerical Officers	2	Permanent	€22,102-€35,838
Private Office	Staff Officer	1	Permanent	€33,321-€44,487
Constituency Office	Personal Assistant	1	Political appointee	€48,640
Constituency Office	Personal Secretary	1	Political appointee	€ 21,002-€40,520
Constituency Office	Clerical Officer	2	Permanent	€22,102-€35,838
Constituency Office	Clerical Officer	1	Permanent	€20,995-€34,050
Total		10		

402. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Transport the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42749/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The tables provide the information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of staff broken down by grade employed within my private office and constituency office. The salary costs are based on current salary scales. The annual cost in terms of salary, overtime and expenses, over the past year (January 2006 to date) is approximately €846,335. This includes travel and subsistence costs for staff and all other associated office costs.

Office	Grade/Job Title	Total staff	Status Permanent or Political	Salary scale/cost per annum
Private Office	Private Secretary	1	Permanent	€44,399-€56,361 plus allowance of €19,727 per annum
Private Office	Special Adviser	1	Political appointee	€153,190
Private Office	Press Adviser	1	Political	€66,000
Private Office	Executive Officer	1	Permanent	€29,152-€46,253
Private Office	Clerical Officers	6	Permanent	€22,102-€35,838
		10		

Office	Grade/Job Title	Total staff	Status Permanent or Political	Salary scale/cost per annum
Constituency	Personal Assistant	1	Political appointee	€42,180-€53,541
Constituency	Personal Secretary	1	Political appointee	€21,002-€40,520
Constituency	Senior Special Assistant	1	Political appointee	€42,180-€53,541
Constituency	Executive Officer	1	Permanent	€29,152-€46,253
Constituency	Clerical Officer	1	Permanent	€22,102-€35,838
		5		

Pension Provisions.

403. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the pension scheme for Aer Rianta employees and pensioners is not adequately

funded; his plans to ensure that adequate financial provision is made for Aer Rianta pensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42944/06]

Minister for Transport (Mr. Cullen): The pension scheme in question, the Irish Airlines

(General Employees) Superannuation Scheme, is a multi-employer scheme in which the Dublin Airport Authority, Aer Lingus and SR Technics participate. Pension entitlements under the scheme are primarily matters for the Trustees, the members of the scheme and the companies participating in the scheme.

Irish Language.

404. **Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the assistance he, his Department or other Departments have given or will give to aid the European Parliament's recruitment of a full complement of translators, 60 in number, to facilitate the full implementation of the promised official working status of the Irish language within the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42244/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Both my Department and Foras na Gaeilge have provided practical assistance to the EU Institutions in their arrangement to recruit Irish language staff in the context of the language having official and working language status as from 1 January 2007 and will continue to do so as required. I am informed that the figure of 60 translators mentioned in the Deputy's Question is not accurate.

Departmental Funding.

405. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding the assessment and approval for a club (details supplied) in County Mayo seeking funds from the dormant account fund; when he expects that allocations will be made towards this club; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42665/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): Among the priority measures approved by Government for assistance from dormant accounts in 2006 is one providing small-scale equipment grants for youth groups. Applications received for this funding measure, including one received from the organisation in question, are currently being processed and assessed by the relevant Vocational Education Committees under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science. It is anticipated that recommendations will be submitted to Government for decision early next year, in accordance with the legislation.

406. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if discussions have been held with Dublin City Council regarding the allocation of volunteering funding; if the necessary criteria have been met for the allocation of volunteering funding; if not,

the criteria that remain to be met; if funds have been allocated to Dublin City Council for volunteering; and if not, when a decision can be expected on a volunteering funding allocation to Dublin City Council. [42671/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): In the context of the broad programme of measures in support of volunteering which I announced last year, cohesion funding was made available during 2005 and 2006 to promote volunteering at a local level. In common with other local authority areas, Dublin City Development Board co-ordinated and facilitated the process at local level. Eleven projects to promote volunteering for Dublin City, worth €211,488, have been approved for funding. A further 3 projects will be considered in the context of resources available for volunteering in 2007.

407. **Mr. N. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the position regarding an application for grant aid under the voluntary and community support scheme for the elderly for a group (details supplied) in County Cork. [42677/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): An application has been received by my Department from the group in question, under the 2006 Scheme of Community Support for Older People. The application is currently being assessed and I expect that the group will be notified of the outcome shortly.

Departmental Staff.

408. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42723/06]

409. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42738/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): I propose to take Questions Nos. 408 and 409 together.

[Éamon Ó Cuív.]

The following is a breakdown of the staff and costs for 2006, currently serving in the Minister's and Minister of States' offices:

Minister's Private Office

Grade	Numbers	Civil Servant	Non-Civil Servant
Media Adviser	1		Yes
Special Adviser	1		Yes
Personal Secretary	1		Yes
Private Secretary	1	Yes	
Clerical Officer	4	Yes	
Total	8		

The annual cost for this Office in terms of salary and overtime is €431,125. The annual cost relating to expenses is €30,574.

Minister's Constituency Office

Grade	Numbers	Civil Servant	Non-Civil Servant
Personal Assistant	1		Yes
Executive Officer	1	Yes	
Clerical Officer	2	Yes	
Total	4		

The annual cost for this Office in terms of salary and overtime is €120,012. The annual cost relating to expenses is Nil.

Minister of State's Private Office

Grade	Numbers	Civil Servant	Non-Civil Servant
Private Secretary	1	Yes	
Clerical Officer	2	Yes	
Total	3		

The annual cost for this Office in terms of salary and overtime is €118,888. The annual cost relating to expenses is Nil.

Departmental Funding.

410. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the level of funding in 2006 for the community development programme; if he will give a breakdown of the level of allocations to CAP projects in the Dublin area over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42804/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): The Community Development Programme was established in 1990 in recognition of the role of community development in tackling the causes and effects of poverty and disadvantage. The Programme is designed to reduce social exclusion by targeting support at disadvantaged and socially excluded communities in order to improve their capacity to benefit from social and economic development. My Department assumed responsibility for the Programme in June 2002.

Projects within the Community Development Programme are funded on a contract basis, and are located in recognised disadvantaged urban and rural areas nationwide. Some €24 million has been allocated to the Programme in 2006. Sixty-nine community development projects are based in the Dublin area in 2006, of a total of 182 projects nationwide. Details of funding to these projects in the past five years can be found in the appendix.

Appendix

Community Development Project	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002 (from 25 June)
	€	€	€	€	€
An Cosán/Shanty	126,800.00	175,350.00	78,740.00	76,020.00	56,550.00
An Síol CDP	124,700.00	112,400.00	97,820.00	94,565.00	77,650.00
Aontas	N/A	N/A	N/A	71,500.00	70,700.00
Ballybrack CDP	50,769.00	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ballyfermot Travellers Action Project	60,000.00	64,927.11	62,000.00	71,789.00	N/A
Ballymun Men's	113,329.98	80,437.00	62,000.00	77,533.00	5,500.00
Bawnogue Women's	58,100.00	45,952.00	39,380.00	39,270.00	18,838.00
Blakestown	128,500.00	118,750.00	103,000.00	100,000.00	77,550.00
Blanchardstown Travellers	96,800.00	88,829.00	83,100.00	83,900.00	28,750.00
Bluebell CDP	100,681.89	98,431.52	60,800.00	40,400.00	0.00

Community Development Project	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002 (from 25 June)
	€	€	€	€	€
Bosnian	110,600.00	103,800.00	97,770.00	111,520.00	42,226.00
Cabra CDP	68,875.00	51,500.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
CAFTA CDP	129,909.00	123,100.00	110,920.00	117,100.00	122,168.00
CAP Ballymun CDP	117,900.00	117,900.00	104,400.00	107,400.00	78,300.00
Cherry Orchard Equine Centre	128,195.00	121,200.00	107,500.00	35,300.00	0.00
Clondalkin Travellers CDP	111,600.00	102,699.00	99,630.00	107,148.00	45,700.00
Clondalkin Womens' Network	136,013.00	138,400.00	132,400.00	129,400.00	67,900.00
Coiste na nIarchimí	136,000.00	111,000.00	129,400.00	136,010.00	93,000.00
Community After Schools Project	154,400.00	145,000.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
Community Technical Aid	134,300.00	126,700.00	126,700.00	126,700.00	63,350.00
Corduff	115,500.00	113,000.00	90,300.00	86,800.00	39,000.00
Crumlin	49,121.85	7,519.85	N/A	N/A	N/A
Darndale/Belcamp CDP	118,797.00	64,690.00	110,500.00	126,550.00	71,850.00
Dolcáin	108,158.00	100,486.00	94,860.00	82,162.30	46,300.00
Dolphin House	78,900.00	82,225.00	88,100.00	0.00	0.00
Doras Buí (PARC CDP)	130,665.00	99,000.00	104,000.00	104,700.00	82,000.00
Drimnagh	76,000.00	28,277.50	N/A	N/A	N/A
Edenmore Raheny CDP	62,279.00	19,173.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
Finglas South CDP	114,200.00	110,900.00	88,400.00	77,842.00	44,350.00
Holly House — Southside Partnership	49,500.00	22,077.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
ICRG CDP	132,545.00	120,400.00	118,000.00	120,300.00	93,819.00
Inchicore CDP	72,000.00	67,399.60	60,800.00	37,300.00	0.00
Irish National Widows Ass.	N/A	N/A	N/A	12,000.00	12,000.00
Irish Senior Citizen's Parliament	78,000.00	72,000.00	69,170.00	63,540.00	33,500.00
Jobstown CDP	117,800.00	102,300.00	99,250.00	96,050.00	61,350.00
Kilbarrack CDP	124,687.00	129,800.00	92,560.00	89,000.00	64,025.00
Kilmore West CDP	107,792.75	115,400.00	88,560.00	87,300.00	40,850.00
Link-Cherry Orchard CDP	139,505.44	109,438.00	100,250.00	133,362.00	48,217.00
Lone Parents Network Tallaght	N/A	5,000.00	20,800.00	20,000.00	10,000.00
Lourdes Youth & Community	124,026.00	115,631.16	102,830.00	102,990.00	50,350.00
MACRO CDP	106,200.00	92,100.00	87,930.00	119,380.57	76,300.00
Markiewicz CDP	71,518.77	68,000.00	80,670.00	68,500.00	39,000.00
Matt Talbot CDP	124,500.00	113,400.00	104,000.00	100,000.00	48,550.00
Mountwood Fitzgerald CDP	120,000.00	121,300.00	108,000.00	150,791.00	54,500.00
Mulhuddart CDP (Greater Blanchardstown)	125,600.00	120,300.00	114,500.00	146,800.00	104,150.00
Nascadh CDP	75,500.00	48,500.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
North Clondalkin CDP	125,300.00	120,500.00	111,840.00	109,400.00	54,700.00
North Wall Women's Centre	107,100.00	101,000.00	92,900.00	71,848.56	44,950.00
Northside Travellers CDP	94,700.00	93,800.00	89,590.00	63,092.45	18,768.00
Northwest Inner City Women's Network	38,328.83	0.00	79,580.00	77,450.00	57,350.00
Partners	175,800.00	172,300.00	165,670.00	161,500.00	78,492.00
PASS	107,040.00	94,540.40	83,200.00	83,000.00	34,953.00
Peace Project	41,573.00	33,894.00	25,850.00	29,183.00	10,000.00
Priorswood CDP	109,600.00	100,775.00	92,560.00	126,400.00	92,800.00
Project West CDP	123,300.00	105,500.00	94,030.00	96,433.00	46,370.00
Quarryvale CDP	114,300.00	114,810.00	101,780.00	111,751.00	47,000.00
Rialto	124,592.54	113,240.98	101,800.00	97,900.00	46,700.00
Ringsend Action Project CDP	138,600.00	126,000.00	113,000.00	111,750.00	57,900.00
Robert Emmet CDP	118,085.00	87,262.60	62,000.00	2,500.00	0.00
Ronanstown Womens CDP	124,480.00	121,040.00	104,000.00	138,505.00	90,194.00
Rowlagh	95,500.00	87,100.00	82,780.00	80,098.98	41,000.00

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Community Development Project	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002 (from 25 June)
	€	€	€	€	€
Shanganagh/Rathsalagh CDP	47,165.00	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
SICCD A	91,780.57	107,200.00	103,000.00	100,400.00	60,000.00
Southside Travellers Action Grp	98,040.00	84,177.00	73,100.00	28,464.03	25,350.00
Southside Women's Network	85,421.00	77,899.00	78,420.00	78,400.00	20,730.00
SPLTU Tallaght CDP	103,400.00	105,900.00	92,280.00	131,903.00	42,600.00
St. Margaret's Traveller Centre	94,500.00	89,380.00	75,430.00	91,361.00	20,350.00
St. Michael's	88,255.00	127,300.00	107,400.00	121,486.00	118,900.00
Tallaght Lone Parents CDP	N/A	86,377.00	92,750.00	89,986.71	45,150.00
Tallaght Travellers CDP	111,000.00	102,800.00	98,800.00	98,554.00	45,000.00
Vista	98,330.77	90,500.00	87,000.00	85,185.00	115,780.00
West Tallaght CDP	145,603.00	115,100.00	111,900.00	109,400.00	59,700.00
Women Together, Tallaght	97,700.00	76,882.00	84,730.00	83,215.00	40,556.00

411. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the level of funding that has been allocated to date for the implementation of the National Drug Strategy 2001 to 2008; if he will give a breakdown of the spend of such funds for supply education, prevention, treatment and research initiatives. [42805/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Mr. N. Ahern): As the Deputy is aware, my Department has overall responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008. The Strategy contains 108 individual actions, under the five pillars of supply reduction,

prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and research. The actions outlined in the National Drugs Strategy are being progressed with the significant input of other Government Departments and Agencies, e.g. Health Services Executive, the Departments of Health and Children, Education and Science, Justice, Equality and Law Reform as well as An Garda Síochána, the Irish Prison Service, the Customs Service and FÁS. All of these bodies are playing important roles in the implementation of the overall Strategy and the structures in place facilitate inter-agency co-operation in that regard.

Towards the end of 2005 I requested that officials of my Department provide an overview of all expenditure directly attributed to drug work across the various agencies. The figure involved in 2005 was in the region of €200m as follows:

Estimate of 2005 Allocations Directly Attributable to Drugs Programmes for Government Departments/Agencies

Department/Agency	Allocation 2005
	€million
Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs	34.00
Department of Health and Children	2.74
Health Service Executive	92.75
FÁS	14.50
Department of Education and Science	3.78
Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government	0.55
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform	8.67
Irish Prison Service	5.00
An Garda Síochána	23.70
Revenue's Customs Service	9.24
Total:	194.93

The figures, which should be taken as indicative, relate only to services that are directly attributable to the issue of illicit drugs. Figures for 2006 will be collated at the end of the year and this process will be continued on an annual basis. The

estimate does not take account of various mainstream services that help to tackle the issue, as it is not possible to disentangle the element of such funding that is utilised by problem drug users from that aimed at the wider community.

Meanwhile the allocations made from Vote of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs towards the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy since the Department was established are as follows:

Year	Allocation	Expenditure
	€	€
2002	14,009,000	13,467,000
2003	32,036,000	36,463,000
2004 *	26,756,000*	27,510,000
2005	31,500,000**	33,962,000
2006	43,006,000	38,798,152 (to 11/12/06)
Total 2002-2006	147,307,000	

* Decrease due to transfer of €6.4m for mainstreamed projects to the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

** Original Allocation before Supplementary Estimate.

412. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the criteria for harbours and piers in west Cork to be considered for funding by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42806/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): The Joint Coastal Development Measure was introduced under the CLÁR Programme in July 2005. The measure is jointly funded by my Department and the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources (D/CMNR) and supports minor repair and safety works on small piers, slipways and coastal erosion works in CLÁR areas, including Gaeltacht areas and islands. Selection of projects for funding is a matter for the D/CMNR.

In 2005, Schull Pier was identified by the D/CMNR as requiring urgent funding and, subsequently, a CLÁR grant of €24,375 was allocated towards the overall cost of the project of €65,000. Alternatively, funding can be sought from the Islands Section, within my Department, which provides funding for ferry access piers situated on the islands and on the mainland serving the islands. Funding is also available under the annual Islands Small Works Programme for minor improvements to local fishing piers on the islands. The eligibility criteria used are that the island in question: must be permanently inhabited; must be cut off daily from the mainland by the tide; must not have a bridge connecting it to the mainland; and, must not be in private ownership.

Departmental Bodies.

413. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the brief, role and structure of Area Development Manage-

ment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42807/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Area Development Management Limited was established in 1999 by the Government and the European Commission to support the delivery of local development initiatives. Following a review of the company in 2003 its name was changed to Pobal in addition to other changes relating to the appointment of the Chairman and Board members, which are now appointed by Government. The company's Strategic Plan 2006-2008 and its Customer Charter are available on www.pobal.ie.

Pobal currently delivers or manages 17 programmes for Government Departments. Each Department has separate arrangements with the company governing the operation of the programme. Pobal has established offices in Clifden, Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Monaghan and Sligo.

Offshore Islands.

414. **Mr. O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the main schemes and programmes in his Department being provided to the offshore islands of County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42884/06]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Éamon Ó Cuív): Since 1997, my Department and its predecessor, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, have provided in the region of €6.5m for essential capital works on the islands off the County Cork coast. These works included pier and road improvements, water supply, waste management, car parking facilities, village renewal and coastal protection. Assistance is also available for the provision of community and recreational facilities and activities on the islands. It is intended to continue with this programme of investment in the islands over the coming years.

My Department currently subsidises six ferry services in Co. Cork serving Oileán Chléire, Sherkin, Bere, Whiddy, Heir and Long Islands at a total cost of over €308,000 per annum. In addition, earlier this year, I announced the establishment of a special Enterprise Scheme for non-Gaeltacht islands. The purpose of this scheme is to stimulate the establishment and development of a varied range of enterprise activities in order to promote the long-term sustainable development of the islands. Údarás na Gaeltachta supports enterprise development on the Gaeltacht islands.

I also launched a plan this year aimed at marketing the islands internationally as a niche product. The total cost of this initiative, which is being funded jointly by my Department and Fáilte

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Ireland, is €343,000 over a three year period. The Deputy can be assured that efforts will continue, over the coming years, to seek ways of achieving my Department's goal of supporting island communities with a view to ensuring the future of viable vibrant island populations.

Coillte Teoranta.

415. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the process involved in relation to Coillte lands being made available for recreational ground for a local community in Donegal (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42331/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): Coillte Teoranta was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters are the responsibility of the company. As the area in question is the property of Coillte, any proposals for use of the land by the local community should be addressed to the local management of the company.

Grant Payments.

416. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the reason for the delay in processing the single farm payment for persons (details supplied) in County Wexford; when payment will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42256/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The position is that an application for the Transfer of Entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme from the first person named to the joint names of the persons named was submitted on the 8th of November 2006. The application was accepted even though the closing date for receipt of completed applications to transfer entitlements was 16 May 2006. This application has now been fully processed and payment will issue shortly.

417. **Mr. Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the reason for the delay in processing the single farm payment for persons (details supplied) in County Wexford; when payment will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42279/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The position is that an application for the Transfer of Entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme from the first person named to the joint names of the persons named was submitted on the 15th of November 2006. The application was accepted even though the closing date

for receipt of completed applications to transfer entitlements was 16 May 2006.

During processing of the Transfer application, it was necessary for an official of my Department to make direct contact with the persons named to seek clarification on certain matters relating to the application. The persons named have agreed to provide further documentation regarding the application. Upon receipt of this documentation, my Department will process the application and will correspond directly with the persons named.

Farm Retirement Scheme.

418. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when she will revert to the EU Parliament Committee on Petitions in relation to problems with the early retirement scheme; and when affected farmers will be informed of her Department's strategy going forward in this area. [42283/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): A group representing retired farmers lodged a petition with the European Parliament Committee on Petitions in May 2003, alleging that Ireland had not implemented correctly the Council Regulations governing the 1994 and 2000 Schemes of Early Retirement from Farming. The Committee requested information from the European Commission. In reply, the Commission made it clear that in its considered opinion there was no question of any infringement having been committed by Ireland in the implementation of the Schemes. The Chairman of the European Parliament Committee on Petitions raised these issues with me again in a letter dated 5 September 2006, while acknowledging the view that the Commission had taken.

A reply to the Chairman of the Petitions Committee is being prepared. Most of the issues raised in his letter were also dealt with in the Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture and Food. Certain of the Joint Committee's recommendations are precluded by the EU Regulations under which the current Scheme and its predecessor are operated. I saw merit in other aspects of the Committee's report; and some recommendations have been either fully or partially implemented and others will be considered in the context of the proposal for a new Early Retirement Scheme, which has been included in the draft Development Plan for the period 2007-2013. Following clarification from the European Commission, I have also recently announced increases in the rate of pension under both Schemes. These increases, which are financed entirely from the National Exchequer, will cost some €33 million extra over the remaining period of the two Schemes, and some 5,000 retired farmers will benefit from them.

Direct Payment Schemes.

419. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if she will re-examine the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny in view of the hardship and exceptional circumstances of their case; and if she will expedite a positive response. [42307/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): An application for acceptance of a late application under the 2005 Single Payment Scheme on the grounds of *force majeure*/exceptional circumstances was received from the person named on 4 August 2006. Following consideration of this appeal, it was decided that the circumstances as outlined by the person named could not be accepted as constituting *force majeure*. However, following further review of the circumstances of the case, it has been decided that the circumstances as outlined may be deemed to constitute acceptable *force majeure*/exceptional circumstances. An official of my Department will shortly be in direct contact with the person named in this regard.

420. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if there are further developments in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary in relation to their entitlements under the single farm payment scheme national reserve. [42337/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): As indicated in my earlier reply to the Deputy the person named submitted an application for an allocation of entitlements from the 2005 Single Payment Scheme National Reserve under Category C. Category C caters for farmers who sold their milk quota into the Milk Quota Restructuring Scheme and converted their enterprise to a farming sector for which a direct payment under Livestock Premia and/or Arable Aid Schemes would have been payable during the reference period 2000 to 2002.

The person named sold his milk quota into a re-structuring scheme in April 2002 but he did not convert to a farming sector for which a direct payment under the Livestock and/or Arable Aid Schemes would have been payable in respect of the years 2000 to 2002 and therefore did not satisfy the criteria for an allocation of entitlements under Category C.

The person named submitted an appeal against this decision and provided additional documentation in support of his appeal. In all such cases, the procedure is that all contentions put forward in support of an appeal are first of all reviewed within my Department to see whether there is sufficient evidence to warrant any change to the original decision. In this case the documentation was examined by my Department but it did not provide grounds for a change to the original decision. The case was then forwarded to

the Independent Single Payments Appeals Committee who have completed their review and disallowed the Appeal. A letter outlining the decision of the Committee has issued to the person named.

421. **Mr. Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if there is a result from payment appeals committee in respect of allocation from the single payment's scheme national reserve for a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [42353/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): As indicated in my earlier reply to the Deputy the person named submitted an application for an allocation of entitlements from the 2005 Single Payment Scheme National Reserve under Category B. Category B caters for farmers who, between 1 January 2000 and 19 October 2003, made an investment in production capacity in a farming sector for which a direct payment under Livestock Premia and/or Arable Aid schemes would have been payable during the reference period 2000-2002. Investments can include purchase or long term lease of land, purchase of suckler and/or ewe quota or other investments.

The person named was not considered eligible under the National Reserve as the investments did not commence prior to 19 October, 2003 and a letter setting out my Department's decision has issued to the person named. Subsequently the person named submitted an appeal against this decision. In all such cases, the procedure is that all contentions put forward in support of an appeal, if any, are first of all reviewed within my Department to see whether there is sufficient evidence to warrant any change to the original decision. In this case the documentation was examined by my Department but it did not provide grounds for a change to the original decision. This case was then forwarded to the Independent Single Payments Appeals Committee. On completion of their review the Independent Single Payment Appeals Committee will correspond directly with the person named.

Bovine Diseases.

422. **Mr. Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the position in relation to farmers with joint herd numbers with their spouses, parents, siblings and so on who received correspondence from her Department requesting them to appoint one contact name as keeper of the herd in case of problems in order that they would have one contact name; the location this directive came from; the person who authorised to contact all joint herd numbers with this request; what will happen when they sell to the mart, factory, shipping and so on and not her Department; if the cheques are made out to the name on the card will the other herd-owner be able to cash or lodge this cheque to their own account even though the

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cheque is not made out to them; if this will not be possible the way she will solve this problem for farmers who are joint herd owners; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42392/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): A herd number is an administrative arrangement in place since the early 1950s and designed primarily for the purposes of disease control under the disease eradication schemes. The current legislative framework involves the allocation of a number to a herd as provided for under S.I. No. 276 of 1999 (European communities (Identification and registration of bovine animals) Regulations, 1999). The traditional term “herd-owner”, which required the nomination of one person in respect of the herd in the 1989 TB Order, has been substituted by the term “keeper” which is defined in Regulation (EC) No. 1760/2000 as any natural or legal person responsible for animals, whether on a permanent or on a temporary basis, including during transportation or at a market. In effect, the “keeper” is the person who is to be the initial point of contact in regard to animal inspections, testing, identification, records etc. to sign movement documents passports of animal(s) and to be deemed legally responsible for the day to day care and welfare of the animals. The keeper also has responsibility to notify the database of animal births, deaths and movements, to keep the herd register and to sign certain documents such as the animal passport when the keeper takes possession of an animal.

My Department, as a matter of policy, when issuing a herd number registers one individual person as the “keeper” of the animals. The designation of more than one person as “keeper” would lead to general confusion, possible denial of responsibility, duplication of communication to all named parties, difficulties in supply of identification tags and documents and difficulties in prosecutions, all of which could delay immediate action in relation to the prevention of the spread of animal disease and the protection of animal welfare.

With regard to correspondence received by the person concerned from my Department, the position is that in a recent effort to align Department computer systems, to regularise records and to bring the terminology more into line with the EU regulations, in cases where multiple persons had been recorded and no single person was nominated as keeper, my Department issued a request to farmers to nominate one person as keeper for the herd.

The registration of a person as keeper does not infer ownership of the lands or animals in the herd. When multiple persons, a company, or an institution wish to register an interest in the herd number, they are registered as “herd-owners”. There is no legal obligation on each and every

person who may have an interest in the herd number to so register but those who do are asked to nominate the keeper. Indeed those persons on the Department’s records registered as “herd-owners”. may or may not be the legal or beneficial owners of the animals tested under the particular herd number as would for instance be the case where animals are boarded in a herd on a fee/head/day basis. Ownership is a civil matter and it is not within the competence or remit of the Department to keep records of or determine legal ownership or beneficial interest in individual animals.

With regard to the position of persons who have a beneficial interest in the herd but who are not registered as keepers, such persons may register their interest in the herd as “herd-owners”. through Form ER1.1 and, accordingly, qualify for payment under the various schemes implemented by my Department. In this regard, I should emphasise that the “keeper” role is classified as a non-financial role and payments are only made to those who have registered as “herd-owners”.

With regard to the issue of payment by marts, factories etc., since inclusion of a name on a cattle identity card does not denote ownership of an animal, the question of payment by the mart or factory is a civil/commercial matter between the owners of animals and the factory and it is advisable that with regard to the selling of animals to third parties, joint owners of animals have a formal arrangement in place with marts, factories etc. regarding the payment for these animals.

In view of the fact that this policy has been in place for many years, I have asked my Department to have it reviewed.

Grant Payments.

423. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Offaly under the single farm payment scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42403/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): An application for the Transfer of Entitlements to the person named under the Single Payment Scheme was submitted on 26 October 2006. The application was accepted even though the closing date for receipt of completed applications to transfer entitlements was 16 May 2006.

The application was examined and further documentation was required. An official from my Department contacted the person named on the 16th of November and requested the specific documentation. The requested documentation was received on 24 November.

The application was fully processed and an official from my Department contacted the person named on 5 December and informed him that payment in respect of 106.75 entitlements transferred by way of inheritance will issue shortly.

Common Agricultural Policy.

424. **Dr. Upton** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if she will provide this Deputy with copies of Ireland's reports to the EU on the administration of the meeting standards part of the 2003 Common Agricultural Policy reform which helps small producers conform with EU standards and to adapt to the introduction of higher standards concerning the environment, public health, animal health and animal welfare; the dates on which these reports were submitted to the EU; the dates the EU's reaction to these reports was received; and the details of that reaction. [42494/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): As indicated in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 435 on 5 December, 2006, Member States are obliged to set up the "Farm Advisory System" by 1 January 2007. Farmers may participate on a voluntary basis and Member States must give priority to farmers who receive more than €15,000 in direct payments (Single Payment) each year.

This matter was discussed at a Commission workshop in Ispra Italy in September last. Prior to that meeting each Member State was requested to complete a standard questionnaire on the proposed operation of the farm advisory system. I will arrange to have a copy of the completed questionnaire forwarded to the Deputy.

425. **Mr. N. O'Keefe** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food when payment of the EU single farm payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Cork who has not yet received payment under this scheme for 2006. [42676/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): An application under the 2006 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 15 May 2006. Processing of this application is now complete and payment is expected to issue to the person named within the coming week.

Animal Diseases.

426. **Mr. Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 247 and 248 of 23 November 2006, the reason her Department did not issue a statutory notice under Section 25 of the Diseases of Animals Act 1966; if this section is still utilised by her Department; the number of times it has been used in the past 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42716/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The person mentioned failed to have conducted the tests required to maintain the

health status of his herd and refused to comply with notices issued by my Department to have his herd tested for Bovine Tuberculosis and Bovine Brucellosis. The herd belonging to this person was last tested for TB on 30 September 2004 and for Brucellosis on 27 September 2004.

Section 25 of the Diseases of Animals Act 1966 does not provide for a statutory notice to be issued. Rather it provides that an authorized person may enter a holding with a view to carry out such examinations, carry out tests, take samples etc as may be required by the Minister for Agriculture and Food. Further it requires any person owning or in charge of animals to carry out such instructions from an authorized person as may be necessary in connection with the furtherance of disease eradication. In the case in question, in view of the fact that primary responsibility for carrying out TB and Brucellosis tests rests with herd-owners, an authorized officer of the District Veterinary Office served formal statutory notices under the Bovine Tuberculosis (Attestation of the State and General Provisions) Order 1989 and the Brucellosis in Cattle (General Provisions) Order 1991 on the person concerned requiring the tests to be carried out by 15 December 2005. To date, the person has not complied with these notices.

Section 25 of the Disease of Animals Act is regularly used by my Department as the legal basis for Class B disease investigative purposes and also for tests under the TB and Brucellosis schemes conducted by veterinary inspectors employed by my Department and other authorized officers. It is furthermore the legal basis for persons to act for the purpose of eradication of a Class B disease and as such all persons authorized to act under the TB and Brucellosis Orders have been authorized under this Section. Details of the number of times it has been used in the past 12 months are not kept centrally.

Departmental Staff.

427. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food in respect of each Minister of State within her Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42720/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The following tables show the breakdown of staff in my two Minister of State's private and constituency office.

[Mary Coughlan.]

Minister of State Smith's Private and Constituency Office

Grade	Number	Salary Scale
Private Secretary	1	€42,180-€53,541 Higher Executive scale + €18,742 allowance
Personal Assistant (Non-Civil Servant)	1	€44,399-€56,361 Higher Executive Officer scale
Personal Secretary (Non-Civil Servant)	1	€21,002-€40,520 Secretarial Assistants salary + 10%
Executive Officer	1	€27,692-€48,078
Clerical Officers	4	€20,995-€36,616

The Personal Secretary and Personal Assistant are non-Civil Servants employed on a contract basis. Expenses since January 2006 total

€54,881.55. Overtime since January 2006 totals €19,504.77.

Minister of State Wallace's Private and Constituency Office

Grade	Number	Salary Scale
Private Secretary	1	€42,180-€53,541 Higher Executive scale + €18,742 allowance
Personal Assistant (Non-Civil Servant)	1	€42,180-€58,250 Higher Executive Officer
Personal Secretary (Non-Civil Servant)	1	€21,002-€40,520 Secretarial Assistants salary + 10%
Executive Officer	2	€27,692-€48,078
Clerical Officers	1	€20,995-€36,616
Temporary Clerical Officer	2	€20,995-€34,050

The Personal Secretary and two Personal Assistants are non-Civil Servants employed on a contract basis. Expenses since her appointment as Minister of State on 15 February 2006 total €35,699.94. Overtime since her appointment as Minister of State on 15 February 2006 totals €6,087.90.

428. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food the number of staff broken down by grade employed within her private office

and her constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42735/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The following table shows the breakdown of the numbers in my private and constituency office.

Grade	Number	Salary Scale
Special Adviser	1	€59,956-€86,671 Assistant Principal Officer scale + 10%
Press Adviser (Non-Civil Servant)	1	€78,066-€109,062 Principal Officer scale
Private Secretary	1	€42,180-€58,250 Higher Executive Officer scale + €18,742 allowance
Personal Assistant (Non-Civil Servant)	1	€42,180-€58,250 Higher Executive Officer scale
Personal Secretary (Non-Civil Servant)	1	€21,002-€40,520 Secretarial Assistants salary + 10%
Executive Officer	2	€27,692-€48,078
Clerical Officers	8.5	€20,995-€36,616
Temporary Clerical Officer (Non-Civil Servant)	1	€20,995-€34,050

The following four staff members are non-Civil Servants employed on a contract basis: Press Adviser, Personal Assistant, Personal Secretary and a Temporary Clerical Officer. Expenses relating to my office since January 2006 total €15,213.06. Overtime relating to my office since January 2006 total €44,849.90.

Grant Payments.

429. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if she will intervene on behalf of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo to ensure that their single payment application is processed and their entitlements granted; and if

she will make a statement on the matter. [42755/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): The position is that an application for the Transfer of Entitlements under the Single Payment Scheme to the person named was submitted on 15 May 2006.

This application has now been fully processed and payment in respect of 5.60 entitlements transferred by way of lease will issue shortly.

430. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture and Food if legal direction has been given in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; if payment will be made to the person in view of the hardship they are now experiencing; and if she will expedite a positive response. [42781/06]

Minister for Agriculture and Food (Mary Coughlan): An application under the 2006 Single Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 24 April 2006. Following initial processing, it was found that three of the land parcels claimed by the person named had also been declared by another applicant under the 2006 Single Payment Scheme. These, and other lands, were apparently the subject of legal proceedings between the person named and other parties.

My Department is currently examining the ruling of the Circuit Court in this matter and will correspond directly with the person named regarding the Single Payment implications of this judgment.

Academic Appointments.

431. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a position (details supplied) was advertised; if so, the location where the applications were placed; the number of applications that were received; when the interviews were held; the person who was selected for the position; the salary on offer for this job; if she has satisfied himself with the appointment procedure followed in this instance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42425/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): In accordance with the Universities Act, 1997, universities are responsible for the day to day management of their own affairs. Employment issues, therefore, are a matter for the Governing Authority and management of each individual institution.

Juvenile Offenders.

432. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of young people below the age of 18 currently in detention in the State; the number at each centre for young offenders; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42935/06]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Mr. B. Lenihan): I would like to inform the Deputy that there are a number of legislative, operational and administrative changes under way which will see the transfer of responsibility for the detention of young offenders under 18 years of age, ordered to be detained by the Courts, from the Department of Education and Science and the Irish Prison Service to the Irish Youth Justice Service in my Department. The Irish Youth Justice Service has been established as an executive office of my Department and is to, inter alia, manage detention services for young people under the age of 18 years.

The net effect of these reforms to the detention services will be to end the practice of using adult prison places for the detention of children. It will also see the extension of the children detention school model to all offenders, male and female, under the age of 18 years. This will require the construction of children detention school places, with the requisite facilities to provide care and education, which can accommodate all 16 and 17 year olds ordered to be detained by the Courts. The legislation, once commenced, includes arrangements for the use of St. Patrick's Institution on an interim basis. To facilitate this, work is well underway in St. Patrick's Institution for the separation of the majority of those under the age of 18 years from the older age groups.

The transfer of the children detention schools, currently within the remit of the Department of Education and Science, to the Irish Youth Justice Service is intended to take place on the 1st of March, 2007. Currently the Irish Prison Service has responsibility for 16 and 17 year old children who have been ordered to be detained by the Courts. In practice the majority of young offenders being detained are male and are detained in St. Patrick's Institution, which is the designated detention centre for male offenders aged between 16 and 21 years of age. In addition, current legislation allows all prisons in the State to accommodate persons aged 17 years and over. The number and location of offenders, aged 16 and 17 years, in detention on 8 December, 2006, are set out in the following table.

Location	Number
St. Patrick's Institution	55
Cloverhill Prison	2
Cork Prison	6
Dóchas Centre, Mountjoy (Female)	2
Total	65

Some 45 of those detained in custody, 69%, were male young offenders aged 17 years. A further 18 — 28% — were male young offenders aged 16 years who were detained in St. Patrick's Institution. Female young offenders — 2 — in custody

[Mr. B. Lenihan.]

accounted for the remaining 3% of the total number of juveniles detained on that date.

I understand that my colleague the Minister for Education and Science will furnish the Deputy with information regarding the children detention schools currently under the remit of that Department.

Special Educational Needs.

433. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if it is her Department's policy to compel autistic children to attend special schools for mental disability when this is deemed not appropriate for those children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42258/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I wish to inform the Deputy that it is not the policy of my Department to compel autistic children to attend special schools when this is deemed inappropriate for those children.

My Department's preferred approach to the provision of appropriate education for children with autism, is through the primary and post primary school network, whether through placement in mainstream classes, in special classes or in special schools, a view that is supported by the findings of the Task Force Report on Autism.

A specific function of the National Council for Special Education, NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers, SENOs, is to identify appropriate educational placements for all children with special educational needs, including children with autism. The NCSE, through the SENOs, continue to develop and co-ordinate additional provision, where appropriate.

As part of my Department's ongoing commitment to ensuring that all children, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders receive an education appropriate to their needs the following provision has been established: 178 Special Classes for children with autism, attached to special and mainstream schools; 5 special Classes for children with Asperger's Syndrome; 16 early intervention classes for children on the autistic spectrum; and 14 Stand Alone facilities providing an Applied Behavioural Analysis, ABA, specific methodology on a pilot basis — 2 of these facilities have yet to be established.

434. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason her Department fought an action for two days in the High Court on 22 November 2006 brought by the parents of a child seeking speech and occupational therapy, which should have been provided; the amount the case is expected to cost her Department in defending this action; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42259/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I do not propose to comment on the

details of an individual case or on the amount of costs associated with such a case. However I would like to make some comments on the issue of litigation and children with special educational needs in general.

Neither I nor my Department take lightly any decision to defend cases concerning children with special educational needs. Cases are generally only litigated where no potential settlement is acceptable to both sides and the Government's authority to decide issues of policy is in question. The State has an obligation under the Constitution to provide for primary education. In the context of children with special educational needs, that education must be appropriate to their requirements. The State decides on an appropriate form of provision, having regard to the advice available to it from relevant experts in the National Educational Psychological Service, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the inspectorate and independent experts. The Department is not complacent in dealing with these cases and attempts, wherever possible, to reduce the potential for litigation and the levels of legal costs where they arise.

People are free to sue the State where they wish to do so. When this happens, it is clearly proper and appropriate that the State should have available to it the necessary legal advice to make an informed decision on whether it should defend or settle litigation. Settlement of a case requires the agreement of both parties and in circumstances where one party is unwilling to settle then a case will proceed to hearing of the issues in question.

The number of cases taken against the State has shown a downward trend in recent times which can be partly attributable to the substantial increase in resources. It is my belief that the establishment of the National Council for Special Education will further assist the reduction in litigation cases in providing, through its special education needs organisers, SENOs, a more focused and local response to individual needs.

Finally the Deputy will be aware that provision of speech and language therapy and occupational therapy are the responsibility of the HSE. I would like to reiterate my commitment to the issue of special needs education and, in co-operation with the National Council for Special Education and the education partners, ensure that all children with special educational needs are adequately resourced to enable them to meet their full potential.

Schools Building Projects.

435. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the funding that is available to schools for the provision and upkeep of bicycle sheds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42264/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The scope of works referred to by the

Deputy is suitable for consideration under the Department's Summer Works Scheme. It is open to school management authorities to make an application under the scheme which is published each year by School Planning Section. The closing date for the 2007 scheme expired on 29th September 2006 but details in relation to SWS 2008 together with application forms will be published in the New Year. Alternatively, schools can use their minor works grant which is issued by the Department annually and which has recently been increased to reflect construction inflation. The revised grant is now €5,500 per school plus €18.50 per mainstream pupil and €74.00 for pupils in special classes or special schools.

436. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when funding for adequate education facilities will be made available to a school (details supplied) in County Louth where there are 206 children enrolled in premises designed for approximately half this number; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42272/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Officials in the Department have recently been in communication with the authorities of the school referred to by the Deputy in relation to its application for an extension under the Permanent Accommodation Scheme 2007 (Devolved Scheme).

Applications under this Scheme are currently being assessed and a list of successful applicants will be published when this process is complete.

Residential Institutions Redress Board.

437. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the situation of person (details supplied) in County Sligo; if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that it has caused them serious concern as they feel their integrity is being questioned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42297/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): From correspondence supplied by the Deputy it appears that the person in question made an application to the Residential Insti-

tutions Redress Board in relation to her period of residence in a Magdalen laundry in 1961-1962.

Under the terms of the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002 financial awards are made to people who as children were abused while resident in institutions for which the State had a regulatory or supervisory responsibility. The scheme applies in respect of institutions which are listed in the Schedule to the Act. The Magdalen laundries are not listed in the Schedule as these were not subject to State regulation or supervision. However, Section 1(3) of the Act provides that children who were sent to the Magdalen laundries from an institution listed in the Schedule to the Act can be considered for financial redress if, as children, they were victims of abuse while resident in the laundries. The justification for this provision is that the State was still responsible for the welfare and protection of children who were transferred to a Magdalen laundry from a State regulated institution.

However, the situation in relation to children who were taken into the laundries privately or who entered the laundries as adults is quite different. The Magdalen laundries were privately owned and operated establishments which did not come within the responsibility of the State and, accordingly, women or children who were privately placed and resident in the laundries are not eligible for inclusion in the scheme.

I should add that, in the Government's initiatives to address past abuse, the needs of those who suffered abuse in institutions not covered by the Act is recognised and provided for and a range of measures has been put in place to assist them. These include the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, dedicated counselling services for victims of abuse and the amendment to the Statute of Limitations.

National Schools.

438. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of primary schools broken down by patron as per the latest available figures. [42303/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The following table outlines the number of primary schools broken down by patron and ethos as at 5 December 2006.

Ethos and Patrons of Primary Schools

Catholic ^(a)	Church of Ireland ^(b)	Presbyterian	Methodist	Multi-D	Inter-D	Muslim	Jewish	Total
3,033	182	14	1	38	8	2	1	3,279

^(a) includes gaelscoileanna, special schools and 5 Model schools where Minister is Patron.

^(b) includes 4 Model schools where Minister is Patron.

Schools Building Projects.

439. **Mr. Perry** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will meet the parents

and friends of a school (details supplied) in County Sligo to discuss their need for funding; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42305/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The school referred to by the Deputy have applied for funding under the Summer Works Scheme 2007 to upgrade internal disused rooms to augment their range of special needs facilities. My Department is currently assessing all applications received from schools for funding under this programme. The list of successful applicants will be published as soon as possible.

Third Level Education.

440. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been to the situation whereby students access to higher education is severely penalised for non-EU students whose parents have resided here for more than five years and where the naturalisation process is taking years to progress; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42308/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Under the terms of my Department's four maintenance Grants Schemes, grant assistance is awarded to eligible students who satisfy prescribed conditions including those relating to residence, nationality and previous academic attainment.

Under the nationality requirement, students must hold E.U. Nationality, have Official Refugee Status or have been granted Humanitarian Leave to Remain in the State; or have permission to remain in the State by virtue of marriage to an Irish national residing in the State, or be the child of such person, not having EU nationality; or have permission to remain in the State by virtue of marriage to a national of another EU Member State who is residing in the State and who is or has been employed, or self-employed, in the State or be the child of such a person, not having EU nationality; or be nationals of a member county of the European Economic Area, EEA, or Switzerland.

Students must meet the nationality requirement at the time of entry or re-entry to an approved course. However the Grants Schemes contain a 'change in circumstances' clause which provides that a candidate's eligibility may be assessed or re-assessed in the event of a change in circumstances in relation to, inter alia, reckonable income, the number of dependant children, normal residence and nationality, where the candidate becomes an Irish national or the national of another EU member State.

The 'change in circumstances' provision allows candidates who acquire nationality through the naturalisation process, during the course of their studies, to apply to be assessed or re-assessed for grant assistance with effect from the academic term when the change occurs.

School Accommodation.

441. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the plans for the future use of a school building (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42320/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): A meeting was held recently between the Department and the Trustees of the school to which the Deputy refers. At this meeting, the Department's interest in acquiring the school building and the associated playing fields was put forward. The Department has since formally put in writing its expression of interest to the Trustees and is currently awaiting a response. Consideration of the options as to the future use of this building will be contingent on the response from the Trustees of the property.

Grant Payments.

442. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a grant does not exist to assist a developing school (details supplied) in County Kildare to equip their classroom with essential equipment other than furniture; if her Department is considering such a grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42321/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): New schools initially operate with provisional recognition from my Department. During the period of provisional recognition, it is the responsibility of the school patron to provide interim accommodation. This accommodation must be capable of fully meeting the needs of the developing school until permanent recognition has been secured and my Department is in a position to provide permanent accommodation. While schools with temporary recognition do not qualify for capital funding, my Department does provide grant aid for the rental of interim accommodation. It is open to a school to seek an increase in this rental as its needs develop.

The school, referred to by the Deputy, commenced operation with provisional recognition in September 2004. The management of the school has applied for permanent recognition and an assessment of the application is being carried out by my Department at present.

In recent years I have introduced a number of measures to assist newly established schools. A new grant of €10,000 is payable in two instalments of €5,000 for the training of the Boards of Management and staff in their initial years. A start-up grant of €6,348.69 is available to all new primary schools. As a further measure to assist new schools I authorised the earlier appointment of principal teachers to assist in the establishment phase.

The authorities of the school in question should contact the Building Section of my Department regarding essential equipment requirements for their classrooms.

Special Educational Needs.

443. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science the action she will take against second level schools that discriminate against special needs students and not just to leave it up to parents to fight this injustice in the education system here. [42344/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I have expressed a view on a number of occasions that some second-level schools do not appear to be doing as much as they could to welcome students with special needs. I made a particular point of raising this when I attended the annual conferences of the education partners over the course of the year.

It is the general position that a school cannot turn away a child solely because he or she has special needs. A student may be refused enrolment on the basis of criteria in the school's published enrolment policy, such as those that relate to the school's catchment area, preference given to siblings of existing students etc., but the policy must be legal and cannot involve discrimination against special needs students.

While the legal position on non-discrimination in enrolment policies is strong, some schools seem not to be officially refusing to take students with special needs but rather encouraging parents to apply elsewhere on the basis that another school would better meet their needs.

I am concerned about this practice, particularly given all the extra investment that has been provided by this Government to ensure that all schools can cater for students with special needs. In the current school year, more than 1,850 whole-time equivalent teachers and more than 1,350 special needs assistants have been allocated to second level schools to cater for pupils with special educational needs. This represents an increase of more than 200 teaching posts and more than 260 SNA posts on the previous school year.

Of course, as well as the extra resources that have been provided in recent years, the process for accessing special needs supports has also been improved dramatically by the establishment of the National Council for Special Education and its teams of local organisers. Schools now have a specific person to whom they can apply for supports based on the professionally assessed needs of the individual student. All schools should see that there is now a strong system in place to ensure that special needs students get the additional resources they need. It is necessary,

however, for schools to be willing to be proactive and seek extra support from their local SENO.

I also want all parents to be aware of both their legal rights and the fact that all schools have access to special needs supports, and will be asking the NCSE to assist in this regard.

Far from leaving it to parents, as the Deputy implies, the Education Act 1998 actually empowers parents to pursue their rights and the rights of their children to fair and equal treatment when seeking enrolment in a school. With regard to parents who feel that their child has unjustly been refused a school place, they may appeal the school's decision to the Secretary General of the Department under section 29 of the Education Act 1998. Such appeals are dealt with within 30 days of their receipt and, where an appeal is upheld, the Secretary General is empowered to direct the school to enrol the student.

With the improvements that have been put in place in recent years, students with special needs should not only be welcome in all schools but should be embraced as part of an inclusive and caring school community.

School Accommodation.

444. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in relation to a school building (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42352/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): An application has been received in my Department from the school referred to by the Deputy under the Small Schools Scheme 2007. My Department is currently assessing all applications received from schools for funding under these programmes. The list of successful applicants will be published as soon as possible.

Grant Payments.

445. **Mr. Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will change the terms governing educational grants to introduce some flexibility in cases where a person has qualified for the grant but is only marginally over the income limit to qualify for a top-up. [42354/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): To qualify for the top-up grant in the academic year 2006/2007 all candidates must satisfy the following conditions:

1. Qualify for the ordinary maintenance grant in respect of the academic year 2006/07;
2. Total reckonable income limit in the tax year to 31 December 2005 must not exceed €16,748 (net of standard exclusions, as set out in the 2006 Maintenance Grants Schemes and

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net of Child Dependant increase, CDI, payments, where applicable);

3. As at 31 December 2005, the reckonable income of parent(s)/guardian(s), the candidate himself/herself, or the income of the spouse/partner, as the case may be, must include one of the eligible social welfare payments prescribed under the Scheme.

List of Eligible Payments

1. Social Assistance Payments

Blind Person's Pension
 Carer's Allowance
 Deserted Wife's Allowance
 Disability Allowance
 Farm Assist
 Lone Parent's allowance
 Unemployment Assistance (where held for 391 days or more)
 Old Age (Non-Contributory) Pension
 One parent family payment
 Orphans (Non-Contributory) pension
 Pre-retirement allowance
 Prisoner's Wife's Allowance
 Widow's/Widower's (Non-Contributory) Pension.

2. Social Insurance Payments

Carer's Benefit
 Deserted Wife's Benefit
 Invalidity pension
 Unemployability Supplement
 Occupational Injuries Death Benefit (Orphan's pension)
 Occupational Injuries Death Benefit (pension for a widow or widower)
 Old Age Contributory Pension
 Orphan's (Contributory) Allowance
 Unemployment Benefit (continuous for at least 12 months)
 Widow's/Widower's (Contributory) Pension
 Retirement Pension.

3. Family Income Supplement (FIS)

4. Designated Programmes

Back to Education Allowance
 Back to Work Allowance (Employees)

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance

Community Employment Scheme

FÁS Training Programmes, including Apprenticeships

Job Start

Part time job incentive scheme

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS).

5. Others

(a) In receipt of payments under the Fáilte Ireland Skills Programme equivalent to a social welfare payment;

(b) In receipt of payments under the Fast-track to IT, FIT, initiative equivalent to a social welfare payment;

(c) Participants on a training course approved by a Government Department, State Agency or Area Partnership and who were in receipt of an eligible payment prior to progressing to the programme;

(d) Grant aided employees in social economy enterprises;

(e) In receipt of payments under the Senior Traveller Training Centre programmes.

The annual income threshold for the special rates of maintenance grant is increased, in line with the relevant social welfare payments. The higher, non-adjacent special rate of maintenance is based on the maximum personal rate of Social Welfare Unemployment Assistance.

While I have no plans to depart, in the foreseeable future, from the current practice in relation to the Special Rate of Maintenance Grant under my Department's student maintenance grant schemes, I am committed to ongoing improvements in the scheme including increasing the income limits and the rate of payment, as resources permit.

School Staffing.

446. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in relation to an application by a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42355/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The mainstream staffing of a primary school for a particular school year is determined by reference to the enrolment of the school on 30 September of the previous school year and by reference to a staffing schedule. This staffing schedule for the 2006/07 school year is outlined in Primary Circular 0023/2006 which was issued to all primary schools.

In the current school year (2006/07) the staffing of the school referred to by the Deputy comprises of a Principal and one mainstream class teaching post, based on an enrolment of 41 pupils at 30 September, 2005 as submitted by the Board of Management of the school.

The Board of Management has submitted a report indicating that there were 50 pupils enrolled in the school on 30 September 2006. The mainstream staffing of the school for the 2007/08 school year will be determined on that figure.

Special Educational Needs.

447. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Science when an increase in the general allocation hours for learning support will be made to a school (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42356/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Deputy will be aware that the general allocation system was implemented with effect from September 2005 and it is intended that a review of the system will take place within three years of operation.

The school in question has entered into a cluster arrangement with another school and receives 0.3 of a teaching service from a teacher based in the other school. I have no plans to increase the general allocation hours to the school in advance of the review.

Schools Recognition.

448. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Science when a decision will be made regarding the establishment and recognition of a Gaelcholáiste in Buncrana, County Donegal. [42368/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): It is my Department's policy to support the provision of all-Irish school facilities at primary and post-primary level in all areas where a demand for such provision is clearly demonstrated and no alternative exists within a reasonable distance.

An application has been received from County Donegal VEC to establish a Gaelcholáiste in Buncrana from September 2007 and this is under active consideration in my Department. A decision on the granting of recognition to the proposed school will be conveyed to the VEC when the assessment is finalised.

School Transport.

449. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will provide details following her response to Parliamentary Question No. 447 of 7 November 2006; if transport is being

organised by Bus Éireann or her Department; the check or investigation carried out in relation to the original question before reply; if she will confirm receipt of correspondence of 14 September 2006 regarding this case; the reason a response has not been issued; if her attention has been drawn to the fact that this child is autistic and special arrangements for transport have to be put in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42374/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Bus Éireann operates the School Transport Service on behalf of my Department. Routes are planned in such a way as to ensure that, as far as possible, pupils have a reasonable level of service, while at the same time, ensuring that school transport vehicles are fully utilised in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

Bus Éireann have informed my Department that the pupil referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied is availing of a shared taxi service from home to school. This is regarded as a reasonable level of service to meet the transport needs of the child.

Schools Recognition.

450. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her Department is discriminating against voluntary secondary schools by not providing equal funding to that received by community and voluntary schools, particularly in the area of insurance payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42375/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Significant improvements in the levels of direct funding to second level schools have been made in recent years. The funding arrangements made by my Department for second level schools reflect the sectoral division of our second level system. At the core of all arrangements is a reliance upon capitation as the principle determinant of funding. There are however significant differences in the approaches to insurance cover. In my view it is important to consider these issues in the wider context of the equalisation of funding arrangements across the second level system.

My Department provides funding to secondary schools by way of per capita grants, which affords schools considerable flexibility in the use of these resources to cater for the needs of their pupils.

There have been significant improvements in recent years in the level of funding for voluntary secondary schools. In addition to the €12 per pupil increase in 2006 in the standard per capita grant that now stands at €298 per pupil, voluntary secondary schools have benefited additionally by the increase of €14 per pupil in 2006 in the support services grant bringing the overall grant to €159 per pupil.

[Ms Hanafin.]

I wish to draw the attention of the Deputy to my announcement of further significant increases in the context of the 2007 estimates. From 1 January next the standard per capita grant will be increased by a further €18 to €316 per pupil. In addition, the support services grant will be increased by a further €30 for voluntary secondary schools, which includes a further equalisation measure, to €189 per pupil. For such schools this cumulative increase of €48 per pupil will bring the aggregate grant to over €500 per pupil from 1 January next. These grants are in addition to the per capita funding of up to €40,000 per school that is also provided by my Department to secondary schools towards secretarial and care-taking services. For example in the case of a secondary school with 500 pupils, this will bring annual grants towards general expenses and support service to over €290,000.

Budget allocations for schools in the VEC and C&C sectors are increased on a pro rata basis with increases in the per capita grant.

The provision that I have made, in the context of the 2007 estimates, for these significant increases in the funding of voluntary secondary schools is a clear demonstration of my commitment to prioritise available resources to address the needs of schools.

Schools Building Programme.

451. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding the application by a school (details supplied) in County Laois for a minor works grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42380/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I can confirm that the School Planning Section of the Department is in receipt of an application for additional accommodation from the management authority of the school to which the Deputy refers, under the Permanent Accommodation Scheme 2007.

Applications under this Scheme are currently being assessed and a list of successful applicants will be published when this process is complete.

School Staffing.

452. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if iniquitous funding in insurance payments is contributing to a situation where assistant principals in voluntary secondary schools have to carry out their middle management duties in addition to 22 hours of class contact time whereas teachers at the assistant principle grade in community and vocational schools teach an 18 hour class contact time to allow for carrying out of middle management duties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42381/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The terms and conditions of employment for teachers are a matter for the Teachers Conciliation Council, which is comprised of representatives of the teachers unions, school management, the Department of Finance and the Department of Education and Science.

Significant improvements in the levels of direct funding to second level schools have been made in recent years. The funding arrangements made by my Department for second level schools reflect the sectoral division of our second level system. At the core of all arrangements is a reliance upon capitation as the principle determinant of funding. There are however significant differences in the approaches to insurance cover. In my view it is important to consider these issues in the wider context of the equalisation of funding arrangements across the second level system.

My Department provides funding to secondary schools by way of per capita grants, which affords schools considerable flexibility in the use of these resources to cater for the needs of their pupils. There have been significant improvements in recent years in the level of funding for voluntary secondary schools. In addition to the €12 per pupil increase in 2006 in the standard per capita grant that now stands at €298 per pupil, voluntary secondary schools have benefited additionally by the increase of €14 per pupil in 2006 in the support services grant bringing the overall grant to €159 per pupil.

I wish to draw the attention of the Deputy to my announcement of further significant increases in the context of the 2007 estimates. From 1 January next the standard per capita grant will be increased by a further €18 to €316 per pupil. In addition, the support services grant will be increased by a further €30 for voluntary secondary schools, which includes a further equalisation measure, to €189 per pupil. For such schools this cumulative increase of €48 per pupil will bring the aggregate grant to over €500 per pupil from 1 January next. These grants are in addition to the per capita funding of up to €40,000 per school that is also provided by my Department to secondary schools towards secretarial and care-taking services. For example in the case of a secondary school with 500 pupils, this will bring annual grants towards general expenses and support service to over €290,000.

453. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if the iniquitous situation in the area of insurance payments to voluntary secondary schools is adding to the number of voluntary secondary teachers seeking early retirement in view of the fact that their duties involve dealing with student indiscipline and truancy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42382/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I am puzzled by the link made by the Deputy between the funding of school insurance costs in the voluntary schools and early retirement of teachers in that sector.

All teachers, whether they are teaching in vocational, community and comprehensive or voluntary secondary schools have to deal with student discipline issues as part of their normal duties.

My Department has issued guidelines to the Management Authorities of second level schools on meeting their obligations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act to ensure the safety and health of their employees.

The close interaction of the school management with staff and parents in developing effective school policies on school discipline, bullying and health and safety contributes to a positive school environment where mutual respect, co-operation and natural justice are accepted features of the school community by all.

School Management Authorities are responsible for ensuring that a fair and efficient code of behaviour, encompassing rules, sanctions and procedures, is drawn up and applied in the school. The Code should be developed by the Principal and the staff in consultation with parents and approved by the School Management Authority. Parents should be circularised regarding the Code when it is finalised.

This Code should have as its aim the maintenance of desirable standards of behaviour, particularly in fostering understanding and co-operation between teachers, pupils and parents in helping schools to adapt to the needs of its students while establishing the basis for responsible actions by its students and observing the principles of natural justice. Any sanction imposed on a pupil should be in accordance with the Code of Discipline. Procedures for suspending pupils should be clearly set out in the school's Code of Discipline and should be adhered to. Aggressive, threatening or violent behaviour towards a teacher is regarded as serious or gross misbehaviour and may warrant suspension.

The National Educational Welfare Board is currently working on revised Guidelines for Developing School Codes of Behaviour. This work is nearing completion and I expect that the revised Guidelines will be available in the new year.

As a supportive resource, teachers can now access an Employee Assistance Service, EAS, specifically tailored to meet their particular needs. The EAS now available to teachers throughout the country is designed to support the health and well-being of teachers which will in turn positively affect work quality and performance. The service will incorporate confidential counselling on issues such as health, relationships,

addictions, bereavement, stress, conflict, critical incident and trauma.

Services include, single session or short term structured telephone counselling, face to face short term confidential counselling as well as critical incident debriefing.

Earlier this year I announced an implementation strategy following publication of "School Matters" the Report of the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools, and that strategy is now well advanced.

At the core of the recommendations of the Task Force was the putting in place of a National Behaviour Support Service, NBSS. This has now happened with the appointment of a National Co-ordinator and four Assistant National Co-ordinators. In addition, nine Regional Development Officers and twenty part-time Associates have been recruited to ensure the success of this significant initiative. A key feature of the composition of the National Behaviour Support Service is the assignment to it of a senior psychologist and three psychologists. These have been seconded from the National Educational Psychological Service and their presence will ensure that the team operates in a multi-disciplinary way. A full-time administrator is based in Navan Education Centre.

Since their appointment, the team has been working on a number of key issues: the development of a Draft National Framework for Behaviour Improvement; the development of models of good practice for systems in schools which assist with and impact on classroom and whole school behaviour; on-going training for the NBSS team; and research into and communication with behaviour support systems in other jurisdictions.

The NBSS has commenced its engagement with schools and a series of information seminars have been organised throughout the country. Subsequently intensive work will begin with a smaller number of schools most in need of this intervention.

It is my intention that this new service will work intensively with those schools initially selected for inclusion in this development. I have already announced that part of this work will see us testing the concept of a behaviour support classroom in up to 30 schools next year. I want to emphasise however that these classrooms cannot be, in themselves, a solution to the issue of poor student behaviour. They must be one part of a holistic response which should see a school, actively supported by the Behaviour Support Team, defining for itself a pathway to improvement.

I wish to draw the attention of the Deputy to my announcement in the context of the 2007 Estimates, that I am providing €8million to support the work of the NBSS, in helping schools promote positive student behaviour at second level.

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A teacher may retire voluntarily where s/he has attained the necessary age or service threshold. A teacher on voluntary retirement does not have to specify a reason for choosing to retire at that time and is only required to give 3 months prior notice.

With regard to teachers who retire under the Early Retirement Strands, Strand 1 is available to teachers who are consistently experiencing professional difficulties in their teaching duties; Strand 2 is available to teachers whose retirement will provide their school with an opportunity to enhance the education service provided through facilitating change and Strand 3 is for teachers in posts which are surplus to requirements.

Public-Private Partnerships.

454. **Mr. Crowe** asked the Minister for Education and Science the breakdown of public private partnership costs as laid out in the Revised Estimates 2007. [42383/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The sum of €33m is allocated in the 2007 Revised Estimates to Public Private Partnerships (PPP). Estimated current expenditure is €24.9m. This sum is in respect of the unitary payments due in 2007 for the five pilot PPP second level schools, the National Maritime College and the Cork School of Music, when completed.

Capital expenditure is estimated to be €8.1M. This represents the Construction VAT payable on the Cork School of Music PPP project. It was decided prior to the commencement of the Pilot PPP Programme that the cost of VAT on the construction of PPP project would not be included in the unitary payments over 25 years and would be paid when the project is handed over on completion of construction. The Cork School of Music is due to be completed and handed over to my Department in October 2007.

Schools Recognition.

455. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Kildare for permanent recognition; when a final decision will be made in regard to the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42385/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The school to which the Deputy refers opened with provisional recognition from the Department in September 2004. The school is required to complete a minimum period of three years in this mode, during which time it must demonstrate its viability and that it is operating in accordance with the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools. The matter of permanent recognition can be considered when this period has expired.

456. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of applications with her Department by schools seeking permanent recognition status; the period of time that each application is with her; the average period of time that such an application takes for a decision to be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42386/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The information as sought by the Deputy is not readily available. However, all new schools commence operation with provisional recognition and are generally required to complete a period of three years in this mode. Four main areas are examined in determining permanent recognition as follows:

1. The school must be operating in accordance with the Rules for National/Secondary Schools.
2. The school must have determined its viability in terms of enrolment.
3. The school's accommodation must be deemed suitable to meet its needs for the short/medium term.
4. The school is meeting a need which is not already being met by existing schools.

Many new schools in rapidly developing areas have received permanent recognition status in less than 3 years.

457. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views in regard to the need for or the provision of a secondary school (details supplied) in County Kildare; the meetings she has had or has planned to meet interested groups of boards of management in regard to the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42387/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The school to which the Deputy refers opened with provisional recognition from the Department in September 2004. The school is required to complete a minimum period of three years in this mode, during which time it must demonstrate its viability and that it is operating in accordance with the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools. The matter of permanent recognition can be considered when this period has expired.

Gaelscoileanna.

458. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of Gaelcholáistí within her Department's control; the placement area or position of each school; the number of pupils enrolled in each school; the number of primary Gaelscoileanna in the catchment areas of each

Gaelcholáiste; her plans to increase the number of Gaelcholáistí; the number of applications with her Department at present; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42388/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The information is not readily available in the format requested. If the Deputy requires details with regard to a particular area, I will arrange for the information to be collated and forwarded by the Department.

School Transport.

459. **Ms Enright** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will confirm receipt of an updated report from Bus Éireann on the case referred to in Parliamentary Question No. 235 of 11 October 2006; if the matter has been resolved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42393/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The school transport service available to the families, referred to by the Deputy, is considered a reasonable level of service in the context of the general operation of the school transport scheme. The provision of a payable extension to this service was offered to, but not availed of by, the families in question.

School Staffing.

460. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if the avenue for self development and preparation for promotion is denied to voluntary secondary school teachers adding to the numbers of voluntary secondary teachers seeking early retirement from the teaching service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42394/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): For every profession, it is important that its members have access to professional development and teachers are not an exception. It can be argued that teachers, because of their key role in the preparation of students for their role in society, are one profession where such development is of critical importance. Opportunities for professional development enable teachers to enhance their teaching and learning while continuing to provide a high quality of education and improved student outcomes.

This is why I was particularly proud to have launched the Teaching Council of Ireland earlier this year. The Teaching Council is responsible, amongst a number of other issues, for the education and professional development of members of the teaching profession. In addition, my Department has put in place a range of measures to assist the professional development of teachers. The priority I attach to providing qual-

ity professional development for teachers is evident from the levels of funding provided in successive budgets for this purpose. In general terms, my Department's Teacher Education Section supports the continuous professional development of primary and post-primary teachers through the establishment of National Programmes (dealing with new or revised curricula) and Support Services (covering a range of issues relating to teaching and learning). In addition, the network of twenty-one Education Centres provides a wide variety of courses. Teachers also have the opportunity to attend courses in a personal capacity and apply for a refund of fees in accordance with my Department's Teacher Fee Refund Scheme. Furthermore, teachers can also avail of the arrangements operated by the Revenue Commissioners under which individuals can apply for a rebate of taxation of certain tuition fees.

The opportunities for professional development outlined above are open to all teachers but it should be noted that in some circumstances they only be applicable to teachers of a particular subject.

461. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on whether all school secretaries employed by schools here should be employed on the same principle regardless of the school in which they work; her further views on whether all secretaries should be paid by her Department; if this is discrimination; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42395/06]

462. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on whether school secretaries should be paid in the same manner as special need assistants, that is all being paid directly by her Department, in line with the Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001 and the Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act 2003; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42396/06]

463. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on whether all school secretaries should be paid by her Department in view of the fact that these persons are doing the same work as secretaries who are paid by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42397/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 461 to 463, inclusive, together.

My Department provides funding towards the cost of secretarial services in primary and secondary schools under two separate schemes. One is the 1978 scheme for the employment of school secretaries in primary and secondary schools

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under which my Department meets the full cost of salary. The 1978 scheme is being phased out as posts become vacant and no new posts are being created.

The 1978 scheme has been superseded by a more extensive school support grant scheme towards the funding of ancillary services in schools including secretarial services. The scheme is flexible in nature giving Boards of Management and schools discretion as to the manner in which these services are provided. The terms and conditions of employment are matters for agreement between the employee and the authorities of each school. The Department does not stipulate any rules concerning how the secretarial services are to be obtained by schools. Accordingly the arrangements are suited to local needs and are not standard across the sector.

There have been significant improvements in recent years in the level of funding for primary and voluntary secondary schools. In addition to the €12 per pupil increase in 2006 in the standard per capita grant that now stands at €298 per pupil, voluntary secondary schools have benefited additionally by the increase of €14 per pupil in 2006 in the support services grant bringing the overall grant to €159 per pupil.

I wish to draw the attention of the Deputy to my announcement of further significant increases in the context of the 2007 estimates. From 1 January next the standard per capita grant for secondary schools will be increased by a further €18 to €316 per pupil. In addition, the support services grant will be increased by a further €30 for voluntary secondary schools, which includes a further equalisation measure, to €189 per pupil. For such schools this cumulative increase of €48 per pupil will bring the aggregate grant to over €500 per pupil from 1 January next. These grants are in addition to the per capita funding of up to €40,000 per school that is also provided by my Department to secondary schools towards secretarial and care-taking services. For example in the case of a secondary school with 500 pupils, this will bring annual grants towards general expenses and support service to over €290,000.

At primary level, the basic rate of capitation will increase by €18 per pupil next year to a level of €163.58 per pupil from January. The ancillary services grant will also increase by €6.50 to €145.50 per pupil. Taken together, these increases mean that primary schools eligible for the full ancillary services grant will get €24.50 extra per pupil to cover their day to day running costs next year, with a primary school of 300 pupils getting nearly €7,400 extra next year. In fact, this 300 pupil school will get approximately €93,000 from my Department next year to meet such costs.

The provision that I have made, in the context of the 2007 estimates, for these significant increases in the funding of primary and voluntary

secondary schools is a clear demonstration of my commitment to prioritise available resources to address the needs of schools.

Teacher Training.

464. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the purpose of her visit to a school (details supplied) in County Cork in June 2000; if she will confirm that she turned a sod for a centre of excellence for the teaching of Irish and teacher facilities; the reason this centre has not been provided; when it will be provided; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42401/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): When the establishment of an Ionad Náisiúnta Oideachais Gaeilge in Baile Bhuirne was announced in 1999 the intention was that it would function as a national centre of excellence to support the teaching of Irish and through Irish, and would engage with education institutions from pre-school to third level. It was announced again on 12 June 2000 when the then Minister for Education and Science Dr Michael Woods signalled the establishment of a “£1.5m all-Irish Education Centre” on the occasion of the turning of the sod on the site on the grounds of Coláiste Íosagáin, Baile Bhuirne, Co. Cork.

When the project went to tender, the construction costs were deemed excessive and it did not go ahead.

There have been a number of developments since the original announcement. Principal among these was the establishment of An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta and the evolution of a new in-service model for teachers.

There is an overlap between the functions of An Chomhairle and the functions envisaged for the Centre in Baile Bhuirne and this has to be addressed. In addition, the new in-service model for teachers will prioritise regionalised access to a full spread of curriculum expertise through the regional education centre network.

In order to clarify the specific rationale and function of the proposed Ionad Náisiúnta Oideachais Gaeilge, officials from my Department together with officials from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs met with the interested parties in June of this year.

Following consideration of the views expressed by the interested parties at that meeting, I expect to be in a position very shortly to make a final decision on the project.

Schools Funding.

465. **Mr. Quinn** asked the Minister for Education and Science the amount of funding given in each year from 2002 to 2005 and in to date in 2006 for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 9;

the amount of funding requested by the school for each year from 2002 to date in 2006; the running costs of the school for each year from 2002 to date in 2006; her views on whether the school is adequately funded by the Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42404/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The school to which the Deputy refers received €173,097.34 in Capital Funding since 2002. The details are as follows:

2005:

Summer Works €13,490 (window project)

2004:

Summer Works €132,970 (access-for-all project)

Furniture €6,400.94

2003:

Furniture €8,591.30

Tarmacadam €11,645.10.

In addition to the above payments, the school benefited from the annual Minor Works grant which is paid to all primary schools. The current Minor Works Grant rate is €5,500 per school and €18.50 per pupil. The per capita rate for special needs pupils is €74.00.

In 2004, all Primary Schools received a Science Grant in the amount of €1,000 per school and €10 per pupil, to allow the acquisition of appropriate resources and materials for science work. In 2006, all Primary Schools received a once-off PE Equipment grant of €2,000.

Primary schools' running costs are met by my Department's scheme of capitation grants. These grants are intended to contribute towards the general operating costs of schools which would include heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, painting, teaching aids and other miscellaneous charges.

The school to which the Deputy refers received the following in respect of the Capitation Grant between the years 2002 and 2006 inclusive:

Year	Total
	€
2002	13,435.00
2003	9,531.90
2004	12,009.32
2005	14,737.00
2006	16,077.00

School Accommodation.

466. **Mr. McEntee** asked the Minister for Edu-

cation and Science her proposals to meet the current and future needs at primary school level of Ashbourne, County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42407/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Department has received an application for additional accommodation from the school authority at St. Mary's National School in Ashbourne. This application is currently under consideration. It is open to the other primary schools to apply to expand their accommodation as they see a need arising.

Apart from this, the Department is continuing to monitor housing and demographic developments in Ashbourne using its contacts with the local authority. Under this process, the Department expects to be in a position to make any extra required provision in line with or ahead of demand.

467. **Mr. McEntee** asked the Minister for Education and Science her proposals to meet the current and future needs at secondary school level in Ashbourne, County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42408/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Ashbourne Community School was recently extended to cater for 1,000 pupils. It is expected that this level of provision will be sufficient to meet the needs of the area for the foreseeable future.

However, the Department is continuing to monitor housing and demographic developments in Ashbourne using its contacts with the local authority. Under this process, the Department expects to be in a position to make any extra required provision in line with or ahead of demand.

Youth Services.

468. **Mr. Deasy** asked the Minister for Education and Science the discussions she has had with the Department of Health and Children regarding a proposal (details supplied) to fund a youth worker in Tramore, County Waterford; if she will urge the Department to provide such funding; if the proposal is eligible for funding from her Department's youth affairs' budget; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42419/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department has been in consultation with the Department of Health and Children concerning a proposal from Foróige to fund a youth worker in Tramore, Co. Waterford.

The Youth Affairs Section of my Department administers the Special Projects for Youth Scheme. Under this Scheme, grant-aid is made available on an annual basis to organisations and groups for specific projects which seek to address

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the needs of young people who are disadvantaged due to a combination of factors, e.g. social isolation, substance misuse and inadequate take-up of ordinary educational opportunities.

It is open to the organisation in question to submit an application for funding under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme in the 2007 round of grants. Any application received will be considered along with all other requests for funding having regard to the financial resources available and my Department's ongoing commitments in respect of existing youth work supports and initiatives.

469. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she has conducted an audit of the level of youth facilities and youth organisations across the country; if she has put initiatives in place that would seek to develop activities where there are significant gaps in existence and in particular where there is not an established nucleus of people to organise and develop programmes for young people; and if she will set out the benchmarks that she hopes to achieve over the remaining years of the youth strategy. [42420/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My Department's Youth Affairs Section provides support for a number of schemes and initiatives designed to ensure the provision of non-formal educational opportunities for young people throughout the country. It provides grant-aid assistance for national and major regional youth organisations under the Youth Service Grant Scheme, for special projects for disadvantaged young people under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme and the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund. It also supports a range of other youth work programmes and initiatives inter alia Gaisce — the President's Award, Léargas — the Exchange Bureau and the National Youth Health Programme.

Under the terms of the Youth Work Act, 2001, Vocational Education Committees (VECs) are to assume certain responsibilities for the provision of youth work programmes and services at local level including the drafting of three-year youth work development plans for their area. In drafting such plans, VECs are required to liaise with local youth work organisations and interests to ascertain the existing service provision and to identify any possible gaps or emerging needs. In 2006 I have assigned a number of youth officer posts to the VEC sector to carry out the designated VEC functions of the Act at local level. The additional resources being provided to the VECs will facilitate a coordinated and appropriate youth work response to local needs.

My Department recently appointed an Assessor of Youth Work. The Assessor will sup-

port the development of good youth work practice by monitoring and evaluating youth work projects and programmes supported by my Department. At present, the Assessor in consultation with the National Youth work Advisory Committee, NYWAC, is developing an Assessment/Quality Standards Framework. In a related development, my Department is at present in the process of establishing a National Youth Work Development Unit in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, NUIM, with a remit of researching and developing guidelines for best practice in youth work, and managing and coordinating research as well as piloting innovation and new initiatives.

Schools Building Projects.

470. **Mr. J. Higgins** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will sanction the construction of a new secondary school for the Castleknock area, Dublin 15 as a matter of urgency. [42422/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The provision of a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school has been sanctioned for Phibblestown Dublin 15. This school has taken longer than expected due to difficulties in acquiring the site. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that as part of my Department's partnership with Fingal County Council the site purchase can now be concluded. The site is almost 8.5 acres in size and the legalities on the site purchase will be completed by County Dublin Vocational Education Committee.

It is intended to progress the provision of the school as a Design Build Project. An advertisement was placed in the Official Journal of the European Union for design build teams and a project manager has also been appointed to manage the delivery of the project.

While it is not possible to be definitive at this early stage as to when the new school will open, the target date for delivery is September 2008.

School Planning Section is also examining the need for further post primary provision in the area.

Higher Education Grants.

471. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science if income from a VTOS course is fully assessable as reckonable income for third level grant purposes in view of the fact that it is not taxable income and would not appear on a P21 and assessing this income is effectively punishing the student for their parent's return to education; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42423/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The assessment of means under my Department's Third Level Student Maintenance

Grant Schemes is based on gross income from all sources, with specified social welfare and health service executive payments being excluded from the calculation. Income in respect of a VTOS course is assessable.

I have no plans at present to depart from the above practice in respect of the determination of income.

Schools Funding.

472. **Mr. P. Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Science the status of an application, in relation to the small schools scheme 2007, for a school (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42427/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): An application has been received in my Department from the school referred to by the Deputy under the Small Schools Scheme 2007. My Department is currently assessing all applications received from schools for funding under this programme.

The list of successful applicants will be published as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects.

473. **Mr. S. Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Science her proposals for a much needed primary school in Skerries, County Dublin; the priority it has in her Department; the proposed location in Skerries and the proposed commencement date; if she will report on the urgent need for a replacement school (details supplied); if she proposes to construct two separate schools on the same campus; and her views on whether such a proposal would be a positive development for integration of education in Skerries. [42431/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Department is aware of the need to provide a long term solution to the accommodation needs of the school to which the Deputy refers. The provision of a permanent home for the school has a Band 1 priority status under the published prioritisation criteria for large scale building projects. Locating the school in the Skerries area is one of a number of possible solutions under consideration. The Department will be in contact with the school as soon as a decision has been taken.

School Accommodation.

474. **Ms O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Science the action she has taken or will take to resolve the difficulties surrounding the move of a school (details supplied) in County Kildare to a site which was to be shared with another school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42468/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Department is addressing the issue to which the Deputy refers through the relative Patron bodies which is the correct protocol. The Department is hopeful of a resolution of the matter in the near future.

475. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position regarding an application from a school (details supplied) in Dublin 20 for a grant to build additional rooms to cater for English classes for non-national pupils and the principal's office, as these classes are currently held in the school hall. [42672/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The school referred to by the Deputy has made an application under Summer Works Scheme 2007 for refurbishment works which would allow for the provision of additional accommodation for Special Education and Language Support Teachers.

All applications under the Summer Works Scheme 2007 are currently being assessed in accordance with the published prioritisation criteria and I intend to publish the list of successful applicants before Christmas.

School Transport.

476. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the fact that there is a problem with the school bus which ferries children to and from a school (details supplied) in Dublin 20, in that it has no safe set-down area; and if she will communicate with Dublin City Council and the school management on the need to agree a plan to provide a safe set down area, within the school grounds or by altering the paths outside the school, which currently have double yellow lines running alongside them. [42673/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Bus Éireann, which operates the school transport scheme on behalf of my Department have advised that they have no service, within the scheme, operating to the school referred to by the deputy, in the details supplied.

The Deputy should liaise with the school authorities and the relevant Local Authority regarding traffic management in the vicinity of school grounds.

Schools Building Projects.

477. **Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Science if consideration has been given to relocating a school (details supplied) in Dublin 20, to allow for its expansion and provide adequate play facilities; and if consideration has been given to purchasing a nearby property to serve such a purpose. [42674/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Department have asked the Office of Public Works to advise on the availability and suitability of the site to which the Deputy refers. When the outcome of the OPW's investigation is known, full consideration can be given to the school's re-location proposal.

School Transport.

478. **Mr. McGinley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the preschool transport difficulties in a school (details supplied) which results in pupils being left unsupervised before school opening in the morning and after school closure in the evening; the steps being taken to solve the problem; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42678/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The school referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied, has a transport service within the guidelines of the School Transport Scheme. Queries regarding the supervision of pupils should be addressed to the chairperson of the board of management of the school in question.

Schools Building Projects.

479. **Mr. Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Science if, in view of the fact that her Department has concluded its examination of the needs of gaelscoil education in the Ballymun area, and that all documentation requested in relation to the site of a school (details supplied) in Dublin 9 has now been submitted, she will expedite the process for the provision of a permanent building for the school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42679/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Department is aware of the need to provide permanent accommodation for the school in question. Accommodation options are currently under consideration and when a decision has been taken the school authority will be contacted directly in the matter.

480. **Mr. Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Science the proposals she has received regarding the provision of more suitable accommodation for a school (details supplied) in Dublin 11; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42680/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Department is aware of the need to re-locate the facility to which he refers. Possible accommodation solutions are currently under consideration and when a decision has been taken the school authority will be contacted directly.

481. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Science her plans to provide another primary school for Carlow town in view of the level of housing development completed and planned and the pressure on the existing school; her views on the submission made to her Department in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42703/06]

497. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the plans in place to build new primary schools in Carlow town and surrounding outskirts for 2007. [42809/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 481 and 497 together.

I can confirm to the Deputy that a Notice of Intention to apply for the recognition of a new primary school to commence operation next September has been submitted to the New Schools Advisory Committee, NSAC. As with all such applications, a full application must be submitted to the NSAC no later than 31 January 2007 and, following the NSAC's report to me in the matter, I expect to announce my decision in mid-April of 2007. In the interim, the school planning section of the Department is in the process of completing a full study of the demographics of the area in question to ensure adequate educational provision at all levels for the area.

Special Educational Needs.

482. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the definition of a unit in the context of classes for autistic children; the number of classrooms required to constitute a unit; the reason these criteria apply and when they changed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42704/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Deputy will be aware that I recently announced a series of measures to assist primary school principals with particularly significant levels of non-teaching duties. The new measures include that when a school with a principal and four or more mainstream class teachers also has a specialist autism unit, established under approval of the National Council for Special Education, the Principal will be appointed on an administrative basis. An autism unit is defined as two differentiated autism classes and provision for younger children with autism i.e. a total capacity for 12-18 children with autism. I am satisfied that this measure will provide much needed support to schools who facilitate the establishment of special classes for autism.

School Staffing.

483. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Mini-

ster for Education and Science the criteria for the increased principal's administration time initiative; the reason special needs assistants are not included in the numbers needed to qualify for administrative principal in primary schools; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42705/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): My recent announcement referred to by the Deputy introduced a range of new measures to improve the capacity of schools to cater for the educational needs of all their pupils and will assist their principals in their work.

Some principals have particularly heavy workloads arising from the size of their school. Others carry additional duties arising from the fact that in addition to their mainstream classes they have a significant number of special classes containing children with complex special needs. I am responding to these needs by the introduction of these new measures.

The new measures include:

- The allocation of additional teachers to allow all deputy principals in schools with 24 or more mainstream class teachers operate as administrative deputy principals;
- The allocation of additional teachers to allow deputy principals in mainstream schools that, in addition to their ordinary mainstream class teachers, also have five or more special classes for children with the more complex, low incidence, special needs, to operate as administrative deputy principals;
- Where a school has a principal and four or five mainstream class teachers also has a specialist autism unit established under approval of the National Council for Special Education, the principal will be appointed on an administrative basis.

The role of the special needs assistant (SNA) is essentially a care one in supporting pupils with assessed special educational needs. The number and types of non-teaching staff in a primary school does not impact on the allocation of post of responsibility holders in a school, i.e., principal, deputy principal and special duties teachers.

484. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a school (details supplied) in County Kerry does not qualify at present for administrative principal status; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42707/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): In accordance with the terms of Primary Circular 0023/2006, which sets out the details of the staffing schedule for the 2006/2007 school year, in ordinary primary schools and schools in the Gaeltacht with an enrolment of less

than 179 pupils or in Gaelscoileanna with an enrolment of less than 158 pupils, that have a staffing of a Principal plus nine or more teachers when all ex-quota posts are counted, the Principal may be appointed as an Administrative Principal. In such instances, a permanent mainstream class teacher may be appointed to replace the Principal.

The Deputy will be aware that I introduced a new measure on 12 November, 2006 whereby a school that has a Principal and four or five mainstream class teachers also has a specialist autism unit (2 or more autism classes) established under approval of the National Council for Special Education, the Principal will be appointed on an administrative basis.

The school referred to by the Deputy is classified as an ordinary primary school. There is one special autism class in the school. The staffing in the school for the 2006/2007 school year is Principal, 4 Mainstream Class Teacher Posts, 1 Permanent Developing School Post, 2 Permanent Learning Support/Resource Posts and 1 Temporary Special Class post.

As the school does not satisfy either of the two requirements as set out above, it does not qualify for the allocation of an Administrative Principal post at this time.

Special Educational Needs.

485. **Ms B. Moynihan-Cronin** asked the Minister for Education and Science if a special needs education organiser will be appointed for south Kerry; the number of SENOs countrywide at present; the numbers of SENOs in 1997; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42708/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for the appointment and deployment of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) and is subject to the terms of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004.

The NCSE provides services in all areas of the State through its network of Special Educational Needs Organiser posts. These posts were first established by the National Council for Special Education in September 2004. There are 80 such Special Educational Needs Organiser posts, of which 76 are currently filled. The NCSE is currently arranging to fill the vacant posts, including the post referred to by the Deputy.

School Equipment.

486. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the situation regarding the information communication technology programme for a school (details supplied) in County Mayo and to

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the fact that children in this school achieved international awards; if her attention has been further drawn to the fact that the school fostered a community programme with the local community for use of the information technology equipment and that the recent whole school evaluation, while recognising the outstanding work in which students were involved, recommended that the IT equipment be completely refurbished; if her attention has also been drawn to the fact that the cost is approximately €15,000; if, in view of the achievements of the students of this school, she will make a decision to upgrade and refurbish the equipment in the school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42717/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, the two major investment priorities under the ICT in Schools Programme over the past two years have been the provision of grant aid to schools to develop their computer networks and the establishment of the Schools Broadband Network and the provision of broadband access to schools. In this context, the school concerned received a networking grant of €2,200 in December 2004 and has had its broadband connectivity installed.

The school concerned has written to my Department seeking financial support to update its ICT equipment. I am aware of the benefits that good use of ICT can bring to our children's education and I am conscious of the need for further investment to realise the full potential of integrating ICT into teaching and learning. I intend to publish a comprehensive new ICT strategy in 2007 covering the period of the new National Development Plan to 2013.

Departmental Staff.

487. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Education and Science in respect of each Minister of State within her Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42725/06]

488. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of staff broken down by grade employed within her private office and her constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42740/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 487 and 488 together.

There are currently 9 staff working in my private office and 5.5 staff working in my constituency office, as follows:

Private Office:

- 1 Principal Officer
- 1 Private Secretary at Higher Executive Officer level
- 2 Executive Officers
- 4 Clerical Officers
- 1 Special Adviser at Principal Officer level.

Constituency Office:

- 1 Higher Executive Officer
- 1 Staff Officer (working on a half time basis)
- 2 Clerical Officers
- 1 Personal Assistant at Higher Executive Officer level
- 1 Personal Secretary.

All these staff are permanent civil servants except for my Special Adviser, Personal Assistant and Personal Secretary. The annual cost of these offices in 2006 was as follows:

Private Office: €444,463.84

Constituency Office: €205,958.42.

There are four staff working in the Minister of State's private office and four in the constituency office.

Private Office:

- 1 Private Secretary at Higher Executive Officer level
- 1 Executive Officer
- 2 Clerical Officers.

Constituency Office:

- 1 Staff Officer
- 2 Clerical Officers
- 1 Personal Secretary.

All of these staff except the Personal Secretary are permanent civil servants. The annual cost of these offices in 2006 was as follows:

Private Office: €166,125.30

Constituency Office: €109,224.17 (cost of Personal Secretary up to 8 December only).

The amount paid in respect of salary, overtime and expenses for these staff is in accordance with the salary scales and travel and subsistence rates approved by the Department of Finance.

Schools Refurbishment.

489. **Mr. Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position of the application for an extension to a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; when work will begin on this project; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42783/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I can confirm that the Department is in receipt of an application for major capital works from the management authority of the school to which the Deputy refers. The school's long-term projected staffing is currently being assessed. When this has been agreed with the school authority progress on the works will be considered in the context of the School building and Modernisation Programme from 2007 onwards.

Site Acquisitions.

490. **Mr. F. McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will deliver on her promise to purchase a site and build a school (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make this a priority issue. [42784/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The Property Management Section of the Office of Public Works, which acts on behalf of my Department in relation to site acquisitions generally, has been requested to source a suitable site for the school in question.

A number of proposals were received by OPW on foot of advertising. These proposals are currently being examined by OPW and officials in my Department are awaiting a final report. On completion of the site acquisition the project can then be considered further in the context of the School Building and Modernisation programme 2007-2011.

Teacher Training.

491. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science her views on introducing an allowance to support trainee primary teachers in undertaking the six week placement which is a part of their course, in view of the fact that under present arrangements these student teachers have to incur all the cost of the materials for the classroom activities themselves; and if she plans to meet the representatives of trainee student teachers who have been petitioning on this issue. [42785/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The position is that teaching practice is an integral part of the curriculum for the training of both primary and post-primary teachers. It is not a paid activity because it is viewed as training rather than employment. On that basis, my Department does not provide special financial

assistance for students towards costs associated with teaching practice.

The Deputy will be aware that teacher education programmes provided in approved third level institutions are, however, approved courses for the purposes of the Higher Education Grants Scheme. Under the terms of the Scheme, grant holders who are required to participate in off-campus placement as part of their course of study may have their grant entitlement paid in the normal manner. Accordingly, student teachers who are eligible for grant assistance continue to receive their entitlements while undertaking teaching practice.

In addition, my Department allocates funding each year to third level institutions under the Student Assistance Fund. This fund is available in order to assist students who may be experiencing difficulties in continuing their studies because of financial hardship. The disbursement of this funding is a matter for individual institutions in line with guidelines issued by my Department.

My Department has no plans at present to introduce a scheme of financial assistance, over and above the current provision, for trainee teachers to cover costs associated with teaching practice.

I met the Union of Students in Ireland recently and this issue was discussed at that meeting.

School Accommodation.

492. **Mr. Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will prioritise an on-site technical assessment of needs of a school (details supplied) in County Mayo, in view of the present accommodation shortcomings of the school building and the fact that the accommodation does not conform to Department guidelines; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42786/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The overall accommodation needs of the school are being examined in my Department in order to ensure that any capital funding being provided is appropriate to meet the school's long-term accommodation needs. When a decision is made on the appropriate level of accommodation to be provided a technical visit will then be arranged and the application will be considered further.

Special Educational Needs.

493. **Dr. Cowley** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the fact that mainstream primary school teachers do not have the specific training needed to teach autistic children; her views on whether specific schooling and teaching is absolutely necessary for children suffering from autism; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42787/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):

My Department is committed to initiating and managing ongoing programmes of in-service training and professional development for teachers of pupils with special educational needs, including pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, through an expanding range of accredited courses in Colleges and Third-Level Institutions and in the development of support programmes and services, my Department continues to provide support for teachers in their ongoing professional development. A strategy has been developed, which combines a number of elements as follows.

- A new combined post-graduate diploma programme of in-service education is being offered to teachers in the current school year.
- From 2001, a Graduate Certificate Course in the Education of Pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders has been available at St. Patrick's College Drumcondra.
- A one-year programme, running from September to June and leading to a Masters in Special Educational Needs is provided at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

My Department supports the training and professional development of staff working with children with special educational needs through the Special Education Support Service (SESS) which was established in 2003. The service as appropriate, consolidates co-ordinates, develops and delivers a range of professional development initiatives and support structures for school personnel working with students with special educational needs in a variety of educational settings. Generally this support is provided by direct training input or sanction for school staff to attend courses recognised and funded through the SESS.

As part of its response to the growing demand from teachers for support and training, the SESS is currently developing teams of trainers to deliver training in four specific areas, one of which is Autism. This training will be delivered locally through the Education Centre network and/or through whole-staff in-school support.

My Department's preferred approach to the provision of appropriate education for children with autism, is through the primary and post primary school network, whether through placement in mainstream classes, in special classes or in special schools, a view that is supported by the findings of the Task Force Report on Autism. My Department supports a multi-skills approach in regard to the education of children with autism where a range of teaching methods are available e.g. Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH), ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis), Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

School Transport.

494. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Minister for Education and Science the position in relation to a school transport application (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42788/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):

My Department has been informed by Bus Éireann that it is currently in the process of establishing a school transport service to the school referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied. The Deputy may wish to check with the local Bus Éireann office regarding the pupils eligible for this service.

Disadvantaged Status.

495. **Mr. Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Science if all appeals regarding the DEIS initiative have been determined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42789/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin):

DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan for educational inclusion, provides for a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP). The SSP will bring together and build upon a number of existing interventions in schools with a concentrated level of disadvantage.

The process of identifying primary and second-level schools for participation in DEIS was managed by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) on behalf of my Department and supported by quality assurance work co-ordinated through the Department's Regional Offices and the Inspectorate.

A review mechanism was put in place to address the concerns of schools that did not qualify for inclusion in DEIS but regarded themselves as having a level of disadvantage which was of a scale sufficient to warrant their inclusion in the programme. The review process operated under the direction of an independent person, charged with ensuring that all relevant identification processes and procedures were properly followed in the case of schools applying for a review. The closing date for receipt of review applications was 31 March, 2006. The Group have submitted a final report and the review is now concluded.

As a result of the identification and review process, 873 schools have been included under the DEIS action plan. These comprised 670 primary schools and 203 second-level schools.

A number of urban primary schools included in Band 2 of the programme applied for review and a number of these were successful and were identified for inclusion in Band 1. The remaining Band 2 schools, that had not applied for review, were then afforded the opportunity of applying for a review. Completed applications for review had to be submitted by 25 September 2006. The

review process for these applications has now been completed and schools will be notified of the outcomes shortly.

School Accommodation.

496. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the huge population growth that has taken place in Carlow town on both sides of the County Carlow and Laois border; if Carlow is prioritised as an area of rapid growth requiring targeted educational investment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42808/06]

498. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science if her attention has been drawn to the fact that village schools on the outskirts of Carlow are already taking pupils from the town due to the town schools being full; the plans in place to cater for the proposed residential development on the former sugar beet factory in addition to existing population strain; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42810/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I propose to take questions 496 and 498 together.

I can confirm to the Deputy that Carlow town has been designated as an area of rapid growth and all applications received from schools in the area are treated in that context.

The School Planning Section of the Department is currently in the process of completing a full study of the demographics of the area to ensure adequate educational provision is in place at all levels.

Question No. 497 answered with Question No. 481.

Question No. 498 answered with Question No. 496.

Schools Recognition.

499. **Mr. Gogarty** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of applications received to date by the new school advisory committee in relation to the application for a multi-denominational English medium primary school in Carlow town; if her Department is of the view that other schools would also be desirable and planned for in the next one to three years after the multi-denominational school; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42811/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The New School Advisory Committee is in receipt of a notification of an intention to apply for a Multi-Denominational English medium primary school in Carlow town. The closing date for applications is 31 January 2007. All applications received will be referred to the New

School Advisory Committee for their consideration.

The criteria and procedures for the recognition of new primary schools were revised in 2002 based on the recommendations of a report of the Commission on School Accommodation, on which the Education Partners were represented.

Applications for the recognition of new primary schools are assessed by an independent advisory board (the New Schools Advisory Committee) on the basis of the facts provided by the patron body in support of the case for the new school and the likely demand for places. Schools are granted provisional recognition and permanent recognition follows when long term viability has been established on actual enrolments over a period.

Under this process all patron bodies are treated on an equal footing regardless of whether they are denominational, inter-denominational or multi-denominational. The Committee's annual programme of work culminates in a report with recommendations on the granting of recognition to application. I am happy to support all new schools where it has been clearly demonstrated in accordance with the criteria that a demand exists.

500. **Ms Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Science her reason for denying permanent recognition to a school (details supplied) in Dublin 9; the way she proposes the funding deficit to be bridged by parents and school management; if she will review this decision in view of the extra costs this will place on parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42823/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): An assessment is being carried out by the Department to strategically examine the extent of multi-denominational provision in the Dublin 9 area. It will also determine long term requirements and how these should best be addressed. The issue of permanent recognition for the school in question will be visited once this assessment has been completed.

While schools with temporary recognition do not qualify for capital funding, the Department does provide grant aid for the rental of interim accommodation. This accommodation must be capable of fully meeting the needs of the developing school until permanent recognition has been secured and the Department is in a position to provide permanent accommodation for the school. Teacher salaries, capitation grants and school transport costs are also paid for eligible pupils.

Special Educational Needs.

501. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of primary and post-primary children with serious reading diffi-

[Mr. Kenny.]

culties; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42932/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): I want to assure the Deputy that this Government is committed to doing everything that we can to reduce the number of children with serious reading difficulties. We are very conscious of the fact that good levels of literacy and numeracy are fundamental prerequisites for full educational and social participation, and we have intensified our efforts. As the Deputy will be aware, a general allocation system has been introduced to provide teacher support to all mainstream primary schools to cater for pupils with higher incidence special educational needs, that is, pupils with borderline mild and mild general learning disability and specific learning disability. The allocation is also intended to support those with learning support needs. This model was designed to put in place a permanent resource in primary schools to cater for pupils with these special educational needs.

Second-level pupils with reading difficulties are normally integrated into ordinary classes. In such situations, they may receive additional tutorial support from the remedial/learning support teacher, guidance counsellor and subject teachers. Primary and second-level schools may apply to the local special educational needs organiser, an official of the National Council for Special Education, for additional teaching support in respect of pupils that satisfy the criteria for such support on account of their special educational needs. I am particularly conscious of the need for extra support for children in disadvantaged areas who are more at risk of having reading difficulties. A key underlying principle of DEIS, the action plan for educational inclusion that I launched last year, is that of early intervention. It focuses on identifying and assisting children who are having difficulty with reading and writing at an early stage with the aim of preventing literacy difficulties from becoming entrenched.

Children in DEIS schools that are identified as having major reading difficulties will be targeted early on to benefit from intensive, individualised literacy tuition through the Reading Recovery programme. This programme, under which each child is/can be provided with 2.5 hours of extra reading tuition a week, has been extremely positively received since its introduction a few years ago. The number of schools participating in the programme has already been doubled from 66 in 2004 to 136 in 2006. Access to Reading Recovery is being rolled out to all of the more than 330 urban primary schools participating in DEIS. Children with writing difficulties in these schools will also be targeted for extra support through the roll-out of the First Steps Programme to all urban primary DEIS schools. Taken together, the expansion of these two programmes, will signifi-

cantly improve the service available to children with literacy difficulties in disadvantaged areas. These measures will also be augmented by other extra supports being put in place under DEIS such as smaller classes at primary level, an expansion of the Home School Community Liaison scheme, a new initiative on pre-service and in-service professional development for teachers, and more school libraries at second level.

What is also very important is that there will be a much greater focus on target-setting and planning under DEIS to ensure that the substantial extra resources being provided will lead to better outcomes for children. In this context, the School Development Planning service will support schools in developing their plans and policies for teaching literacy and numeracy and in setting measurable targets for the reduction of serious literacy and numeracy difficulties. Of course as well as improving the supports we provide in our schools, we all know that initiatives that help parents with any literacy problems that they may have themselves can have a hugely positive effect on their children's achievement. For this reason, the establishment of a new family literacy project is also a key priority under the DEIS programme. The project will build on previous experience in this area and will be based on a partnership approach involving the VEC adult literacy services, Home School Community Liaison teachers and the National Adult Literacy Agency.

In this context, the Deputy will be aware that this Government has dramatically improved the level of provision for adult literacy training in recent years. Indeed, expenditure on adult literacy has increased by more than twenty-fold since we came into office — from €1 million in 1997 to €23 million in 2006. As a result of this dramatic increase in funding, we have been able to expand the number of people receiving adult literacy training, to the point where 35,000 people will receive a service in 2006. I believe that this unprecedented level of investment in adult literacy services will not only bring major benefits for the adults themselves, but will make a positive difference to their children's lives. Helping a parent to be able to read to their child could be one of the best things that we as a Government can do for both parent and child. So, as I have outlined, not only has this Government done a lot in recent years to improve the literacy levels of our children, we have intensified our efforts. I am confident that taken together, the initiatives that I have outlined will ensure a much greater level of support for children with literacy difficulties, and that achievement will improve considerably as a result.

Early School Leavers.

502. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of young people leaving school without a qualification; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42933/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): The latest data published by my Department on retention rates in second-level schools relate to the cohort of entrants to the first year of junior cycle in 1996. Students in this cohort would have sat the Leaving Certificate in either 2002 or 2003, depending on whether they took the Transition Year Programme. The published data for the 1996 cohort indicate an average “unadjusted” retention rate to Leaving Certificate of 70.3% for the local authority area of South Dublin, as compared with a national average figure of 77.8%. The term “unadjusted” relates to the fact that the figures cited have not been adjusted to allow for factors such as persons opting to pursue their senior cycle education in private institutions, emigration and death. The national adjusted Leaving Certificate retention rate for the 1996 cohort was 81.3%.

As regards those who complete the Junior Certificate but who depart from second-level education prior to the Leaving Certificate, the available statistical evidence indicates that the increasing range of further education and training opportunities available for these students is having a positive impact. CSO data show that the educational profile of 20-24 year olds in Ireland has improved steadily over the last five years, as increasing opportunities have been made available in the further education and training sector. By 2005, almost 87% of 20-24 year olds had completed upper second-level education or higher, up from some 82% in 2000. This compares with an EU average of 77% in 2005.

Given the clear link between leaving the system without formal qualifications and continued socioeconomic disadvantage in adult life, the Government is determined to do all that is possible to ensure that children and young people get the opportunities and supports they need to enable them to complete their education and secure their future economic and personal well being. Against the background of our continuing economic success, our increasingly well educated population (with almost 40% of 25-34 year olds having a third-level qualification, among the highest in the EU) and inward migration, those who leave school early without adequate qualifications face serious difficulties and challenges. My Department has adopted a broad-based approach to tackling early school leaving. We established the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) to monitor attendance and help to get young people back to school. We have widened the range of curricula available to students by promoting the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme in addition to the traditional Junior and Leaving Certificate curricula.

We have also put preventative measures in place such as the School Completion Programme and the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL). Under the School Completion Programme children at risk of early school leaving are targeted for a variety of extra supports, educational and non-educational, during and outside of school time — all aimed at encouraging them to stay in school. The Home School Community Liaison Scheme helps to get parents involved in their children’s education, which as we all know is a crucial component of convincing young people of the value of education. Enhancing attendance, progression, retention and attainment are central to DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) the action plan for educational inclusion, which is being implemented at present. The action plan represents a shift in emphasis away from individual initiatives, each addressing a particular aspect of the problem, with the new plan adopting a multifaceted and more integrated approach. This is the first time that an integrated educational inclusion strategy has been developed for 3-18 year olds in this country.

In relation to second chance educational opportunities for young people who left school early, this Government has shown a sustained commitment to providing greater opportunities in the adult and further education sectors. Many such young people take up places in Youthreach centres, while others pursue options such as FÁS apprenticeships. I would like to assure the Deputy that we have greatly intensified our efforts in recent years both to keep more young people in school and to provide increased educational opportunities for those who left school early. I will continue to prioritise further progress in this area. To that end the total provision in the 2007 estimates for educational inclusion programmes at all levels is €730 million — an increase of €95 million, or 15% on the 2006 figure. The 2007 provision includes a 20% increase in funding for the NEWB.

Special Educational Needs.

503. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the average waiting time for a psychological assessment for a child at primary and at post-primary level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42938/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): All primary and post primary schools have access to psychological assessments either directly through my Department’s National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) or through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA) that is administered by NEPS and full details of which are available on my Department’s website. NEPS does not keep

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waiting lists for assessments of children but in common with other psychological services encourages a staged assessment process, whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention, in consultation with their assigned NEPS psychologist. Only if there is a failure to make reasonable progress in spite of the school's best efforts, will a child be referred for individual psychological assessment. This system allows the psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually.

The introduction of the General Allocation model for primary schools last year, supported by the provision of over 600 extra resource teachers, means that children with high incidence special needs now longer have to wait for an individual assessment before they can get access to extra support. Children who manifest very special or urgent needs in school and who have not been previously assessed by a psychologist and are brought to the attention of a NEPS psychologist by the Principal teacher will usually be assessed by the psychologist within that school term. Normally, principals of schools prioritise those children in need of psychological assessment in consultation with the assigned psychologist. In the case of schools that do not currently have dedicated NEPS psychologists assigned to them, as I already mentioned, such schools have access to psychological assessments through the SCPA. Under this Scheme, schools can commission assessments from a member of the panel of private practitioners approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the fees directly to the psychologist concerned.

School Enrolments.

504. **Mr. Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of children for whom neither English nor Irish is their first language who are enrolled in the education system at both primary and post-primary level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42939/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Additional support is being given to schools in respect of an estimated 18,000 pupils at primary level and 6,000 pupils at post-primary level whose first language is not English to ensure that they can succeed at school. This support can take the form of financial assistance, additional teaching posts or portions of teacher posts.

Physical Education Facilities.

505. **Mr. Noonan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if she will approve the provision of a larger gymnasium sufficient for the

playing of basketball in the building programme she has sanctioned for a school (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [42941/06]

Minister for Education and Science (Ms Hanafin): Following an assessment of the school's long term accommodation needs, an extension project has been agreed on the basis of staffing of Principal plus 20 Mainstream class teachers plus ancillary. Based on this staffing level, schedules of overall accommodation has been drawn up and as is standard practice provision has been made for General Purpose facilities. The Office of Public Works, which acts on behalf of my Department in relation to site acquisition, is currently engaged in sourcing a site extension for the school in question. When the additional land has been acquired, the building project required to deliver the extension project at the school will be considered further in the context of the School Building and Modernisation Programme 2006-2010.

Departmental Properties.

506. **Mr. N. O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Defence the acreage of a property (details supplied) in County Cork in the ownership of his Department; the townlands this property occupies; the number of military personnel employed there; the number of civilian employees; the acreage which is under lease to local farmers; the area of this property that is the preferred area that his Department would agree to for the proposed development; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the local community are welcoming the proposal. [42285/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O'Dea): My Department administers an area of some 3352 acres at the property referred to by the Deputy. The property is vested in the Minister for Finance and is situated in a number of townlands which includes Ballinrush, Ballinvoher, Gortnahown, Killally West, Caherdrinny, Graigue, Skeheen Upper, Glenatlucky, Whitebog, Toor, Killakane, Pollardstown, Ballybeg and Turbeagh. All of the lands in question are used for military training and exercises, including the firing of live ammunition. For land management purposes, 136 acres approximately are let to local farmers on an 11-month basis, a further 76 acres are let to Teagasc at Moorepark, for agricultural research purposes, while the remaining area (excluding the Camp and ancillary infrastructure) in excess of 3000 acres approximately is grazed by sheep on a per-capita basis. There are ten civilian employees attached to the location in question along with one Land Steward and an Assistant Land Steward employed on a full time basis. During peak training periods, a further four civilians are

employed on a contract basis. It is not the practice for security reasons to give details regarding the numbers of military personnel serving at individual military locations. The proposal referred to by the Deputy is currently under examination in my Department.

Departmental Staff.

507. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Defence in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42724/06]

508. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for Defence the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42739/06]

Minister for Defence (Mr. O'Dea): I propose to take Questions Nos. 507 and 508 together.

There are four permanent civil servants employed in my Private Office comprising one Higher Executive Officer, one Executive Officer, one Staff Officer and one Clerical Officer. The salaries of these staff from December 2005 to December 2006 amounted to €178,151 per annum. Costs in relation to overtime and expenses (travel and subsistence) have amounted to €7,943.

There are six permanent civil servants employed in my Constituency office comprising of one Executive Officer, one Staff Officer and four Clerical Officers. The annual salaries of these staff since December 2005 amounted to €201,742 per annum. Costs in relation to overtime and expenses (travel and subsistence) have amounted to €1,374.

Also, I have appointed a Special Adviser, a Press Adviser, a Personal Assistant and a Personal Secretary. The salaries of these staff amount to €280,689 per annum. Costs in relation to expenses (travel and subsistence) since December 2005 have amounted to €11,170.

There are two permanent civil servants employed in the office of the Minister of State for Defence comprising of one Higher Executive Officer and a Clerical Officer. At current rates and since December 2006, the salaries of these staff amounted to €79,728 per annum. Costs in

relation to overtime and expenses (travel and subsistence) have amounted to €20,735.

Question No. 509 answered with Question No. 75.

Property Purchases.

510. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the large number of people who buy homes off plans and pay a deposit at this early stage; if he is satisfied there is adequate protections for consumers in terms of the development being as described, the completion of the house being to a proper standards, the commitment to deal with snag-lists efficiently resolved and so on; and his views on an initiative with the industry to ensure that high standards are maintained which is important for both the consumer and the long-term reputation of the building sector. [42989/06]

517. **Mr. Bruton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he is satisfied persons who buy homes from plans published by developers are sufficiently protected in law and in practice from the home turning out to be different than described in view of a cavalier attitude by builders to the snag list and concealed conditions in terms of the cost of management company fees and so on; and if he will review with the CIF the codes to protect buyers in this situation and the case for tighter protection. [42332/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 510 and 517 together.

Property purchase transactions are subject to private contract and buyers should ensure that they have adequate legal advice and information when signing contracts. While my Department has no statutory function in relation to the content of contracts, I am anxious to promote the interests of home buyers as far as possible and with that in view, my Department engages with the industry, as appropriate, in relation to voluntary codes of practice. The Department is currently pursuing certain matters in that regard, including possible measures to address some issues relating to residential property management. There has been a positive response from the industry and I am hopeful of early progress.

The Government legislation programme provides for the publication in 2007 of a Property Services Regulatory Authority Bill, which is being developed by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform based on recommendations in this area by the Auctioneering/Estate Agency Review Group and the Law

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Reform Commission. I understand that it is proposed to include provision in this legislation for the licensing of auctioneers, estate agents and property managing agents and that there is also likely to be provision for regulations relating to advertising, deposits and certain other matters relating to property sale and contracts.

Question No. 511 answered with Question No. 124.

Local Authority Funding.

512. **Ms C. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the arrangements between local authorities and his Department in relation to local authority loans and overdrafts; his views on the extent of overdraft use by any local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42265/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Local authority borrowing is subject to the provisions of section 106 of the Local Government Act 2001; borrowing is a reserved function and requires the sanction of the appropriate Minister.

Borrowing proposals, including overdrafts, must be submitted to the relevant Minister together with a resolution of the local authority members approving the proposed borrowing. Where sanction is sought from a Minister, other than the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, my Department is consulted, in accordance with guidelines issued by the Department of Finance, on the ability of the local authority to meet the loan repayments involved.

The extent to which recourse to overdraft is used by local authorities for their normal operational purposes is dependent on the relative timing of receipts of income from their various revenue sources and expenditure in respect of their current and capital programmes.

All borrowing by local authorities is subject to the overall limits which are set by the Government from time to time in the context of the General Government Balance.

Question No. 513 answered with Question No. 51.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

514. **Mr. Allen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when sanction will be given to an application made by Cork County Council for funds for the connection of water and sewage treatment infrastructure in the Monard area of County Cork. [42267/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Cork County Council has ranked a proposed water supply scheme at Monard as fortieth out of these water and sewerage schemes for its Southern Division for the period 2010-2014 in a list of schemes submitted to my Department in July last. The list did not include any plans for a sewerage scheme in the Monard area.

The priorities adopted by the members of Cork County Council will inform the next phase of my Department's Water Services Investment Programme.

Local Authority Housing.

515. **Mr. Morgan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the guidelines for local authorities on the taking over of housing estates based on the Local Government Act 2001 will be published by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42286/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department has set up a Working Group on Management Companies/Taking in Charge of Estates which is considering the question of responsibility for the maintenance of common shared facilities (roads, sewerage, footpaths, public lighting, large open spaces, smaller landscaped open spaces, car-parking, etc) in residential estates, including the newer type of mixed high-density estate. It is intended to issue guidance to planning authorities based on the outcome of the Group's work in early 2007.

Planning Issues.

516. **Mr. McGuinness** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the reason a licence was not granted to Kilkenny Borough Council allowing the council to provide public toilets at The Parade, Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42309/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Kilkenny Castle is a national monument in the ownership of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and under the management of the Office of Public Works. An application by Kilkenny Borough Council for consent under the National Monuments Acts to provide new public toilets on State owned property within the Castle grounds was refused by my Department on 30 June 2006. This refusal was because the proposed works, which included the breaking of a number of new openings in the wall, were considered to constitute an undue interference with a landmark national monument in State ownership.

In response to a notification of new development proposals put forward by the Borough Council under the Planning and Development Acts and Regulations, my Department advised on 30 November 2006 that it is amenable to the removal of the existing public toilets at The Parade on the basis that such removal would have a positive impact on the amenity of the national monument. My Department, in consultation with the Office of Public Works, is willing to continue to discuss with Kilkenny Borough Council the development of mutually acceptable proposals in relation to the Parade and other areas in the vicinity of the Castle, but which will not damage or otherwise interfere with the integrity of the national monument.

Question No. 517 answered with Question No. 510.

Question No. 518 answered with Question No. 173.

Special Areas of Conservation.

519. **Ms McManus** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the action he will take to combat the destruction to the natural environment taking place in County Wicklow by the use of quad bikes; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that quad bikes are used in special areas of conservation; his views on reports of a new EU directive making it a criminal offence to damage a special area of conservation; the steps he will take to support local farmers who feel intimidated by users of quad bikes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42445/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Question No. 433 of 22 November 2006.

Planning Issues.

520. **Mr. G. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if Part V of the Planning Acts applies to houses built on unzoned land (details supplied) where 60% of houses are subject to being available for short term rental; and if Part V is applicable to short term rental houses built in conjunction with hotel and golf clubs. [42473/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2006 applies to an application for permission for the development of houses on land that has been zoned for residential development or for a mix of residential and other uses. It does not, therefore, apply to unzoned land. Under the Acts, the definition of a house

means a building, which is being or has been occupied as a dwelling, or is provided as use as a dwelling. It is a matter for the relevant planning authority to determine what planning applications are subject to Part V.

Local Authority Housing.

521. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has received details from Dublin City Council regarding the number of their local authority dwellings that are vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42482/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The management and maintenance of their rented dwellings, including the control of vacant dwellings, is the responsibility of the housing authority concerned. The most recent figures available to my Department from Dublin City Council indicate that at 31 December 2005 there were 2,493 dwellings vacant. Of this figure 1,952 dwellings were de-tenanted for planned refurbishment purposes.

522. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if Dublin local authorities have furnished him with the local authority housing waiting lists for the Dublin catchment area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42483/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The statutory assessment of housing need is undertaken by local authorities on a triennial basis. The most recent assessment of need for social housing was undertaken by local authorities in March 2005. The results of that assessment indicated that there were 43,684 households on local authority waiting lists. More comprehensive data in relation to the assessment at an individual local authority level was published in the Annual Bulletin of Housing Statistics, a copy of which is available on my Department's website, www.environ.ie. The number of households on the waiting lists of the four main Dublin catchment area local authorities are given in the following table:

Local Authority	Net Need (2005)
Dublin City Council	5,617
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	2,395
South Dublin County Council	1,976
Fingal County Council	1,658

523. **Mr. Callely** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of housing units built in Dublin city and the surrounding local authorities areas to date in 2006; the number of units that the local authorities obtained under Part V; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42484/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Data on the number of house completions by each local authority for the first 10 months of 2006 have been published on the Department's website, *www.environ.ie*. Details in respect of the greater Dublin area are provided in the following table:

Local Authority	Number of dwellings completed in period to October 2006.
Dublin City	6,378
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	2,106
Fingal	4,697
South Dublin	2,697
Kildare	3,986
Meath	3,074
Wicklow	1,583
Total Greater Dublin Area	24,521

Data on the number of units acquired in the first 6 months 2006 by each local authority under Part V Planning and Development Acts 2000-2006 are published in the latest Quarterly Housing Statistics Bulletin, which is available in the Oireachtas library and on the Department's website. While my Department is currently compiling figures to the end of September 2006, data supplied by the local authorities indicate a provisional outturn of some 1,390 units acquired under Part V. This represents a 64% increase on the same period last year and exceeds the twelve months output in 2005. This is a very significant increase and I am confident that this upward trajectory in delivery will continue in the coming months and years.

National Parks.

524. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has satisfied himself that the €700,000 deer fencing programme in Killarney National Park is not in breach of the park's protective designations. [42510/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The programme referred to in the Question is the erection of a medium-disturbance deer fence over an area of some 150 hectares in the oak woodlands of

Killarney National Park. The fencing is being undertaken with the agreement and financial support of the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and Food under the Native Woodlands Scheme. It is an objective of EU and national habitats policy that appropriate steps should be taken to avoid the deterioration of natural habitats such as the old oak woodland. The erection of the fencing with this area of Killarney National Park is necessary because the presence of deer and feral goats has resulted in there being virtually no natural regeneration of native trees and no young or medium-aged oak trees in the woodland. The Forest Service has estimated that, unless this problem is addressed, there will be little or no oak woodland in the area in 80 or 90 years' time. Furthermore, the Forest Service and my Department consider that the erection of the fencing is the only viable way to restore semi-natural woodland to this area. I am satisfied that the fencing programme is essential for the survival of this woodland and is not in breach of the Park's protective designations.

Question No. 525 answered with Question No. 77.

Social and Affordable Housing.

526. **Mr. Carey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his Department has made progress with local authorities and financial institutions to enable affordable home owners who are mortgaged to a local authority through annuity loans (details supplied) re-mortgage their properties to take advantage of lower interest rates currently offered by the financial institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42682/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): My Department has facilitated standardised arrangements with a number of the main financial institutions who have introduced schemes of mortgage financing for persons wishing to access affordable housing. These arrangements relate only to the first time purchase of affordable properties.

The question of facilitating arrangements for persons in affordable housing also wishing to re-mortgage with private lenders has been the subject of discussions between my Department and a number of the financial institutions. The current practice requires that if a private lender agrees to provide re-mortgage finance it will be on the basis that their mortgage charge will rank below the clawback charge where such a charge exists. This is consistent with the Land Registry system on property charges which are time sensitive and means the older the charge the higher is its ranking.

It has not been possible to agree a standardised approach on the basis of the above. Notwithstanding this, my Department has no objection to a local authority allowing the re-financing of its mortgage, on an individual basis, through a private lender so long as the clawback provision is fully protected. It is a matter for the local authority in such cases to ensure that the clawback can be imposed as provided for in legislation.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

527. **Mr. Deenihan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the provision of a sewerage scheme in Milltown, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42700/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Milltown is part of Phase 1 of Kerry County Council's proposal to refurbish a number of village sewerage schemes which has been included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007.

I understand that the Council is currently assessing tenders for the sewage collection system for Milltown and is examining expressions of interest from prospective tenderers for the treatment plant.

Proposed Legislation.

528. **Mr. Dennehy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has any plans to amend Section C of Part 4 of the Private Residential Tenancies Act as there is a potential loophole which could be used by property owners for not registering tenants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42709/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): It is a function of the Private Residential Tenancies Board, under section 151(1)(g) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, to review the operation of the Act and to make recommendations for amendments to the Minister. Any proposals from the Board for the amendment of the Act will be fully considered.

Departmental Staff.

529. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in respect of each Minister of State within his Department the number of staff broken down by grade employed within their private office and their constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42727/06]

530. **Mr. Gilmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of staff broken down by grade employed within his private office and his constituency office; the number of staff who are permanent civil servants; the number who are political appointees; the annual cost of each such office in terms of salary, overtime and expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42742/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 529 and 530 together.

The staffing composition of my private and constituency offices (detailing permanent civil servants and temporary unestablished civil servants) are set out in the tables below.

Private Office

Permanent Civil Servants		Temporary Unestablished Civil Servants	
Full time Equivalents	Grade	Full time Equivalents	Title
1	Executive Officer (Private Secretary)	1	Special Advisers (Principal Officer grade)
3	Executive Officer		
3	Clerical Officer		

Constituency Office

Permanent Civil Servants		Temporary Unestablished Civil Servants	
Full time Equivalents	Grade	Full time Equivalents	Title
2	Executive Officer	1	Personal Assistant (HEO grade)
2.5	Clerical Officer	1	Personal Secretary (Secretarial Assistant grade)

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From January to end November 2006 salary costs for the above staff amounted to €526,465.67.

Overtime and travel and subsistence are paid as the need arises in accordance with Department of Finance Guidelines; from January to the end of November 2006 these have amounted to €23,437.44 and €14,221.10 respectively.

The staffing composition of the private and constituency offices of both Ministers of State at my Department are set out in the following tables.

Minister Noel Ahern: Private Office

Permanent Civil Servants		Temporary Unestablished Civil Servants	
Full time Equivalents	Grade	Full time Equivalents	Title
1	Higher Executive Officer (Private Secretary)		
2	Executive Officer		
2	Clerical Officer		

Minister Noel Ahern: Constituency Office

Permanent Civil Servants		Temporary Unestablished Civil Servants	
Full time Equivalents	Grade	Full time Equivalents	Title
1	Executive Officer	1	Personal Assistant (HEO grade)
2	Clerical Officer	1	Personal Secretary (Secretarial Assistant grade)

From January to end November 2006 salary costs for the above staff amounted to €345,919.54. Overtime, from January to the end of November

2006, amounted to €12,217.20 and no travel and subsistence expenses have been incurred to date in 2006.

Minister Batt O'Keeffe: Private Office

Permanent Civil Servants		Temporary Unestablished Civil Servants	
Full time Equivalents	Grade	Full time Equivalents	Title
1	Higher Executive Officer (Private Secretary)		
1	Executive Officer		

Minister Batt O'Keeffe: Constituency Office

Permanent Civil Servants		Temporary Unestablished Civil Servants	
Full time Equivalents	Grade	Full time Equivalents	Title
1	Executive Officer	1	Personal Assistant (HEO grade)
1	Clerical Officer	1	Personal Secretary (Secretarial Assistant grade)

From January to end November 2006 salary costs for the above staff amounted to €248,966.74. Overtime and travel and subsistence, from January to the end of November 2006, amounted to €68.27 and €8,174.97 respectively.

Departmental Staff.

531. **Mr. Cuffe** asked the Minister for the

Environment, Heritage and Local Government the responsibilities beyond the management of the park of the Wicklow National Park divisional manager, regional manager, district conservation officer, head conservation ranger and general operatives (details supplied). [42791/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The staff

referred to, while headquartered in the Wicklow Mountains National Park, also discharge functions across parts of the South East in relation to the Wildlife Acts 1976-2000 and of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and, in particular, the protection of designated habitats and species.

The previous Divisional Manager for the Eastern Division of my Department's National Parks and Wildlife Service was headquartered in the Wicklow Mountains National Park office at Kilafin, Laragh. The present Divisional Manager operates from Dublin.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

532. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position of a new sewerage scheme (details supplied); if all of the funding has been drawn down in regard to the scheme; if not the amount outstanding; the targeted completion dates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42812/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I understand that the civil works contract for the Curragh/Brownstown/Cutbush/Suncroft Sewerage Scheme is substantially complete and that the mechanical and electrical installation is being commissioned. My Department is funding half the cost of the scheme and has to date recouped €1.74 million to Kildare County Council from an overall contribution of €1.906 million.

Local Authority Grants.

533. **Mr. Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the numbers of meetings he or his officials have had with the Health Service Executive in seeking to finalise a report and resultant decisions in relation to streamlining the payment of a disability payment; the present position of a local authority paying a certain percentage and the HSE paying a top-up grant where the local authorities payment does not meet the necessary funding to ensure the completion of the disability payment application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42813/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The review of the Disabled Persons Grant scheme, which incorporates the conditions governing the Essential Repairs Grant scheme and the Special Housing Aid for the Elderly scheme and the issue of the HSE 'top-up' grant was recently finalised within my Department. Representatives of my Department, the Department of Health and Children, the Health Service Executive and Local Authorities have been in regular contact on the future operation of the schemes. A formal meeting of this group

took place on 24 October 2006 and discussions have continued since then.

Proposals for the future operation of the schemes are expected to be announced early next year in the context of a new Housing Policy Statement.

Question No. 534 answered with Question No. 134.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

535. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the various sewerage treatment or pipeline facilities throughout County Kildare in respect of which his Department directly or through Kildare County Council have received complaints of methane gas emissions; his proposals to address this issue with particular reference to the ongoing complaints in this regard at Main Street, Leixlip; when he expects these issues to be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42890/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): My Department has received no complaints about methane gas emissions from wastewater treatment plants in County Kildare.

The position in relation to the odour issue in Leixlip is set out in the reply to Questions Nos. 428 and 429 of 22 November 2006.

Road Network.

536. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will allocate specific funds to carry out urgent remedial works on the minor roads throughout County Kildare which have deteriorated sharply due to excessive vehicular traffic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42892/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I refer to the reply to Question No. 357 of 8 November 2006.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

537. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will authorise, approve and fund the proposed Balyna group water scheme in County Kildare in the near future; the procedures expected to delay the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42893/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Responsibility for the administration of the Rural Water Programme, including the prioritisation, approval and payment of grants to group schemes, has been devolved to county councils since 1997.

Questions Nos. 538 and 539 answered with Question No. 74.

Planning Issues.

540. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if planning permission is required for a well; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42896/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Class 44 of Schedule 2, Part 1 of the exempted development provisions of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 provides that the sinking of a well, drilling of a borehole, erection of a pump, or construction of a pumphouse, for the purpose of providing a domestic water supply, or a group water supply scheme in accordance with a plan or proposal approved by the Minister or a local authority for the purpose of making a grant towards the cost of such works, is exempted from the need to seek planning permission.

541. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that all local authorities are implementing his statutory guidelines in respect of rural housing with particular reference to the need to accommodate the indigenous population and that some unsuccessful applicants have expressed concern that where it would appear they qualified under the revised guidelines only to find that other reasons previously not referred to are being used to prevent a grant of permission, even where they propose to build on a site donated by a family member and where traffic or public health grounds do not arise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42897/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Rural Housing came into effect on 13 April 2005. Their purpose is to achieve a balance between the accommodation of rural housing needs and the requirements of sustainable development in economic, social and environmental terms. The Guidelines provide that reasonable proposals on suitable sites for persons who are part of, and contribute to, the rural community should be accommodated.

Suggested categories include persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community such as farmers and their families, people who have lived most of their lives in rural areas and returning emigrants. Other suggested categories include persons working full-time or part-time in rural areas such as those involved in farming, forestry, inland waterway or marine related occupations, and people whose work is intrinsically linked to rural areas, such as teachers in rural schools.

The Guidelines make clear that the foregoing list is not intended to be exhaustive and that it is a matter for each planning authority to make its own assessment of the scope and extent of rural housing needs to be catered for in its development plan, taking account of local conditions and relevant planning issues. Also, as regards rural areas which are under strong urban influence, the Guidelines recommend that the development plan policies make a distinction between urban and rural generated housing in those rural areas closest to large urban areas, in order to avoid ribbon and haphazard development.

The Guidelines are a material consideration both in relation to development plans and in the consideration of planning applications. The detailed application of the guidelines to particular planning cases is however a matter for the planning authority concerned or An Bord Pleanála, as appropriate.

Social and Affordable Housing.

542. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if the 20% social and affordable housing requirements anticipated in Part 5 of the Planning Act 2000 refers to 20% of the housing units or 20% of the area of the site to be dedicated towards social and affordable housing; if he has received communication from local authorities in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42898/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2006 requires, inter alia, that up to 20% of land zoned for residential developments or for a mix of residential and other uses, is to be reserved to meet social and affordable housing needs. Instead of the transfer of land there are other options available to satisfy the Part V requirement viz. the provision of new units or other lands within the functional area of the local authority; the transfer of fully or partially serviced sites to the local authority or to an approved housing association, the payment of money in lieu of land or a combination of the above. As a matter of policy, my Department has made it clear that local authorities should regard the early delivery of completed homes as a priority, when they are concluding Part V agreements.

The legislation requires, inter alia, that where a local authority consent to the use of one of the alternative options available to meet the Part V requirement, the aggregate monetary value of the option being agreed to must, in all cases, be equivalent to the monetary value of the land that the planning authority would receive if the agreement provided solely for the transfer of land.

My Department's most recent Part V guidelines issued on 27 November 2006 stated, inter

alia, that equivalent monetary value can be achieved through acceptance of a percentage of the total units on-site based on the percentage unit requirement in the relevant housing strategy. The guidelines were prepared following discussions with local authorities and the home building industry.

Question No. 543 answered with Question No. 74.

Question No. 544 answered with Question No. 74.

Question No. 545 answered with Question No. 87.

Residential Density.

546. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has satisfied himself that adequate numbers of family sized homes are being built here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42902/06]

548. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will outline what constitutes a housing unit; if this refers to a one, two, three or four bedroomed house, flat or apartment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42904/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 546 and 548 together.

Local housing strategies, provided for under the Planning and Development Act 2000, determine housing requirements under local development plans. In developing these strategies, local authorities must ensure that there is an appropriate mix of dwelling types and sizes to cater for a range of housing needs.

My Department has been reviewing the guidelines on residential density with a view to updating them later this year to achieve higher residential density of a suitable scale at appropriate locations. The updating of the guidelines will in particular focus on the quality of new developments and will take account of the extensive experience built up since the introduction of the guidelines in the design, assessment and development of higher density proposals. The revised guidelines will also reflect the need to promote the building of sustainable communities, particularly in terms of adequate facilities, amenities, schools, transport and leisure infrastructure.

In addition, new Housing Policy Framework: Building Sustainable Communities was published in December 2005. This sets out an agenda for an integrated package of policy initiatives on matters which include supporting higher densities and compact urban settlement through design innovation in the creation of new homes, new urban

spaces and new neighbourhoods, whilst also ensuring an appropriate mix of dwelling types and sizes to cater for a range of housing needs. My Department has also commissioned a research study into apartment size and space standards, which will inform the revised planning guidelines on residential densities. The thrust of these will focus on the need to ensure that apartments are family-friendly, both in terms of their overall floor area and also facilities such as storage space and external play areas. Guidance will also be included on best practice mechanisms in the effective linkage of the development of new residential areas with the provision of wider social infrastructure such as schools and amenities.

In response to the question on what constitutes a housing unit, my Department receives data from ESB Networks on the number of new meters installed into newly built residences, and these data form the basis for the number of housing units completed. These units include apartments, and single or multiple bedroom houses.

We are currently building housing units at the rate of over 20 homes for every 1,000 persons living in Ireland. This is well ahead of the building rate in the European Union and has been achieved during a time of high economic growth and full employment. In fact only four years ago the rate of house building was running at 15 units per 1,000 persons. Household size has also been falling with the 2002 Census figures revealing on average 2.9 persons from over 3.5 twenty years ago. These data in themselves suggest that the housing stock is well positioned to meet the needs of different family sizes.

With the support of a range of policy initiatives and measures, my Department will continue to work with planning authorities to ensure that the unprecedented rate of population growth and housing development, currently being experienced in Ireland, is planned for in a manner that will, over the longer term, support a more balanced regional development and the creation of sustainable communities.

Social and Affordable Housing.

547. **Mr. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has satisfied himself that the quality of all modern apartment blocks or affordable housing meets the desired quality standards and building regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42903/06]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. N. Ahern): The national Building Regulations operative from 1 June 1992 apply to all new buildings and existing buildings which have been the subject of a material alteration. Responsibility for compliance with the Building Regulations is a matter for the builder and the

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owner of a building, while enforcement of the Regulations is the responsibility of the local building control authorities. Accordingly, all affordable housing developments and apartments must meet the relevant requirements of the Building Regulations. In addition, my Department has issued guidance documentation on Part V, which recommends that affordable housing acquired under Part V should also adhere to my Department's Design Guidelines for Social Housing.

In relation to apartments, my Department commissioned research on apartments size and space standards earlier this year. The outcome of this research has informed the preparation of Draft Guidelines on Apartments Size and Design Standards which will very shortly be issued for public consultation. The new Guidelines will replace the existing guidance contained in the 1995 Guidelines on Residential Developments in Urban Renewal Designated Tax Incentive Areas.

The new Guidelines will also form part of a suite of guidance documents which will replace the existing 1999 Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Residential Density. The suite will include guidelines on new residential developments and a new best practice handbook on urban design and housing layouts, which will illustrate how the policies set out in the planning guidelines might be implemented, with examples drawn from current practice.

The guidance will take account of experiences to date with the 1995 and 1999 guidelines, the rapidly changing demographics and settlement patterns, the need for more compact urban development (particularly within the Greater Dublin Area) and the on-going policy of delivering sustainable communities and enhancing quality of life.

Question No. 548 answered with Question No. 546.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

549. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Edgeworthstown sewerage nutrient reduction scheme; if final plans have been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42920/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Edgeworthstown Sewerage Nutrient Reduction Scheme has been approved for funding in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007.

I approved Longford County Council's Preliminary Report for the scheme in March 2006.

550. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Longford central regional water supply scheme, reservoir and pipelines; if final plans have been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42921/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Longford Central Regional Water Supply Scheme has been approved for funding in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 at an estimated cost of €7.29 million.

I approved Longford County Council's Contract Documents for this scheme in February 2006.

551. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Ballymahon regional water supply scheme; if final plans have been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42922/06]

553. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Granard regional water supply scheme strategic review; if final plans have been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42924/06]

556. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Longford sludge management scheme; if final plans have been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42927/06]

559. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Longford grouped towns and villages sewerage scheme feasibility study; if final plans have

been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42930/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 551, 553, 556 and 559 together.

These schemes are all approved for funding in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007.

My Department is awaiting the submission of Preliminary Reports from Longford County in each case.

552. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Drumlish and Newtownforbes sewerage schemes; if final plans have been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42923/06]

557. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Ardagh, Ballinalee, Aughnacliffe sewerage schemes; if final plans have been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42928/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): I propose to take Questions Nos. 552 and 557 together.

These schemes have been approved for funding under my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 and Longford County Council's Preliminary Report for each scheme has been approved. My Department is awaiting submission of construction stage budget applications from the Council for the five schemes. Under new streamlined approval procedures I have introduced to accelerate progress under the Water Services Investment Programme, the Council will not require any further approvals from my Department in the case of those schemes where the approved construction stage budget does not exceed €5m.

Question No. 553 answered with Question No. 551.

554. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for

the Longford central regional water supply scheme strategic review; if final plans have been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42925/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Longford Central Regional Water Supply Scheme Strategic Review has been approved for funding in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 at an estimated cost of €1.02 million.

The Council's Preliminary Report for the scheme, received on the 13 November 2006, is being examined by my Department and will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

555. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Longford sewerage scheme phase two; if final plans have been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42926/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): Phase 2 of the Longford Sewerage Scheme has been approved for funding in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007.

My Department is awaiting details of Longford County Council's development proposals for the area to be served by the scheme in order to consider the Council's Preliminary Report and Water Services Pricing Policy Report.

Question No. 556 answered with Question No. 551.

Question No. 557 answered with Question No. 552.

558. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Lanesborough water supply stage one scheme; if final plans have been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42929/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): A Preliminary Report for Stage 1 of the Lanesborough Water Supply Scheme was approved by my Department

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in 1999 and approval to the Scheme remains in place under the Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007. I understand that the Council is currently carrying out a review of the scale and scope of the scheme with a view to submitting more extensive proposals to my Department for approval.

Question No. 559 answered with Question No. 551.

560. **Mr. P. McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if approval has been given by his Department for the Longford town sewerage scheme, network and waste water treatment; if final plans have

been received from Longford County Council for this scheme; if those plans have been approved; if contract documents have been approved; if finances have been allocated for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
[42931/06]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Mr. Roche): The Longford Town Network and Waste Water Treatment Plant Scheme has been included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2005-2007 as a scheme to advance through planning.

My Department is awaiting submission of Longford County Council's contract documents for the scheme.