



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

Wednesday, 9 July 2008.

Death of Member: Expressions of Sympathy	531
Leaders' Questions	534
Ceisteanna—Questions	
Taoiseach	543
Requests to move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 32	554
Order of Business	554
European Council Decisions: Motion	561
National Development Plan: Motion	561
Ceisteanna—Questions (<i>resumed</i>)	
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	
Priority Questions	572
Other Questions	584
Adjournment Debate Matters	596
National Development Plan: Motion (<i>resumed</i>)	596
Private Members' Business	
Public Private Partnerships: Motion (<i>resumed</i>)	642
National Development Plan: Motion (<i>resumed</i>)	664
Message from Seanad	694
Adjournment Debate	
Hospital Services	694
School Accommodation	699
Questions: Written Answers	701

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 9 Iúil 2008.

Wednesday, 9 July 2008.

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Death of Member: Expressions of Sympathy.

An Ceann Comhairle: We will now have expressions of sympathy on the death of the late Deputy Séamus Brennan. Tributes will be confined to party leaders and all other Members will have an opportunity to pay tribute on another day when the late Deputy Brennan's family will be present.

The Taoiseach: Ba mhaith liom mo chomhbhrón pearsanta agus comhbhrón Pháirtí Fhianna Fáil a chur in iúl don Teach ar bhás Shéamuis Ó Braonáin. Ba mhaith liom cású freisin lena bhean céile Ann agus lena seisear clainne. Is cinnte gur ócáid an-bhrónach scéal a bháis dúinn ar fad. Bhí an pholaitíocht go smior i Séamus Ó Braonáin. Óna chéad laethanta mar mhac léinn san ollscoil ina chathair dúchais, Gaillimh, bhí a lámh ariamh sa bpolaíocht. Le linn dó a bheith mar Ard Rúnaí ar Fhianna Fáil, d'éirigh leis go leor leasuithe agus athruithe a chur i bhfeidhm. Ceannródaí ab ea é mar Aire. Ba bheag leis stádas na hoifige ach ba mhór leis spriocanna a bhaint amach. Leas an phobail, feabhas an tsaoil agus dul chun cinn na tíre na clocha ba mhó ar a pháidrin. Ní raibh aon éirí in airde ag baint le Séamus. Seirbhís phoiblí agus cúram dá chlann, Shay, Daire, Aoife, Sine, Breffni agus Éanna agus a chéile Ann, a chuid príomh cuspóirí.

I was saddened to learn of the passing of Deputy Séamus Brennan overnight. On my own behalf as Taoiseach and as uachtarán of Fianna Fáil, I convey my sincere sympathies to Ms Ann Brennan and her family on the death of Séamus. He will be deeply mourned by all sections of our organisation, our parliamentary party, our national executive and in every cumann throughout the State. In the coming days we will reflect on Séamus's immense contribution to Fianna Fáil's welfare and on his proud career of public service. His untimely death at the age of 60 will be deeply felt in this House and throughout Ireland.

Séamus Brennan has made a massive contribution to our country. He was at the front line of Irish politics for more than 35 years and for that entire period, he served our nation and the Fianna Fáil Party with great distinction. He will be remembered as a brilliant political strategist, a dedicated constituency Deputy, a reforming Minister and a very popular colleague. He will be hugely missed.

Deputy Brennan had deep roots in our party organisation. His father was a prominent Fianna Fáil activist and director of elections in Galway. Séamus became active in Fianna Fáil as a student. He first came to national prominence when Jack Lynch appointed him general secretary of Fianna Fáil in the mid-1970s. He was our party's youngest ever general secretary and

[The Taoiseach.]

he brought great enthusiasm to the role as well as unrivalled organisational skills. His efforts in revitalising the Fianna Fáil organisation, alongside his genius for electoral politics, played a significant part in ensuring a landslide victory for the party in the general election of 1977.

He was appointed to Seanad Éireann by Jack Lynch in that year. In 1981, he successfully contested his first general election. He was elected to Dáil Éireann in nine successive general elections by the people of Dublin South, frequently topping the poll. His great commitment to his constituents and to public service made him a formidable vote gatherer and a great asset to our party. He had a keen political acumen and understood better than most the importance of communicating a political message. As a Minister, he was a committed public servant in the cause of our country. He was a practical Cabinet colleague who thrived on bringing forward proposed solutions to the challenges the nation faced. He was an able and capable administrator in each of the offices of State he held.

He first served as Minister of State at the Department of Industry and Commerce, with special responsibility for trade and marketing, in 1987, before being appointed Minister for Tourism and Transport by the former Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, in 1989. In a long and distinguished ministerial career, he also served as Minister for Education, Minister for Communications, Minister for Transport and Minister for Social and Family Affairs. He served with distinction as Government Chief Whip from 1997 to 2002 and played a significant role in ensuring that Administration completed its full term.

At the core of his political philosophy was his belief that a strong economy geared towards maximising employment was the best means by which wider social objectives could be achieved. As a Minister his achievements were numerous. His establishment of the Small Business Forum brought great change and improvement for small businesses. In his highly successful tenure at the Department of Social and Family Affairs, he negotiated significant welfare increases for the most vulnerable in society. In education, he published a Green Paper which placed special emphasis on giving priority to disadvantaged students and was the genesis for much subsequent policy development. As Minister for Transport, he brought forward many new initiatives in air transport services.

I served with Séamus in the Governments of Albert Reynolds and Deputy Bertie Ahern. I knew him to be a reforming Minister with a strategic mind and a huge grasp of public policy. He played a significant role in shaping the Ireland in which we live. I acknowledge his key role in the negotiations which led to the formation of the current Fianna Fáil-Green Party-Progressive Democrats Party Government with Independent support.

Séamus Brennan was a man of great courtesy. He faced his illness with great dignity and fortitude. He never complained and despite his declining health, he continued to work for his constituents and for the Government. I recall my last meeting with him during the campaign on the Lisbon treaty referendum. Even though he was battling a serious illness, his enthusiasm, commitment and innate courtesy were such that he joined me and other colleagues on the hustings in south Dublin. I remember a brave and courageous man, exchanging words of encouragement upon my arrival and, subsequently, the parting words, firm handshake and the inevitable smile that sought to reassure that all would be well.

I extend my deepest sympathy to Séamus's family, especially his wife, Ann, and his children, Shay, Daire, Aoife, Sine, Breffni and Éanna, as well as his wider family and wide circle of friends. Braon de dhrucht na bhflaitheas agus deoch de thobar na ngrásta, go mbeannaí Dia d'anam a Shéamuis.

Deputy Enda Kenny: On my own behalf and that of the Fine Gael Party, I wish to tender our deepest sympathy and condolences to Séamus Brennan's wife, Ann, and their six children,

as well as to the Fianna Fáil Party on its loss of an active, elected Member who held many ministerial portfolios over the years. I spoke to Séamus Brennan outside this House just after Christmas and he knew that this was not going to be easy. He spoke of his illness and his understanding of mortality in a way that few would.

I first met Séamus Brennan shortly after 1973 when he was appointed general secretary of Fianna Fáil. I was elected to the House in 1975. In the early 1980s, Séamus Brennan was already talking about the power of the computer and its capacity to allow politicians to maintain contact with constituents and interest groups in various sectors of society. His understanding of human nature and the mechanics of politics made him an outstanding elected representative. On more than one occasion when times were difficult and a political crisis erupted, Séamus Brennan could always be relied upon to be wheeled out by Fianna Fáil to defend whatever the issue might be. He did so with a simplicity and nature that was hard to dislike. Of the many people I have seen pass through this House, Séamus Brennan epitomised through his western roots a deep understanding of people's concerns and of humanity in general.

For him, politics was an all consuming passion. It was his life and I do not think he worked at anything else, other than having qualified as an accountant in UCG before joining Fianna Fáil. He brought about a marked change in the way political parties did their business. He was the first in the country to bring a sense of analysis to political polls and electoral trends that came from the United States and changed forever the way political parties operated here. He knew the organisation of his own party inside out and from top to bottom. There was not a village, parish or townland that he could not pinpoint from Donegal to Wexford, or from Louth to west Cork, as well as knowing individual party members there. He had been around such places, building up Fianna Fáil in the early 1970s. I recall his many television appearances when he explained in his own quiet way what it was like to be general secretary of a party that was striving for Government at that time. From that perspective, he served his country well in a range of junior and senior ministerial portfolios.

His family and friends can be proud of the part that Séamus Brennan played in Irish political life and in public life generally. At public meetings, he always went out of his way to pay respect to his elected colleagues from all parties and none. He made a point of crossing crowded rooms to seek out other elected representatives and show them a respect that the ballot box brings. For that, I pay him tribute. Young, aspiring politicians would do well to study the way in which Séamus Brennan conducted himself in terms of the responsibilities given to him both by the people and by the Taoisigh with whom he served in various Departments.

In his own unassuming way, he was never shy about garnering the odd bit of publicity. One of those who worked with him told me: "You could find a major statement in the national newspapers on a Monday morning from Séamus Brennan, but when you looked for the press release that went with it, there was no press release". That was because on quiet days Séamus Brennan would take up the phone and give journalists some news story that would carry the day for them and for him. I shall miss him as a friend and a political colleague. After Christmas, just outside these doors, he said to me: "I've had a tough battle. I'm not sure whether I can weather this storm or not." He has gone and politics is the poorer for his passing. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Ba mhaith liom cur leis na focail atá ráite ag an Taoiseach agus an Teachta Kenny ar an lá brónach seo, lá bháis Séamus Brennan. Ba mhaith liom comhbhrón thar mo cheann féin agus thar cheann Pháirtí an Lucht Oibre a ghabháil le Ann Brennan, lena clann agus le comhgleacaithe Shéamuis i Fianna Fáil agus sa Rialtas.

Today is a sad day for all of us, but particularly for the Brennan family as well as Séamus's Government colleagues and others in Fianna Fáil. Séamus Brennan has given his entire adult

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

life to the service of his party, constituency and country. He was appointed general secretary of Fianna Fáil at the remarkably young age of 25 by the former Taoiseach, Jack Lynch. Since then, he served in the Seanad and Dáil, holding several ministerial offices with great distinction. Séamus Brennan was a rare political phenomenon: a politician of strong convictions, effective for his party and quietly partisan, yet an extremely likeable person. He managed to conduct his political business effectively but without rancour or animus, which is the way all of us will remember him.

My constituency and his adjoin each other, so it was inevitable that our care of constituents and dealings on various issues would sometimes overlap. I always had great admiration for the way in which Séamus served his constituents individually and dealt with issues that arose in his constituency. Sometimes, the constituency boundaries would change and on one such occasion I inherited two of his election workers. They needed no induction to the business of how to run an election, including campaigning and canvassing. They were the best I had seen in a long time.

We also shared our Galway origins and I always enjoyed discussing such matters with him, including football, hurling, politics or Galway people. He had a particular affiliation with the university in Galway, which he attended. The last time I met Séamus socially was at an event in NUIG a couple of months ago, where he was presented with an award by the university for his service to public life. He was enormously proud of the recognition that he got from the university on that occasion. While I had known he was ill and we all shared the struggle that he battled so bravely, I do not think any of us was to know on that occasion that his time would be short afterwards.

On behalf of the Labour Party I extend my sympathy to his wife Ann, to their children and to all his colleagues in Fianna Fáil.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I was very saddened to hear about the death of Séamus Brennan, a very good colleague in the Government. I convey my deepest sympathy on behalf of the Green Party to his wife Ann and his children, and to his colleagues in the Fianna Fáil Party.

Séamus Brennan had a very distinguished political career and made a great contribution to Irish public life. I got to know him very well when I was a Whip in the Opposition. That period formed my impression of the man. He could not have been more generous with his time, and he facilitated me with any requests that were made. That built up a relationship and it has been rightly said that he played an important role in the formation of this Government. In fact, he played the pivotal role in the formation of this Government. Throughout my time in the Opposition, he always made of point of saying to me “whatever you do, do not close any doors”. He repeated that over and over again. Eventually the message got through and we did not close any doors.

After the last election, he got my mobile phone number and constantly sent me texts. Eventually we spoke on the phone and I began to realise that the offers of negotiation were serious. We ended up in Government buildings and Séamus Brennan greeted the Green Party team with the immortal words, “you are playing senior hurling now lads”. He added ominously, “but you are playing with lads with All Ireland medals”.

He was a model of wisdom, courtesy, calmness, total reliability and modesty. When he was Government Chief Whip and getting great press, I remember saying to him “Séamus, it seems that you are now a political star”. He said “John, there are no stars in politics”. It is a lesson we could usefully learn today. We are here to do a job and he did that job. He knew he was

here to serve the public and he did that with total reliability, which was borne out by the fact that he topped the poll time and again.

People are genuinely saddened today. Sitting beside him in Cabinet and watching him fight that illness was a difficult experience for all of us. He did so with great dignity. He never complained. He was a campaigning TD to the very last and served his constituents with total dedication. It is with a genuine feeling of sadness that I come to the House today on behalf of my party to say ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal.

Deputy Martin Ferris: On behalf of the Sinn Féin Party, I join in the expression of sympathy to the family of the late Deputy Séamus Brennan. To his wife Ann, his two sons and four daughters, we offer our sincere sympathy. We also offer condolences to the Fianna Fáil Party, in which Séamus Brennan was a long serving and leading member.

Séamus Brennan was courteous and friendly, and was willing to listen and engage with all sides in the Dáil. I had the privilege of being with him in Boston in 2004, when we addressed a number of meetings on the Northern peace process. Throughout that day, he was courteous and generous, and understood the desire of the Irish American community for a successful conclusion to the peace process. It was a long day and later on that night, I thought he was about to look for an application form to join Sinn Féin. He left a striking presence in my mind from that day on.

While it was known that he was ill, he bore this illness without any fuss or attention, but he has now passed away at the relatively young age of 60. No doubt he would have much more to contribute to public life had he survived his illness, and he deserves the respect for the contribution he made over his long career. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): We were all sad to hear of the premature passing overnight of our colleague, Séamus Brennan. As many others have said, Séamus was the consummate politician. He devoted almost all of his adult life to politics. He was appointed general secretary of the Fianna Fáil Party when he was 24 years of age. He served in six different Departments, and he used his great intelligence and his spirit of innovation in each of them. I remember being very impressed with how he moved from issues relating to competition in transport to the cause of society's most vulnerable in social welfare. He applied the same energy, vigour and determination to that task and his colleagues in the Government were deeply impressed with his commitment. He was like a dog with a bone. When he took up a cause, he did not easily give it up.

I have known him for all my political career. He was very encouraging to me in my early years when I joined a political party. I remember him calling me once to tell me I had been added to the ticket in Dublin South-East. I asked him where that was, as I was living in west Dublin and that is where I had sought to be a candidate. He said to me "it is those posh places like Ballsbridge, but it is also where I live in Goatstown, and you will be fine". We have had a very good personal relationship ever since.

His political judgment was incredible. He was not just a good organiser and a great campaigner. He brought a new style to Irish political campaigns in the 1970s. He had somebody like me wearing tee shirts and singing songs, even though I cannot hold a note. He had a great vision of the kind of country he wanted. He passionately believed in a united Ireland, but he also passionately believed that could only be achieved by agreement, by persuasion and not by force. He was totally loyal to the Fianna Fáil Party. I should know as I tried to get him to leave. He was completely committed to his party in every sense.

11 o'clock

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

When the Government came into office in 1997, most people said it would not last six months. It was a coalition Government between two parties that had not got on in a previous arrangement, and it was a minority Government dependent on four Independent Deputies. The skills of the then Taoiseach were very important in keeping that Government together, but Séamus Brennan's political skills as Chief Whip were immense. He built up fantastic relationships with everyone. Séamus always wanted to be accommodating to individuals and to see the other point of view. Members referred to his zest for publicity. My memory is that he got his publicity on a Sunday morning when every matter was a large story. He made small decisions sound radical and important up to the end.

The manner in which he dealt with his illness is an example to us all. He showed great courage and great dignity. He did not give up but was determined to get better. Unfortunately, it was not to be. Having recovered from one bout of illness before the general election, he was unlucky to get a different bout of illness last autumn. He never spoke about it to his colleagues even though it was evident to all of us that he was suffering. He was determined to get on with the job and not to talk about himself or focus on his illness.

He was deeply proud of his six children and often spoke about them and their achievements. They meant very much to him. To his wife, Ann, who has been by his side all his life — if memory serves me right they met in University College Galway — he is a huge loss. He is a huge loss to his family, extended family and his colleagues in Fianna Fáil. He will be hard to replace because he encompassed so much. May he rest in peace.

Members rose.

Leaders' Questions.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Yesterday, the Government announced cutbacks of €440 million in public services. At the press conference, neither the Taoiseach nor the Minister for Finance would give any breakdown of these cutbacks. We now know why. They were ashamed to set them out. The figures produced by the Government show that one third of the cutbacks — that is €1 in every €3 because of the Government's economic mismanagement — will come from the health budget. Specifically, they will come from moneys set aside to assist thousands of families in catering for elderly family members in nursing homes. What the Government has done is sacrilegious.

The promises made to help families with the high cost of nursing home care have been abandoned. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Health and Children will claim this matter concerns legislation and legal difficulties. The elderly and their families who need this assistance cannot afford to put legislation on hold because of legal difficulties in the same way as the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health and Children can. They cannot afford to put their lives on hold because they need immediate attention. Families must make decisions to sell family homes to meet the costs of nursing home care. The sop of the €12 million allocated for nursing home subventions is only to salve the Taoiseach's conscience.

Thousands on the streets may not understand all the details of the consequences of Fianna Fáil's economic mismanagement. However, they know for sure the Government is taking money away from the health budget, particularly the €110 million earmarked for the care and assistance of elderly people in nursing homes. Before this blows up in the Taoiseach's face, will he not see the value of increasing nursing home subventions, as Deputy Reilly has pointed out on so many occasions? Will he not leave the moneys for the purpose for which they were allocated under a policy decision?

The €110 million earmarked for elderly people and their nursing home care is abandoned. A sop has been given out of it with the rest going back into the maw of a heartless Exchequer. Will the Taoiseach show some sense of humanity in this matter? Will he put the moneys into nursing home subventions for those who require them? What he has done is heartless, sacrilegious and he must reverse the decision.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: The fair deal scheme can only come into place when there is a proper legal footing for it. Dealing with people who have diminished mental capacity is a legally challenging area. The Attorney General is drafting legislation which will be sufficiently rigorous to address the matter.

This is a deferral of the introduction of the scheme. It can only come into place when legislation is in place. In the meantime, the Minister for Health and Children is providing for an enhanced provision of €12 million to deal with the nursing home subvention issue. It is unlikely the nursing home Bill will be published until the next session. Its enactment will be around the end of the financial year.

Over €500 million of extra resources have been allocated for care for the elderly. It is not an area we have been remiss upon. The fair deal scheme is an effort to bring about a uniform level of care and a proper legal basis for the provision of nursing home care. Due to the challenging nature of the legislation, we have not been able to enact it thus far. On the basis that the funds will not be used this year, we are in a position to defer it until the enactment of the legislation. In the meantime, the enhanced level of nursing home subvention will assist the situation.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: Let the old suffer.

Deputy Enda Kenny: This goes back to the old slogan of “Health Cuts Hurt the Old, the Sick and the Handicapped.” The people understand the Taoiseach is cutting back moneys allocated under a policy decision to help elderly people with nursing home charges. This morning many are concerned for elderly family members who might fall and break a limb, thus requiring nursing home care. These people may have to sell the family home to pay for that care. It does not matter to them that the Government has not been able to draft legislation.

Before Christmas, the Minister for Health and Children told the House she wanted nursing home legislation put through in three days. Since then there have been umpteen questions in the House on the state of the legislation with the same answer that it will be produced the following week. It will be 18 months before the Minister can introduce the legislation. Meanwhile, those people who need nursing home care now cannot put their lives on hold.

Out of the €110 million allocated, €85 million will go back into the maw of the Exchequer with only €12 million as a sop for increased subventions. Then there is the irony of an announcement for an extra 200 contract beds yesterday. The Minister’s press release stated: “Sanction has now been received from the Department of Finance for the spending of €13 million from the fair deal provision of €110 million on 200 extra contract beds.” That was announced last January. It is just a reheated announcement.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: They were not delivered.

Deputy Enda Kenny: This Fianna Fáil-led Government, for all its bluster, has been unable to introduce legislation to deal with the fair deal provision. It is allowing thousands of elderly people to suffer in indignity.

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

It is putting pressure on families to sell their homes when for all his failures the Taoiseach could have used the €110 million for the purpose for which it was designed — either by increased subventions or as an allocation towards care for the elderly. He has failed miserably in this area of the €440 million cutbacks. What he has done is politically sacrilegious and he is condemned for that.

I ask the Taoiseach to reverse this decision before it gets out of hand. Bring back that €110 million. He has taken one in three of the €440 million in cutbacks from the health area, which he proclaimed had not been subject to any cuts and in fact, was exempt, by comparison with other Departments. The evidence is here, nonetheless, and he should be ashamed and have some conscience as regards what is going on, and reverse this decision. Deputy Cowen, as Taoiseach, is supposed to be in charge of the Government. He should leave this money intact in line with the decision that was taken and put it into care for the elderly because they are watching this and listening in their thousands. They now know that Fianna Fáil has directed that €85 million of the €100 million should be withdrawn. Elderly people will suffer as a consequence of this political decision. I ask the Taoiseach to reverse it.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: I point out to Deputy Kenny that 80% of day to day expenditure is in the areas of health, education and social welfare. However, economies have to be made and moneys must be reallocated, while keeping the overall spending limit for this year at what we intended. Because of the deteriorating economic situation, where we have increased allocations to provide in areas over and above what was projected, money must be reallocated from within the overall Government spend.

The critique from Fine Gael was that we were not doing sufficient in this area. The bottom line is that this must be dealt with in a way that will seek to minimise the impact on frontline services. That is what we will seek to do. The whole purpose of these proposals is to minimise the impact. As regards this specific allocation, the money was ringfenced for this purpose. This specific purpose cannot come into operation for practically the whole of this financial year. Therefore that allocation is not required in present circumstances.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: It is required for care for the elderly.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: It is overdue.

Deputy James Reilly: One minute it is legal and the next minute it is fiscal.

(Interruptions.)

An Ceann Comhairle: Let the Taoiseach finish, please.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: They are still there.

The Taoiseach: If I may be allowed——

Deputy James Reilly: There is only so much listening, we can do.

The Taoiseach: The problem is that the Deputy never listens.

Deputy James Reilly: I am prepared to listen to reason, but not rubbish.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is not the leader of his party yet. The situation is——

Deputy James Reilly: He has hit the disabled. He has hit those with mental illness, who cannot speak up, and that is why we are here today talking to the Taoiseach. That is not an answer.

The Taoiseach: The Ceann Comhairle will have to do something.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Reilly should be aware that this is Leaders' Questions. Surely I do not have to remind him of that. Nobody is allowed to intervene, other than the leaders.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Ceann Comhairle. As regards the whole question of contract beds, some 2,000 have been put into the system within the last three years, in addition to increased home services. More money will be spent on services for the elderly this year than in previous years. However, as regards this specific initiative, which will not come into play this year because of the enactment required in order to make it operable, that money will not now be used — so, it is a deferral. In the meantime, other initiatives for the elderly, which have totalled €500,000 in the last three years, will continue to be provided as part of the base, to enhance the service. We acknowledge it would be better if this could be brought in sooner. That was our hope, but the legal difficulties must be overcome in the first instance.

The subvention system was introduced in 1993, at a time when the whole house could have been taken under original regulations. We are trying to regularise all that now and have a proportionate response which meets the requirements of the situation. It is not possible to talk about economies on the scale of €440 million and suggest that health, education and social welfare can be exempt from the process, given that €4 out of every €5 of day to day expenditure——

Deputy Brian Hayes: That is what he said yesterday — that they were exempt.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: No, he did not.

The Taoiseach: No, I did not. The Deputy is good at claiming that he is paraphrasing me, while misquoting me. I made it very clear in my statement that we are seeking to minimise the impact on frontline services.

Deputy Enda Kenny: He said they were exempt.

The Taoiseach: I did not say that. I said, in relation to the 3% payroll——

Deputy Enda Kenny: I am not going to take any more lectures from the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: If the Deputy is not prepared to read and understand what is going on, that is his problem.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I am well able to read, and the Taoiseach can try to shout everybody down, if he wants——

(Interruptions.)

The Taoiseach: The 3% payroll bill relates across all Departments and State agencies, with the exception of health and education whose parameters——

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Taoiseach said they were exempt.

An Ceann Comhairle: Let the Taoiseach finish.

The Taoiseach: Let me say what was said, because this is what I did say. The parameters will be decided on the basis of discussion with the Department of Finance. That is what I said and what the record will show. No amount of effort by the Deputy to misrepresent me will disprove that point.

(Interruptions.)

Deputy P. J. Sheehan: The Taoiseach's fair deal has turned out to be a raw deal.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call on Deputy Gilmore, without interruption.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is becoming increasingly clear that the so-called package which was announced with great fanfare by the Government yesterday, is only a very small picture of what it has in store for the people in the coming months. It would appear that yesterday's announcement was packaged for public relations purposes. It contained a number of high profile items such as ministerial pay and a reduction in public relations' budgets. I believe this was the tenth occasion on which the Government announced it would cut the cost of tribunals.

Yesterday, when I asked the Taoiseach how much the 3% cut in payroll would come to, he said it amounted to €250 million between now and the end of 2009. That leaves €1.25 billion to be made up as regards the cuts the Government is planning. The detail of the announcements made yesterday is a long way from that €1.25 billion. Already we see a drip-drip effect starting to take place. Deputy Kenny referred to the fair deal package for people in nursing homes, which has now been put on hold. This means that people in nursing homes and their families are being asked to bear the burden as regards the state of the public finances. We are told that more cuts will be announced next week by the HSE. There has been a cut in €45 million in real terms in overseas development aid, and there is speculation today that some 5,000 jobs are to go in the public service.

Instead of having this type of drip-drip feed of sneaky cuts and stealth taxes emerging during the summer months, will the Taoiseach give the House the full picture as regards what the Government intends, before the Dáil goes into recess? I want to ask him again, because he did not answer yesterday, what is in the package to address the needs of people suffering most from the downturn in the economy. These are the people who are losing their jobs. Some 54,000 people have lost their jobs in the last year. Since 2 May, when Deputy Cowen became Taoiseach, more than 25,000 people have lost their jobs. That is nearly 600 for every working day he has been Taoiseach. Those people are entitled to know what the Government is going to do to get them back to work and secure their future — as well as the future of the many other people who are worried they will lose their jobs in the months ahead.

The Taoiseach: As I said yesterday, the Government, on the basis of the mid-year Exchequer returns, decided to bring forward a package totalling €440 million for the remainder of this year, which would have a full year impact of more than €1 billion, not €1.25 billion..

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: It is €1 billion, plus €440 million, minus €200 million.

The Taoiseach: No, that is not the position. Let us be clear. There is no need for any confusion.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: All right, so tell us.

The Taoiseach: The €440 million package is the outcome of decisions made yesterday for the remainder of this year, which will have a full year, 2009, impact estimated by the Department of Finance of over €1 billion.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: That is €1.44 billion.

The Taoiseach: No, it is not.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Between now and the end of the year——

(Interruptions.)

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach should be allowed to finish. The question has been asked and should be answered.

The Taoiseach: We are talking about this financial year and next. The €440 million relates to this financial year. Next year it will have a full year effect of over €1 billion. That is the situation.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: What about next year?

Deputy Joan Burton: So €1 billion plus €440 million is not €1.44 billion.

(Interruptions.)

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Burton cannot intervene at all.

The Taoiseach: Allow me to finish.

Deputy Joan Burton: Get a blackboard and write it out.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy is completely out of order.

The Taoiseach: If that is going to be the level of debate here, we can forget about it. In the context of our mid-year Exchequer returns, we have made these decisions. This is our initial reaction to the situation. We are saying that in the context of the Estimates for 2009 further decisions may be required to make sure that we have a sustainable public finance position going forward. That would be determined by information as it emerges during the course of the year. It is necessary for the Government to do whatever is required to make sure we work within the Stability and Growth Pact principles that have been set out, which is the basis of our membership of the euro currency. We have seen a deterioration of €3 billion in our tax revenues this year. That means we must work within the spending limits we have set ourselves to underline confidence in ourselves going forward and to devise a strategy next year that will be sufficient to be sustainable going forward. That is the position.

I made it clear yesterday that this is a process by which the Government is tailoring its response in an effort to meet the requirements of the situation as it emerges. That is no suggestion of anything else to the contrary. It involves some efficiencies, administrative savings, the reallocation of existing allocations from some Departments to others, which now require more money because of the increased unemployment that was mentioned, and working within the overall spending limits we have set ourselves. That is what we are trying to do.

We are also examining the position for 2009. We are putting out the information as we have it on what we are trying to do. We are not suggesting that this process is now *finito*, that this is the end and that all Members can sit back until next February. We have to manage this serious situation, and we intend to do that. We intend to discharge our duties in government and bring to the attention of the House, as I have done, through the course of the debate on this issue today and tomorrow, whatever information Ministers are required to bring forward; that will be brought forward and detailed to the House. That is the way I want this to be, that

[The Taoiseach.]

is the way it should be and that is the way it will be. There is no question of anything to the contrary. We are bringing forward to the House the decisions that were made and finalised by Government at 2 p.m. yesterday, which were then announced and on which we will have a debate for two days. That is a fairer reflection of the Government's intentions than what has been suggested from the benches opposite.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I am simply trying to get clarity on what exactly the Government has decided. I understand what the Taoiseach has said. Cuts of €440 million will be made between now and the end of 2008 and cuts of €1 billion, or €1.44 billion to be exact, will be made in 2009. From that figure will be taken €250 million for the payroll reduction which will leave cuts of €1.2 billion, the details of which we have not got. That is the first problem. We have some of the details, the decision on ministerial pay increases, a review of tribunal costs and various bits and pieces of information. Information has begun to be leaked about the postponement of the Fair Deal scheme and all of that, but we do not have the detail of where the €1.2 billion cuts will bite between now and the end of 2009. That is problem one and we need an answer to that.

Second, the Taoiseach has said that this process will be revisited a second time in 2009. Therefore, it is clear this morning that the round of €1.4 billion cuts is the opening shot and round two is to come in 2009 or perhaps in the context of the Estimates and budget. Where will the Taoiseach secure cuts of €1.2 billion, outside of the payroll reductions, between now and the end of 2009? They can only come from cutting jobs, services or increasing taxes or charges or whatever.

The Taoiseach also needs to tell us exactly what is in his mind for round two. Are the cuts of €1.4 billion announced yesterday simply the opening shot of a two or three phase round of cuts in services and expenditure that the Government has in mind over the course of the next 15 months?

The Taoiseach: It is clear that in regard to the remainder of this year we are involved in efficiency savings of €240 million, securing other savings in PR and consultancy expenditure of approximately €20 million and payroll savings of €10 million beginning this year. The remaining savings of €360 million will come from efficiency savings and deferred capital programmes. That accounts for the €440 million savings.

Deputy Joan Burton: The cuts will be in capital costs — I knew it.

The Taoiseach: Yes, of course, capital will play a part. If the suggestion is that I should take the savings all from current spending, the Deputies are effectively suggesting that day to day savings should be even deeper.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: What projects will be affected?

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Taoiseach tell us what projects will be affected?

The Taoiseach: These will brought forward——

Deputy Brendan Howlin: What schools will be affected?

The Taoiseach: It is not a question of schools being affected.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: What is it a question of?

The Taoiseach: Allow me to speak and I will explain the position.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: The Taoiseach will not tell us anything. He is as good as his predecessor in that respect.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach to finish.

The Taoiseach: In regard to the OPW, we are talking about a figure of €75 million.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: For what?

The Taoiseach: Various projects.

Deputy Joan Burton: We want them listed on a sheet of paper.

The Taoiseach: A debate on this issue will take place in the House over two days during which everything will be laid out.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: We want a list of the projects concerned.

The Taoiseach: If the Deputies want to have that debate in two minutes rather than during the nine hours they demanded, that is a bit unreasonable.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Give us a list of the projects.

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Taoiseach to finish.

The Taoiseach: We will outline to the House in full all the issues making up the figure of €440 million. We have no problem doing that. That is the purpose of the debate from the Government's point of view. Any suggestion to the contrary by the Opposition is ridiculous. We will set out our position during the course of this debate. I have explained to the Deputies that the figure of €440 million includes €140 million in deferred capital expenditure, there is also €300 million on the current side, €240 million of which relates to efficiency savings, and there is another €60 million from other savings, administrative and otherwise.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Taoiseach has now given us three different figures.

The Taoiseach: No, that is the €440 million, they are not different figures.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: They are.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Gilmore has been trying to suggest that they are different figures, it is same figure, €440 million, divided as I have outlined, and the Ministers will set this out in detail during the course of the debate.

Ceisteanna — Questions.

Dialogue with Faith Communities.

1. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach the progress to date in regard to the structured dialogue with churches, faith communities and non-confessional bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14628/08]

2. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the structural dialogue between the Government and the faith communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19681/08]

3. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he will continue with the structured dialogue with churches, faith communities and others in civic life; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20932/08]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 3, inclusive, together.

The process, inaugurated by my predecessor, has continued with inaugural meetings between Government and the Presbyterian and Methodist churches.

The meeting with the Presbyterian Church took place on 6 February. The then Taoiseach was accompanied by the Minister for Education and Science, the Minister of State with responsibility for European affairs and by the Minister of State with special responsibility for equality issues and officials. The Presbyterian Church delegation was led by the Moderator, Rt. Reverend Dr. John Finlay, Reverend Dr. Donald Watts, Clerk of the General Assembly and members of the community. The discussions addressed a range of issues including education, civil partnerships legislation, the bill of rights and the EU reform treaty.

The meeting with the Methodist Church took place on 21 February. The Government was represented by the Minister for Transport, accompanied by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Minister of State with responsibility for European affairs and the Minister of State with special responsibility for integration policy. The Methodist Church delegation was led by Reverend Roy Cooper, president, Reverend Donald Ker, secretary and members of the community. The discussions covered a wide range of issues in education, social policy, property and heritage protection.

At a special general meeting, the then Taoiseach was very pleased to have the opportunity to meet with many of the consultation and dialogue partners on Tuesday, 22 April to thank them for their support and commitment to the process of dialogue and to review the progress which had been made to date.

The process of structured dialogue was envisaged from the outset as an enduring channel of consultation and communications. I am satisfied that it will develop in the years to come to be a very valuable support in dealing with issues of change in society and confident that the opportunity to exchange perspectives and address issues of mutual concern in this way will be of great benefit to all the participants.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I welcome the progress that has been made in the structured dialogue between the Government and the churches. Does the Taoiseach consider it would be helpful to have this dialogue on a more public basis, perhaps through an Oireachtas committee? What progress has been made with regard to the patronage of schools?

The Taoiseach: The discussion on this particular area relates to church-State relations generally and people's perspectives. It is an exchange of views held in normal delegate format where a group meets the Taoiseach or the person whom it wants to meet and sets out its position. It does not necessarily have to be a public forum. One can indicate through private questions and otherwise the general tone or content of discussions but not all discussions in this context have to be held in a public forum. There are various and continuing opportunities for church or faith groups to interact with committees on areas of interest to them by invitation, written submission or representation and advocacy with committee members who can reflect those points of view at the committee proceedings concerned. The issue does not need to be put into a public

process. That does not mean we cannot speak about it, discuss it and have questions on it but it is better to conduct it as it is being conducted.

Everybody in education is mindful of the patronage of schools. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin has made some very helpful and instructive comments in this area in terms of the church's position and how structures will be developed. This matter reflects the social and demographic change in the country. We should continue to work through those issues. Many of the churches are in constant contact with line Departments where they have an ongoing, day-to-day involvement regarding these policy questions.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I welcome some of the developments that have taken place here. Has the Taoiseach had a dialogue with the Muslim community as part of this structural dialogue? Was there any discussion or explanation from the Government on its position on the wearing of the hijab, the headdress worn by Muslim women, and the burqa? Was this discussed at the structural dialogue with that community? Is that of concern or interest to the Government given that women in this country are supposed to have equality of opportunity? Was the issue discussed or raised or was any reference made to it?

The Taoiseach: The consultations and discussions to date have been addressed to approximately 20 churches and philosophical societies and there have been other expressions of interest, which are being addressed. The Muslim community will be part of that. It will be largely for the communities to address the issue of appropriate representation at meetings. It is hoped the delegations and their dialogue contributions will authentically reflect the diversity and views of the various communities. I recognise that each community participating would have views and positions on a great number of issues and it will not be possible in any one meeting to address the totality. This is reflected in the dialogue being structured as an enduring process. We have invited participants to nominate their priority interests and concerns for bilateral discussion for each inaugural meeting with the Government. Other issues can be addressed subsequently through correspondence or added to the agenda for bilateral meetings as the process continues. Discussions include the services provided by the communities and general issues of interest to society. On the Deputy's question on whether the specific issue to which he refers was raised, I would have to check.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Are specific dates set for the bilateral meetings with the different churches? How many will take place this year? Following any discussions on the problem of dress as far as the Muslim community is concerned, will the Minister for Education and Science announce Government policy on it?

The Taoiseach: In view of the contacts made thus far, the next step on an official level is that we would welcome a plenary session with all the partners in the near future. That is on foot of my entry into office as Taoiseach but also because a wider coming together of all the partners from time to time reflecting a wider sense of community and mutual acceptance is important for our life together as a nation. It is felt that a plenary session might be a helpful step in seeing where we go generally with the process and give everybody an indication of their involvement and a sense of what the potential of this dialogue might ultimately provide. A parliamentary question to the Minister for Education and Science might elicit more accurate information on his position.

Deputy Enda Kenny: There seems to be a difficulty with some representatives who are sent here and maintained by their churches in other countries. If they come to preach or teach to whatever congregation they have in this country, when their remit is over after 12 months they must return to their countries for 12 months before they are allowed back in, despite the fact

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

that they may be fully maintained and funded by their churches in their home countries. Has that matter been brought to the Taoiseach's attention? A number of these missionaries have contacted my office about that problem.

The Taoiseach: It has not, as far as I am aware. However if specific issues give rise to a wider general concern perhaps the Deputy would communicate them to me.

Departmental Expenditure.

4. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach if he plans to retain the communications unit in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17132/08]

5. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach if he plans to make changes to the role or functions of the communications unit within his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19442/08]

6. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he plans to make savings in relation to the communications unit in his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20933/08]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 4 to 6, inclusive, together.

The communications unit will be retained in my Department as it provides a valuable media information service to Government Ministers and their Departments. It furnishes news updates and transcripts which ensure that 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 work of the unit is under continual review in terms of its efficiency and the timely provision of service. As a result of a recent audit of its work, it has been decided to digitally upgrade its manual recording equipment. When fully implemented, this change will improve the service provided by the unit and should result in cost savings both in my Department and across other Departments.

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 on secondment from other Departments. The work of the unit means Departments have reduced their use of external companies and ensures that they no longer duplicate work such as transcripts and tapes.

Deputy Enda Kenny: We used to direct these questions to the Taoiseach's predecessor and it was very difficult to get an answer from him in a number of respects. The previous Taoiseach used to say the purpose of the communications unit was to monitor political events and make this information available to Ministers. However, through other questions Deputy Varadkar determined the cost of each Department's monitoring newsworthy events and following politics in general and there is a serious amount of duplication. Was the communications unit included in the efficiency audit of the Taoiseach's Department? If it is doing the job it is supposed to do, why are there are similar tracking systems in each State Department and, possibly, for every Minister of State? Is a serious amount of money being wasted if the Taoiseach's Department has this communications unit working efficiently and can relay to other Ministers what it has monitored and at the same time those Ministers' Departments are spending public money doing the same thing? If we are in the business of cutting back in the interests of efficiency, can I take it there will be no further tracking systems in each individual Department and the communications unit of the Department of the Taoiseach will supply all the necessary infor-

mation to Ministers to keep them briefed so that in their busy schedules they will know what the public is saying about them?

The Taoiseach: I think the Deputy is referring to the fact there are press offices in every Department. This is not solely about listening to the radio——

Deputy Enda Kenny: I know that, but they are tracking the news.

The Taoiseach: ——or looking at the television. It is about a communications unit in the Department of the Taoiseach communicating with the existing press offices, which are part of every Department of State and are necessary in the modern age. Given the number of outlets and queries, one could not provide an efficient service if one did not have some dedicated staff for that purpose and they are kept very busy. Quite apart from efforts that might be made by Ministers to communicate what they are doing or by Departments to communicate decisions, public policy issues or issues of important public information, the traffic coming from outside into the Departments, involving queries on this, that and the other, on each and every issue that may be relevant, irrelevant or even non-existent, that must be chased up to satisfy the insatiable appetite of some media outlets requires people to be available to do that work. Some of it is productive and one would hope that somewhat fewer queries would arise, but that is the modern world in which we live. To have only one communications unit for the entire Government would be an inefficient way of dealing with the situation.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I am aware of the function of the communications unit within the Taoiseach's Department and I know that Ministers have their own press personnel in their Departments, that is understood. However, let us take the Minister for Transport, Deputy Noel Dempsey, sitting beside the Taoiseach, as an example. How does the system operate in terms of supplying his press office with cuttings about transport issues, whether local, national or international, which might be relevant to his work? Does that come through the communications unit of the Taoiseach's Department, or is a contract given to a clippings service which sends the material to his press office? It appears that the high spend emanates from the collection of this information. Does the communications unit have the capacity to provide that service or does it just listen to radio stations throughout the country and report on what is broadcast?

I understand that every Minister has a press office and a press unit, but I am asking about the press cuttings relevant to each individual Minister's activities. Who supplies the clipping service? Are there different contracts involved or where do the clippings come from?

The Taoiseach: They are dealt with in the press offices of individual Departments as part of their overall work. As Deputy Kenny knows as a former office holder, the work of the press office is to deal with press queries and to provide whatever information the Minister or his office is seeking. One needs people *in situ* in each Department who are acquainted with how the Department operates, who the relevant personnel are and who can provide assistance in respect of finding answers that people wanted 20 minutes before they even phoned. That can only be done on a practical level within the Departments.

The important point is that the communications unit furnishes news updates and transcripts which ensure that Departments are kept informed in a fast and efficient manner. As the Deputy knows from his own position, the level of news and media queries has mushroomed out of all proportion to what it was even ten years ago.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance announced yesterday that there would be a 50% reduction in expenditure on the whole public relations area for the Government. Will that 50% reduction apply to the communications unit?

The Taoiseach: The communications unit is not a public relations body, it is simply an internal arrangement for transmitting information across Departments from within the internal workings of the Government. As the Deputy knows, the question of public relations concerns outside advice being obtained from external companies for the purpose of communicating various initiatives at Government level or within Departments. They are the arrangements to which the subheads refer.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: In reply to Deputy Kenny, the Taoiseach said that the time of the communications unit is taken up with answering media queries and that there is an increased workload because of the increase in the volume of media queries. That sounds to me like public relations work.

The Taoiseach: No.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I thought that was what the communications unit was doing.

The Taoiseach: No, it provides information across Departments. As a former incumbent in an office of State, the Deputy is aware that the press office deals with most of the requirements of any Department. There are occasions when people require outside communications companies to assist them. Personally, I have not used such companies much, but arrangements have been made in the past when there was a need to communicate public information or to ensure that initiatives were brought to the public's attention. In some instances, it was a case of organising campaigns to make sure people were aware of their entitlements. All this work is done internally, in the main, but on some occasions outside help is required and obtained. It was in respect of that aspect of public relations that the Minister for Finance was referring.

Public Service Pay.

7. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Taoiseach the projected cost to his Department of the implementation of the recommendations of the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the Public Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [17133/08]

8. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Taoiseach the estimated cost to his Department of the full implementation of the recommendations of the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the Public Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [19443/08]

9. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the Public Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20934/08]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 7 to 9, inclusive, together.

The projected cost of the implementation of the recommendations of the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the Public Service to my Department is €115,099 for 2008. This includes costs in respect of Departmental staff and special advisers in my Department. These costings are supplied in the following table.

The first phase of the increases recommended for the public service under the report of the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the public sector has been implemented since September 2007. The Government has decided that all the pending increases for ministerial and parliamentary office holders and for other senior public servants recommended by the Review Body on Higher Remuneration in the Public Service will not be implemented. The issue will be reviewed in September 2010 but without commitment at this stage to the outcome.

Costs in respect of:	Departmental staff	Members of Government
	€	€
2007	33,477	nil
2008	115,099	nil
2009	115,099	nil

Excludes any general round increases awarded to staff during the period.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I do not know what the value of reviewing the issue in 2010 is without an indication of what the outcome might be. Given the economic circumstances in which we find ourselves and the attitude thereto, why did it take so long to make this decision? Is back pay ruled out? If a review is conducted in 2010, will it have an impact on ministerial pensions, for instance, in the period between 2008 and 2010? Will that issue be included in the review? Does the same apply to county managers, judges and members of the higher ranks of the public service, who are included in that category?

The Taoiseach: It refers to all the people who are affected by the review body's recommendations, including all those to whom the Deputy referred. I do not envisage that any retro-spection will be contemplated. We are talking about requiring a Government decision to activate this matter. The Government has made the decision that no further increases will be paid to those who already received the first payment. Politicians who did not receive any payment will not receive an increase and the issue will be revisited by the Government in September 2010, without any commitment.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: What parts of the recommendations of the review body have been implemented? As I understand it, pay increases were recommended for a range of senior public servants, including senior politicians, that is, Ministers and office holders, as well as judges, senior civil servants, chief executives of State bodies and county managers. Has any part of the review body recommendations been implemented? Does yesterday's decision mean that no further part of the recommendations will be implemented?

The Taoiseach: Those who received payments under 5.5% in the review body recommendation were paid that amount in September 2007. Those whom it was recommended should be paid more received 5% in September 2007. There was a proposal that they would get another 5% in September 2008 and the remainder in September 2009. The Government made a decision early this year to defer that for a further year so the second increment for those who got a first increment in 2007 would be due in September 2009.

We have deferred the whole thing and said that there will be no payments for anybody still awaiting some form of payment until September 2010 when a Government decision will be needed to see whether it will be activated in any way in the future.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I thought the decision made last year to defer was only in respect of the Government itself and that the civil servants and so on got it.

The Taoiseach: Yes, that is correct.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I do not know if the Taoiseach has the figure with him but could he tell us the total cost of implementing the recommendations? How much of that has been committed to being implemented or to being paid and, therefore, what is the annual saving as a result of yesterday's decision?

The Taoiseach: I would have to get that information for the Deputy. That question is wider than the remit of the question.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: It seems that the decision to defer these pay increases to 2010 is just another example of the Government operating on a wing and a prayer rather than taking the opportunity for real reform. Essentially, the Government has recognised that there is a crisis in the public finances and has just put many things off and long fingered them for a few years in the hope that something will come up next year or somehow another €10 million will magically turn up.

My question for the Taoiseach is really simple. Why has he not done what he should have done, namely, cancel them permanently and reassess the whole basis for the review body on higher remuneration which based its recommendations on erroneous comparisons with the private sector? Why did the Taoiseach not take the opportunity that exists for real reform, cancel these pay increases permanently and set up a new system whereby pay increases for higher civil servants, judges, etc., are linked to performance and reform and not this erroneous link with the private sector? Why did he just take the easy and soft option and long finger it to 2010 so that we can go back to the same old flawed policies?

The Taoiseach: To link it to performance with whom? That is the question. I take the view that public servants should be paid a remuneration commensurate with the responsibilities of what is available for similar jobs in the private sector. In that way, we try to ensure that we have more cross-pollination between the public and private sectors. We will get more people from the private sector coming into the public sector and *vice versa*. This is good for careers, experience and people understanding the disciplines that may apply in both sectors and the ethos of the public sector. I do not agree with the Deputy's premise that there is a flaw in comparing those at the top end of the public sector with the lowest quarter of those with commensurate jobs in the private sector.

I also agree that there is no question of those in the highest echelons of the public sector obtaining, seeking or being granted remunerative packages like those in the highest reaches of the private sector. It would go against the ethos of public service. However, we must also ensure that there is some process of arbitration and evaluation. Those terms of reference for the review body on higher remuneration are set out on each occasion it is asked to decide. It was over seven years since the body was asked to do so for these categories of people who include chiefs of staff and higher public servants. Ministers are, of course, included in that. The developments in the private sector in that time brought about a situation where even looking at the lowest quarter of comparable jobs in the private, not the middle or higher end——

Deputy Leo Varadkar: What is a comparable job to that of a judge in the private sector?

The Taoiseach: Those are set out by the review body in the report.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: It is bogus.

The Taoiseach: People who are well qualified in this area are members of that review body. They might know a little bit more about it than the Deputy, although he might be surprised to hear that. They were in a position to make comparisons which stack up in terms of the process and methodology. That is the situation.

We know all the pompous arguments made thereafter and the political hay that was sought to be made on the head of it. The fact is that if one wants to avoid anomalies or a situation where we allow public sector pay to trail way behind comparable positions in the private sector

— I am not talking about the upper echelons which are at a rate of pay that is way beyond my comprehension but people who are in comparable positions — one needs to find a means by which one has some method of assessment and evaluation.

That is the wider policy issue. As I said when I became Taoiseach, I believe this is a matter that needed to be considered in the context of upcoming pay talks, the question of social partnership and its demonstrable effect. In view of the deteriorating situation in the public finances, the Government made this decision, felt it was timely to make it in the context of having received the Exchequer returns and was making decisions in any event in respect of wider expenditure issues, which was the right thing to do. It is also timely given that we have now finally come to the point where perhaps the pay discussions element of the social partnership talks will probably get under way this week.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: Public sector pay does not lag way behind private sector pay. Numerous studies carried out by people who know more about this than the Taoiseach or I show that this is not the case. This is one of the erroneous arguments that has crept into the Government for some reason.

We can agree to disagree on that but I do not understand why the Taoiseach does not use the opportunity of these massive pay rises to shoehorn real concessions and reform from the people who stand to benefit. I do not understand why he is simply saying that we will defer it to 2010 when the economy will, hopefully, go back into growth, there will be enough money and we can go back to the way things were. Why does he not use it as an opportunity to say that these pay increases will not be paid unless we get real reform and concessions from the people concerned, for example, longer sittings and working hours for judges? The only opportunity the Government has to shoehorn reform is pay yet it is not prepared to use it. I do not understand that.

The Taoiseach: I do not accept that we do not do that. The wider pay agreements are based on ensuring industrial peace and that we have ongoing reforms in the public service that are agreed to by the trade unions and staff representative bodies. Continuing reform is ongoing. The OECD points out the need to accelerate that, particularly at times when resources are tight and in view of the commitments we have all made in the social partnership Towards 2016 agreement, which is a ten-year framework agreement. This entire agenda is a centrepiece of how we can proceed.

The way one achieves objectives in this regard is through working in partnership and finding solutions with partners on these issues. The OECD report provides an excellent background and framework within which we can advance that agenda. The question of continuing civil and public modernisation is part of the non-pay element of pay agreements. As we saw with the announcement yesterday, we must engage with those stakeholders to bring about the changes that are required in the interests of greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Deputy Leo Varadkar: Engage, yes, appease, no.

The Taoiseach: I did not say appease.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I have a few questions arising from the decision not to implement the recommendations and to review them again in 2010. Are there pension implications arising from that decision? Does the Taoiseach have an estimate of the number of persons covered by the review body who are likely to retire between now and the review date in 2010? Is it the intention of the Taoiseach to continue the review body mechanism as the means by which pay

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

is determined for the top end of the public service? Does the Taoiseach accept that the idea of comparison to the private sector is a false comparison?

In the seven year period leading up to this review, top executive salaries in the private sector have gone mad. Chief executives of banks and major companies pay themselves in millions while their employees are on the minimum wage. A major gulf has developed in pay culture in the private sector, which is unprecedented. Over the past decade in the private sector, here and worldwide including the United States, there is the idea that chief executives and top executives of private sector companies are so wonderful that they pay themselves in millions while they pay many of their employees the minimum wage. It is nonsense for the public sector to replicate that or make comparisons based on it. The issue that must be addressed is the major gulf in earnings between those at the top end and those toiling at ground level.

The Taoiseach: The comparison made in respect of these recommendations was not comparing those who were the subject of the review body to the highest echelons of the private sector. I agree that this would be absurd. It took the lowest quarter of those in comparable positions.

The average increase recommended by the review body was 7.3%. The review ranges from a number of posts that received no increases to one post, manager of Dublin City Council, the pay of which was increased by 36.2%. For half of those covered, such as Civil Service assistant secretaries and related grades, including university professors, the increase is 5.5%. When one takes away the hyperbole that surrounded the report when it was published, the period being examined was seven years. This is a fair point to make. Looking at the substance of the recommendations, they were arrived at by comparison between public service posts to posts in the private sector with comparable levels of duties and responsibilities. These were based on the lower quartile of the private sector rates and further reduced by 15% to allow for the superior value of public service pensions relative to the private sector.

Concerning members of Government and other political office holders, the review body considered that direct comparison to the private sector was not appropriate and that the salaries of senior public servants was a more relevant comparator. In their case, therefore, the comparison to the private sector is an indirect one. As the review body points out, the overall effect of the review is that the salaries recommended are below the average level of salary for comparable posts in the private sector. The increases reflect, in a modified form, what has happened to pay in the private sector.

Regarding the argument that pay in the private sector is dependent on performance, the salary levels recommended by the review body are based on the basic fixed pay of the private sector salaries. The review body recommends performance related payments for many of the public service posts covered but the maximum possible is 20% of pay. The review body states that this is much less than the proportion of pay available for many in the private sector.

While I recognise that the findings of the review body attracted some criticism, and I am aware of the sensitivity of the issue in terms of public service and national pay policy, there has never been a time when increases for these posts were regarded as timely. The period of this review was seven years; under benchmarking, it was four or five. The question of why there should be a separate pay review for higher public servants has been determined by negotiation between management and trade unions and, where necessary, with recourse to third party adjudication by the Labour Court or the arbitration board.

Recently, the benchmarking process was established by agreement between public service employers and trade unions. The top posts in the public service are in a different position —

their pay cannot be determined through the industrial relations machinery because they are the managers in that context. Standard increases under the national pay agreements are applied to these posts but the local bargaining or similar provisions of these agreements cannot in practical terms apply to these top public service manager posts because they would be negotiating with themselves and we could not have that. Instead, the pay of these posts is determined by Government and adjusted on the basis of recommendations by an independent review body that is requested to carry out reviews from time to time. The last such review was conducted in September 2000.

The review body estimated the cost of the increases recommended, if they were all made, would be €16 million annually or 7.3% of the pay costs of those covered. That is a weighted average increase. The level of increase varies from group to group.

Regarding recommendations on pension arrangements, as part of the general review the body commissioned a detailed examination of the value of public service pensions for the grades covered in its remit by reference to pension arrangements in the private sector. The key finding was that the pensions of the groups covered are significantly more valuable than the pensions of the comparable groups in the private sector. The actuarial advisers put this at 15% of salary and applied a 15% discount to reflect the value of public service pensions. This is a fair reflection of the process and I hope it answers some of the questions.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: Why did the Government decide to review it in 2010? The decision is not to implement the recommendations to make the payments. Why did the Taoiseach decide to review this in 2010? Could it not be addressed by making a fresh reference to the review body in the future rather than reviewing the implementation of these recommendations?

The Taoiseach: The last review was September 2000. We are saying that we will not pay the rest of the increases and will examine the situation in 2010 if the situation has improved for those who claim they have an independent review body recommendation. This was always implemented under successive Governments in the interest of trying to maintain confidence in pay determination for this important, albeit smaller, group in the public service and to confirm there is a process in place that is not being abandoned but whose recommendations cannot be implemented in view of current economic circumstances. That is a fair, reasonable, sensible approach.

Deputy Andrew Doyle: Can the Taoiseach confirm that the review body's recommendations do not apply to State agencies, such as the HSE? Given that the paper on cost-cutting measures yesterday referred to reviewing all State agencies in respect of activities, staffing and costs and that the higher pay remuneration package will be put on hold until 2010, is it the plan to incorporate this into the review? For instance, the HSE has employed a new PR person who may turn out to be the best value for money but it is not proven as yet. We will ensure the measures he recommends are acted upon.

Will the Taoiseach state whether he intends to incorporate the State agencies, known as quangos, into the review body?

The Taoiseach: The review body refers to this category of people in respect of this report. What bodes for the future, I cannot state. If we want to get people of commensurate ability into the public service to deal with very important issues, we must have an attractive enough remunerative package to have the person do the job. It is an indication of what happens if one leaves a very anomalous situation between wage rates in the public and private sectors at high managerial posts. The requirement is often for Government, agencies or Departments to seek

[The Taoiseach.]

to obtain specific approvals in respect of remunerative packages to bring on board the people chosen by the committee established to find the person with the requisite skills to do the job.

This is why in our effort to show probity, with which I agree, in the context of the decision we made in terms of the present economic circumstances, the need to avoid creating further anomalies arising out of that is an issue which must be considered for the future. A pay review recommendation body examines all these issues in the context of categories of people and at what grades they should be, based on an updating of whatever responsibilities they may have in a Department in which traditionally they may have had less responsibilities in the past. All these issues are dealt with independently at that level. This is not an easy area and we must be careful to find ways and means of arbitrating on these issues in a way that ensures the best of people are available to do these very important jobs, which is the purpose of the exercise.

Requests to move Adjournment of Dáil under Standing Order 32.

An Ceann Comhairle: Anois, iarratais chun tairiscint a dhéanamh an Dáil a chur ar athló faoi Bhuan-Ordú 32. We will now deal with requests to move the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32.

Deputy Martin Ferris: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to adjourn the House to discuss the urgent need to proceed with the reconstruction of Ballinagar Bridge in Lixnaw which collapsed in February 2007 and which since then has caused severe inconvenience to people living in the general area who are forced to make diversions of up to ten miles to go about their daily business.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: I request the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 32 to discuss an urgent and specific matter of public interest, namely, to ask whether the €50 million provided for the HSE in 2008 to fund a range of additional services under the multi-annual investment programme for people with disabilities will be paid out this year. Disability groups are urgently awaiting this funding and I seek assurances that previous statements by the Taoiseach and Ministers will be honoured, that the money will come on stream in the next two weeks and that it will not be affected by the proposed Government cutbacks.

An Ceann Comhairle: Tar éis breithniú a dhéanamh ar na nithe ardaithe, níl siad in ord faoi Bhuan-Ordú 32. Having considered the matters raised, they are not in order under Standing Order 32.

Order of Business.

The Taoiseach: It is proposed to take No. *a*10, motion re proposed approval by Dáil Éireann of Council Decision 2008/381/2008 of 14 May 2008 establishing a European migration network, to be decided without debate, and No. *b*10, motion re national development plan and the economy. It is proposed, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders, that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. and business shall be interrupted not later than 11 p.m. The proceedings on No. *b*10 shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 3.30 p.m. tomorrow and the following arrangements shall apply: the speeches of the Taoiseach and the main spokespersons for the Fine Gael Party and the Labour Party, who shall be called upon in that order, shall not exceed 30 minutes in each case and the speeches of each other Member called upon shall not exceed 20 minutes in each case, Members may share time, a Minister or Minister of State shall be called upon to make a speech in reply which shall not exceed 20 minutes and any divisions demanded thereon shall be taken manually. Private Members' business shall be

No. 38, motion re public private partnership (resumed) to conclude at 8.30 p.m. tonight, if not previously concluded.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are three proposals to be put to the House. Is the proposal that the Dáil shall sit later than 8.30 p.m. agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. *a*10 agreed? Agreed. Is the proposal for dealing with No. *b*10 agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Enda Kenny: A number of Bills, which were included in the list provided by the Chief Whip, were not published this session. Can I take it that, in accordance with previous activity of the Government, some time between now and mid-September the Bills not yet published will emerge? The Taoiseach's predecessor used to state that a session continues until the beginning of the next session. The next session will include 13 or 14 weeks from mid-September to mid-December and a great deal of time will be taken up with preparation of the Estimates and the budget, which will be exceptionally difficult. Is it the Taoiseach's best estimate that the legal difficulties with regard to the fair deal legislation will be ironed out and it will be taken during the next session and will be published before then or during the run-up to the Dáil recommencing?

When does the Taoiseach expect to have the completed analysis and assessment of the reasons for the result of the Lisbon treaty vote? Arising from this, does he intend to have discussions in the House when it resumes in September prior to the Council meeting in October, which will be a difficult period? There is an understanding from a European perspective of Ireland's position. Does the Taoiseach intend to examine the consequences of the vote on the Lisbon treaty and when does he expect to be in a position to outline his proposals to deal with these consequences?

The Taoiseach: On the first matter raised by Deputy Kenny, the Government hopes to get final approval on the draft of this legislation from the Attorney General, who is giving this matter his personal attention, and that we will be in a position to bring it forward during the next session.

With regard to the vote on the Lisbon treaty, I take the point made by the Deputy. As he knows, the Department of Foreign Affairs is undertaking work on this matter and the information will probably be collated and available in September. We need to apply our minds to what forum we can use to conduct dialogue on the implications of that and collectively assess the means by which we could articulate the issues. In the meantime, work will take place at official and political levels in Government. We will interact with colleagues and President Sarkozy will be here next week. We will also work with the Commission to see, based on our preliminary analysis, to what extent we can move matters forward. The Deputy is aware this is a difficult situation and one that will probably require further discussion.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I raise this matter in the final week of this session because a long lead-in time is required. It must be decided what type of Parliament will be elected and what type of Commission is appointed. The Taoiseach's preparations for his October deliberations will be critical in this context. I hope that as he deliberates on this and as he and the Government make decisions we will all be kept informed. Other governments are seriously examining the situation. A decision must be made with regard to proceeding or not on the basis of the Nice treaty in terms of the European Parliament elections and the Commission must also be organised. That is the context in which I raise this.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: The amount of legislation going through the House in recent times has been small and, at the beginning of every session, the Chief Whip circulates a legislative

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

programme, much of which does not materialise by the end of the session, including legislation promised to be published and the order it is to be taken. I ask for two changes in the coming session and the coming year. Will the Chief Whip circulate the programme earlier than the day immediately preceding the resumption of the Dáil? Will the Government consider issuing an annual legislative programme? I do not say this should be set in stone but it would be helpful if the House had an annual schedule. The Government could give an indication, given we know roughly when budget day will be and when the Estimates, the Finance Bill and so on will be introduced. An annual schedule of approximately when business will be dealt with in the House would be useful and perhaps that could be done for the coming year.

The Taoiseach: I understand from the Chief Whip he is working on that in the context of the legislation committee and we are trying to assist all Deputies to give a guideline at least on what legislation and issues are likely to be taken and the timing of major debates in the House. I will ask the Minister of State, Deputy Carey, following his legislation committee meeting to convey to the leaders what the likely outcome of that will be to see if we can do something.

Deputy David Stanton: I support the comments of Deputies Kenny and Gilmore. For instance, the animal health and welfare Bill was promised first in September 2003, which is almost five years ago. It was on the B list then and it is now on the C list. The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism sponsors the Irish Sports Council (amendment) Bill, which was promised in September 2006. It was in section A in January 2007 but it is now in section B. The same Department is responsible for the greyhound industry (amendment) Bill, which first appeared in section C of the programme in September 2006. It was moved to section B in the most recent legislative programme and it is still there.

The Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources first listed the minerals development Bill in section C in September 2005. It moved to section B and it has remained there since. The Department of Defence has only two Bills in the legislative programme, one of which has been promised since September 2004 — the Curragh of Kildare Bill. It appeared on the A list in September 2006 but it is now on the B list. The Government is all over the place with legislation. The defence (amendment) Bill appeared in section C in January 2005, section A in 2006 and in section B when the Government entered office. The adoption Bill, which is important legislation, was first promised in section C in September 2004. It was moved to section B in the legislation programme for the summer 2005 session and it was listed in the A list in 2007. It remains on that list and we still have not seen it.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform's criminal justice (miscellaneous provisions) Bill was first promised in September 2004. It was moved to section A in April 2007 and remained there in the Government's first legislative programme but it was then moved to section B before returning to section A. The sale of alcohol Bill, which is topical and important, was on the B list in September 2005 and has remained there since. The Department of Transport's harbours Bill was first promised in September 2004 in section C of the programme. It remained there until April 2006. It then disappeared and reappeared in section A in April 2008.

Consistency is needed. What is happening with all these Bills? Will they ever be published?

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Minister of State, Deputy Pat Carey, must sort this out.

The Taoiseach: The late Brian Lenihan once spoke about the consistency of his inconsistency. Priorities change but I will not get into all of that with the Deputy. The legislation committee should come forward with a realistic legislative programme. The Departments insist on Ministers making sure legislation is put on A and B lists at Cabinet meetings but when the legislation

reaches the Parliamentary Counsel stage, they find there is a problem or another Department has priority and another issue comes down the track.

Deputy Enda Kenny: The Chief Whip will sort this out with his new package of reforms.

The Taoiseach: Shorter lists are needed.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: The Taoiseach would not need to answer more questions if the list is shorter.

The Taoiseach: That is also true and that would be no harm at all, not looking at one in particular from the Curragh in Kildare.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: It is time to give it a gallop.

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy Flanagan for that very constructive proposal. I will give a commitment that there will be a short list from next year.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The Taoiseach kindly said the promised legislation on a deposit protection scheme would be brought forward at an early date because the UK is introducing deposit protection at three times the level available to Irish depositors in financial institutions. There is a genuine concern we should match that, given the proximity of credit institutions adopting the higher level.

Does the Taoiseach intend during the upcoming debate to circulate a tabular statement outlining the different Estimates that will be amended and the Supplementary Estimates that will be considered over the summer or on the resumption of the House by select committees? Will that detail be spelled out? One of the subjects of all the questions earlier is the lack of clear understanding about where the €1 billion is to be found in 2009. If that was set out in tabular form, perhaps more light would be shed on the issue.

The Taoiseach: I was not aware that was being contemplated. The purpose of the debate is that each Minister will discuss these issues in detail. The €1 billion full year effect will be outlined in the 2009 Estimates. We are dealing with this financial year and identifying the €440 million that needs to be found. Next year, the full year effect will be reflected in the Estimates and any budgetary decision to be taken thereafter. The purpose of the debate is to clarify the issues in detail and I will make reference to that in my contribution. I will make inquiries about the provision of a tabular statement.

On the deposit protection issue, I wrote to the Minister for Finance on 4 July as a result of the Deputy's inquiry and I am still waiting to hear back. I will ask him to contact the Deputy directly.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: As one who is interested in Northern Ireland issues and the work George Mitchell did there, when will the George Mitchell Scholarship Fund Act 1998 amendment Bill be introduced? Will the scholarships be subject to cutbacks?

Where stands the enforcement of fines Bill, which could generate more money for the Exchequer and save the Garda time? It was promised some years ago.

The Taoiseach advised us earlier about the fair deal, for which €110 million was allocated. It was recognised in the budget that money was needed for the elderly and the Taoiseach referred to the number of beds available for people.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy cannot go into that.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: A total of 100 fewer beds are available in Monaghan General Hospital.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy was going very well. It is a pity. He should stick to legislation.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: When will the health information Bill be introduced in order that we will be provided with true and factual information about health services and not waffle?

The Taoiseach: The George Mitchell Scholarship Fund Act 1998 amendment Bill is expected at the end of the year. There is no date for the second Bill mentioned by the Deputy. The third Bill is expected next year.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Until recently, I did not realise the Government had a better regulation agenda. It was not obvious. The financial services regulation Bill appears to fall under that heading. Given the straitened times, it would be a good idea for the Taoiseach to indicate to the House when critical regulation of the sector will be undertaken.

Approximately nine EU compliance requirement Bills are outstanding in the justice and law reform area. Since it is imperative that legislation be introduced to comply with EU law or to indicate what is intended, when will the various Bills promised in section C of the legislative programme appear before the House so that discussion on them can be generated?

The Ceann Comhairle has a passing interest in a final matter, namely, the Dalton report. Required legislation has been promised several times by a number of people, including more than one Taoiseach. What lifespan is that report likely to have on the legislative list?

The Taoiseach: Unfortunately, practically none of the Bills mentioned has a publication date. They are on the list, but we do not have a date for them. I do not mean to be unhelpful. The Deputy's questions emphasise the point that I will ask the Chief Whip to place on the list only those Bills that will be introduced within a five-month or six-month period, with another list for Bills that we hope to publish thereafter. All other Bills should be left within their Departments until such time as they are ready to be discussed in the House or published. We spend a great deal of time asking about Bills that have been in gestation for years and to which we cannot add anything of value on the floor of the House. In the interests of tidying up our Order of Business arrangements, it has become apparent to me since taking up my post that a change is necessary.

Deputy David Stanton: Hear, hear.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has often promised that the housing miscellaneous Bill, which appears to be ready for publication, would be introduced in the House before the end of this session. Many people have been waiting on it and I wonder whether it will be published when expected or during July when no one is here.

The Taoiseach: The Bill is at an advanced stage. The complexity of some of the issues has necessitated external legal advice, which has resulted in the delay of publication. It is hoped that the Bill will be before the Cabinet this month.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: I revert to the theme of legislation that, while promised, has not been published. The pink list in respect of the Department of Health and Children details three Bills, namely, the adoption Bill, the child care Bill and the health long-term residential care

services Bill. None of them has been published despite their presence on this term's publication list.

Deputy Stanton referred to the adoption Bill, but the issue is older than he stated. As the Ceann Comhairle knows, it used to be within the remit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The Bill, which relates to the Hague Convention, dates back approximately ten years, but it has not been published. Will the three Bills be published during the holiday period?

Since the Government now has the time, will it begin consultations on the long-term residential care Bill? Obviously, the Bill will not be published before tomorrow. The Government should consult groups such as Age Action Ireland and other representatives of the elderly who have concerns about the likely contents of the legislation.

The Taoiseach: I will pass that idea on to the Minister for Health and Children. On the Attorney General's advice, a new provision has been added to the adoption Bill and ongoing discussions are taking place in that respect. As a result, the Bill's publication has been delayed, but we hope to publish it during the summer.

There are many complex legal issues involved in the child care Bill. While it is at an advanced stage of drafting, it will not be ready for publication before tomorrow. It is hoped that the problems can be overcome during the summer. That is what has been stated to me and we must wait and see.

Deputy Joan Burton: That is not much progress. The tax strategy group papers on next year's finance Bill have not been published. It would be normal for at least some of them to have been published by now. When will the Government have them published? The annual pay and pensions booklet, which would normally have been published by the Department of Finance by now, has not been published. Is there a reason for withholding the publication of these items? Even after our little bout of arithmetic this morning, it is difficult to make sense of the figures without the documents' publication.

The Taoiseach: The tax strategy group documents have no relevance to our current discussions on the €440 million——

Deputy Joan Burton: They have every relevance.

The Taoiseach: ——in terms of expenditure items. I do not know how the situation regarding these line Department matters stands since I left, but I will make inquiries.

Deputy Joan Burton: Will the Taoiseach give an undertaking that the tax strategy group papers and the Department of Finance's pay and pensions booklet will be published? They are fundamental documentation that would normally have been published by now. Will they be published or have they been suspended?

The Taoiseach: No. The simple point is that they will be published in the normal way whenever consideration of the matters in question have been dealt with by the tax strategy group. I do not know what meetings have been held by the group in respect of preparations for the coming budget.

Deputy Joan Burton: Several meetings have been held. The Minister for Finance is agreeing.

The Taoiseach: We are in the midst of a process. I assure the Deputy that the tax strategy group will do its business in the normal way.

Deputy Simon Coveney: I wish to raise two issues. For some months, the Government has promised that a new e-Government strategy would be in place by the end of this month. Is that matter still on track and are we likely to see it?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy should ask the Minister for Finance about that issue.

Deputy Simon Coveney: No, it was a Government promise on the basis of a Private Members' motion.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not a legislative promise.

Deputy Simon Coveney: A promise was also made regarding a new code of practice for data protection, which was also to be in place by the end of this month.

The Government promised an independent study on the comparative merits of overhead electricity transmission lines versus underground cables, which the Cabinet received and was briefed on yesterday. Is it normal practice for the Government to brief the media before informing Opposition spokespersons of the content of a report on which everyone in the House agreed? The matter is on the front page of the local newspaper.

An Ceann Comhairle: That matter is not in order.

Deputy Simon Coveney: It is in order.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not. That is the problem.

Deputy Simon Coveney: It is in order as the Cabinet is leaking sensitive documents before informing the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: As Deputy Coveney knows, there are other ways in which that matter may be raised. He is long-experienced.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Maybe we will have an opportunity to question the Minister on it tomorrow.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: In light of the fact that tomorrow is the last day of this session, regarding legislation that was promised for this session but has not been published, will the Taoiseach ensure that his colleague, the Government Whip, sends a memo to all Deputies indicating the timeframe in which promised legislation will be published in July, August and September? In terms of due process, it is important that Deputies know what legislation is about to be published during the closed season between now and resumption of the Dáil.

The Taoiseach: The Chief Whip will try to co-operate in that respect, but obviously he can only give an indication.

Deputy Simon Coveney: Is the e-Government strategy on time? It was a clear promise from the Government.

The Taoiseach: Were Deputy Coveney from Laois-Offaly, I would probably answer his question.

Deputy Richard Bruton: Racism.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not a legislative promise.

European Council Decisions: Motion.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Pat Carey): I move:

That Dáil Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option, provided by Article 4 of the fourth Protocol set out in the Treaty of Amsterdam, to notify the Council and the Commission that it wishes to accept the following measure:

Council Decision 2008/381/2008 of 14 May 2008 establishing a European Migration Network,

a copy of which measure was laid before Dáil Éireann on 25 June 2008.

Question put and agreed to.

National Development Plan: Motion.

The Taoiseach: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

- commends the Government on the progress made under the NDP as evidenced by the 2007 NDP Annual Report, particularly the substantial investment made in consolidating and enhancing Ireland's economic competitiveness;
- acknowledges important economic and social progress made over the last decade and the fact that we face the present economic and fiscal challenges from a position of strength; and
- commends the Government on the measures it is taking to address the current challenges, particularly the maintenance of policies that support economic and budgetary sustainability, thereby positioning Ireland to benefit from a future upswing in the global economy.

While we face short-term problems requiring action now, our future remains positive. The testimony to that is the national development plan and the progress the Government has made in delivering on that plan. The NDP 2007 report shows the Government's commitment to making the investment necessary to consolidate and enhance Ireland's economic competitiveness. It is clear that NDP investment is tackling our infrastructure deficits and providing the upskilling, training and education that our workforce needs. The NDP is also supporting our enterprise and innovation sector. The most visible progress under the national development plan can be seen in our steadily improving transport network and in the large-scale and ongoing investment programmes of the Dublin Airport Authority, the ESB, EirGrid, Bord Gáis and Bord na Móna. A highlight in 2007 included the completion of Pier D in Dublin Airport which can handle up to 10 million passengers a year.

The NDP investment will help firms in Ireland to produce high quality, value-added and innovative goods and services that will generate competitive exports and create over 9,000 new jobs in overseas companies located in Ireland. These and other investments under the NDP are necessary to continue to stimulate the economy and enhance the quality of life of people all over the country.

Unfortunately, the economic climate has deteriorated over the course of this year. On the domestic front, developments in the house-building sector have proven to be more severe than anticipated when the budget was presented last December and in broad terms this sector is

[The Taoiseach.]

depressing growth by about four percentage points. Furthermore, the sharp increase in the live register in recent months is related to developments in this sector and we all know that there will be further pressures on employment over the coming months.

There is understandable concern about the current conditions and the future prospects for the Irish economy. As one of the world's most open economies, we cannot expect to be immune from international trends and global downturns. Ireland today is feeling the impact of the global slowdown and after an unprecedented period in economic terms when Ireland caught up with and indeed surpassed many of our fellow European nations, we are now facing more difficult times.

People are paying more for their weekly food bill and for filling up at the petrol pump and many people are worried about the possible impact of the global downturn on their job prospects. The situation in Ireland is, of course, not unique as other countries are also experiencing difficulties. Listening to some people in recent days, one might think that the economic slowdown is exclusively an Irish phenomenon.

Internationally, there has been continued turbulence in global financial markets and consequential movements in interest rates; faltering economic growth in the US, the UK and other major trading partners; major exchange rate shifts in terms of the depreciation of the dollar and sterling; and unprecedented rises in oil and energy prices.

In Germany, unemployment has risen and retail sales have fallen for three months in a row. Some economists think Germany may show no growth in the second quarter. In France and Spain, the property market is also enduring turbulent times. In Portugal, GDP fell in two of the last three quarters. In New Zealand, the economy contracted in the first quarter. Denmark is in recession. A diverse set of international circumstances have combined over recent months to place our economy under much greater pressure.

I accept that the source of the problem will not be the primary concern for those people who are currently facing financial difficulties. However, it is important to say that the fundamentals of our economy are strong and will help us withstand this global pressure. The level of economic activity in the first quarter of this year remains at 2007 levels which last year saw GDP grow by 6%; in other words, activity remains at a high level by historic standards. Our workforce now stands at over 2 million, which is a doubling in two decades. A record level of investment in education has created a young dynamic labour force which is highly skilled and flexible. In the past decade, we have invested heavily in the knowledge economy through research and development. Ireland's low tax regime has been a key element in this package and remains attractive for foreign direct investment. Given the progress we have made over the last decade, we are well positioned to withstand the global downturn. We have ended forced emigration and we have achieved historically low levels of unemployment. The Government has used the boom wisely and saved while times were good by recording budget surpluses in ten of the last 11 budgets.

We used the boom to more than halve the national debt as a percentage of GDP, from 64% in 1997 to 25% in 2007. In 1997, €1 in every €6 of tax revenue went on servicing the national debt. By 2007, this had fallen to €1 in every €29 of tax revenue. If the assets of the National Pensions Reserve Fund are taken into account, the net debt position is about 12% of GDP. Over the past 11 years there has been unprecedented capital investment to provide key infrastructure such as roads, public transport projects and third level research facilities. This infrastructure has greatly increased our productive capacity and will be essential in returning the economy to a sustainable growth rate when global conditions improve.

We have also used the good times to give more money back to workers because we believe that they have worked hard for what we achieved and should share in the fruits of their labour. Billions of euro have been returned to Irish workers as a result of tax cuts since my party came to power in 1997. We reduced the tax on business because we believed it would increase investment, economic growth and the revenues that come to Government, and this has indeed been the case.

We have also used the good times to invest in public services. A total of 80% of current day-to-day spending goes on health, education and social welfare. We have significantly increased pensions, child benefit, the carer's allowance and other social welfare benefits. I am determined that a comprehensive welfare system will continue to support the most in need in society and those who are most at risk in the downturn.

Ireland in 2008 is very different from how it was in the dark days of the 1980s and the credit for this transformation goes to the Irish people. Their vitality, ingenuity and hard work have made Ireland one of the world's most remarkable economic success stories. Irish people deserve all the success they have achieved and I am determined to do my best to ensure that the citizens of this country continue to prosper.

Those intent on talking down our economy at a time when we want to maintain confidence in this country, against the background of a general global economic slowdown, diminish themselves and their cause. I ask Deputies to be constructive in their comments in this debate and not to take the soft option of simply playing partisan politics with our economic prospects.

This is not a time for disingenuous criticism nor is it a time for complacency. While we must not overstate the difficulties, equally we must not understate the necessity for decisive action. The eyes of the international community are now firmly on Ireland from a variety of perspectives, politically, economically and from a trade and investment point of view. By making the right decisions, we have a greater opportunity to emerge from the current difficulties within the next two years and return to a positive stable growth rate, as predicted by the ESRI and other independent commentators.

Anybody who experienced the difficulty of getting a job in the 1980s will understand why we are taking tough decisions now to ensure we continue to enjoy the fruits of our hard work. The wrong decisions based on short-term gain will only result in persistent negative consequences. We must act responsibly now to secure Ireland's future and this Government is determined to do that.

For many years we have operated on the basis of engagement within a framework of social partnership. We recognise that the effectiveness of the decisions that we take in the interests of the people is greatly enhanced when they take place in the context of a broader understanding and a co-ordinated approach.

To that end, I wish to make it clear that the Government believes that a renewed consensus in a new partnership agreement is in the best interests of the country. At the same time, it is necessary to caution against sectional interests being elevated above those of the whole community. It is incumbent on all of us to make the compromises necessary to ensure that Ireland emerges undamaged from the current difficult global environment. I should be absolutely clear that within the framework of democratic accountability, we will not abdicate our responsibility to take decisions that are in the best interests of the people.

In taking the corrective action necessary to ensure the period of reduced growth is as short as possible, the Government is committed to the following principles. Our primary emphasis will be on making every effort to maintain employment. Over the past decade, responsible social partnership has delivered a record rate of employment growth. All the evidence suggests

[The Taoiseach.]

that having a job is the most important positive influence on people's well-being. Unemployment in Ireland remains at approximately half the level it was in 1997. We must minimise the negative effect of the current difficulties on employment and avoid any increase in long-term unemployment. We must continue to emphasise securing high quality jobs for our citizens. We will promote sustainability in the economy. We will ensure we take decisions that are in the long-term interest and not merely for short-term gain. We will proceed with those capital investments which will have the greatest impact on stimulating the economy and enhancing the quality of life of our citizens, but we will pay strict attention to achieving value for money. We will prioritise front line services for current expenditure while achieving greater efficiencies across all services. We will examine measures to reduce the cost of doing business in Ireland to stimulate export-led growth and enhance productivity *per capita*. We will explore initiatives to increase competition to enhance consumer value and dampen rising prices. We will support those on the margins of society for whom the adverse global conditions are making life difficult.

Yesterday, the Government agreed an important step in implementing these principles, specifically in regard to the management of the public finances in the face of reduced revenues due to lower economic growth. After careful deliberation, we have developed a range of measures to limit spending increases. Spending is still increased compared to 2007 but, through a range of measures such as not implementing pay increases recommended for Ministers and senior public servants, we are underlining our commitment to keeping the public finances secure.

The total savings planned for 2008 are €440 million. This includes a saving of €50 million through measures identified as part of the efficiency review process carried out across Departments, which I announced in the budget for this year. A saving of €21 million will come from savings on advertising, public relations and consultancy expenditure. A further €10 million will come from payroll savings.

The remaining €360 million will come from savings on non-front line programme expenditure. This will include a saving of some €85 million which will arise on the allocation for the introduction of the fair deal nursing home scheme. That expenditure will not now be incurred in 2008. Savings of €38 million will arise from the slower than expected roll-out of the package of new developments provided for in the Department of Health and Children's Vote for this year. Savings of €25 million will be secured under the Department of Social and Family Affairs' Vote as a result of its continuing anti-fraud initiative.

Given the projected revision to gross national product and other factors, there will be savings of some €45 million this year in the allocation for overseas development aid. The revised total contribution in 2008 will be more than €200 per citizen, totalling some €900 million. Ireland, therefore, will still be far ahead of almost all developed nations in our rate of contribution to overseas development aid and in line with our commitments for this year. There is scope for savings of some €10 million in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, including in respect of FÁS apprenticeships, where the number of participants has fallen. Finally, responsibility for the REACH programme has recently transferred to the Department of Finance, which will result in savings of some €2.5 million this year.

The remainder of the €440 million will comprise capital savings in 2008 of €140 million arising from projects which are being rescheduled to later years. These include the deferral of the gateway innovation fund, which will yield savings of €40 million; €75 million from the deferral of some projects under the decentralisation programme which have not been advanced to date; deferral of the national sports campus project, making a saving of almost €3.9 million; and savings this year across a range of capital projects in transport which are expected to yield

€20 million. These measures are clearly focussed on tangible general savings through efficiency, better use of resources, cutting out waste and duplication, streamlining delivery of public services and focusing capital resources on those areas that will return us to our potential growth rate as soon as international circumstances improve.

Some commentary in recent days has suggested that the public service is inherently wasteful and inefficient and is, in some way, the source of our current economic difficulties. On the contrary, the recent comprehensive review by the OECD shows that the public service is relatively modest in size, efficient in its activities and effective in its outcomes in comparison to most OECD countries. However, the review also showed that in Ireland, as in all OECD countries, there is significant scope for improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness with which public business is transacted. The report indicated some areas where the scope for improvement seems particularly significant by international comparison.

That the OECD report was undertaken at the invitation of the Government shows our determination to improve the value and impact of public services in partnership with those who work to serve the public across all sectors of the public service. I announced on my first day in office my determination to give priority to public service modernisation and renewal. All that I have heard since from public servants and their representatives is a welcome for that focus and a willingness to engage in achieving even more for the citizen.

There are many examples of good practice and good value throughout the public service. Many of our services are world class in their performance. I refer in particular to the performance of the Revenue Commissioners, the implementation of the new system of payments to farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy and the e-Cabinet project, which has attracted international attention. Likewise, we have seen improvements in the administrative processes which support the transaction of public business. These have produced substantial efficiency gains in areas like shared services and improved management of procurement. For example, in my own Department, we have joined with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in its shared services operation, which now manages my Department's payroll.

Similarly, by bringing together three separate agencies in the National Economic and Social Development Office, we have reduced the cost of overheads and streamlined activities, while enhancing the benefit of co-operation and co-ordination in three organisations which play an important role in the broader social partnership process. Similar examples of good practice can be found in areas like the operation of outpatients departments and accident and emergency departments in our hospitals and the management of the planning process in our local authorities. These examples of good practice, and many others, must now become the norm. We must quicken the pace of reform and progress. The best of breed in each part of our public service must become the norm.

In pursuing that goal, it is right that we empower local management and staff to make changes that generate the best outcome for the citizen and the taxpayer. They are the people who understand best how their services work and where changes could be made to best effect. That is why we are implementing these changes in ways that afford flexibility to organisations to approach the reduction in payroll costs and the streamlining of the activities of agencies and State bodies. The alternative might have been to impose a rigid, centralised regime which would seek to control every decision from Merrion Street. That would be ultimately self-defeating, and it would also deny the opportunity to public servants to show their commitment and capacity for change and development.

I am confident this is the better strategy and that it will produce enduring results in terms of achieving greater efficiencies while also delivering more effective services for the citizen. Reductions in planned expenditure are designed so as to minimise the impact on front line

[The Taoiseach.]

services in health and education. These proposals represent a measured and reasonable response to current challenges and I am confident the people will see that we are pursuing a sensible course of action.

As I have said, the savings deliver €440 million in 2008 and €1 billion in 2009. Even with these savings, however, the fiscal position in 2009 will be demanding and all spending will have to be rigorously controlled. As we prioritise, we need to show care and common sense in the adjustments that we make. The measures we are taking will help steer this country through a temporary period of challenge and enable us to resume quickly a substantial growth rate in line with our strong economic potential and thus resume prudent but significant increases in desirable public spending.

The Government has sought to prioritise those areas of spending which contribute most to our capacity to weather the period ahead and to respond promptly and strongly to the emergence of more benign international conditions. Equally, we are giving political priority to those

who are most vulnerable and most dependent on public spending programmes.

I o'clock This means that everything else must be a lower priority. Again, we make no apology for that. The public will recognise and support that combination of competitiveness and fairness which current conditions require. The prophets of doom would have people believe that this is the worst of times, in the narrow hope that such an approach might gain them some political advantage. The Government sees the bigger picture and we want people to know that despite the negative short-term forecast, our economy is better placed to emerge from the current difficulties than it was in the past. This is why it is imperative that we take the right corrective action at this time. It is a down payment on a prosperous future.

In the past decade, this country has experienced extraordinary success built on the hard work and ingenuity of the people. The Government is fully committed to ensuring that the progress made during this period is secured. Moreover, I am committed to creating the conditions under which we can take advantage of the inevitable upturn in the international economy. While the current circumstances are challenging, I wish to make absolutely clear that the Government is determined to take whatever decisive action is necessary in the best interests of the country.

This is important because all the fiscal projections indicate that if we can stand firm, deliver responsible Government and control public spending, this will give us the capacity to keep Ireland on a stable and upward economic growth path. It is in our hands to ensure that this country remains in the best possible position to withstand that global downturn. As Taoiseach, I pledge to the House all my energies in working towards that objective. I commend the motion to the House.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I wish to share time with Deputy Kieran O'Donnell.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Enda Kenny: I move amendment No. 1:

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

notes that the Government has contributed to the current economic downturn through:

- the introduction of reckless inflationary budgets, driven by electoral needs, that killed competitiveness;
- implementing huge increases in day to day spending financed by unsustainable property tax revenues; and

- stalling public sector reform and abandoning any credible value for money discipline;

condemns the Government for producing a package of measures which:

- fails to introduce serious reform in the way the public finances are managed;
- ignores the need for a credible medium-term strategy to address our declining competitiveness and provide training and upskilling support for the increasing numbers of unemployed; and
- misses the opportunity to embark on a process of economic recovery through reform.

This debate is essentially about the Government's economic competence and credibility. It is about the stark realism of Ireland having been allowed to drift into a situation where we are clearly uncompetitive against international competition. That is now compounded by a real sense of loss of public confidence across the country. Hundreds of thousands of families all over Ireland are now worried about their livelihoods and jobs, their ability to service rising mortgages, the value of their homes and pensions, the cost of living and funding for key local services. They no longer believe the false statements of assurance from a leader who is discredited because of his inability to manage our economy when he was Minister for Finance. The Government is clearly discredited because of its blatant failure to manage the affairs of the nation competently. People no longer believe the Taoiseach because every action and utterance on the economy by him has further diminished his credibility as a leader and the credibility of the Government to steer Ireland away from the deep recession now staring us in the face.

People no longer have any faith in the Taoiseach because when he was Minister for Finance he used every opportunity to tell Irish families and investors, in 2005 and 2006, that house prices were based on "strong economic fundamentals". We now know that he was being told exactly the opposite by domestic and international experts. That is too late, though, for the tens of thousands of young families who have seen their entire savings wiped out by the property crash. Does the Taoiseach realise the extent of the despair felt by young people faced with negative equity in up to 100,000 cases?

People no longer have faith in the Taoiseach because, as Minister for Finance, in the space of just two years, he turned a €2 billion surplus into an €8 billion deficit, the biggest deterioration in the public finances in the history of the State. He was the Minister for Finance who ignored all the warnings about the unsustainability of tax revenues from the property boom, ramping up day-to-day spending in the run-up to the last general election at almost twice the rate of growth in the economy and leaving the public finances hopelessly unprepared for the inevitable downturn. Even when all the omens were pointing to a dangerous slowdown in the economy last autumn, he further ramped up day-to-day spending by over 9% in the last budget, which effectively destroyed the economy's ability to respond to tougher economic times.

People no longer have confidence in the Taoiseach because as Minister for Finance he spent four years expanding the number of Government agencies and quangos, fragmenting our public services, handing them over to consultants, damaging democratic accountability and massively wasting taxpayers' resources. He now realises the folly of these actions and has referred in his speech to amalgamations, reductions and quangos.

People no longer believe the Taoiseach because in April 2007, when he was Minister for Finance, he said that stamp duty reforms were unnecessary and reckless. However, he was then

[Deputy Enda Kenny.]

forced unwillingly to eat his words, not once but twice. People no longer trust him because when he was Minister for Finance he said, as recently as last April, that he was not concerned about the downturn in the construction industry. We know now that approximately 25,000 construction workers have already lost their livelihoods. In addition, FÁS told the Government that up to half of those working in the house-building industry — 75,000 workers — might well lose their jobs because of the property crash.

People no longer have faith in the Taoiseach because he was the Minister for Finance who tried to appropriate all the credit when the economy was growing at 5% on the back of cheap credit and a debt-driven housing boom. However, he now disingenuously claims that the Irish economy is simply the victim of international events outside our control, when we know the sharp reversal the economy is experiencing is unique in its suddenness and brutality.

Since last year we have witnessed the biggest fall in growth of any advanced economy, with growth falling from 5.3% last year to the latest ESRI projection of a decline to 0.4% this year. Even the USA, the source of the financial credit crunch, is only seeing growth drop by 1%. We are witnessing the biggest increase in unemployment of any advanced economy, with unemployment expected to exceed 6% by the end of the year. Meanwhile, the OECD is predicting that unemployment will fall in 25 of the 27 EU countries. Our projections seem to point to 250,000 being in the dole queues by year end.

We are witnessing the biggest deterioration in the public finances of any advanced economy, with Ireland now facing the ignominious prospect of being the only country this year to breach the 3% borrowing limit set by the EU's growth and stability pact. If the rest of the world economy is catching a cold, we are surely suffering from pneumonia. People no longer trust the Taoiseach when he says that we are witnessing a temporary adjustment to the housing sector and the public finances, and that the fundamentals of the Irish economy are still strong, when they know that the Central Bank is telling us that our cost competitiveness has declined by 35% since 2001. The Department of the Taoiseach is telling us that our export market share has been in sharp decline since 2003. I am not sure whether the Taoiseach and his Ministers meet business people, including exporters, these days, but these are tough times for Irish business. Enterprises are becoming uncompetitive because it is too costly to do business in this country for a variety of reasons. The CSO is telling us that we are the most expensive country in Europe to live in and Forfás says we are the most oil-dependent country in Europe. The National Competitiveness Council states that we are bottom of the international rankings for transport, energy and telecoms infrastructure. That is blatantly obvious when one travels throughout the provinces and speaks to people who are trying to do business in the face of international competition from countries whose infrastructural facilities are so much greater.

Business investment is collapsing and has dried up. Yesterday, one manager in charge of six banks said there had not been a single query for a mortgage in five weeks. Meanwhile, other mortgages that were approved under tightened conditions have not been taken up. Consumer confidence is at a record low. I predict that by this time next year several hundred retail businesses will have gone to the wall. They cannot sustain a situation involving such a loss of consumer confidence across every sector of society.

People no longer have faith in the Government because, to this day, not a single Minister will accept responsibility for the current position. There has been no acknowledgement of the huge mistakes that were made. This is not just about an adjustment to the housing market and the public finances; it is a crisis of confidence in the credibility of the Taoiseach, who is central to having brought about this recession, and in the Government's record of mismanagement of the nation's affairs.

The Taoiseach has squandered the fruits of the Celtic tiger. We are in this position because of a long-standing Government culture of cynical, soft-option politics and a refusal to face hard decisions and implement real reforms. Neither the Taoiseach nor those around him has done anything to change that culture during their long ministerial careers. We have seen a failure, without accountability, to deliver all the promised transformation programmes in health, e-Government, climate change, the spatial strategy and Dublin transport. No target or objective has been achieved. Many have been abandoned and many have become noble aspirations. There has been a catalogue of waste and mismanagement without any accountability, including benchmarking without reforms. It is now five years since we pointed out in Killarney that if the Government was going to pay out €1 billion per annum under benchmarking, then the very least it could do was to determine and agree the increased efficiencies that were going to come throughout the public service as a consequence. The Government missed a glorious opportunity for real reform of the public service at the start of the benchmarking process.

The Government also created 250 new quangos and a completely fragmented public service. How many consultants' reports, paid for by the taxpayer, are lying on the shelves of Departments gathering dust? There were 120 such reports in the Department of Health and Children alone. The HSE is a bureaucratic nightmare. The Minister for Health and Children said when this was set up that it was a once in a generation move to bring about efficiency, professionalism and a world class service for patients. Now we are seeing a return to regional devolution of responsibility and some form of accountability.

The wasteful spending by FÁS was uncovered recently in a document obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by Deputy Varadkar. The PPARS system wasted €200 million, while the e-voting system wasted €60 million. There are overruns in so many of the major infrastructure projects throughout the country, and this is the hallmark of failure for the Government. It is fine to have the money during the good times and to set out projects, but there has been no ability to manage and deliver them in the way the public would expect.

This is the most wasteful Government of the past 50 years — we have never had so much economic strength but never seen such a waste of obscene amounts of public money. There has been an unwillingness to challenge antiquated practices that have held back the public sector as the driver of economic and social transformation that it so needs to be. I agreed with the Taoiseach's comment on the public service. Its officials have always been among the brightest and the best in Irish life, but they have been bypassed by the Government for one consultancy report after another. I guarantee that there will now be a break in the link with the public sector, due to the 3% reduction in the payroll, as the Taoiseach has not spelled out where it is going to happen.

There has also been cynical management of the public finances for electoral purposes, at the expense of longer-run economic stability and competitiveness. The Taoiseach's predecessor put it very well when he said we get in here and our ethic is to stay in here. The ethics of the Fianna Fáil Party in Government has been to bring about a situation where its members assume that they have a right to be in power in perpetuity, to stay in Government at all costs, and to ratchet up public spending before elections.

This recession is not just about bad luck. It is about bad management. It is the legacy of a decade of Government mismanagement, waste and missed opportunity. It is the legacy of a flawed Government culture of tolerance of low standards and soft option politics. Yesterday's announcements by the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance will do nothing to restore confidence in the Government's economic competence. The response ranked as one of the weakest and most uncertain performances from any Taoiseach and Minister for Finance in recent years. Deputy Bruton remarked that the two men appeared dazed or confused.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Or both.

Deputy Enda Kenny: We are told by the Taoiseach that the measures will save €440 million this year and will then save €1 billion in 2009, even though these measures include the deferral of one-off capital projects and a delay until next year of implementation of the fair deal on nursing homes charges. Taking €85 million from the health budget is simply disgraceful. The sop of a €12 million increase in subventions is simply a salving of the Minister's conscience, while the further €13 million announced for 200 beds was already announced last January.

The gateway innovation programme of €40 million is gone. How can there be balanced regional economic development when some of these very good ideas are now being put on the long finger? The €75 million earmarked for decentralisation is also gone. This has been a complete shambles. Everybody supports a well planned, well managed decentralisation programme, but what has happened to Departments and State agencies has been a farce. The Taoiseach knows well that many of these State agencies will never move, and he should face that reality. The decision to cut the €75 million needs to be highlighted a lot more.

If the incoherence and bungling of the numbers by the two most senior members of the Government was not bad enough for the country's confidence, even more worrying is the absence of a clearly thought-out plan. Such a plan would set out the anti-inflation measures of this programme and the stimulus for the economy. Despite the Government's attempts to conceal the breakdown, it has now emerged that the biggest cut announced is in health spending for the old and the vulnerable, those who need the most assistance.

We respect the fact that the Government has adopted a number of the proposals put forward by Fine Gael. However, the ministerial pay award has only been deferred, not dropped. Action is proposed on agencies and quangos, but the Government has not explained what that means. Some of the other proposals are so vague as to be meaningless. There was no breakdown of where the €1 billion in savings in 2009 will come from, and one has to suspect that a large portion of it will come from cutbacks in the vital capital projects needed to get this economy back on track. If so, this is exactly the wrong response from Government. There is no detail on what cutbacks are going to be enforced in the health and education sectors. Despite the fact that we were told these sectors were to be exempted, we need to see the colour of the Minister's eyes when talking about front line services. There is no responsibility assigned to individual Ministers to ensure that savings are achieved from efficiencies will take effect. These savings should be in back office bureaucracy, rather than front line services.

There is evidence of county council managers across the country not signing contracts for major water and sewerage schemes, because they have no money to meet their contributions. The response of the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government has been to appoint more inspectors for the polluter pays principle. I guarantee that the fines paid over a few years would pay for the implementation of these schemes. The Government has left local authorities high and dry with no income stream and they now face a very difficult situation.

This does not represent a credible medium-term strategy to address the serious economic challenges that we now face. Besides lacking a credible strategy to reform our public finances, the Government has remained entirely silent on how it might help to tackle the deep-seated problem of lost competitiveness that is threatening many jobs across the country. A young man spoke to me the other day about his proposal to set up a restaurant and how he was billed for almost €200,000 by a local authority betterment levy. People cannot do this and hundreds of businesses are in a critical state.

There are no anti-inflationary measures in the statement. Fine Gael has proposed a freezing of State charges and a cut in the 13.5% rate of VAT, funded by a carbon windfall tax on power generators.

Deputy Brian Lenihan: That is a great plan, cut taxes and spend more.

Deputy Enda Kenny: It is a great plan which the Government should adopt and Fine Gael will give it credit if it does.

No measures are contained in the plan to help the 220,000 people on the live register. Fine Gael has urged the Government to overhaul FÁS to ensure those laid off from the construction industry will be re-trained to work in other sectors. The young apprentices who have started courses with FÁS cannot be left in limbo. No attempt has been made to help the frozen property market. There has been no response or stimulation from the Government to give an opportunity to the thousands who want to purchase their own homes.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: There are 100,000 people on housing waiting lists.

Deputy Enda Kenny: Ronald Reagan once said, “If it moves, tax it, if it continues to move, regulate it, and if it stops moving, subsidise it”. This is not the type of response the economy needs from the Government. The Government is responsible for this recession. It could have done far more to prepare the economy to deal with international challenges. The consequences of this will become apparent over the next 18 months.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: The main reason the Government gave no details in its planned cutbacks yesterday was it knew they would affect front-line services. From the Taoiseach's speech, I have calculated that 40% of the cutbacks will affect these services. The Government tried to produce a three-card trick yesterday, hoping people would not believe there would be cuts to front-line services.

Various savings have been outlined such as €10 million from the public payroll, €85 million from the fair deal package, €35 million from a slower roll-out of new developments in health services, €2.5 million from the Reach programme and €45 million from the overseas development aid budget. The latter is a sleight of hand. As the economy is not performing as well as forecasted, GDP growth rate is being reduced which allows the Government to rejig the overseas development aid figures. It defies logic for the Government to cut €10 million from FÁS apprenticeship funding when people are being laid off. It has used the crude instrument of cutting 3% of the public payroll with no assurance it will affect front-line services.

The figures do not add up to €440 million either. Apart from the clever use of language, there is a shortfall of €14.5 million. Will the Taoiseach explain where this saving will be made? Either the Government is rudderless and unaware or it is misleading the people. I do not know which is worse. The Government's role is to provide confidence and direct policy.

Typically, the Government blames the international downturn for the state of the economy. It did not blame international factors when the Celtic tiger was roaring. The Government cannot have it both ways. The role of the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance is to give confidence to the economy, which they are not doing.

The Government claims the downturn is not unique to Ireland. It is unique to Ireland. Recent Irish GDP and unemployment figures are ahead of EU averages, bar those of Spain. The Irish GDP growth rate has fallen six times faster than the EU average. Unemployment is rising at a faster rate than the EU average.

[Deputy Kieran O'Donnell.]

I take exception to the Government's claims that this side of the House is talking down the economy. The Opposition has come forward with constructive policies to deal with wastage and encourage growth. As Deputy Kenny stated, the Government has not taken any steps to stimulate the housing sector. Fine Gael has proposed straightforward measures, such as reducing the VAT rate from 13.5% to 12.5%, to give some impetus to the construction sector. The Government's plans do not refer to a freeze in Government charges. Over the next 18 months, more stealth taxes will creep in.

Until 2000 Irish export growth rates were good. When the construction industry took off, the exports market collapsed to the point that in 2003 it saw negative growth. As the construction industry was tax rich, it suited the Government, for electoral reasons, to go after it. It allowed the economy to become uncompetitive with rising inflation rates. The Government's stealth taxes contributed to more than 50% of the increase in inflation between 2000 and 2006. While there were some international factors involved in the downturn, it was predominantly caused by the Government's policies.

These planned cutbacks are incompetent, the figures do not add up and they directly hit front-line services. The Government, yesterday, thought it would get away with it. It also produced the plans on the last sitting week when no parliamentary questions can be tabled on them.

Deputy Damien English: The Ministers would not answer the parliamentary questions anyway.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: We are living in a democracy. In any other situation, an executive summary of the proposals would be provided. The logic of translating the savings of €440 million this year into €1 billion next year is ludicrous. Does this mean this year's cuts will be multiplied by two? The Government must believe we are all fools. The Fine Gael policy document, *Recovery through Reform*, proposed that the Government change the budgetary process from an incremental basis to a review of expenditure year-on-year.

These cutbacks were made up on the back of an envelope on the way to the press conference. The Government could not find €14.5 million of a difference so it used the term "involved" when it should have used "consist of". These proposals are a disgrace and an insult to the people. The Government must be positive but, instead, its proposals are negative, lacking in leadership, fail to protect the vulnerable or bring about renewed economic growth. I hope the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance will reconsider these proposed cutbacks.

Debate adjourned.

Sitting suspended at 1.30 p.m. and resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Ceisteanna — Questions (Resumed).

Priority Questions.

Waste Management.

37. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the sites that are subject to investigation and report by his Department that require remediation; the date he was first informed of each site in each case; the action plan in respect

of each site; the financial outlay by the State to bring each site back to safe standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27785/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The State, acting through the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in a co-ordinating role, took over custody of the former Irish Ispat site from the liquidator in June 2003. This position is an exceptional one in that the Department has been directed by a specific Government decision to have responsibility for the care and maintenance of this specific site and this is the only such site currently subject to any investigations or reports by my Department. The standing Government position is that Ministers are responsible for the implications of their own policy areas and programmes, including any associated land and property holdings.

The mandate required my Department to co-ordinate all legal actions in relation to the site and to cover issues such as ongoing site security, ongoing maintenance and other issues arising once the site was vacated by the liquidator and to enable a site investigation to be carried out to determine the best option, economically and environmentally for site remediation.

During that period the Department has co-ordinated all legal actions in relation to the site; carried out a comprehensive site investigation to determine the levels of contamination and remediation-development options at the site; set up ongoing environmental monitoring at established monitoring points; decontaminated and demolished the steelworks buildings; and arranged for the site surface clearance contract with Hammond Lane Metal Company.

These steps have brought the site to a position where the Government can make an informed decision as to its future use and where a detailed risk assessment of the entire site with recommendations for the appropriate remediation required can be undertaken. The costs associated with such appropriate remediation will depend on the Government decision on the future use of the site.

In regard to the question of any other site in the country, my Department does not compile or maintain a list of such sites which could relate to any contaminated land. With regard to landfill remediation under the Waste Management Acts, the statutory responsibility for landfill remediation lies with the local authorities and statutory responsibility for national hazardous waste management planning rests with the EPA which has prepared a national hazardous waste management plan. Section 60(3) of the Act precludes me as Minister from exercising power or control over a matter for which the agency or local authorities have statutory responsibility.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I thank the Minister for his reply. I find it amazing that he does not have information about any other sites around the country apart from Haulbowline, which his Department is directly involved in. That particular revelation showed that the Minister was very proactive in reassuring people at the time that there was no risk to public health. Even when my colleague, Deputy Stanton, and others revealed that a baseline study was required into the increased cancer rate in Cobh, he appeared to have no difficulty in coming forward with that information or meeting residents' groups about these matters.

Since the revelations about Haulbowline has the Minister asked the EPA or his Department about any other potential sites around the country of a toxic nature that might present a risk to public health and require remediation and an action plan? In the event, have costs been devised for such areas?

Deputy John Gormley: The Deputy is right in pointing out that I met the residents. I made all the information available very rapidly. If the Deputy assesses the situation, he will find that, without disparaging previous Ministers, I did more about this matter in a very short time than

[Deputy John Gormley.]

previous Administrations. The reports that have been made available are in the Library, as the Deputy knows. People made much of the fact that there were five previous reports. They are all available in the Library and are all on CD.

My Department took responsibility for this site in 2003. The Deputy is asking me now to take responsibility for sites all over this country. There may well be such sites elsewhere, but they are not my responsibility. I can imagine that many of our old mines could pose difficulties with remediation, but they are not the responsibility of my Department. As much as the Deputy would like me to have responsibility for many things, I am not responsible for those sites.

Deputy Phil Hogan: Deputy Gormley is Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and, like all of us, I know he has an interest in ensuring the protection of the environment. I am aware that he can get the information needed through the local authority system. His Department officials can ring the local authorities and assemble such a list. However, it is clear that he has no interest whatsoever in doing that.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: Hear, hear.

Deputy Phil Hogan: Otherwise, he would take an interest in this matter and would be able to give us the information today. I understand the EPA has no list of such toxic dumps that may exist throughout the country. We can only speculate, but in the absence of the information the Minister refuses to give me today, I believe it is disingenuous of him to say he cannot get it in view of the fact that he could assemble all the facts about Haulbowline. Will the Minister say what core sampling and testing was carried out in the Haulbowline case in particular? Where were the samples tested before the State took over the site and after the revelations that came through his Department in the past few weeks? What is the testing process so that we may ensure that a bona fide problem exists, which can be resolved?

Will the Minister give an undertaking to the House to compile a list of potential difficulties to public health in various sites around the country? Will he instruct his Department officials to get such a list from the EPA, and the local authorities immediately to determine what the risk to public health is, if any?

Deputy John Gormley: The Deputy appears to be contradicting himself because——

Deputy Phil Hogan: No, I am not.

Deputy John Gormley: ——when he spoke there he asked me to contact the EPA. He has now revealed, if I understand him correctly, that the EPA does not have this information.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I asked the EPA today and the Minister could, equally, have asked.

Deputy John Gormley: The Deputy has just said he does not have the information, yet he is asking me to contact the EPA. I have gone through a number of the documents dating back to 1995. My preliminary assessment at this stage is that a previous Government, which comprised Fine Gael and the Labour Party, did not cover itself in glory as regards this site.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I am asking the Minister about——

Deputy John Gormley: I know the Deputy does not want to hear this.

Deputy Phil Hogan: We shall answer for that.

Deputy John Gormley: I know he does not want to hear it, but I am just giving him the truth. As regards the White Young Green study carried out in 2005, an extensive, intrusive site investigation was undertaken at the time, which indicated no evidence of immediate threat to human health or the environment, and they are best suited in determining the best way forward in securing the site from an environmental and health and safety viewpoint. That is the way we are proceeding. I got them on site immediately. Not only that, but as I said to the Labour Party Deputies here last evening, the residents requested that any analysis undertaken should be subject to a peer review. I was happy to accommodate the residents in that regard so that they may be assured that the methodology for any analysis carried out is up to best international practice.

Deputy Phil Hogan: Will the Minister give an undertaking to the House that there is no risk to public health, in his view and that of his Department, from any other hazardous site in the country?

Deputy John Gormley: To suggest that I can give a clean bill of health to every single site in the country is ridiculous.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister was able to do it for Haulbowline.

Deputy John Gormley: In the case of Haulbowline, I was able to get the analysis. I will not lead people up the garden path.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister can get the information, however.

38. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the latest information available to him regarding any threat to human health or life, animal or marine health or life, or the environment arising from contaminated waste at the Haulbowline site in County Cork; the steps he is proposing to take to deal with any such threat; the plans for the safe disposal of the contaminated waste; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27806/08]

Deputy John Gormley: The environmental challenge presented by the former steelworks on Haulbowline did not manifest overnight. It is the legacy of an industrial past. For many years the steelworks were a significant employer in the Cork area and an important part of the local economy. The site has the potential once again to contribute to the economic and indeed social life of the area. First, however, the legacy issue must be addressed.

Since 2003 my Department has had responsibility for the management of the facility on an interim basis pending a decision by Government on the future use of the site. This has included enabling a site investigation to be carried out to assist the Government in determining the best option, environmentally and economically, for its future use.

In light of the situation created by the unauthorised actions of contractors on the site, I have moved to address the more immediate, very understandable and legitimate concerns of the local community. I have made available the entire report on the 2005 site investigation, including the full suite of technical data which it generated. I have also made available the reports on the ongoing monitoring of the site which has been carried out over the intervening period. My Department has arranged with the consultants who produced the 2005 report that they will clarify any technical issues which may be raised.

This information is the total of the reports and investigations of the site arranged by my Department. The 2005 report in particular summarises earlier desk studies and, more

[Deputy John Gormley.]

importantly, reports on comprehensive intrusive site investigation which included extensive analysis of soil, water and air, including sub-surface testing for heavy metals. These reports have indicated no immediate threat to human health or the environment in the locality, while recognising that this is a contaminated site which will ultimately require an extensive and co-ordinated resolution.

In light of the recent events my Department has re-engaged the consultants to carry out an independent and rigorous assessment of current site conditions. This assessment is under way and will involve analysis of soil, slag, dust, surface and ground water samples for all likely contaminants, including heavy metals such as chromium. The results will be published.

My Department and other relevant agencies are properly engaged in the management of this legacy site in a manner which is consistent with good practice and minimisation of risk to human health and the environment. A coherent overall approach rather than piecemeal action, which could inadvertently cause problems to the local community and the environment, must be taken and that is the objective being pursued now by my Department.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: I thank the Minister for his reply. My question raises issues concerning the threat to public health and that of the people who worked on the site, those who live nearby and to the marine environment, air quality and water quality. Approaching this issue from a slightly different angle, I have raised with the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment a number of times the fact we have not properly implemented the Seveso directive, which is an environmental directive. Responsibility for its implementation has been given to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. That was a mistake, given that it concerns an environmental issue. To ensure we have joined-up Government, it would be much better if the Minister's Department had responsibility for implementing this directive. It would cover the issue of this site. I put a question to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the other day——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy might put a question to the Minister now.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: ——to ascertain if the Seveso directive would apply to the management of this site. That is not clear because the Minister said it is not listed as an establishment under the directive. I tabled that question because it is the type of directive that should apply to the management of this site. I want the Minister to examine this further. The directive requires the putting in place of plans to deal with a toxic environment above a certain level and ensuring safety provisions are put in place. The issue of this site has been highlighted in terms of information, openness, accountability about the health issues involved and the levels of chromium on the site. The Minister is arranging for a report to be prepared, which is a positive step and represents progress——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Will the Deputy put a question to the Minister?

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Will the Minister set out a planned approach for dealing with the site? A plan should be put in place setting out the steps to be taken over a period of time and it should be made public. Such a plan should cover emergency planning, day to day activity in the area, who carries out work and who visits the site. All those arrangements need to be planned. It is not enough to have a report. We need an overall plan that sets out for the next number of years how this issue will be dealt with in terms of plans A and B etc. If an emergency arises or there is a risk to human health, there needs to be a plan to deal with it. The Minister needs to address that.

Deputy John Gormley: That is precisely what we are doing. That is what the Government is about. We are producing a strategy for a way forward, a plan. That is what the White Young Green analysis is about, namely, to get on the site and produce the data, which will be peer reviewed. I hope the residents will be happy with the analysis that has been carried out.

I have said previously that I am about openness and transparency. We have produced all the reports and we want a “warts and all” approach. If this site is contaminated, and we believe it is highly contaminated, let us find out how contaminated it is and the necessary steps to be taken to ensure it is properly cleaned up.

The Deputy talked about a plan, but I advise that an options paper will be produced and put before Government which will examine it in detail to determine the best way forward.

The Deputy referred to the Seveso directive and it was raised previously in Cork when I met people in regard to other sites related to the docklands area. We must make sure no danger is posed to people in the locality. We must ensure this plan takes account of the future use of this particular site, whether part of it will be a residential area, a marina and what the people there want. The sort of remediation required differs from plan to plan. If, for example, the people want a park on the site, that would not require the level of remediation that would be required otherwise. I am not pre-empting the options in any way, but it may well be that some part of the site may have to be capped while other parts of the site may have to be fully remediated. That is what we have to examine.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I will take a final supplementary from Deputy Tuffy. We have spent more than the time allocated on this question. Therefore, I ask the Deputy to put a brief, direct question.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Will the Minister specifically indicate whether the Seveso directive applies to this site? I would like people to be told the answer to that question. The directive provides that residents must be protected in terms of the threat posed by dangerous substances on sites. All such considerations must be taken into account in residential planning. The directive covers the protection of human health and so on. It seems it should apply to concerns regarding this site. The Minister should find out if it does and report back to the House and, if it does, he should advise the way it will be implemented.

It is good to have a report and data on the site, but a plan has not been put in place. The site may be capped. Apparently, it will be capped, but previously it was not going to be capped. The approach to dealing with the site has been one of crisis management. The Minister needs to put in place a proper plan. I am not blaming the Minister in this respect. As he said, there is a legacy regarding the management of the site, but the Deputy is now the Minister, and henceforth we need a planned approach to managing the site. The message must be clearly put across that the health of the public is being protected and that there will be planning for land use in the future to ensure it meets safety standards. The Minister should find out if the Seveso directive applies to this site and, if it does, he should implement it.

Deputy John Gormley: There is a plan in place.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Yes, but what about the directive and the legal position?

Deputy John Gormley: I have said to the Deputy over and over again that we have put a plan in place, and more of a plan than existed previously. We have made more information available than ever before.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: That is not a plan; that is a report.

Deputy John Gormley: No, that is a plan.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: That is not good enough.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Allow the Minister to respond.

Deputy John Gormley: That is a plan of action. I am glad the Deputy is not blaming me in this respect because there is a legacy issue here. As I said to Deputy Hogan, I have gone over the files and my preliminary analysis shows——

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister should publish them.

Deputy John Gormley: I certainly will.

Deputy Phil Hogan: We will then note what the environmental law was at that time.

Deputy John Gormley: I would like to see the Deputy's response to them because his party did not produce any plan for this site.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister should publish the files.

Deputy John Gormley: I will publish all the information and I will meet the Deputies any time they want regarding this.

Planning Issues.

39. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the effect the recent European Court of Justice decision on environmental impact assessments will have on current and future construction projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27786/08]

Deputy John Gormley: There are two aspects to the judgment of the European Court of Justice delivered on 3 July. First, the compatibility with the requirements of Directive 85/337/EEC on Environmental Impact Assessment, as amended, of Irish legislation under which permission may be granted for the retention of unauthorised development and, second, whether appropriate environmental impact assessments were carried out in respect of the development of a windfarm at Derrybrien, County Galway, which was the subject of a number of planning applications between 1998 and 2003.

With regard to retention permission, the court noted that while Community law cannot preclude applicable national rules from allowing, in certain cases, the regularisation of operations or measures which are unlawful in the light of Community law, such a possibility should be subject to the condition that it does not offer the persons concerned the opportunity to circumvent Community rules or to dispense with applying them, and that it should remain the exception. The court found, however, that under Irish law, there is the possibility of the grant of retention permission in cases lacking any exceptional circumstances.

With regard to the Derrybrien development, the court found that the development consents given for, and the execution of, the wind farm development and associated works at Derrybrien were not preceded by environmental impact assessments which conformed to the requirements of Directive 85/337/EEC.

This very recent judgment is being studied in detail to determine the appropriate response. I have already been examining legislative options for removing or minimising the possibility of retention for unauthorised developments that would otherwise have been subject to environ-

mental impact assessment under Directive 85/337/EEC and these will be further developed in light of the court's judgment.

The position remains that under Part 10 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and Part 10 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, a planning application in respect of a development or class of development falling within the scope of Directive 85/337/EEC, as amended, must be accompanied by an appropriate environmental impact statement. The carrying out of unauthorised development is an offence under the Act.

Deputy Phil Hogan: Would the Minister agree with the European opinion that Irish planning law is weak on retention planning? Will he bring any proposals forward to assist local authorities in ensuring they have better guidance on matters such as the one in Derrybrien? I cannot believe such a large wind farm would not be subject to an environmental impact statement. A large number of environmental cases are active against the Government in the EU. Is the Government taking steps to ensure these complaints are addressed? What progress is being made on them?

Deputy John Gormley: The Deputy is correct. The Commission challenged the enforcement measures put in place by Ireland to ensure genuine application of the EIA directive. According to the Commission, Irish legislation did not impose any clear obligation to bring unauthorised development to a stop. In particular, the Commission felt Ireland had not presented evidence of clear guidelines for local authorities to ensure these authorities take the necessary enforcement action. The Commission set out some examples illustrating the failure to take enforcement action in Ireland and cited five particular examples relating to quarries and one each of a piggery, a peat bog, a hotel, a convention centre and a wood processing factory. Ireland argued that the existence of an exception power to grant retention permission represents a sensible fallback development and consent position.

It has always been my conviction that in this country we play fast and loose on planning and particularly on retention. I am introducing a suite of measures, which I have circulated to my Government colleagues. I want to develop the heads of a new planning Bill that will address these issues.

Environmental Policy.

40. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding proposals for carbon credits on flights by Government Ministers and officials; the way the amount to be spent on carbon credits for each flight will be calculated; the flights for which they will be purchased; the person from whom they will be purchased; the environmental purposes the money will be used for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27807/08]

Deputy John Gormley: In response to the programme for Government and the national climate change strategy commitments to introduce a carbon offsetting scheme for air travel on Government business, including flights by Ministers and civil servants, I have developed the principles of a scheme which will operate on an annual basis starting in 2008. I am currently finalising the necessary logistical and administrative arrangements.

The offsetting scheme will require each official flight to and from Ireland to be recorded, and the carbon dioxide emissions calculated based on the total air miles or kilometres travelled. The offsetting cost will be determined on the basis of a carbon price which will be set by my Department each year to reflect the average price in the voluntary offsetting market. The value of the total offsetting requirement each year will be invested on behalf of Ireland by the

[Deputy John Gormley.]

Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership, REEEP, in small scale “gold standard” energy efficiency and renewable energy offsetting projects in Ireland’s priority least-developed countries.

The scheme will apply to all Departments and offices and will cover all flights by Ministers and officials on both commercial airlines and Government passenger aircraft. It will also apply to bodies under the aegis of Departments and it will be a matter for individual Departments to decide which bodies are to be included. The scheme will be optimal in terms of administrative efficiency and accountability, and will have the added advantage of increasing awareness of the global warming implications of air travel among official travellers and their Departments and offices. The scheme will retrospectively account for all official air travel since this Government came into office in June 2007. I believe the Government scheme sets an important example in terms of a very practical step which air travellers can take to minimise their carbon dioxide emissions.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Those are the first proper details I have had of the scheme. I was very interested in what the Minister said. The money will be given to a company called REEEP which will invest it in renewable energy in the least developed countries——

Deputy John Gormley: It will be invested in countries in which we have projects.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: That is the problem with this type of scheme and has been identified by a number of people including Friends of the Earth. The Minister says we will keep doing what we are doing, putting out our emissions, and let the least developed countries take the brunt of reducing emissions. They can have renewable energy but they cannot have the technology we have. It is all to make the Green Party look good because it brought in carbon offsets, although it did not reduce emissions but got the Third World to do it for us instead. That is the gist of what the Minister said. I am very sceptical about this type of initiative. The Minister would do better to put more buses on the road. If he spent that €400,000 on extra buses for Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus or whoever, I would not be sceptical. This is all about appearances, like all the other Green Party initiatives. We will have our consciences eased about flying or driving in our big cars and let the Third World take the brunt of it. We will not let them have the development we have. They will take the brunt of this while we feel good about ourselves.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Tuffy must ask a question.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: These companies are not regulated. I do not include the company the Minister mentioned because I do not know anything about it, but Friends of the Earth has raised many issues around this. These companies are not regulated and we do not know what will happen to the money. It is a load of nonsense.

Deputy John Gormley: That was a wonderful question. I do not even know what the question was. The Deputy mentioned the “brunt”. Friends of the Earth supports this scheme.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: No, it does not. Friends of the Earth in Ireland does not.

Deputy John Gormley: REEEP is a “gold standard” company. I met its representatives in Bali. It is sometimes difficult to understand what Deputy Tuffy says. What is the Labour Party’s position on this? Her colleague, Deputy Burton, has raised this issue time and again on the Order of Business, asking the Government when it would introduce this scheme. I got the clear impression the Labour Party was waiting for us to introduce this. Now it appears the Labour

Party is opposed to this. This is “gold standard” offsetting. Deputy Tuffy should listen to people such as Mr. Al Gore, who clearly said it does not matter where one reduces carbon as long as it is reduced. That is the principle behind the European scheme. One puts a cap on emissions and decides to reduce them. Would the Deputy prefer that we do nothing? This is the practice of most progressive Governments, and now that the Green Party is in government, we have a very progressive Government.

Deputy Phil Hogan: Good man John. The Minister should not get carried away.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Friends of the Earth in the UK argue that supporting carbon offsetting companies could delay laws being put in place to set targets for everybody to cut carbon emissions. Is the Minister aware of that information on the Friends of the Earth website?

Deputy John Gormley: I am very aware of it.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Why not put more buses on the road? The Minister is letting the Government away with murder regarding buses. The Department of Transport is making people take buses off the road, and then the Government is paying this out to some other country.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That would be a good question for the Minister for Transport.

Deputy John Gormley: I was not aware that we are letting people away with murder, but that is Deputy Tuffy’s assessment.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: I spoke metaphorically.

Deputy John Gormley: I went to quite some difficulty to ensure this measure got through Government.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: That is because the Minister could not get anything else.

Deputy John Gormley: It is “gold standard” offsetting. We can be quite assured that the people involved in these projects are only too delighted to get renewable energy such as solar power put into their villages.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Maybe they would like electricity and water.

Deputy John Gormley: I am very disappointed the Labour Party is opposed to progressive measures such as this, which will assist the most vulnerable people on our planet.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: It is all cosmetic.

Waste Management.

41. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his policy on incineration and its role in the national waste strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27787/08]

Deputy John Gormley: The programme for Government signalled the development of waste and resource policy in the direction of sustainability and, in particular, to move away from mass burn incineration towards alternative technologies. Arising from a commitment in the programme, a major international review of waste management strategy is commencing. This will inform the Government’s approach to waste prevention and minimisation and to diversion

[Deputy John Gormley.]

of waste from landfill. This review will examine, in particular, the emergence of new technologies in waste management, particularly those for the mechanical and biological treatment of waste, which can reduce the need for incineration or landfill.

The Government is acutely conscious of the very real and imminent challenge posed for Ireland by the EU landfill directive. To meet our obligations under this directive will require a doubling of the amount of biodegradable waste we divert away from landfill by 2010. We need to accelerate the move away from landfill quite dramatically, to examine all the technologies that can contribute to this and to regulate the sector in a manner which supports optimal environmental performance at minimum cost. The review is not just about technology. Its terms of reference are deliberately broad so as to promote a fundamental review of the legal, institutional and financial approach we take to waste management.

Inaction is not an option and the approach reflected in the current waste management plans, while facilitating some progress, is not going far enough fast enough. Ireland needs to pursue the most innovative solutions available and applied internationally. We can move from being an under achiever to world class standard and to a position of leadership rather than struggling to meet EU targets, as at present.

Undue emphasis on incineration as the cornerstone of waste management policy is detrimental to the development of alternative solutions. The review may well indicate some residual role for thermal treatment in our future waste management strategy, but I do not envisage it being on anything like the scale that was previously planned.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister has repeatedly said, since coming to office, that he has no role in the planning and granting of licences relating to incinerators or other waste management infrastructure. Yet, when An Bord Pleanála or the Environmental Protection Agency makes decisions he has, through media interviews, said that he is going to make those decisions redundant in his own constituency in Poolbeg. That seems to be the basis of Government policy in relation to waste — soundbites and media interviews.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Does the Deputy have a question?

Deputy Phil Hogan: If the Minister is so much against incineration, why did he meet an economic consultant about a 100,000 tonne incinerator in Rathcoole?

Deputy John Gormley: I did not meet any economic consultant. I met an environmental consultant, a former director of the EPA. Deputy Hogan's party has described this as a secret meeting but if it was so secret, why was I happy to announce it to the Deputy and to others?

Deputy Phil Hogan: Why did the Minister meet the person concerned?

Deputy John Gormley: The fact is that the lady, whom I have known for quite some time, came to me to talk about a range of issues. She spoke about what she described as an alternative proposal for Rathcoole. I told her I was sorry but I could not get involved in any particular application. I have said already this afternoon that I do not get involved in any applications. She also wanted to speak to my party colleague and I understand that the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, met her. That is as far as it went.

I meet people on a regular basis to discuss alternative technologies, gasification being one of them. I have met many people to discuss that issue. I have also met a lot of people in

relation to pyrolysis. I am looking at all options and a suite of measures to deal with the waste management problem.

The bottom line is that when we are talking about alternative technologies, what I want to see happening is not high-tech. We must get into source segregation, ensure the roll-out of the brown bins and then, as is happening in Austria and elsewhere, we could use NBT for the residual or black bin waste. That is the way forward and we can make massive reductions in our waste if we pursue that particular option.

Deputy Phil Hogan: It is quite difficult to get to meet a Minister, whether as part of a delegation or deputation or even as an individual, unless one attends the Minister's clinic. I was amazed that the Minister put himself in a position — notwithstanding what he has just said and I accept his bona fides in the matter — whereby he gave the impression that he was in favour of incineration. He surely knew what he would talk to the person concerned about before he met her. The fact that his Green Party colleague met the same individual certainly raised the antenna.

Does the Minister accept that in view of his policy, which he has enunciated through various soundbites and media interviews — to which An Bord Pleanála and the EPA do not listen, although the Minister would like them to — it was inappropriate for him to meet somebody who is in favour of incineration and of developing a 100,000 tonne project in Rathcoole, especially given that under the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act, the application goes directly to An Bord Pleanála and the Minister has no direct function?

Deputy John Gormley: The Deputy is being entirely disingenuous. The impression he is trying to convey here and that his fellow Deputies are trying to convey on the ground in that area is that a secret meeting took place. They are trying to give the impression that I am, somehow, in favour of incineration. Nothing, as I hope the Deputy now realises, could be further from the truth.

I am quite willing to meet people and have met quite a number of delegations since assuming office but what we require is clarity around the Deputy's party's position on this matter.

Deputy Phil Hogan: My party is not in Government. The Minister is in Government.

Deputy John Gormley: Fine Gael, unfortunately, on the issue of incineration, has voted in favour over and over again.

Deputy Phil Hogan: When?

Deputy John Gormley: On at least three occasions, Fine Gael was in favour of including——

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister is in favour of it.

Deputy John Gormley: When the original Waste Management Bill was going through the House, my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Trevor Sargent, tabled amendments which were rejected by all of the main political parties. His main amendment concerned incineration——

Deputy Phil Hogan: Which is now accepted by the Minister.

Deputy John Gormley: That is the situation.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister is now meeting the developers of incinerators.

Deputy John Gormley: Deputy Hogan's party put that through. It voted for the waste plan going through Dublin City Council. Fine Gael voted on three separate occasions for incineration. That is the situation and——

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister is meeting incinerator developers. What hypocrisy.

Deputy John Gormley: Deputy Hogan needs to face up to that reality and stop playing politics with this issue.

Other Questions.

Electronic Voting.

42. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on electronic voting; the cost of storing electronic voting equipment for 2007 and to date in 2008; whether this is an acceptable cost in view of the economic downturn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27712/08]

Deputy John Gormley: As I recently informed the House, I am at present considering the next steps to be taken in relation to the electronic voting project. In this, I am taking into account the work of the Commission on Electronic Voting, which has examined the system, relevant experiences and developments internationally, the need to maintain public confidence in the electoral process, as well as the provisions in the programme for Government relating to electoral reform generally.

I am not in a position, therefore, to be definitive regarding the timing of future use of the system. I am conscious of the extensive work inherent in the recommendations of the Commission on Electronic Voting, including the replacement of the election management software, as well as adaptations to the equipment and further end-to-end testing. At the very least, it will be problematic to envisage use of the current e-voting scheme at the local and European elections in 2009.

Information provided by returning officers to my Department indicates that the total annual storage costs incurred by them in respect of electronic voting machines and ancillary equipment in 2007 is €489,000. In 2006, these costs amounted to €706,000. Based on recent provisional information from returning officers, a total of €139,000 has been expended to date in 2008 in respect of the storage of the electronic voting equipment. Full annual cost data is gathered by my Department at the end of each year and a more definitive figure will be available in due course.

In 2007, over 60% of the electronic voting machines — 4,762 in total — were moved to a central storage facility located at Gormanston army camp. Costs incurred to date in respect of the movement and storage of this equipment are approximately €328,000. These are largely one-off costs related to the preparation of the facility, transportation of the machines and the acquisition of storage containers. The available capacity at this location has now been fully utilised and my Department is examining other options for greater centralised storage of the remaining machines. Further costs will be incurred in the completion of these centralised storage arrangements, including buy-out costs of local leases.

With approximately €51.32 million having been spent on the development of the electronic voting project, it is reasonable to make adequate and appropriate provision for the storage of the machines. The Government decision to proceed with the movement of the electronic voting

equipment to centralised premises, therefore, was the right approach, taking into account a range of factors, including costs of the current and centralised arrangements and the likely benefits to be realised.

Deputy Phil Hogan: In a previous reply, the Minister stated that he would not be afraid to make a tough decision, if necessary, on the e-voting machines. Obviously he did not get around to making any tough decision in the past few days, despite the announcement of €43 million worth of cuts in his Department. He has an opportunity now to make some savings by terminating the storage arrangements and selling or recycling the e-voting machines, although it now seems clear that will not happen.

Does the Minister accept that €51.3 million in the roll-out of electronic voting and €2.8 million, to date, on storage costs is an obscene amount of money to have spent on a project that is dead? At a time when €48.3 million must be saved in his Department, I urge him to re-examine those cuts and to deal with the issue of terminating the storage contracts and selling, at whatever salvage value can be obtained, the e-voting machines.

Deputy John Gormley: It is very interesting to hear the Deputy speak on this issue because I get the impression that if a decision is made in line with the Fine Gael manifesto, which is to scrap electronic voting, that—

Deputy Phil Hogan: I am glad to hear the Minister has read our manifesto. I have read the Green Party's manifesto which has changed considerably.

Deputy John Gormley: Fine Gael would welcome that decision with open arms.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Green Party tore up its manifesto last June.

Deputy John Gormley: We will put down a marker here today.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister should answer the question.

Deputy John Gormley: The marker is that Fine Gael is encouraging me to do this. I take it that if a decision is made along those lines, Fine Gael would be more than happy to welcome it. To return to the point made by Deputy Hogan, I have a funny feeling that Fine Gael would crow about waste.

This is an issue with which I must deal. I am looking at the best international practice. The problem, as the Deputy knows, is that countries like Germany use these machines and are happy with them. France is currently conducting a study on this to see if these machines can be tampered with in any particular way. I must give consideration to all of these matters.

I will talk to those dealing with the setting up of the electoral commission.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am anxious to bring in other Deputies.

Deputy John Gormley: Hopefully, I am progressing that at a rate with which Deputy Hogan will be happy. The commission will have its report by the end of August. I would also like it to look at this issue and see what recommendations it can come up with.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: Members of this House and the public have no faith in these electronic voting machines. The Minister needs to get that report and see what can be salvaged from this situation. Certainly, a considerable amount of money has been wasted in the storage of these voting machines. Does the Minister see these machines being used in the local or

[Deputy Terence Flanagan.]

European elections next year? When will they be used? Otherwise, what is the point in having them in the first instance?

Deputy John Gormley: In my original reply, I said that it would be quite problematic for these machines to be used at this stage in the local and European elections.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Hogan may ask a brief supplementary.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I know the Leas-Cheann Comhairle is being very patient.

Deputy John Gormley: Lots of latitude.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I do my best.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I know the Minister had a difficulty with e-voting machines when there was no verifiable paper trail before the election but, like everything in his party's manifesto, it has been torn up. Does he accept that those machines are effectively obsolete? Does he also accept that this is a more meaningful way of making savings in his Department rather than the proposal he came up with this week?

Deputy Terence Flanagan: Hear, hear.

Deputy John Gormley: The Deputy knows only too well that the commission on electronic voting carried out an analysis. He also knows that in respect of the voter verified audit trail, VVAT, issue, it was not part of the terms of reference. However, the submissions made reference to VVAT and the need for it. It looked at that issue in some detail.

We know that retrofitting will cost about €22 million, which is probably a conservative estimate. That is the figure it came up with. If the Deputy is suggesting that we spend——

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister should justify that.

Deputy John Gormley: The question is whether it is the Deputy who is justifying that.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister is the one who mentioned the figures.

Deputy John Gormley: Those are the questions with which I must grapple.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister should justify it but he cannot. It is more hot air like the incinerator.

Services for People with Disabilities.

43. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the obligation there is on local authorities to ensure easy access to public buildings for the elderly and people with disabilities; if they are obliged to conduct audits of buildings under their control and carry out works where necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [20941/08]

Deputy John Gormley: My Department's sectoral plan, as provided for in section 36 of the Disability Act 2005, was developed in consultation with people with disabilities to assist the Department and local authorities in supporting an inclusive society with accessible buildings, facilities, services and information. There are statutory provisions, codes of practice and guidelines available to assist local authorities in providing the measures required in the sectoral plan.

Following the completion of accessibility audits, local authorities are required to draw up implementation plans setting out programmes to give effect to the commitments and objectives contained in the Disability Act 2005 and the Department's related sectoral plan. Each implementation plan, when adopted, will be published and placed on the authority's website with targets and timeframes for carrying out the required works. Priority will be given to local authority buildings and other facilities to which people with disabilities most frequently require access, including footpaths, public amenity areas, information and other services. To date, 22 implementation plans have been received by my Department. A further six local authorities have completed accessibility audits with significant progress being made towards finalising their implementation plans.

My Department provides €15 million annually to local authorities to assist them in carrying out actions under the national disability strategy. The Department is monitoring progress on the implementation of the plans and seeks reports, as appropriate, as required by the sectoral plan.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: I thank the Minister for his response. How often will audits of public buildings take place and what targets has the Minister put in place for local authorities to make public buildings more accessible?

Deputy John Gormley: We have taken a number of measures in the Department. We have established the local government disability steering committee and the Disability Act sectoral plan advisory committee, introduced the Building Control Act 2007 to provide for disability access certificates, initiated a review of Part M of the building regulations, introduced the revised housing adaptation grants scheme for older persons and people with a disability in November 2007 and implemented a new protocol governing liaison between housing authorities and the HSE on the assessment of the accommodation needs of people with a disability. A second protocol which deals with support costs for social housing projects for people with a disability is expected to be finalised by the third quarter of 2008. New development management guidelines for planning authorities were issued in 2008.

Building regulations and other statutory instruments were introduced. The local government Disability Act steering committee and the publications of the National Disability Authority, including statutory codes of practice made under the Disability Act 2005, provide guidance and advice to assist local authorities in providing services to people with a disability. Local authorities have competent professional, technical and administrative staff to ensure that services are provided for what I call best practice standards.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Local authorities are still allowing buildings to be constructed that do not have proper access for the disabled. An example relates to affordable housing. I dealt with a constituent who was offered affordable housing by a particular council but when she went to examine it, she found that she could not move her wheelchair around the building. Apparently, the apartments were built in keeping with Part M of the building regulations.

We need a two-pronged approach. The most cost-effective way is to ensure that any new public or private building that has been given permission has proper access.

Deputy John Gormley: I agree with the Deputy. I have the implementation plans here and can give that detail to Deputies Tuffy and Terence Flanagan. The list is too long to read out now but I can give the Deputies all that information. It goes through all the county councils, the implementation plans received and comments about where they are in respect of those plans.

Social and Affordable Housing.

44. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local

[Deputy Michael Creed.]

Government the impact that the downturn in the construction industry will have on the provision of social and affordable housing; the number of units he expects under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 for the next six months; if he is examining alternative methods of delivering social and affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27673/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Delivery of homes under Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2006 is, necessarily, subject to a number of variables. These include the volume of housing development for which planning permission is granted, the finalisation of individual agreements between local authorities and developers, the timing of commencement and phasing of individual developments and the general level of activity within the sector itself.

Local authorities have been advised from the outset of Part V to conclude agreements with developers at the earliest possible stage to ensure that housing to be provided under agreements is delivered in a timely manner. Accordingly, most of the homes that are delivered this year under Part V will be as a result of agreements reached with developers up to 12 months ago, or longer in some cases, and should therefore not be impacted by the recent reduction in residential development activity generally.

While it is difficult to predict precisely the likely future output from Part V in any given period, particularly because of timing factors, I expect that Part V delivery this year will exceed the 3,246 homes delivered through this mechanism in 2007. It will, therefore, continue to play a significant part in achieving progress towards the ambitious targets for social housing and for the delivery of affordable homes set in the national social partnership agreement, Towards 2016. I expect that it will be later in 2009 before the recent reductions in overall housing output begin to impact on Part V delivery. In terms of planning for future delivery, consideration is being given to the enhancement of the existing affordable housing mechanisms by introducing a new affordable housing product based on an equity loan arrangement.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House.

An incremental purchase scheme, targeted at households with an income lower than that required for affordable housing, is also being advanced.

In terms of the broader social housing programme, a wide range of supply options are available to local authorities. Apart from Part V, these include design-build contracts, acquisitions, public private partnerships, turnkey projects and lease options under the rental accommodation scheme, as well as the traditional construction contracts tendered by authorities. The potential for new and innovative approaches to delivery and funding of housing programmes is kept under review by my Department on an ongoing basis.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: There is a major problem with supply in the affordable housing area. I refer to the PPPs and the breakdown in the five McNamara PPPs with Dublin City Council. It is the young and the most vulnerable who are waiting. Some 8,000 people are on the Dublin City Council waiting list, 3,056 people on the affordable housing list in——

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: A question, please.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: ——South Dublin County Council, 4,500 on the affordable housing list in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and 750 people on the affordable housing list in Fingal County Council. We want to see new thinking in this area.

The Minister stated recently that if councils are not using the money hoarded to build houses under Part V, he will confiscate it. The Minister might advise us how much money has been taken from local authorities that have not produced the goods or delivered on Part V. What other measures is he taking to ensure Dublin City Council reopens its affordable housing list?

Deputy Michael Finneran: Deputy Flanagan referred to PPPs and the regeneration projects, which are the subject of a Private Members' motion last night and tonight. I made a statement on this situation last night. We are in consultation with Dublin City Council and I hope to meet it in the coming week to discuss this issue. I have met one of the groups involved and will meet with the other two this week.

Regarding Part V, we have not received the housing assessment needs from the Dublin county councils yet. We have received responses from 51 of 88 local authorities but none of the Dublin local authorities has responded. All were to be in by 31 May but we have not received them. We sent a further request for them to be delivered as soon as possible. We will then be in a better position to know the overall situation.

The question refers to other options that I did not address in my reply. I am bringing forward initiatives in the equity loan and incremental schemes. There are major opportunities for people under these schemes, which will hopefully be included in the housing Bill we will bring forward.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: In the context of this question and providing social and affordable housing, there is great apprehension about funding for the Limerick regeneration project. I would like the Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, to state that the Government is committed to providing funding, the amount of funding in 2009 and that people in Limerick can be assured that funding can be provided. The regeneration project is important to Limerick and the people living in the areas concerned.

Deputy Michael Finneran: This was the subject of a question I answered in the House some weeks ago. Off the top of my head, some €20 million was allocated to this project in 2008.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: It is €10 million. A sum of €10 million is in the budget.

Deputy Michael Finneran: I am not sure of the figure but I will provide a definite figure to the Deputy. The budgetary situation in 2009 has not been decided yet and it is a matter for discussion about all projects and housing developments for 2009.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Do I gather from that response that the Minister of State is committed to providing the funding and will specify the amount of funding? The Government announced this project amid fanfare. Is the Minister of State committed to providing the funding?

Deputy Michael Finneran: The Government is committed to the Limerick regeneration project. It would be inappropriate for me to give any figure for 2009, which I do not have at this stage.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Is the Minister of State committed to providing the funding?

Deputy Michael Finneran: I stated that the Government is committed to the Limerick regeneration project.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: What about funding?

Deputy Michael Finneran: Obviously, if the Government is committed to the project, it must be funded.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Will it be Government funding?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is beyond the scope of the question.

45. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of applicants for social housing, by local authority, and in total in tabular form; the steps being taken by him to ensure that the number of people on social housing waiting lists is reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27578/08]

Deputy Michael Finneran: A statutory assessment of housing need is carried out every three years by all housing authorities. The last assessment took place in 2005 and indicated that there were 43,684 households on local authority housing waiting lists. Detailed information on this assessment is available on my Department's website. Local authorities are currently carrying out the 2008 statutory housing needs assessment, the results of which will be published in due course.

Information on housing need, broken down by housing authority, has been a major consideration in the allocation of Exchequer resources for the national social housing investment programme. This year alone, my Department has allocated a record amount of over €1 billion to support construction and acquisitions projects by local authority across the country, with a further €200 million for regeneration and renewal projects. In addition, close to €300 million in capital grants and loan funding is being provided to support a significant programme of activity by the voluntary and co-operative housing sector.

The Government's housing policy statement, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, and the National Development Plan 2007-2013 reflect the strong commitment to expand social housing provision contained in the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. Under the agreement, 27,000 social housing starts are to be delivered over the period 2007-09. Good progress is being made in meeting this target with some 9,000 new social housing starts achieved in 2007. The resources being made available for social housing under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 will allow for the needs of some 60,000 households to be met over the full period of the plan.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Why is the assessment of housing need so old? Surely this should be updated at least yearly. I am sure there are more than the 43,600 to which the Minister of State refers. The reply referred to 9,000 housing starts in 2007. From my experience as a councillor, I know this to be a meaningless statistic because it has no relationship to the houses built and allocated to people on the housing list each year. The record of the Government on housing over the past 11 years has been abysmal. The National Economic and Social Forum had a target of some 10,000 each year to get rid of waiting lists. That has never happened.

I dealt with someone last year who had been on the housing list for eight years. She lived in the most dire conditions imaginable and was suicidal. I do not want to give details but it was a situation that one would not believe. This is the kind of story that representatives come up against. People are on housing lists for years and we are throwing money away on the private rental supplement. The Government policy has been to rely on the private market to solve problems. In years gone by there was more emphasis on building social housing, which is the key.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: A question, please.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Will the Government do anything to fast-track the building and delivery of social housing? Now is the chance, when there are problems in the construction industry, to put construction workers building social housing in order to provide people with homes and the security that goes with it.

Deputy Michael Finneran: The first question concerned housing assessments. The last was in 2005 and we await the return of the others. Some 65 out of 88 have been returned. That is the system at present but I take the point that it could be annual. It is a three year assessment at the moment.

The Deputy referred to my reply citing building starts. The target was 9,000 and the number of starts was 9,061. Social housing completions for 2007 are 9,469 so we are well ahead of target. My Department had a major input into the programme in 2007.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: What measures will the Minister of State take to ensure local authorities ensure all boarded up houses and any houses in disrepair are turned around as fast as possible? There are houses in my constituency which are not handed out to those on social housing lists as soon as possible. The Minister of State stated that 43,000 people are on social housing lists. How many years does he expect it will take for these people to be housed? Will the Minister of State review the remit of the affordable housing partnership and ensure it will achieve better value for money?

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: We have approximately 5% social housing and not too long ago, perhaps 30 years ago, we had approximately 30%. Last year, we had approximately 9,000 houses but we needed 10,000 year on year for the previous five years. We need front-loaded social housing construction. Will the Minister of State ensure construction workers build these houses now so people can get roofs over their heads? It would stop the waste of money on private rented supplements and over time those people can buy their houses.

Deputy Michael Finneran: Our target is 27,000 new homes up to 2016 and we are well on target for this, with more than 9,000 this year. With regard to the question from Deputy Flanagan, this matter was debated by the Seanad yesterday and information was relayed to us that there may be empty houses. Some local authorities tell us they are in a position to turn around the houses inside of four weeks. We will seek an audit on how many empty houses exist.

Deputy Denis Naughten: The Minister of State can start in Roscommon.

Local Government Elections.

46. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the plans he has to introduce spending limits for candidates in the 2009 local government elections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27585/08]

Deputy John Gormley: In accordance with the programme for Government, I recently published the Green Paper on local government reform, Stronger Local Democracy — Options for Change. The Green Paper outlines a range of issues for consideration, including the establishment of expenditure limits at local elections.

The submissions made in the course of the preparation of the Green Paper were generally supportive of some expenditure limit. The Green Paper outlines two main options with regard to such limits for local elections, to introduce a fixed expenditure ceiling or to link limits to a proportion of Dáil expenditure. It states that care needs to be taken to ensure against overly bureaucratic rules and suggests that it may be useful to engage on the issue on a cross-party

[Deputy John Gormley.]

basis. In this regard, I have written to the Joint Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government with a view to engaging with the committee and to explore the scope for an all-party approach to this issue.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: The Leas-Cheann Comhairle was the Minister who introduced section 72 of the Electoral Act 1997 which would allow the Minister to make regulations limiting election expenditure in local elections. I would like a straightforward commitment from the Minister that he will introduce limits on spending in next year's local elections. The Green Party and the Labour Party have a lot in common. Neither party receives pots of money from business. No matter what one may state about this, both parties know we are similar in this regard and the Minister could address the uneven playing pitch.

The Minister, who is a member of the Green Party, is introducing bits and pieces which I welcome and we have a lot in common. This type of measure would make a real difference. A date can be fixed for local elections in a way which it cannot for general elections. It is absurd that we have spending limits in general elections and not in local elections. Somebody could spend €100,000 on a local election campaign and while this is rare, it happens. A fraction of this is spent on general election campaigns.

Deputy John Gormley: If it is so absurd why did the Labour Party not introduce it when it had the opportunity?

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: We introduced the legislation and we brought in the limits for general elections.

Deputy John Gormley: However, it was not done for local elections. I recognise that it was a progressive move on the part of the Leas-Cheann Comhairle when he was Minister to introduce such measures and the same Government introduced other measures, such as the Freedom of Information Act. I have always been on the record with regard to these matters.

Last week, Deputy Tuffy's colleague, Deputy Ciarán Lynch, recommended an approach to electronic voting which I referred to a committee where it could be discussed and an article on this was published in *The Irish Times*. I have done the same with this matter. I want to get all-party consensus on this issue and this should be possible. It is recognised that we have an anomaly whereby limits are in place for general elections but no such limits exist for local elections.

Deputy Phil Hogan: The Minister will have our full co-operation in case he thinks I am down on him all day.

Deputy John Gormley: I thank the Deputy and I appreciate it very much.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: It is generous.

Deputy John Gormley: We had examples in the past where there were expenditure figures for local election candidates of approximately €100,000, which is ridiculous.

Deputy Phil Hogan: We know one or two of them

Deputy John Gormley: This is not tolerable. It is like the United States, with the best democracy money can buy. We must get away from this.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Consensus is good and I have no problem with it. Has Fianna Fáil stated the Minister can do this in time for next year's local elections?

Deputy Phil Hogan: Will it allow the Minister to do so?

Deputy John Gormley: When I say "all-party consensus" I include my Fianna Fáil colleagues——

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: Has it agreed yet?

Deputy John Gormley: ——with Fine Gael, the Progressive Democrats——

Deputy Phil Hogan: There are no Progressive Democrats.

Deputy John Gormley: ——the Labour Party, Sinn Féin and Independents. Everyone can come and bring a little bit to the party. I am sure we can make progress on this.

Special Areas of Conservation.

47. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he will implement the commitment to review the derogation on turf cutting on designated bogs with the view to extending the right beyond 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27138/08]

66. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to review proposed restrictions on turf cutting on designated bogs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27139/08]

70. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the plans he has to introduce grants to compensate people affected by the end of the ten-year derogation on the cutting of peat in bogs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24953/08]

88. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the plans he has to deal with the end of the ten-year derogation of cutting peat in bogs in view of the importance of this way of life to rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24951/08]

Deputy John Gormley: I propose to take Questions Nos. 47, 66, 70 and 88 together.

There is a certain amount of confusion regarding the impact that restrictions on turf-cutting are having or will have. Turf cutting is restricted on a very small number of Ireland's bogs. Of the 1,500 to 1,600 raised bogs in Ireland, only 139 are designated as special areas of conservation, SACs, or natural heritage areas, NHAs, and only 32 of these are subject to the ten-year derogation that comes to an end this year. While a similar ten-year derogation period will apply to the balance of the 139 designated bogs, turf cutting may continue as before on the vast majority of bogs.

Raised bogs are found mainly in the Irish midlands, from Kildare to east Galway and from south Leitrim to Tipperary. Less than 1% of Ireland's original active raised bog remains. However, this tiny proportion represents 60% of western Europe's remaining raised bogs.

Under the EU habitats directive, Ireland is obliged to designate certain priority habitat sites as areas for conservation, including some raised and blanket bogs. The habitats directive was transposed into Irish law by the EC Natural Habitats Regulations 1997. Under these regu-

[Deputy John Gormley.]

lations, all peat extraction was proposed to be ended on designated bogs. However, a derogation period of up to ten years was introduced by the then responsible Minister in respect of domestic turf cutting.

An agreement reached between the Government and the farming representative organisations in 2004 provided that the Department would review whether there are particular circumstances in which domestic turf cutting could continue beyond the derogation period without damaging the bogs.

Recent scientific reports on bog monitoring and turf cutting found that continuing damage at a rate of approximately 2% to 4% per annum was occurring because of domestic turf cutting. In the light of this scientific evidence, it would not be appropriate to extend the ten-year derogation and turf cutting on the 32 raised bogs designated prior to 1999 should therefore cease at the end of the current season as scheduled. The situation with regard to extraction of peat from blanket bogs is different, primarily because this habitat can accommodate a certain amount of turf cutting without significant damage and is in a better position to renew itself without active intervention.

My Department operates a compensation scheme for persons to stop turf cutting in designated raised bogs. This covers both special areas of conservation and natural heritage areas. It provides payments of €3,500 for the first acre and €3,000 for each subsequent acre of freehold, as well as an incentive bonus of up to €6,000. This has enabled the State to acquire either the freehold or the turf cutting rights on 6,500 acres of designated peat land. Arbitration is available in cases where the turbary owner believes that compensation should be higher. I am providing for the record a schedule of all designated raised and blanket bogs identifying, in particular, those designated in or prior to 1999.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I thank the Minister for his response. Initially, a ten-year grace period was provided to allow those who own bogs to secure an alternative fuel source but they have not been given assistance by the State to facilitate them in sourcing alternative fuels. In 1997 the cost of oil was \$24 a barrel whereas now it is \$140 a barrel. In light of that, will the Minister explain what assistance his Department has provided to facilitate turf cutters to secure alternative fuel sources?

Why can he not furnish information about the scientific evidence to Members? He gave a commitment to provide it to me on 1 July but I am still waiting on it and his Department cannot furnish it to me. Was the scientific study carried out on all 32 designated bogs due to cease turf cutting at the end of this year? If turf cutters are permitted to cut turf by hand or with a sleán, what is the scientific difference between doing that and using the hopper? The Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, will be well able to explain the implications of this, having footed plenty of turf in his time.

Deputy John Gormley: There is a misapprehension about this. The hopper is permitted but the sausage machine is causing the difficulty.

Deputy Denis Naughten: There are no sausage machines.

Deputy Ulick Burke: They are obsolete.

Deputy Denis Naughten: The Minister is completely out of touch.

Deputy John Gormley: I am not out of touch. I am outlining the current position. We are not dealing with hoppers.

Deputy Denis Naughten: What about sausage machines?

An Ceann Comhairle: Allow the Minister to continue, without interruption.

Deputy John Gormley: The Deputy wants answers and clarity and I am providing that. I take the Deputy's point.

Deputy Ulick Burke: We are going back to the wheelbarrow.

Deputy Denis Naughten: Will the Minister reiterate this only affects sausage machines?

Deputy John Gormley: That is what we are dealing with, not hoppers. Last night, the Deputy's colleague correctly stated people voted "No" in the recent referendum because they were resentful about their right to cut turf being affected and a campaign of misinformation was pursued on this matter.

Deputy Emmet Stagg: Why did the Minister not correct this?

Deputy John Gormley: We need to clarify this. All of us have a duty as elected representatives to tell people the truth regarding this matter. People say they cannot use the traditional hopper for turf cutting, which is not the case.

Deputy Naughten asked what my Department has done. Only last week we provided exemptions for microrenewables in order that people in the affected areas can erect wind turbines and install solar panels and so on without planning permission. We are making it easier for people to heat their water and so on through CHP plants, which Deputy Hogan welcomed. I will give Deputy Naughten the scientific advice if he wants it.

Deputy Ulick Burke: The Minister ignored my statement last night that the EU habitats directive declares its central aim is, "to promote the maintenance of biodiversity, taking account of the economic, social, cultural and regional requirements". The interpretation over the years has been based solely on scientific evidence. Can he reconcile that with the directive?

Deputy Denis Naughten: Will the Minister deliver on one commitment? Will he reiterate to his officials policing this issue on the ground that this concerns sausage machines and not hoppers?

Deputy John Gormley: I can do that but my officials are well aware of that, particularly those on the ground. They try to engage the public and I have spoken to rangers. I met the ranger in Galway recently who informed me about the campaign of misinformation on this matter.

Deputy Naughten contacted my Department regarding the scientific information. My officials indicated they are compiling it and they will have it for him as quickly as possible. I will ensure that happens.

Deputy Ulick Burke raised the compatibility of preserving SACs and economic activity. We have had a ten-year derogation which it was hoped would give people the opportunity to put alternative arrangements in place.

Deputy Ulick Burke: The Minister referred to alternative sources of fuel last night. What does he mean?

Deputy John Gormley: This issue of restricting turf cutting must be put in perspective, as it involves 32 bogs this year. I recently listened to “Sunday Miscellany” and a romantic story about the end of the turf cutter.

Deputy Ulick Burke: Romantic Ireland is dead and gone.

Deputy John Gormley: Turf cutting can continue on our blanket bogs and that message needs to be disseminated.

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 Aengus Ó Snodaigh — the closure of wards during weekends at Our Lady’s Hospital for Sick Children, Crumlin, Dublin; (2) Deputy Brian Hayes — the proposed building project at Our Lady’s school, Templeogue Road, Dublin; (3) Deputy Thomas McEllistrim — the need for the Minister for Health and Children to ensure the HSE consults and works with communities for health reform and better service delivery; (4) Deputy Joanna Tuffy — to ask the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if the Haulbowline site, Cork is affected by the provisions of the Seveso directive, or any other directive and, if so, whether the provisions have been complied with in respect of this site or any other relevant sites or establishments; (5) Deputy Pat Breen — the lack of facilities available in the mid-west region for sufferers of cystic fibrosis; (6) Deputy Joe Costello — the need for the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to outline his proposals for the tenant purchase of local authority flats; and (7) Deputy Joan Burton — the lack of MRI and modern imaging facilities at Connolly hospital, Blanchardstown, Dublin.

The matters raised by Deputies Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Pat Breen, Joan Burton and Brian Hayes have been selected for discussion.

National Development Plan: Motion (Resumed).

The following motion was moved by the Taoiseach today:

That Dáil Éireann:

- commends the Government on the progress made under the NDP as evidenced by the 2007 NDP Annual Report, particularly the substantial investment made in consolidating and enhancing Ireland’s economic competitiveness;
- acknowledges important economic and social progress made over the last decade and the fact that we face the present economic and fiscal challenges from a position of strength; and
- commends the Government on the measures it is taking to address the current challenges, particularly the maintenance of policies that support economic and budgetary sustainability, thereby positioning Ireland to benefit from a future upswing in the global economy.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

notes that the Government has contributed to the current economic downturn through:

- the introduction of reckless inflationary budgets, driven by electoral needs, that killed competitiveness;
- implementing huge increases in day to day spending financed by unsustainable property tax revenues; and
- stalling public sector reform and abandoning any credible value for money discipline;

condemns the Government for producing a package of measures which:

- fails to introduce serious reform in the way the public finances are managed;
- ignores the need for a credible medium-term strategy to address our declining competitiveness and provide training and upskilling support for the increasing numbers of unemployed; and
- misses the opportunity to embark on a process of economic recovery through reform.

—(Deputy Enda Kenny)

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I wish to share time with Deputy Penrose.

The Labour Party amendment reads:

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

“mindful of the deteriorating position of the Irish economy, caused primarily by the collapse in the house-building industry;

concerned in particular at the alarming increase in the number of persons on the live register;

notes that the Government’s austerity package contains no measures to deal with the worsening employment crisis, and will, if anything, worsen the employment position;

calls on the Government to:

- bring forward a medium-term fiscal strategy that will restore order to the public finances on a phased basis, and renew confidence in the Irish economy;
- maintain investment in key economic and social areas;
- bring forward proposals to offer educational and re-skilling opportunities to those losing their jobs;
- maintain and enhance investment in education as the core ingredient in a knowledge economy;
- ensure that necessary efficiencies are achieved without impacting on frontline services.”

Yesterday, the Government announced a package of public expenditure cuts — no more and no less. Like the famous Conan Doyle story, the vital element of yesterday’s announcement was the dog that did not bark. That bit was missing. What the country needs is an economic plan, what we got was a half-baked book-keeping exercise. What the country needs is a recovery package, what we got was a package of cuts. What the Government is proposing will not create a single job in the private sector. All it will do is cut jobs and services in the public

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

sector. This is not the forward-looking strategic approach that will restore confidence in the economy, reignite growth or lay down the basis for necessary future employment. It is a crude and conservative knee-jerk reaction, part of an emerging conservative consensus that views cuts in the public sector as the solution to a recession firmly rooted in the private sector. It will do nothing for the 54,000 people who have lost their jobs in the past 12 months or those who are living in fear that they will be next.

Rather than taking decisive action to restore confidence to the economy, we have a Taoiseach and a Minister for Finance who are muddled and confused. The package they produced yesterday was long on tough talk and short on specifics. Where are the figures? Some of them were outlined by the Taoiseach, but they do not add up to the €440 million to be cut in 2008 or the €1.44 billion to be cut by the end of 2009. If the Government is going to go down the road of cutting public spending, it could at least supply the House with a set of costed proposals. Yesterday, the Taoiseach stated that the proposed 3% cut in the public pay bill would save €250 million over 18 months. From where will the other €1.19 billion come?

We are told that health and education are excluded on the one hand and that the “parameters of this exception for the health and education sector are to be agreed by the Departments concerned with the Department of Finance” on the other. Will someone please translate that? I cannot find a translation of the dialect of “official-speak” to English. It sounds as though the Government will lay off nurses and teachers, but that it is not being honest about it. If that is not the case, from where will the other €1.19 billion come? Is it to come from stealth taxes and charges? In recent weeks, we have been told that there will be no cuts, only savings and adjustments. Perhaps there will not be any charges, only negative expenditures or appropriations-in-aid. When will we see them and who will they hit?

There are proposals in yesterday’s statement that are welcome, such as the curtailment in public relations spending or the reform of public procurement, although the €50 million figure attached to that measure is purely speculative. What is not speculative is the disgraceful €45 million cut in overseas aid. Has the Government no shame? Is it honestly saying that our economy is in such dire straits that we must cut aid to the poorest people in the world? Have we been reduced to that? The Government made a solemn vow to meet the 0.7% of GNP target by 2007. It broke that promise. Subsequently, it promised to meet the target by 2012, but there are now to be further cuts. When the economy was doing well, the Government stated that GNP was rising too quickly to meet the target. Now the economy is growing more slowly and there are cuts. Which is it?

On 2 December 2004, an article in *The Irish Times* stated:

The Minister for Finance, Brian Cowen described as “a fair effort” the €535 million earmarked for Overseas Development Aid (ODA) next year. The Government recently admitted it would not achieve its stated target of providing 0.7 per cent of the GNP to ODA.

“The problem here is we are a victim of our own success. The growth in GNP is accelerating — thankfully — and obviously that makes it all the more difficult to reach the targets that were set.”

He said by 2007 the State will be contributing some €695 million to ODA, a “significant fund by any stretch of the imagination”.

“We are seventh in the world *per capita* in ODA funding. I do not think anyone should question the commitment of Ireland as a country through this ODA mechanism.” “I am sorry we didn’t make 0.7 per cent . . . had we been in recession we would have made it,” he quipped.

When the Government makes promises on overseas aid, it speaks not on its own behalf, but on behalf of the Irish people to the poorest people of the world. The Government may not care about breaking its word, but it is breaking the word of the Irish people, who care.

I am not interested in engaging in a political point-scoring exercise on the economy. Several times, I have made it clear why I believe the recession is the direct result of the Government's mismanagement. However, I want to discuss how we can begin a process of recovery from our present position. To do that, we must start with an honest analysis of the problem, but the Government is refusing to do so. It insists that this situation is due to international factors. That assertion is simply untrue. When the Government does not tell the truth about the problem, it cannot get near a solution.

What is occurring in the economy? The main factor precipitating the recession is the collapse in house building and the problems besetting the broader construction sector. While international conditions are contributing to the problem and inhibiting export growth, the recession is primarily the result of the mismanagement of the property sector by the Government. This explains the mismatch between the short-term outlook for 2008 and 2009 and the medium-term outlook for 2010 and beyond. For example, the ESRI medium-term review predicted an average growth rate of 3.8% in the period 2010 to 2015. This positive long-term picture is based on the opinion that there are strong underlying fundamentals that will drive growth, particularly via services exports.

As of now, it is reasonable to consider the situation as a once-off shock that is reducing activity and employment in one sector, albeit one on which both the labour market and the Exchequer have been heavily reliant. This will reduce employment and income from that sector and will have an effect on the broader economy, primarily by dampening consumption growth.

There are other risks, such as the credit crunch, higher interest rates in response to higher international commodity prices and the competitiveness of the euro in its rise against the dollar. These are significant, but the balance of probabilities continues to be that Ireland will benefit from the resumption of growth in the international economy in 2009 or 2010. In the meantime, we can anticipate serious difficulties for the Exchequer and the labour market in 2008 and 2009. While growth is expected to resume in 2009, the worst effects in terms of unemployment and the Exchequer finances are likely to be felt in that year, with the ESRI expecting unemployment of 7% and a GGB deficit of 3.9% of GDP.

How should the Government respond? The policy emphasis should be on dealing with the jobs crisis and the real economy, not bookkeeping exercises in respect of public finances. The Government must have a strategy for the public finances, but it must also address consumer confidence, the labour market and medium-term growth. While it is important that the public finances are restored to a sustainable path, that can be done quickly or slowly. A rapid adjustment runs the risk of making the problem worse by deepening the recession. Given that Ireland's debt to income ratio is low, a more gradual restoration of the public finances is both possible and preferable. What the Government should do as a matter of urgency is propose a new set of budgetary tables showing how the public finances can be restored over approximately a three-year period.

I agree with the ESRI that the 3% deficit limit in the Stability and Growth Pact should not be treated as the Holy Grail. On the basis of the best available analysis of Ireland's medium-term prospects and given the once-off nature of the collapse in construction activity, a deficit that exceeds 3% would not necessarily be regarded as excessive. Under the terms of the revised Stability and Growth Pact, as amended in 2005, a breach of the 3% reference value need not be regarded as excessive where it is temporary and exceptional. The latter explicitly includes situations where a country experiences negative growth, as is forecast by the ESRI. In assessing

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

whether an excessive deficit exists, the pact also has regard to a range of other factors to do with the quality of public finances. That Ireland's borrowing is entirely focused on infrastructure investment and our debt to income ratio is low qualifies us under this heading.

Yesterday, the Minister for Finance raised the shadowy spectre of people in some quarters calling for large-scale borrowing. I have heard no such proposal. The ESRI predicted a general Government deficit of 3.9% of GDP. This is hardly the end of the world, given the scale of Ireland's infrastructure needs. It is certain that with negative growth and a deficit of this order, the debt to income ratio will rise, but Ireland has no official target for its debt to income ratio.

If the Government were to come forward with a three year programme that provided for orderly adjustment of the finances, it could address any such concerns. Such an approach would make a far greater contribution to the restoration of economic competence and confidence, than the present package. All that yesterday's announcement will do is paper over the cracks and send the signal to consumers that a panicky Government is expecting much worse to come. If the Government has confidence in the economy, let it say so, and let it put forward a set of budgetary tables that show how an orderly transition can be achieved.

The Government stated yesterday there would be a review and re-focusing of capital spending. Frankly, it is amazing it cannot tell us at this point what that will mean. Certainly, there is scope for such an exercise, as there is scope for better project management in capital spending.

Depending on the projects that are delayed or axed, however, this review has the potential to cause real and lasting damage. Infrastructure deficits remain a serious problem and cuts imposed now could have a substantial negative impact on future jobs and incomes. The most recent example of this was in 2002 and 2003, where capital spending was severely curtailed, particularly when adjusted for the rise in tender prices in civil engineering. This led to severe delays in the national roads programme that are still being made up.

I have made the point in the House on many occasions that this presents a significant opportunity for the Government. We all know the country needs more school accommodation, including new schools and extensions. Now is not the time to bring down the shutters on school building; now is the time to press ahead with school building programmes, providing employment to people who have lost their jobs and building the schools that Ireland will need for decades to come.

The Government announcement yesterday states, in another masterpiece of nonsense, that "further expenditure for the acquisition of accommodation for decentralisation will await detailed consideration of reports from the Decentralisation Implementation Group". If decentralisation is now part of the solution, is the Minister unable to admit it was part of the problem in the first place? Instead of more waffle, will the Minister be honest and admit the Government's decentralisation plan is now finished? It was an unachievable scheme dreamed up and presented without prior consultation by the former Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevy. It has caused untold trouble and expense. It has disrupted the operation of the public service and it has misled local communities and towns throughout the country into believing there was some kind of economic salvation to their area at the end of a decentralised agency.

The main priority of Government should be to deal with the jobs crisis. It is simply not doing so. There are serious grounds for concern about the build-up, once again, of a problem of long-term unemployment, unless action is taken. Over the period 2001-06, employment in the construction sector increased by 100,000. This included a significant number of men with limited educational qualifications. The collapse in house building is leading to a major decline in construction employment and more can be expected to follow as the commercial property sector goes into decline next year. Any reductions in the NDP will also have an impact. Although

construction will eventually come back, we should not sit around and wait for people to slip into long-term unemployment. A determined and largescale programme of upskilling is therefore required.

The Government announcement yesterday was a conservative knee-jerk reaction. It seeks to solve a recession that started in the private sector with an attack on the public sector. The implications this year will be limited. What remains unclear is what the Government means by its proposed 3% reduction in the public payroll and how that will be achieved. If it means anything, it means job losses, which is a pretty strange way to address the jobs crisis. It will have a particular impact on women, since public administration and public services have been a key driver of employment growth for women in recent years.

Labour is proposing a different approach, one that is not based on the conservative consensus. We agree the public finances must be returned to a sustainable path, within the terms of the Stability and Growth Pact, but this can be achieved over a number of years. A breach of the 3% limit this year, for example, would not necessarily be regarded as an excessive deficit, given the speed of the economic downturn, and the otherwise strong position of the public finances. The Government, therefore, should bring forward a new set of budgetary figures providing for an orderly and not a panicked adjustment. This would contribute to the restoration of confidence, both among consumers and investors.

Second, we must maintain a clear focus on future jobs and incomes by bringing forward a revised capital programme. What is needed now is a real determination to address deficits in economic and social infrastructure, delivering projects on time and on budget. What is needed is not panic, but priorities. We need to set out which projects are most urgent, based on solid assessment of costs and benefits. This cost-benefit analysis should include a strong weighting for carbon emissions. It should not be forgotten that Ireland has international obligations to reduce its carbon footprint and that there is a cash cost for not doing so. Maintaining investment in transport infrastructure is a vital element in any coherent strategy for carbon reduction in Ireland.

Third, rather than make cuts in education, Ireland should enhance investment in that area on a planned basis. Education is a major driver, both of the knowledge economy and of a more equal society. There are major deficits in Ireland's educational system, from literacy, to early school leaving, to the level of achievement in science and maths. They cannot afford to wait for the Government to act. Failure to deal with these issues now will cause problems for decades to come and as I have said, now is an ideal time to start and to continue building school accommodation.

Fourth, it is essential that measures are put in place to avoid the emergence of a new group of long-term unemployed. This requires a substantial programme of investment in skills and qualifications. Re-training options at a range of levels should be put in place, with the institutes of technology and the further education sector having a key role to play.

Fifth, the Government should move, as a matter of urgency, to conclude a pay deal with both public and private sectors to restore certainty in this regard and to provide the basis for coherent fiscal planning. There is no need for the talks process to drag on for months, undermining confidence further. Let us have a deal quickly.

Those five measures would go some way to restoring confidence in the economy and to laying down the basis for economic and social progress. While no-one denies there is scope for greater efficiency in public spending, what is on offer from the Government is a knee-jerk reaction that will damage public services and do nothing to create jobs in the private sector. It

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

is crude and it is conservative. What the country needs now is not a cuts package; what it needs is a jobs and stability package and that is what Labour is proposing.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Penrose has ten minutes.

Deputy Willie Penrose: I thought I had more time than that.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate on behalf of the Labour Party as the party's spokesperson on enterprise, trade and employment.

I recall the then Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Cowen, launching the NDP in January 2007, which he described as an ambitious plan which would secure the further transformation of our country, socially and economically, within an environmentally sustainable framework. In his Indecon public policy lecture last November, Deputy Cowen stated his first priority was the delivery of the NDP. I do not doubt the sincerity of the Taoiseach's commitment to the NDP but I consider that the projections of growth in tax revenue on which it was based were absurdly optimistic. When the plan was launched, housing completions had peaked and the Minister must have been aware of how dependent the Exchequer had become on taxes from the building industry. At a time when construction in the rest of Europe comprised about 5% of GDP, construction in Ireland reached a totally unsustainable 11% of GDP.

The Taoiseach must now recall with embarrassment the famous comment of Michael McDowell before the last election that, "we do not need" the revenue from stamp duty. As stamp duty receipts plummet, the Government must surely accept that a tax which was never intended to be a major source of Government revenue became central to projections of tax receipts and consequently, Government spending. As Minister for Finance, the Taoiseach must have been aware the housing boom would come to an end with a consequent sharp fall in employment and tax receipts.

It was clear as early as 2002 that the increase in population would sustain a rapid expansion of the building industry and that the many tax relief schemes introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which my colleague, Deputy Burton scrutinised in great depth, were no longer required. Yet as Minister, the Taoiseach extended some of these schemes when it was apparent to everybody but the Construction Industry Federation that they had outlived their usefulness. He did not take any serious action to curtail these schemes until last year and the result is that we now have hundreds of unsold houses which were built under tax relief schemes rather than in response to real need.

While we have a plethora of poorly constructed and poorly insulated houses, remote from public transport and other facilities which make a mockery of the Government's commitment to sustainable development, the provision of social housing is wholly inadequate. We have a grotesque situation where hundreds of private houses sit empty while thousands are living in substandard accommodation as they wait for the provision of social housing which the Government is unable or unwilling to deliver. As house-building in the private sector declines, the Government must ensure the social housing programme is accelerated. It must also ensure it achieves value for money in these schemes. With declining activity in the construction sector, costs will fall and the Government will be able to ensure a greater level of output for any given level of spending.

Notwithstanding the gloomy comments of economists, many of whom seem more comfortable with recession than boom, it is important to bear in mind that although we must reformulate policy in view of reduced tax receipts, we are not experiencing a fiscal crisis. Borrowing last year was 24% of gross domestic product, GDP, which is minuscule compared to the crisis

of the late 1980s when borrowing reached 151% of GDP. The current level of debt is equivalent to three months' tax revenues. The picture is even less alarming if we look at general Government debt, which takes into account the assets of the National Pensions Reserve Fund. On this measure, Government debt is only 14% of GDP, or less than a quarter of the 60% allowed under the EU's Stability and Growth Pact.

While there is no possibility that we will breach the borrowing levels permitted by the Stability and Growth Pact, it will undoubtedly be difficult to maintain the current budget deficit below the permitted 3% of GDP. However, the Stability and Growth Pact should not be used as a bogey man to frighten us into fiscal submission. The Stability and Growth Pact was famously described as "stupid" by Mr. Romano Prodi, former President of the European Commission and Prime Minister of Italy. When France and Germany breached its limits, no action was taken against them. Instead, the Stability and Growth Pact was revised to allow for the 3% limit to be exceeded in times of severe economic downturn. We will not entertain Government claims that the Stability and Growth Pact represents an insurmountable curtailing or limiting factor.

The fiscal situation is not so bad that drastic cuts must be made in the national development plan. If cutbacks are unavoidable, they should not be made in those areas that affect the prosperity and future stability of our society. Of the €184 billion to be spent under the national development plan, more than €80 billion relates to non-infrastructure projects. Much of this spending, particularly in education, is vital not only for economic growth, but to create the just society to which the Taoiseach claims to be committed. The Government's proposals cast doubt on that commitment.

Some 40,000 children are being taught in prefabricated classrooms. Hundreds of schools are without adequate facilities for physical education. Hundreds of elderly people are in acute hospital beds because of the lack of step-down beds. Providing for all these needs would go a long way towards mitigating the decline in activity in the construction industry. In my own area, for example, commitments have been made to provide a national school in Loughegar, to undertake refurbishment and extension works at St. Brigid's national school in Ballynacargy and Sonna national school in Rathowen and to provide a new secondary school at Athlone community college. There are many such examples throughout the State.

The Taoiseach has told us that the FÁS apprenticeship budget will be cut. Only last week, however, the director general of FÁS, Mr. Rody Molloy, made the case that this service should be expanded. This proposal jeopardises our future. Bord na Móna and the ESB are no longer providing the flow of apprentices they did in the past. Mr. Molloy referred to apprentices completing their apprenticeships abroad. What message does this send to young apprentices who have been released by their employers? A knife is being wielded with no thought for the future. Cutbacks in spending may help to balance the books now but will add to costs in the future. Much of the crisis in the health system is due to the drastic closure of hospital beds in the late 1980s. We must not repeat the mistakes of the past.

We generally talk about investment in terms of physical infrastructure or sometimes as research, both of which are crucial for economic development. However, investment in people offers the highest returns. In 2005, the National Economic and Social Forum produced a cost-benefit analysis which showed that every €1 spent on early childhood education yields a return of €7 at a later date. Children who receive pre-school education will be more productive workers who enable Ireland to compete effectively in the global economy. Moreover, allocating resources to pre-school education now will mean we spend much less in the future in dealing with the consequences of crime, unemployment, poverty and poor health.

[Deputy Willie Penrose.]

National development plan investment is vital in terms of attracting foreign investment. The chairman of the Industrial Development Agency, IDA, stated at the launch of the authority's annual report last week that it is absolutely imperative that the infrastructure element of the national development plan be completed on schedule and in full. The great success of the IDA in attracting foreign direct investment has been largely due to the quality of our labour force. If we are to continue to attract investment, we must continue to increase the education and skills of our labour force. This can only be achieved by increased investment. It is a great tribute to the calibre and commitment of our primary and secondary school teachers that they have achieved such impressive results when so little has been spent on educational infrastructure. As information and communications technologies become ever more important in education, there must be no renegeing on the national development plan commitments in this area.

Our commitment to the euro means the options available to the Government to stimulate economic growth are limited. Devaluing our currency and spending our way out of recession are no longer options. Instead, we must rely on domestic productivity growth to improve our scope for further growth. To do this, we must continue to invest not only in physical infrastructure, but in enhancing the education and skills of the labour force.

The number of pupils leaving school without a qualification has remained stubbornly high and many of these young people end up unemployed or in unskilled jobs. More than a quarter of the adult population has literacy or numeracy problems, yet spending on adult education is low compared to other EU countries, where the problem is less severe. Third level institutions are still obliged to charge fees to mature students embarking on third level education unless they qualify for VTOS grants for which the income threshold is low. If cutbacks must be made to the national development plan, the last area to be considered should be education and training.

More than half of all planned Exchequer spending under the national development plan is on social exclusion and social infrastructure projects which include a large element of current spending. While there may be some room for reordering these spending commitments or finding more cost effective ways of delivering the programmes, any major reductions will simply reduce the potential for economic growth and store up social problems which will require greater expenditure in the future. I urge the Taoiseach and Minister for Finance to ring-fence the €5 billion that has been allocated to the building and refurbishment of primary and secondary schools. As Deputy Gilmore remarked, this will have the added benefit of stimulating the construction sector.

Since adopting the Stability and Growth Pact, the Government has been enthusiastically entering into public private partnerships, PPPs, as a means of keeping borrowing low. I am puzzled by the Government's eagerness to embrace PPPs given that we have never remotely approached the Stability and Growth Pact borrowing limits. The results of some of the PPPs have been disappointing. Any such future arrangements should be subject to detailed cost-benefit analysis before we commit hook, line and sinker to this method of funding infrastructural projects.

The limitations of the PPP model were made clear when the McNamara group withdrew its arrangement with Dublin City Council for the redevelopment of St. Michael's estate in Inchicore and other locations when it realised the anticipated profits would not be forthcoming. Deputy Gilmore recently visited O'Devaney Gardens, which was also due to be redeveloped under a PPP, and encountered the despair of the residents who are to be left living in difficult and demanding conditions because private developers see no profit to be made from redeveloping their area. I question the efficacy and worthiness of these projects. The schools build-

ing programme should not be based on a system whereby the Government sustains the ambition of developers to amass huge profits where they see an opportunity.

I am unconvinced by the concept of public private partnerships. In many cases, the State takes the risk while the private firm takes the profit. The Government must not rely on PPPs for the provision of essential public services. I am alarmed at the substantial sums to be spent under the national development plan on PPPs without adequate cost-benefit analyses of the projects. We are told PPPs offer value for taxpayers' money. In reality, they provide not what the public needs, but what the public sector is willing to pay for. Furthermore, the user charges imposed by firms providing services under PPPs are inherently regressive, unlike taxation which is at least potentially progressive.

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to share time with Deputies White and Calleary.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Martin Cullen: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion. The arts, sport and tourism sectors are important areas of the economy as contributors to economic growth and employment levels. Tourism is a vital contributor to our economic and social well-being and plays a key role in projecting a positive image of Ireland worldwide.

The Central Statistics Office recently confirmed that, last year, a record number of 8 million overseas tourists spent almost €5 billion visiting Ireland. This money was spent on transport, hotels, restaurants, retail shopping and cultural and recreational activities. In addition, domestic holiday makers spent more than €1 billion in the State. Fáilte Ireland estimates that the tourism and hospitality sector supports some 250,000 jobs. More importantly, at a time of rising unemployment, research has found that tourism-related activities are far more labour intensive than the industrial average. The tourism industry is perhaps the most significant internationally traded driver of social and economic development. This is true both at regional and national levels in the service sector in Ireland.

Internationally traded services are widely recognised as central to Ireland's future economic development. The fundamental value of our tourism industry and its continuing contribution to the economy are best outlined by the following facts. The tourism industry is largely Irish-owned. Irish tourist businesses continue to compete successfully with the best internationally. Steady growth in tourist numbers from Ireland and from overseas continues. Our market share against competitor destinations continues to grow in a sustainable way. In addition to its direct contribution to exports, jobs and growth, tourism also helps to create a positive image of Ireland in the minds of millions of overseas visitors. This in turn strengthens our attractiveness as a location for business, foreign direct investment and leisure activities. This year will be challenging for the Irish tourism industry given global economic uncertainty and pressure on consumer confidence in key markets. However, the strategic approach taken with tourism in recent years by both the public and private sectors has given the sector the capacity to withstand such cyclical external challenges and to sustain its performance in the coming years.

In a recent report, the Irish Tourist Industry Federation highlighted that the fundamentals of the industry remained strong. Irish tourism is better positioned to withstand any downturn than in the past. We should remember that tourism continues to generate business revenues and employment even in challenging conditions. While tourism is not immune to cyclical pressures it generally does not undergo the same sharp cycles that other sectors, such as construction and even manufacturing, suffer. Our overseas tourism business has diversified across a wide range of markets in recent years. This has given it the capacity better to withstand pressures on

[Deputy Martin Cullen.]

particular markets. It goes without saying that we must continue to invest in our tourism product, our people and our brand. The Government remains firmly committed to the progressive delivery of the investment priorities to be financed under the National Development Plan, which provides for a total Exchequer investment in tourism of €800 million. The level of investment confirms the Government's commitment to the development of the Irish tourism and hospitality sector. The Government is fully aware of the economic and social importance of the industry providing employment for almost 250,000 people.

Investment is planned within the strategic policy framework in *New Horizons for Irish Tourism: An Agenda for Action*, the 2003 report of the tourism policy review group. In 2006, the tourism strategy implementation group was set up for a two-year period to follow up on the recommendations of *New Horizons* to review targets in light of performance to 2006 and to recommend a possible framework for a mid-term review in 2008. I have recently received the report of that group and will bring it to the attention of my Government colleagues shortly. It is my intention to publish the report and put in place arrangements for the mid-term review as soon as possible thereafter.

Sport plays an important role in Irish life and makes an invaluable contribution to the social fabric of society as well as the health of the population. The sports sector is also a significant contributor to GNP. The importance of sport is confirmed by studies and analyses of national accounts, the economics of large-scale sporting events and physical inactivity costs, including those of an aging population.

The *Social and Economic Value of Sport in Ireland*, a study by the ESRI, which was published in 2005, estimated that four areas of activity in the sports sector generated a staggering €1.4 billion per annum. The four areas are volunteers, membership subscriptions to sports clubs, attendance at sports events and spending on sports equipment, sports clothing and the related costs of playing sport. The study also suggested that further additions, such as tourism, Government spending and horse and greyhound racing, increased that figure to €1.86 billion per annum.

The sports capital programme under the national development plan continues to transform the sporting landscape of Ireland with improved facilities in villages, towns and cities. These grants play a pivotal role in ensuring the provision of modern, high quality, well managed facilities around Ireland that attract more people to participate in sporting activities. Every day, hundreds of thousands of people all over the country are involved in sport in one way or another, be they participants, coaches or volunteers. In an age where time and community spirit are valuable commodities, the thousands of volunteers remain vital to the development and activity of sport. These volunteers should continue to be recognised and encouraged through the provision of support for their projects. It is also fair to say that these projects have hugely positive effects on the broader community. In many new and growing suburbs and towns, the sports capital programme is helping to provide the infrastructure to build a sense of community.

A 2003 value-for-money review of the sports capital programme stated that "the programme represents very good value for money". It found that for every €1 invested by the Government a further €2.73 was invested by local clubs and communities in the provision of facilities. The review also concluded that because of the investment under the programme, hundreds of thousands of volunteers in sports clubs and organisations across the country can devote more time to coaching teams and organising competitions, while the sports capital programme helps to fund the facilities they need.

Government support for the horse and greyhound racing industries is provided under the horse and greyhound racing fund. Since the establishment of the fund in 2001, there has been a major period of development of both the horse and greyhound racing industries. This money has underpinned significant employment in both industries. The 2004 Indecon report on the Economic Value of the Horse Racing and Bloodstock Breeding Industry showed that the thoroughbred breeding sector made a gross contribution to the economy of €330 million per annum and that it paid tax in the region of €37.5 million. Employment of 16,500 people was shown to be generated from the racing, breeding and associated industries. Bord na gCon has estimated that there are more than 11,000 people either directly or indirectly employed in the greyhound industry. Horse Racing Ireland also estimates that horse racing accounts for approximately 80,000 tourist visits to the country each year.

Over the lifetime of the current national development plan, we will invest over €1 billion in hard physical infrastructure in the arts and culture sector and creative industries. This year my Department will invest over €240 million in those sectors. That is a real, tangible investment in the economy. The NDP flagship projects and programmes are already in train. The public private partnership process for the National Concert Hall is under way and the design competition for the new Abbey is being progressed. Some €43 million is being invested in regional arts and culture projects which are under way. The extension to the Gaiety Theatre is completed and the Wexford Opera House will be completed next month. The extensions to the Druid and Gate theatres will be completed by Christmas. The National Library and National Museum projects will commence in 2009 and the next phase of the development plan for the National Gallery is going to planning.

The arts, culture and film sectors are primary economic contributors, real businesses and enduring employers. They are differentiators of Ireland as a cultural and tourism destination and are areas that truly distinguish us as a people in a world of more and more sameness. The arts, culture and creative sectors employ at least 45,000 people in this country. The annual output of these sectors is over €2 billion and it continues to grow.

Ireland today builds on the contribution made by our cultural icons in the past and prospers by the talent and ability of our people. The gift of individual talent is to be cherished, nurtured and fostered from an early age. The more this talent is developed, the better we become as a nation.

We are all aware that the Irish music industry makes a significant impact on the economy and on Irish life. Many Irish musicians have made a huge impression internationally. The Goodbody economic analysis carried out on the sector in recent years provides some interesting statistics in this context. For example, at almost €500 million, the value-added impact of the music industry represents just under 0.5% of GDP, putting it ahead of dairy processing and newspaper and magazine publishing. The industry employs more than 8,000 full-time equivalents.

In recent years, two of our museums won European museum of the year awards. The National Library wins prizes internationally for its exhibitions and the National Museum achieved the annual 1 million visitors mark for the first time in 2007. Irish films won 20 prestigious prizes internationally last year, while Irish writers have reserved places at the top table of international literature competitions.

Tony and Emmy awards are now commonplace for the Irish acting and theatre professions. The marketing value to Ireland of films like "Once" and "PS, I love you" simply could not be purchased. Visitors to the cultural institutions and agencies funded by my Department will top 3 million in 2008.

[Deputy Martin Cullen.]

There has been a significant investment of €2.8 billion by the Government both in current and capital spending in the arts, sport and tourism areas in the past five years. For example, the budget to the Arts Council has increased from €66.2 million in 2005 to over €82 million this year, which represents an increase of 24%. In addition, in 2005, the annual budget of the Irish Sports Council was €34.4 million. This year the figure has risen to €57.631 million, an increase of over €23 million or 67.5%.

In support of the savings required for budgetary consolidation this year, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism will introduce savings for the remainder of 2008. While these will be challenging for the various areas both this year and next, they are needed. The 2008 funding allocation for the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism is €713 million, including the Vote for the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Vote for the National Gallery.

To meet our share of the required savings across all Departments, €5.978 million will be saved between now and year end. The savings will be as follows: €3 million in departmental operated capital programmes for cultural projects; €2 million savings split mainly among our agencies in grant programmes; and an additional €978,000 in savings in administration costs and other efficiencies across the Department, the National Gallery and our agencies.

Deputy Mary Alexandra White: It is good to have this opportunity to debate the economy. The speed of the global downturn has awakened international economies to action, which is what we now have. Before talking about current action on fiscal and economic challenges, it is important to remind ourselves that Ireland is not fully responsible for the current challenges. Make no mistake about it, this is a global downturn. As the sun sinks over the Hang Seng each evening, simultaneously rising on the FTSE screens each morning, it is the same shiver that goes down the traders' spines. The last 12 months has seen a global credit crunch as the reverberations of sub-prime mortgages have impacted upon us. Global food prices have risen, driven by rising demand, drought and escalating fuel prices and interest rates, and Ireland is not the sole trader on these issues. Public spending plans for this year are now too ambitious and so we need a modicum of fiscal pruning in order to harvest the benefits of such an act in the future. The savings announced are welcome, but I want protection for the most vulnerable and marginalised in society to ensure that they will not be adversely affected by these fiscal adjustments. My party and I will ensure that those in need of greater support with fuel allowances will not have to endure a greater burden during the lifetime of this Government because of rising fuel costs.

As we adjust our public finances, let us look towards the future and the possibilities and opportunities for our people and our economy. Sometimes the best opportunities come at times of great difficulty. I started a business in the 1980s, when the economic landscape was bleak. If one shows innovation and is dogged, determined and different, fortunes can be turned around. The Government will lead the way in this regard and I have no doubt the entrepreneurial and hard working people of Ireland will respond. We have opportunities in areas such as tourism, where the number of people visiting this country from January to March this year was up by 60,000 on last year.

We also have opportunities in the renewable energy sector, and the huge investment in renewable energy research and supports for the sector are resulting in new employment opportunities every day. The recent energy demand side management study shows that €3.6 billion economic benefits could be accrued through energy efficiency alone. The German state of Schleswig Holstein has seen 48% of its new jobs come from so-called green collar employment. There are opportunities in the area of exports, as the export of financial and IT services has

led to growth and employment. In its recent medium-term review for 2008-2015, the ESRI documented this fact.

Opposition Deputies regularly spend their time asking what the Government is doing to improve our competitiveness. Let us not forget all the successful structures in place in this country which are encouraging both indigenous industry and foreign investment. These include the better regulation programme, the implementation of reports from the enterprise strategy group and the small business forum, the national skills strategy — which will see €150 million spent by the Government this year on training the Irish workforce and those trying to enter it — the strategy for science, technology and innovation, the national development plan, the work of Enterprise Ireland and certain reforms in this year's budget such as the extension of the business expansion and seed capital schemes. I have no doubt that any successful conclusion to the current review of Towards 2016 will again sharpen our competitiveness.

This country was awash with debt 20 years ago and was lacking in hope. People rallied together. Much has improved and we must remember that those improvements, along with prudent Government action and guidance, will steer us through these difficult times. We in the Green Party are ready to play our part to drive change, to be innovative, to create jobs and to ensure that the poorest in our community do not suffer. This country has a good future. *Quo quis sapientior eo beatior est* should be our motto. He who knows more is wiser. A wise Government with wise policies will ride out the storm. The ship of state is seaworthy and will survive the current global storms.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I welcome the opportunity to discuss the current developments in the economy. I welcome the initiatives announced yesterday, but these are only part of the solution and there are other actions that we can take that do not necessarily involve expenditure reviews. It is important to remember that the fundamentals of this economy are still very strong. The foundations that have been put in place since 1987 have ensured that we will survive this downturn in a much better way than if those decisions had not been taken and if the various investments made by this Government over the past ten years had not been made.

We can look at a number of areas. First, the era of restrictive tendering should be done away with in the current environment. A large number of perfectly qualified and competent contractors are not able to tender for Government contracts due to the size of their turnover and other restrictions. That is not helping competition and is not helping to keep prices down. I ask that the Minister examine the issue with a view to restricting it. Second, the PPP mechanism has worked well so far, and I would encourage that further large scale capital projects be investigated, particularly the area of schools. Schools are a solid investment and we should ensure that we continue to invest in our people. By investing in proper school facilities through the PPP mechanism, we will assist that process.

One of the opportunities of this downturn lies in the small business sector. Small businesses will hopefully get the access to cash and the support they need to weather the storm, while those who have been made redundant can open up their own business. We need to tackle the issue of red tape and reduce its burden as much as possible. That could be done in a cost-neutral way, and it would encourage a lot more people to move into that sector. Our county enterprise boards need greater support, and I hope that they would be immune from any adjustments that are being made to budgets. These boards drive investment and job creation.

It is important to state that the boom was not wasted, as is the chief cry of some people. There has been enormous investment in capital projects and in welfare payments to parents and families. We now have one of the most generous welfare systems in Europe. There has also been a major investment in road and sports infrastructure, as outlined by the Minister a

[Deputy Dara Calleary.]

few minutes ago. Such investment is continuing. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources announced the new national broadband programme, while the rural development programme will begin to roll out in September, ensuring the continuation of the successful Leader programme.

The only happy people at the moment are economists, who can tell us they got it right after ten years. They spent ten years predicting that this would happen, and ten years later they can finally say that they got it right. These commentators have a responsibility to protect confidence in the economy, to protect consumer confidence, and to provide a rational and fair analysis of the situation. They should not be predicting Armageddon on every occasion they comment. I have confidence in the ability of our Taoiseach, in the ability of our Minister for Finance and the Cabinet to deal with this issue. They will need the full support of the House in dealing with it, and that support will be provided by this party. It is not completely within our control to deal with some of the issues that are affecting the situation, particularly the international element. However, if we support the decisions taken now, we will survive.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: Listening to a number of speakers, it is obvious that some of the people from the Government are trying to rewrite the economic history of this country. In 1977, when Fianna Fáil won a landslide victory in the general election, the national debt stood at €5.370 billion. When it left office in 1982, the debt had risen to €14.816 billion, an increase of €9.446 billion. The foreign debt inherited by the Fine Gael-led Government in 1983 was €18.274 billion. By 1986, it had increased by €8.97 billion to €27.244 billion. The rate of increase declined significantly under the then Government which had inherited a wretched economy. I was a Senator at the time and I am glad Garret FitzGerald, Peter Barry and other members of that Government are receiving recognition for their contribution to the country.

In 1977, I recall, even though I was not in politics then, that when Jack Lynch was elected Taoiseach he acknowledged the good health of the public finances. It must also be remembered that Fianna Fáil was in power for five years and a half years during the 1980s, while Fine Gael was in power for four and a half years. All parties must share responsibility for what happened during the 1980s. Some Members have a selective memory of the period, blaming one particular party for all the problems.

The last time Fine Gael was in Government between 1994 and 1997, some commentators suggested the party would not be able to take over the reins of power. I am infuriated by this unfair statement coming from people who should know better. Between 1994 and 1997, under the Bruton-Spring Government, real GDP grew by 10.1%, as opposed to 5.7% between 1998 and 2004. Inflation stood at 1.5% between 1994 and 1997, but increased by 2.2% during 1998 to 2004. The rainbow Government was producing 1,000 jobs a week; the current Government is responsible for the loss of 635 jobs a day over the past month. If one is going to match the economic performances of Governments in the past 20 years, it must be acknowledged that Fine Gael made a positive contribution in this regard. When the history of the Celtic tiger is written, this should be recognised.

Personal borrowing has taken over from State borrowing, most of which was for house purchases. Every house built was worth €100,000 to the Exchequer. In one year housing output came to 80,000 units, which is worth €8 billion. This year, only 25,000 units will be built, leaving €2.5 billion. It is obvious where the money has gone. People are up to their tonsils in debt.

A firm commitment was made to replace the Naval Service's three main vessels, *LE Aoife*, *LE Emer* and *LE Aisling*, over the next three years. Will these go to tender soon?

Last week, Simon Brouder gave a good analysis in *The Kerryman* of the county's economic position. He stated:

Data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Central Bank, housing surveys and Kerry County Council for the first quarter of 2008, all show a marked downturn in Kerry compared with the same period just 12 months ago.

The most obvious place to begin is with the jobless figures and, in the past year, Kerry has seen the number of people receiving social welfare benefits surge upwards by 34 per cent.

Last month live register figures reached their highest level in ten years with the number of signing on reaching 8,179 in the county, with half of these in Tralee alone...

In the last 12 months the number of planning applications made to Kerry County Council dropped by 49 per cent; the number of new house starts plummeted by 57 per cent; and one-off house completions plunged by 34 per cent. . .

Planning applications from developers of multiple houses projects across Kerry have decreased by 53 per cent. In the first quarter of 2007, developers applied for permission to build 405 multihouse developments in Kerry; in quarter one of 2008 this dropped to just 126.

House prices have also seen a stark drop . . . The sale of new cars in May 2008 was down by 29 per cent on May 2007 across all makes of car including luxury cars.

Overall, high-street spending in Kerry is down considerably. Most alarming is that:

According to figures from the Central Bank and Cori, Kerry has the second lowest level of disposable income in the State, at €17,000 per person annually. Some 17 per cent of Kerry's population, almost 24,000 people, are now living below the official poverty line.

I appeal to you, a Cheann Comhairle, as the most powerful politician in County Kerry, to ensure that projects such as Kenmare hospital, which is very dear to you — I have seen announcements by him and Deputy Jackie Healy-Rae about it — and the new school for Ballybunion are not shelved. In that case, the contractor is ready to start building. The day before the general election last year, the then Minister for Transport, Deputy Cullen, announced construction of the Castleisland bypass would commence at the beginning of this year and the money would be provided by the NRA. I hope none of these projects will be cut back. I appeal to the Ceann Comhairle to use his influence in this regard.

Kerry did not experience a Celtic tiger like the rest of the country. When one takes off from Kerry airport and travels to Dublin Airport, one feels one is landing in a different country.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not have to remind Deputy Deenihan that, irrespective of the colour of the jersey he is wearing, he may not involve the Chair in the debate.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: My apologies.

Deputy Tom Hayes: You are not without influence though, a Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Pat Breen: The same problems are reflected in Deputy Deenihan's neighbouring county, Clare. Prior to the general election, Fianna Fáil published its manifesto, *The Next Steps Forward*. It claimed Fianna Fáil in Government has led the transformation of Ireland's economy. What a transformation it has been. Yesterday, €2 billion was wiped off the ISEQ and a €1.5 billion shortfall in tax revenue for the first half of the year was announced. An extra 10,100 people have joined the live register in June, the second highest increase on record, and the construction industry is in serious decline.

[Deputy Pat Breen.]

In Clare, an extra 469 people, or 9.3%, signed on last month. For the past 12 months, jobs have been haemorrhaging from my county. Last week, redundancy announcements were made by Advocent Limited with 57 job losses and Sykes Engineering with 83 job losses, with another 20 jobs lost at Laser Cut Technology. The warning signs were ignored and now belatedly the Government has woken up to realise the economy is in a recession. This has all happened under the stewardship of the Taoiseach, Deputy Brian Cowen, when he was the Minister for Finance.

What is needed now is leadership and vision to restore confidence in our economy. A Government plan has been presented but it lacks vision and clarity. Fine Gael's spokesperson, Deputy Bruton, stated there was no evidence of a clearly thought-out plan and that it was just a cobbled together response to the Government's self-generated recession. We are told this package of measures will involve savings of €440 million and that cutbacks will not affect health and education, yet there are no specifics.

However, we have already established that €85 million is to be cut from the most vulnerable, the elderly, as the fair deal falls by the wayside. A further €38 million saving is to be achieved from the slower rolling out of projects and €21 million from what are termed "other savings".

What will happen to the commitment given by the Minister for Health and Children for the €39 million redevelopment of Ennis General Hospital? At a meeting with the Minister in May, she informed us an announcement on capital projects would be made before the June bank holiday weekend. We were told a visit to Ennis General Hospital was imminent. However, nothing has happened. What has happened this project? Will it go ahead as planned? The Minister gave a commitment it would be a priority.

The same may be said of the slowdown in the roll out of cancer screening projects in the mid-west region. There are 746 women on the waiting list for mammograms in the mid-western hospital area and the only procedures being carried out are in symptomatic cases.

How long more will we have to wait for the roll out of broadband? The Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, Deputy Cullen, spoke about tourism. The loss of the Shannon-Heathrow service took place last August, nearly a year ago and has had a major impact on connectivity and industry and tourism in the region. I hope there will be no cutbacks in the tourism development plan, which was funded last year by his Department. These matters are very important because the tourism season all over the western region is back, particularly American and European business. I know there are other speakers but these are a few of the things I wanted to ask about, particularly the hospital situation and the development plan, which are of major importance for the people of Clare.

Deputy Tom Hayes: Before I discuss what must remain of central importance in our spending, I must reiterate that a strong and competitive economy is the key. We need to cut Government waste, get the most from value for money programmes and expand the reviews of quangos. Fine Gael has advocated such an approach for a long time. Every euro counts in shops today, and we need every euro to count in Government. Let us start with a new sense of responsibility for the hard-earned euro of the taxpayer. This should have been a byword in the boom, but let the Government at least take it on board now.

My concern is that cuts affecting the most vulnerable have already occurred, silently, sneakily, even before this new programme. We must protect the older people, and not abandon them. I discovered this week that the home care package provision run by the HSE is not being adequately funded. There are now waiting lists, recycled funding and worst of all, cuts.

We have had no promised fair deal from the Department of Health and Children. The €10 million for that should be ringfenced for older people. If not there will be cuts. What we see

as regards the innovative hospital in the home programme are cuts. Some 220,000 in total suffer from fuel poverty. People just cannot heat their homes to a safe and comfortable level. The solution is a fuel allowance of €18 per week for only 30 weeks of the year. A constituent told me last week he had recently spent the same amount on oil that it had taken to fill the tank last year and got 550 litres less. The Government needs to increase the number of weeks for which the allowance is paid. This summer has been cold, wet and damp and people are already struggling. The amount paid out needs to be increased. The Government needs to initiate this now and not wait until next year. The shocking increase in fuel prices has been compounded by rising food costs, especially as regards basic goods. I have heard older people say they have to choose between food and fuel and this is not good enough in this day.

Agriculture and tourism are major industries that have sustained Ireland in the past. While building on many other areas we need to focus on both those industries, which have the capacity to perform well. Given Ireland's ability to export food products, we are well situated to contribute to the alleviation of the global food shortage. In terms of tourism, the infrastructure is ready and waiting. We have hotels, bed and breakfast outlets, heritage, cultural and historical centres right across the country. I have no doubt that tourism will grow. We have priced ourselves out of the market, however, and I believe both of these industries must be supported. We have listened today to the Minister, Deputy Martin Cullen, talking about the ability of sporting organisations, particularly the racing industry, to expand and the amount of employment that can be created. I agree with him that there is enormous potential in the agri-tourism and equine related area and we certainly need to build on it.

Deputy Deirdre Clune: We, on this side of the House, have been accused, as have economists and media commentators, of being prophets of doom. One of the major prophets of doom was the Minister for Finance, Deputy Brian Lenihan, as seen recently on national television talking about the construction industry coming to a shuddering halt and his misfortune in being appointed Minister for Finance at this time. That certainly sent forth a negative message and indicated the Minister's own lack of confidence in his abilities, in not being happy to be in that position. I hope to see some leadership from Government and positive measures to indicate it knows how we are going to get through the economic crisis. The announcement made yesterday comprised a few issues cobbled together that really had little meaning, and did not instil confidence as regards the Government steering us out of this downturn in the economy.

I would not give it any credit for foregoing the ministerial rises, since that was well flagged. Perhaps it had not been intended to announce it yesterday, but no doubt it was to be a bargaining chip in the social partnership talks. It was not a surprise, in any event, and the Government has missed the boat as regards gaining any credibility in that regard. It should have shown leadership and done this a long time ago.

On today's debate, I wish to highlight some points in an ESRI report that appeared in the last couple of weeks which did not get much media attention. It was a special report the ESRI produced on Ireland's innovation performance from 1991 to 2005. I am sorry the Minister of State with responsibility for innovation has left the House. Innovation activity, the report stated, is particularly vulnerable to economic conditions, especially to economic downturn. This was evidenced in the downturn in the hi-tech sector between 2002-03, when there was a sharp fall in the level of innovation. If we have been over-dependent on the housing and construction sector, the way forward is through innovation and the knowledge economy, encouraging people to turn their knowledge into creative and economic activity. We must continue to support innovation and ensure Government policies are working. One of the report's conclusions is that policy is not transferring into significant innovation increases among companies. If we are to develop a knowledge economy, create innovation and encourage creativity, we need to

[Deputy Deirdre Clune.]

ensure we have policies that work so we can encourage universities and other third level institutions to enter into collaborative arrangements with business. There are many issues in the whole area of innovation and policies that need to be implemented to support research and development in creating innovative processes and products. It is the key to the future of the economy and it is very important the policies are in place to ensure it happens.

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I wish to share my time with Deputy O'Hanlon.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Mary Hanafin: I welcome the opportunity to detail for the House the actions that the Department of Social and Family Affairs will be taking as part of the Government's collective approach to controlling short-term expenditure in the interests of Ireland's future prosperity. As the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance outlined yesterday and today, with the downturn in the global economy and the adjustments taking place in the Irish housing sector, the amount of revenue received by the Government from taxation so far this year has been much lower than expected and the outlook for the tax intake for the rest of 2008 remains weak.

Taking action now is essential if we are to enable the Irish economy to weather its current difficulties and realise the more favourable growth rates that the ESRI and others believe can be achieved within the next few years. The measures that were announced yesterday are the result of careful consideration by the Cabinet as a whole. They are designed to ensure that we work together to bring overall expenditure more in line with income. They reflect our collective determination to act now in order to protect the future. More importantly, as the Taoiseach has made clear, they are also informed by a desire to protect the most vulnerable people in Irish society during these challenging economic times.

As Deputies will be aware, the number of people on the live register at present is much higher than had been anticipated, with the seasonably adjusted figure for June 2008 representing an increase of a third on the same period last year. The live register is not a register of unemployment, as people claiming jobseeker's benefit may be working up to three days a week while seeking full-time positions. However, it is a measure of the number of workers who need assistance from the State. The actual unemployment rate is estimated to have risen to 5.7% last month. Behind these figures lie real families experiencing real difficulties — people with children, with mortgages and with worries about the future. These are people whom the Government is determined to prioritise.

While statistics are of little consolation to the person who has lost his or her job after many years of hard work, it is important to note that the fundamentals of our labour market are still good. We currently have more than 2.1 million people in employment, following record job creation during the past ten years. A total of 53,800 jobs were created in the first quarter of this year. While some sectors of the economy, most notably construction and traditional manufacturing, are experiencing a slowdown, other areas such as services are continuing to grow.

It is also worth noting that while the unemployment rate for June is much higher than had been anticipated, it is still a long way from the 10.4% rate of June 1998, let alone the very high rates of the 1980s. It also compares favourably with the kind of rates being experienced by other EU countries. Furthermore, CSO figures show 75% of those on the live register last April had been on it for less than a year, while 42% had been on it for less than three months.

Therefore, the unemployment situation, while not as we would wish to have it, is still a long way from the bleak position of previous times.

At the same time, our social assistance system is in a much better position to help the unemployed than ever before. Basic social welfare rates have increased by 79% since 2002, which is more than three times ahead of the 23% increase in the consumer price index, or a real increase of 56%. In addition, improvements in child-related payments mean that a welfare-dependent family with, for example, a child of three and a child of ten, will receive more than €8,000 in direct child income support this year.

More significant, however, are the improvements in measures designed to facilitate people in entering or re-entering the workforce. A wide range of initiatives have been introduced in recent years to help people to improve their employability through education and training, to remove barriers to work and to eliminate poverty traps. Under the national employment action plan, people who are approaching three months on the live register are referred to FÁS for interview with a view to job placement or an offer of training. A team of 40 facilitators is also in place in the Department of Social and Family Affairs to provide additional, more intensive assistance for those that need it such as people who have been identified by FÁS as needing further support. As part of the priority now placed on activation, the Department's facilitators are working closely with FÁS and other agencies at national and local level to target their assistance at such groups. I recently met the director of FÁS to discuss how our respective organisations can further enhance their co-operation in the period ahead.

As an immediate priority, it is intended to refocus the work of the Department's facilitators to target specific attention and support at certain categories of people with a view to minimising the risk of them becoming long-term unemployed. This includes, for example, younger people signing on for the first time and people who have completed the employment action plan process but who are still on the live register. This targeted approach will involve active case management with the development of an individualised personal progression plan. The facilitator and individual will work together to identify the most appropriate method of progressing to training or employment.

We are also committed to removing barriers to work and eliminating poverty traps. Significant progress has been made in that regard in recent years through improvements such as changes in means-testing arrangements for certain payments and the tapered withdrawal of benefits. In addition, the Department has a range of supports such as the back to work and back to education allowances for those who leave welfare to go into full-time work or education. Taken together, the improvements in payment rates, the focus on activation and the removal of poverty traps that have been prioritised in recent years mean that a solid system is now in place to help people get back to work.

Nonetheless, it is expected that expenditure by the Department of Social and Family Affairs on income support payments will be significantly higher than originally forecast this year. The final level of social welfare expenditure this year will be affected by the performance of the live register. The figure underpinning the 2008 Estimates was an average live register of 170,000 for the year. Unfortunately, it is now projected that the average live register for will be of the order of 210,000. The main schemes affected are jobseeker's benefit, jobseeker's allowance and insolvency and redundancy payments. There will also be a knock-on effect on the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, particularly in the area of rent and mortgage interest supplement. My priority is to ensure that vulnerable people dependent on social welfare continue to be protected while at the same time ensuring that resources are directed only towards those who are entitled to them.

[Deputy Mary Hanafin.]

The Department of Social and Family Affairs already has a fourfold approach in place to combat social welfare fraud and errors through prevention, detection, deterrence and debt recovery. Last year, claim reviews and employer inspections generated control savings of nearly €450 million. The targets set at the beginning of this year aimed to realise savings of €511 million. We are on course to achieve that target.

In the context of increased expenditure on welfare payments, it is important to increase the Department's control activities to keep fraud and errors to a minimum and to eliminate incorrect payments. As part of the measures announced by the Taoiseach and Minister for Finance yesterday, the Department is therefore targeting additional savings of €25 million this year from control activities. Particular emphasis will be placed on ensuring that people on the live register demonstrate that they are actively seeking employment and that they engage fully with the employment action plan and other opportunities to re-enter the labour market.

I intend to generate further savings of €4.8 million from the introduction of efficiency measures by the Department and the agencies under its remit. In particular, expenditure on advertising and public awareness activities will be reduced. This action is being taken in a situation where information on the full range of social welfare schemes and services is available from the Department's local offices and the nationwide network of citizens information centres. In addition, many people access information on the websites of the Department and the Citizen Information Board. Essential advertising campaigns will continue to be undertaken as required.

The Department will also be able to generate savings of more than €3 million this year on a more gradual deployment of IT and e-Government related projects. In some cases these savings arise because it has taken longer to develop the technology underpinning the new systems than was anticipated at the beginning of the year. In other cases, the Department is considering how a more gradual deployment can be effected without impacting on day-to-day delivery of services.

In regard to the agencies that come under the Department's remit, in line with the announcement by the Minister for Finance, the Department will review the roles and operations of the agencies under its aegis. In this context, opportunities for achieving efficiencies through shared services, absorbing functions into the Department, or amalgamating or abolishing bodies will be examined.

The statutory basis for the introduction of a personal advocacy service under the Citizens Information Board was provided for in the Citizens Information Act 2007. It is the Government's intention to introduce this service at an appropriate time. However, having regard to the current budgetary circumstances, the service will not be introduced this year and savings of around €500,000 will be generated by the Citizens Information Board as a result.

I want to reiterate, however, that the advocacy service remains a priority. In the meantime, significant resources have been and will continue to be provided for the provision of advocacy services to people with disabilities under the auspices of the Citizens Information Board. The community and voluntary sector advocacy programme has been developed by the board since 2004 and currently has 47 separate advocacy projects. The overall focus of the programme is on representative advocacy for people with a disability. Projects either operate within a specific geographic area or are focused on a particular disability type. The Citizen Information Board is monitoring the programme to ensure that the projects are operating in accordance with the board's advocacy guidelines.

The board already provides advocacy through the citizens information services focusing on access to services, welfare entitlements and employment rights. This type of mainstream advo-

cacy is also open to people with disabilities and the community and voluntary sector advocacy programme is creating close links with the citizens information services to ensure that people with disabilities are encouraged and supported to use the mainstream services where possible. This advocacy capacity is being strengthened through the support of nine advocacy resource officers.

In regard to the Family Support Agency, I reiterate that I am committed to supporting families and value the role that the family resource centres play in communities throughout the country. Funding from the Family Support Agency helps with staffing and equipping these centres. By the end of 2007, the number of family resource centres had expanded from an original ten to 106 nationwide. The funding for the programme increased from €317,000 in 1994 to nearly €19 million in 2007.

In the context of the national development plan, it was intended to expand the number of family resource centres by up to six centres this year and to provide some existing ones with additional staff. However, with the exception of a new centre in Killeshandra that was approved earlier this year, no new centres will open in 2008. It will also not be possible to increase the staffing complement of the existing centres. These measures will enable the agency to save €2.5 million in 2008. It will achieve a further €400,000 savings by deferring the refurbishment of offices of the Family Mediation Service.

Government support for family services will however remain strong. Last year, additional staff were funded for 40 family resource centres. It should also be noted that only last month I approved counselling grants of almost €11 million to 600 voluntary and community groups supporting families nationwide.

Another body which receives significant funding from the Department is the Combat Poverty Agency. Savings of €165,000 in the agency's 2008 expenditure are to be achieved mainly through reductions in spending on advertising and awareness raising activities. A number of conferences which were under consideration will not proceed at this time. As Deputies will be aware, a wide-ranging review of the agency is almost complete and that will inform decisions on its future position.

Over the past decade or so, this Government has significantly improved the standard of living of welfare-dependent and low-income households generally thereby making a decisive impact on poverty and social exclusion. Income support levels have been dramatically increased and the welfare system has been reformed and modernised to reflect our new society. We have clearly demonstrated our commitment to protecting the vulnerable and in these more difficult times we will continue to do so.

I am conscious of the fact that all Departments are making savings in order to meet the expenditure pressures generated by increases in the live register; these are the people whom we need to support most. I am also committed to ensuring that the Department of Social and Family Affairs plays its part in helping to control expenditure in these more challenging economic circumstances. The savings committed to by the Department will deliver efficiencies and reductions in areas such as IT and advertising, while protecting the improvements in welfare payments that have been put in place in recent years.

Deputy Rory O'Hanlon: I thank the Minister, Deputy Hanafin, for sharing time with me. I support the motion and commend the Government on taking action at this time. It is important to take it now so the pain will be short-lived. In his contribution, Deputy Deenihan referred to Fine Gael in government from 1983 to 1987. He did not tell us all the story but he referred to the national debt, which doubled from €12.5 billion to €25 billion in those four years.

Deputy Olwyn Enright: Was he cleaning up Fianna Fáil's mess?

Deputy Rory O'Hanlon: In 1986 we were borrowing 15.2% of our public sector requirement.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: Deputy O'Hanlon should go back to 1977.

Deputy Rory O'Hanlon: Deputy Crawford remembers it like I do: tax rates of 65% with 8% pay-related social insurance, unemployment at 18%, bank interest rates of 20% and the highest level of industrial disputes per thousand workers in the EU. All that changed, but at that time and in those circumstances very tough decisions had to be made and implemented by Government. One lesson that can be learned from 1987 is that Fine Gael, led by former Deputy Alan Dukes, adopted the Tallaght strategy and supported the changes and difficult decisions that had to be implemented, as did the social partners. The Irish people accepted them and we brought about an unprecedented level of prosperity in the country.

While we do not want to return to the 1987 situation and we do not like to see a slowdown in the economy, in particular to see people lose their jobs, there are totally different circumstances today. We are still one of the most prosperous countries on this earth and are well placed to deal with the temporary difficulties facing us. I will enumerate some of the economic and social factors in our favour. We have a young, dynamic and adaptable workforce with 2.1 million people in employment. The size of the workforce puts us in a much better position to support our far more extensive social programmes. We have flexible markets, including the labour market. These markets are characterised by a light regulatory burden. Greater flexibility in the labour market has been the key to the creation of 700,000 jobs over the past decade. We have a pro-enterprise environment in which the burden of taxation on both capital and labour is low. This has facilitated greater entrepreneurial success and the significant growth in small and medium sized enterprises that are key to greater balance in regional economic development. General Government debt is forecast to be approximately 26% of GDP at the end of 2008, one of the lowest ratios in the euro area. This low level of general debt gives us the possibility to borrow modestly to invest ambitiously in key infrastructure.

One of the issues that must be addressed by Government, all the Members of this House and everybody working in the public service is that we should seek to effect the required savings through efficiency rather than a reduction in the level of service. For example, this year the health service is receiving €16.1 billion. When I was Minister for Health in 1987 I received a budget of £1,100 million, approximately the same in euro as the five big Dublin hospitals receive today for one year. That is an indication of the progress that has been made in the level of funding available to support our health service. With a budget of €16 billion and more than 100,000 people working in the service, everybody should look to see how they can effect efficiencies. For example, they could eradicate duplication. Given the multidisciplinary nature of the health service, there is a question of better communication to ensure patients will not wait longer and will not be kept in hospital any longer than necessary. If we all look to see how savings can be effected through efficiencies we will minimise any fall-out from the measures that have to be taken.

I support the motion. I am satisfied that the economy is better placed to emerge from the current difficulties than it ever was in the past. We are still one of the most prosperous countries in the world and it is important that we do not talk ourselves into any more difficulty than we are experiencing. I believe it will be short term as a result of the measures the Government is taking.

Deputy Olwyn Enright: I wish to share my time with Deputies Crawford, Perry and Sheahan. I ask the Acting Chairman to tell me when seven minutes are up.

I welcome this debate. It is important to have it, even if it is in the closing hours of this Dáil. Yesterday's lack of detail shows a mastery of timing and, despite this debate, I believe the real specifics will come to light in far more graphic detail in the coming weeks and months.

The Government's argument seems to be that these are not cuts, but savings, many of which arise because projects are not ready to proceed with. For example, the fair deal scheme which was announced first on 11 December 2006 was due to start on 1 January 2008. A full 18 months later, nothing has happened. Money has been taken away, the scheme has been delayed by at least another year and today we were told that the savings in respect of this scheme will be in the order of €85 million. We were told that the pause is because of legal difficulties and on the advice of the Attorney General. The Government does not seem to realise that this was its proposal, which was simply not properly thought out in the first place — another grand announcement with no follow-through.

A sum of €3 million that was to be spent by Professor Tom Keane to employ specialist cancer consultants will not now be spent. How exactly does this fit in with the Government's policy on cancer care? Whose job is it to ensure we can attract and employ much-needed experts to work in our designated specialist centres? We were told that one of the main reasons these centres were required was to attract top doctors to work here. The money is now being cut, or saved because these people, we are told, are not yet available.

A sum of €38 million was due to be spent on new developments in cancer care, disability care and services for the elderly. This is now also being cut, or not spent, depending on one's perspective. The Minister has promised no cuts to front-line services in health. I ask her to explain how cancer care, disability care and services for the elderly do not qualify as front-line services. The Government has taken money away from the people who need it most.

Still on the area of health, I wish to refer to the clear divergence between capital and current spending, of which there are numerous examples in my own constituency. The new state-of-the-art Midland Regional Hospital at Tullamore has been completed for a number of years now. Indeed, we had a lovely open day before the last general election so that everyone could be assured of its completion and see how wonderful it is. To date, a few departments have made the transition from the old hospital. However, the majority of the hospital remains unopened and is not functioning. The HSE has committed, in writing, that all remaining departments will make the transition between now and September but we have yet to see any evidence of this happening.

Since last September a 12-bed ward has been closed in the old hospital. The knock-on effect of this is that four orthopaedic surgeons are only being sanctioned to carry out between one and two operations, not per day, but per week, despite the fact that there are several elderly people living in severe pain. These surgeons still have to be paid at the end of the day, while their waiting lists continue to grow. The patients will be operated on eventually, either after years of agonising pain or after their families have done a whip-around to try to pay for surgery. Where is the economic sense in that kind of system?

Other capital projects lying idle include the new accident and emergency unit at the Midland Regional Hospital at Portlaoise and the dementia unit in Mountmellick, which is supposed to serve counties Laois and Offaly. Investing millions in such vital and long-awaited infrastructure and then leaving it idle or totally under-utilised is bad planning, bad management and bad Government.

I appreciate that because there is less money available, due to this Government's own flawed management, savings must be made. However, I am bitterly disappointed that no commitment has been given to retain front-line services, which are already being hit. A detailed plan of how

[Deputy Olwyn Enright.]

the HSE will proceed should have been laid before this House before the Summer recess. I have no doubt there will be a drip-feed of information about cuts over the coming weeks.

I wish to turn now to the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The Government has referred to €25 million in savings from anti-fraud activities. I wish to see a clear outline of what exactly is meant by this, which was not included in the Minister's statement today, and of how she intends to address this issue. I find it amazing that a Minister can come into the House and baldly state that she will save money through anti-fraud measures when that is something that the Department should have been doing all along, in any event. Does it take a recession to make people wake up to the fact that we must have adequate anti-fraud measures in place?

I have questioned the current Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Deputy Hanafin, and her predecessor on this issue several times and have always detected complacency. The general Government line is that the amount of fraud is small compared to the overall budget for the Department but that is neither here nor there. The overall budget is the biggest of any Department so a supposedly small amount of fraud can add up to millions of euro. Even from a Government which can describe the waste of €180 million on PPARS as "small change", this is difficult to accept. If we can save €25 million now at the drop of a hat, then any reasonable person could ask how much more could have been saved in each of the past 11 years.

I asked the Taoiseach last week about the progress the Department of Social and Family Affairs has made in ensuring that landlords, who are the ultimate recipients of rent supplement payments from the Department, pay income tax on this money. The Comptroller and Auditor General raised this point at a recent meeting of the Committee of Public Accounts. There is a clear possibility of saving money in this area through ensuring that proper tax is paid on rental income yet, as in so many other areas, there is a lack of cohesive governance on the issue.

The State, through the Department of Social and Family Affairs, pays rent supplements to tenants, who pass it on to landlords. The latter are supposed to be registered with the Private Residential Tenancies Board, which includes supplying their PPS number. However, there is still no proper structure in place to ensure that this information reaches the Revenue Commissioners or that the community welfare officers can check if the landlord is registered.

The current Minister, Deputy Hanafin, made much of the fact that there would be no cut-backs in her Department when she was interviewed recently, as if it was something of a personal victory for her, rather than what one would normally expect at a time of rising unemployment. However, she was incorrect in her predictions. All we have heard from the Government in terms of where the money to address rising unemployment will come from is an expectation that savings can be made in the area of fraud, which has yet to be proven, and a few references to the cancelling of conferences and so forth. We still do not know where the €25 million saving will come from but it will have to come from somewhere.

I am also disappointed at the lack of foresight in yesterday's announcement in terms of the implications of rising unemployment for the Government's overall social welfare policy. The Government has failed to put sufficient, if any, emphasis on ensuring that work actually pays. There is insufficient concentration — despite the reference to activation, which to this Government is only a word and not a reality — on poverty-proofing. The Government must ensure that its policies do not result in people being forced to remain out of work because they would be worse off in employment. The potential loss of secondary benefits such as medical cards, rent supplements or family income supplements can have a serious effect on people's choices.

I was also disappointed that the Minister made no reference to the possible impact of yesterday's announcement on pensions. This is an issue which the Government appears to be happy to put on the long finger.

I have been supplied with figures which indicate that approximately 1,000 young people on FÁS apprenticeships are unable to complete their apprenticeships because of the downturn in the construction sector. Some of them have completed two years, while others have completed three. Effectively, they have lost their apprenticeships because their employers have let them go and there is no facility in place to ensure that they can complete their training. This means that vulnerable young people who have taken up a trade will be left with no qualifications. I call on the Government to think outside the box on this issue, get in touch with FÁS and the institutes of technology and find a way of ensuring that these young people can complete their apprenticeships.

Finally, I am gravely disappointed at the Government's decision on the regional gateway fund.

Deputy Seymour Crawford: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate. It is unreal that just 12 months after the last election, when commitments were given on how well the country was doing and how important it was that the incumbent regime remained in place to maintain this success, that we are here today discussing what is nothing short of a serious crisis.

I note that my colleague, Deputy O'Hanlon, decided to go back to 1987 and make comparisons with figures from that time. I ask him to go back further, to 1977, when the then Fianna Fáil Government brought about an economic disaster for this country from which it took us almost 20 years to recover.

My party leader, Deputy Enda Kenny and party colleague, Deputy Enright, have already raised the issue of the €85 million that is being removed from the budget for the care of the elderly. Front-line staff in the HSE are not being replaced and beds are being closed down, despite the fact that the Taoiseach stated yesterday that health and education would be exempt from cutbacks. As far as the people of Monaghan and Cavan are concerned, the mismanagement and cutbacks in the health sector are causing serious concern, especially to the elderly and disabled. Approximately 100 beds have been removed in the past ten years from the service of the public in Monaghan General Hospital and further cutbacks are on the way. No public nursing home beds have been created, which means that subvention is vital for those who cannot get accommodation in the public sector.

The other major shock for Cavan and Monaghan is that the long-awaited decentralisation programme has also been axed, with the loss of 110 jobs in County Monaghan and 325 in County Cavan. More than 85 people had already planned to move to a new social welfare Department in Carrickmacross while some members of departmental staff are already in place in Cavan town. A total of 325 other people with full-time jobs in Cavan town would have created the much needed workforce in the area and taken up at least some of the oversupply in the current housing market. The biggest anxiety of regions such as ours is that, historically, this Government has failed to supply any foreign investment in this region. If the further cutback of €1 billion for next year is to go ahead, the future certainly looks bleak. Jobs have been lost in the pharmaceutical and food industries. Unemployment in County Monaghan has increased by over 40% in the past 12 months and by almost 30% in County Cavan.

Before yesterday's cutbacks were ever mentioned, plans for schools such as Rockcorry national school, which was promised a new school building last year, have already been put on hold. The new restructured primary school for Virginia announced on 5 April 2007 is also on hold, as are many others.

Commitments were given at the final peace talks in St. Andrews. The Taoiseach as Minister for Finance was part of those talks. It is vital that all the commitments made in that final agreement, which is so important to the peace process on this island, are actually carried

[Deputy Seymour Crawford.]

through. In my own region, I am speaking about such issues as the Ulster Canal and the motorway from Derry city and Donegal town to Dublin.

The price of oil and international markets create problems for any government but, clearly, our Government's failure to deal with these situations is in stark contrast to that of our European colleagues such as Germany, France, Holland or even the UK. The facts are that this Government has failed to manage and it is at its door that we must place the blame.

Deputy John Perry: During the last general election, Fine Gael told the people that Fianna Fáil had lost its way and had become ever more complacent and incompetent as the years in office have grown. How sad that our analysis has proved to be so obviously accurate so quickly.

We in Fine Gael have consistently pointed to the Government's responsibility for and indifference to the sustained loss of international competitiveness. We have relentlessly pointed to the economic dangers and personal risks of the domestically generated housing bubble. These are problems largely of the Government's own making and have little to do with international factors.

The Government ignored all our warnings about these serious problems. Regrettably, we now face the probability of recession while other countries face an economic downturn. The manure has certainly hit the fan, in spectacular fashion I might add. The projectile matter carries a very clear Fianna Fáil ministerial address. There is no point in the Government trying to duck and weave and it is futile for it to try to blame external factors. The Government messed up on the economy just as it messed up the Lisbon referendum campaign.

It accuses us of talking down the economy, which is typical Fianna Fáil arrogance, as it chooses to completely ignore the fact that it is actually responsible for taking down whole sections of the economy. Talking honestly and factually about the economy is not about talking down the country. The only talking down to be done is to talk down the false perception of competence that this Government has sought so carefully to cultivate.

The consequences of Government incompetence are now visible everywhere in the latest CSO figures, in the mid-term Exchequer figures and in last week's Black Friday for jobs. The services sector and the high-tech sectors are also showing headline-grabbing job losses. At local level in Sligo, we have seen a constant haemorrhage of job losses. The consequences of Government incompetence are flowing into the real economy and the lives of ordinary people.

There is nothing in these cutbacks to recognise that we need a renewed focus on job creation efforts. There is an urgent need to review the effectiveness of the incentives used in the development of the indigenous manufacturing sector. This sector must get renewed priority so that investing in productive capacity for solidly based growth becomes more rewarding. The problems are not just confined to those who are losing their jobs. For example, a woman who wanted to bring her 12-year-old daughter home from a rehabilitation hospital was told that this was not possible.

Before the last election, there was much Government talk of developing Sligo and the north west generally. There was much discussion of the national development plan and the national spatial strategy, with Sligo being designated as a gateway city with funding of over €300 million. Where is that plan?

The announcement today by Professor Tom Keane is the most appalling announcement of all. A total of €3 million has been curtailed due to an inability to employ specialist cancer consultants. This is the clear message now being conveyed in Sligo in respect of the closure of the massive service there, triple assessment and the transfer of 4,000 patients, 4,000 mammograms and 2,000 colorectal inquiries from Sligo. They are now being told that this service will

be closed and transferred to Galway with one bed on offer. Despite the fact that only €550,000 was allocated for every centre of excellence, I need clarification in respect of the €3 million allocated from Professor Keane's budget to employ cancer specialists. This is an appalling announcement. Despite the massive campaign in Sligo for the retention of services, we hear today that €3 million is being cut from Professor Keane's budget to employ specialist cancer consultants. How many minutes do I have left?

I want clarification regarding the funding in respect of the N17, N4, the N15; the pedestrianisation of Sligo; and the massive improvements in the gateway status that have been announced by this Government. The most defining issue in Sligo in recent years has been the retention of cancer services. I want a solid explanation as to why the minimal funding of €3 million allocated to Professor Keane to employ specialist cancer consultants is now being cut. This is a total contradiction that needs clarification from the Minister of State, Deputy Devins; Deputy Scanlon; and Senator MacSharry who represent this constituency.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: I will direct my comments and observations to the Taoiseach and former Minister for Finance. Before I entered this House, I would have said that the former Minister for Finance and current Taoiseach was the one man who nurtured and developed the Celtic tiger. Why are we here today where we are now looking at a deficit of €3 billion? It is because of the former Minister for Finance and his actions and inaction in respect of the economy when he was at the Department of Finance.

As the new Minister for Finance has said, it was his misfortune that he inherited the finance portfolio. The construction industry is the one factor that has caused many of the problems we face today. I remind my colleagues opposite that house completions stood at 30,000 in 1999 and 60,000 in 2002. The differential between the stamp duty take in 1999 and 2002 was €0.7 billion to €1 billion. In 2003, we built 70,000 units with a stamp duty take of €1.6 billion. In 2004, 78,000 units were built with a stamp duty take of €2 billion. In 2005, 88,000 units were built with a stamp duty take of €2.7 billion. In 2006, 90,000 units were built with a stamp duty of €3.7 billion were built.

We should note the explosion in stamp duty take during this period and its direct relationship with the construction industry and economy. According to an article in the *Irish Examiner* on 17 August 2007:

Detailed results from the 2006 census on housing show 266,000 units — or about 15% of the total housing stock — were classified as vacant. It means nearly a sixth of 1.46 million homes in the Republic are lying empty.

The article went on to state that:

However, only 50,000 out of 266,000 unoccupied dwellings are formally classified as holiday homes, leaving 175,000 houses and 42,000 apartments across the country empty.

Neither we, nor the then Minister for Finance, saw it coming. Following the 2006 census, he failed to notice that one in six properties in this country was vacant. This clearly pointed to a construction bubble. It was a boom in VAT and stamp duty receipts of a once-off nature. As Minister for Finance, the Taoiseach failed to notice that the swell in public coffers was directly related to the construction industry. Rather than exercise responsibility, he exercised recklessness and squandered the public purse in purchasing the 2007 general election. The Taoiseach and former Minister for Finance failed to manage the finances of the country. Fianna Fáil has failed in government and has failed the people of the country. The young people who had to take out a mortgage of €100,000 to give it to the Taoiseach for the pleasure of a roof over their heads will not forget it.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Billy Kelleher): I wish to share time with Deputies Ardagh and Michael McGrath.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this matter and that we extended the sitting days of the Dáil in order to discuss it. This should be acknowledged.

Listening to the speakers opposite, we would be in breach of the Stability and Growth Pact rules because of the amount of money spent in the past 20 minutes of contributions. We are trying to achieve stability, to protect what we have achieved to date and to have a fiscal policy that gives confidence to the people and investors from around the world who look on Ireland as a place in which to invest.

The commentators, particularly those outside the House, who are almost gloating that the word “recession” can be used again, are slightly irresponsible. We must accept that we in a changed economic climate, in Ireland and internationally. Reference was made to the open nature of the Irish economy. It trades internationally and has been successful in recent years but it cannot be immune to challenges. There is an international credit squeeze, the cost of fossil fuels has increased dramatically, there is volatility in financial markets and there has been an increase in commodity prices, food in particular——

Deputy Tom Sheahan: And half a billion invested in Zimbabwe.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: ——all of which had a major impact on the international climate.

This is coupled with the fact that we have come to the end of the boom years. Everyone accepts that the rapid growth of the past ten years was not sustainable. Listening to the Opposition, one would think we had squandered the boom years. This has been the mantra from commentators. Let us put this in perspective. In 1997, the national debt was 64% of GDP; it is now 25%, and if one includes the pension reserve fund it is 12%. What we did in the past ten years was to unburden the next generation of debt and borrowings with which previous generations had burdened my generation.

The Government has consistently run budget surpluses and reduced the national debt in good times. It has also brought forward ambitious national development plans. Going around the country and seeing infrastructural development, investment in education, health services and other key developments, one would have to acknowledge that the national development plan has been successful to date. The continued spending by the Government on the next phase is something of which I am proud, as a member of the one of the Government parties.

When everyone states that we are in a recessionary crisis, it undermines confidence. The basic reality is that we have a sound economy with a large employment base. Over 2 million people are working, whereas in 1997 it was 1.3 million. In recent times we have achieved a great deal.

The package announced yesterday to ensure we remain within spending limits is a sensible way to address this. I would be interested to read the comments of the leader of the Labour Party. I do not accept his comments that this is a problem in the private sector, with the public sector now carrying the can. One cannot take either sector in isolation. We have had a social partnership process since 1997 and it has stood the country in good stead for many years. Difficult decisions were made in previous times and policies were developed of which we now enjoy the fruits. Those representing the public sector do not want a situation where the private sector is ignored and all the burden is placed on one sector of the economy. We cannot live in isolation. I am hopeful that, over the coming weeks, the social partners will recognise the new reality, particularly in the context of the new, structured pay deal in the private and public

sector. I am confident that the resourcefulness and imagination of the social partners will ensure a pay deal with the new realities that exist.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: Not if something is not done about inflation.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The wish list brought to the table by all sides may have to be parked but the fundamental issue is to bring forward a pay deal that reflects the new reality. All sectors of social partnership, and Members, should outline the realities that exist without undermining the competitiveness of the economy.

Over the past number of weeks, in the context of the publication of the report, the Government was aware of the challenges. The Minister for Finance last year gave an indication that growth rates would be dramatically reduced coming into 2008, over and above what was experienced over the previous years. The Government took remedial action at that time. To say that the Government was unaware of the challenge presented by the fact that we would not have 7% growth year on year suggests people have missed something.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: "A soft landing" was the term used.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: They should read the speech of the Minister for Finance in the budget last December. Corrective action was announced in recent days.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: It is a bit late.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Those who experienced the gain in recent times must also share in an element of the pain to get us over this difficulty in the next 18 months or two years.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: No pain, no gain.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance outlined what they are trying to achieve. Confidence is being restored in the economy and investors and consumers know that the Government has a strategy.

Transport 21—

Deputy Tom Sheahan: Deputy Kelleher should not go there.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: —and the national development plan, across all aspects of the economy, are matters we should highlight and about which we should speak positively.

The 3% reduction in payroll is a matter to which speakers opposite have referred. This is not a cap across all areas of the public sector. It allows local management to ensure front line services will not be affected. This is a fundamental matter. It is not an embargo or a pay cut across the board. It is a saving in the context of the payroll, allowing for flexibility and for managers in agencies or services to make strategic decisions to ensure they comply.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: A 3% payroll cut is a 3% payroll cut.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: A 3% payroll cut is not necessarily an embargo, as some would like to suggest. It allows flexibility at local level.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: Fewer roads will be done in every council.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The difficulty from my point of view is that while the Opposition outlines that we must take corrective measures, Deputy after Deputy spends more money and

[Deputy Billy Kelleher.]

does not tell us where savings will come from. To date, the Opposition has not told us where savings could be made or where savings should have been made in recent years.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: We would have started with the Ministers of State.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Over the past number of months, I have listened to the Opposition highlighting inadequacies in the services and then stating that there should be cutbacks in the public sector and savings there.

Deputy Tom Sheahan: The Government blew it on the last election.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: I would like to know where the Opposition would make savings because I only hear the same mantra, that the boom times were squandered.

Deputy Liz McManus: What about e-voting?

Deputy Billy Kelleher: This is one of the most important debates we have had in a long time and it should not be trivialised. We can be very proud of having substantially reduced the national debt over the past ten years.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: What about the 54,000 people unemployed last year?

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The Opposition continually asks what was done with the budget surpluses. This is what was done with them. The national debt was reduced substantially, with major investment in the National Pensions Reserve Fund and the national development plan——

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: How does the Minister of State explain PPARS and electronic voting?

Deputy Billy Kelleher: ——and these areas of the economy are sound.

We must ensure we remain competitive. Wage restraint and keeping taxation low will be of fundamental importance during the next 18 months. I urge all those involved in social partnership to sit down, ensure they come up with an agreement which protects the vulnerable and the low paid and ensures everybody across society carries this burden during the coming years to ensure we do not undermine our competitiveness.

Deputy Kieran O'Donnell: Will the Minister of State freeze Government charges?

Deputy Billy Kelleher: At the end of the day, the most fundamental issue is that we remain competitive and I am sure my colleagues will continue to speak in this vein. What we are doing is right and proper and the Opposition making nice, juicy soundbites will not serve any citizen, be it those under pressure in the construction industry or in other areas.

Deputy Paul Kehoe: The Minister of State has not looked for home help during recent weeks.

Deputy Michael McGrath: I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the Government motion on the national development plan and the economy. The sharp deterioration in the public finances during recent months was crystalised last week by the publication of the mid-year Exchequer returns. It is clear the expected shortfall of €3 billion in tax revenue poses significant challenges for the public finances and these challenges are being faced in a decisive fashion by Government. The announcement yesterday, with further details today, is intended

to achieve savings in public expenditure of €1.44 billion to the end of 2009. These savings are necessary to ensure the public finances are managed on a sustainable basis.

Comparisons were made between the position we are in now and that of 1987. There is no valid comparison. The Ireland of today, by any objective measure, is unrecognisable from the country of more than 20 years ago and we will not go back to the failed approach of managing the public finances in an irresponsible fashion, thereby causing long-term damage to the economy. The steps being taken by the Taoiseach, the Minister for Finance and the Government are necessary and appropriate. International conditions will improve during the next 18 months and we must be ready to take full advantage when they materialise.

The credit crunch in the US triggered a period of sustained turbulence in international financial markets with consequences for every open economy in the world. The unprecedented surge in oil prices and the weakness of the dollar and sterling further impacted negatively on trading conditions. The sharp downturn in residential construction after years of remarkable boom has directly reduced our GDP output by several percentage points.

Against this backdrop, it is testimony to the resilience of our economy that economic output this year will be on a par with last year, give or take less than 1% in either direction, depending on what economic forecast one believes. This is in the context of our economy having doubled over the past ten years. It is vital that we keep public finances under tight control, spend wisely and target priority areas which will maintain the standard of essential public services and help restore confidence in the economy.

The 3% reduction in public sector pay by the end of 2009 which the Minister of State, Deputy Kelleher, alluded to is achievable. Managers in Departments and State agencies must step up to the plate, make difficult decisions and identify areas for efficiency improvements without affecting front-line services. It is right and proper that health and education are protected as part of this process.

Controlling public expenditure will not in itself reposition the economy for future growth. It is now clear the next budget is an important opportunity to continue with tight fiscal management and include measures to stimulate economic activity and restore confidence in the economy. The issue of confidence is a critical intangible and is having a negative impact on the economy at present. Every Deputy knows people in business, buying their first home or moving up the property ladder who are waiting for the downturn to bottom out. They have the money but they are waiting because the confidence is not there to invest at this time.

It is essential that we rebuild confidence among consumers and in the economy generally. Every initiative we take should be focussed on generating more economic activity. In making public expenditure decisions, focus should be on projects and programmes that would make a practical contribution to the economy. We must encourage investment and reward risk takers. I am disappointed to see some suggestions by commentators that we increase taxes. This would be the wrong road to go down. The burden of small and medium-sized businesses in terms of administration, regulation and costs must be addressed. We cannot have over-reliance on multinationals.

Many fundamental positives still prevail in the Irish economy, such as low levels of public debt, the low burden of direct taxation, improving infrastructure, a skilled workforce and more than 2 million people working. We must take the necessary steps to ensure that when the upturn takes place, we are well positioned to avail of it and return to a period of growth.

Deputy Seán Ardagh: I am delighted to have the opportunity to contribute on this motion on the economy. We have been used to significant growth rates, averaging 5% to 6% year on

[Deputy Seán Ardagh.]

year over the past decade. We were used to new initiatives and many of our expectations have been met with regard to infrastructural and other projects.

Householders with a constant increase in real wages could aspire to a new flat screen television or to remodelling the kitchen. However, without an increase in wages we must review and consolidate our position and work towards the future when the increase will come about. We could use hire purchase or consumer loans and suffer the burden of debt and borrowing but this would not be prudent and most would agree it would be the wrong thing to do.

Ireland is in this position. It used to have growth rates of 5% to 6% but circumstances, largely beyond our control and I will return to them in a moment, have brought us to a situation where temporarily our growth rate has been reduced considerably. As a nation, we must reduce our expectations and become more efficient, less costly, improve our competitiveness and position ourselves to take advantage of the situation when the world economy improves and this, all commentators agree, will happen in the short term rather than the long term.

I stated certain circumstances were beyond our control and I want to reiterate this because it all started in 2007 with subprime mortgages in the United States, which were normally securitised and packaged as a product to financial institutions throughout the world. Many of these subprime mortgages suddenly became bad and thereby all of the securities based on them became bad.

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: They were never good.

Deputy Seán Ardagh: I agree with Deputy Quinn. As a result of this, financial institutions throughout the world suffered and, in turn, us consumers now suffer through the non-availability of loans, particularly mortgages at reasonable rates for young people. Recently, a businessman with a large number of assets went to a bank seeking a small loan and was refused because the bank had no money to lend. This problem will stop development, business, growth and building and it will take time to overcome.

As Deputy Michael McGrath stated, the price of oil has doubled in dollar terms. Fortunately, the weakness of the dollar has helped somewhat but our trading position *vis-à-vis* the United States has disimproved. Sterling has become weaker *vis-à-vis* the euro but we have not received the benefits. We still pay consumer prices at the high sterling rate. Food supplies have been caught in a pincer movement throughout the world. On the demand side, in emerging economies incomes are increasing and demand for staples has increased to such an extent that countries in south-east Asia are out of rice because they are so poor they cannot afford it. At the same time, on the supply side, agricultural land is being used to grow bio-crops, which is taking from the availability and supply of food. All these issues have resulted in an 8% increase in the price of food and a cost of living increase of almost 11% in Ireland. We are a republic and it must be ensured in correcting the downturn in the economy that those who can best afford it will pay for it and the least well-off, who have been well looked after over the past ten years through welfare increases and health services will continue to receive such increases and services. Those who can afford it must take responsibility and suffer the pain that is inevitable.

6 o'clock

Deputy Ruairí Quinn: I wish to share time with Deputies McManus and Morgan.

The response of the Government to the critical downturn in the economy is too little, too late. It promises unspecified pain and delivers no hope. The Government claims we are better off now than in the early 1980s, which is true, but it behaves as if it had no room for manoeuvre. The corrections in current expenditure should have been prepared earlier. The Government

parties did not need to wait for the mid-year Exchequer returns to establish how bad is the position. The then Minister for Finance, Deputy Cowen, knew when he announced his final budget how bad things were and he failed to make the necessary, prudent provisions. No contingency planning or preparation was undertaken by the Department of Finance and we have been sadly lacking the leadership needed since this year's budget was delivered.

The Minister for Finance and the Taoiseach do not have the courage or the ability to deliver the political and economic leadership needed. They have two complementary tasks to perform. First, current expenditure must be reduced to address the massive fall in tax income and, second, productive investment must be boosted in areas of need. With regard to current expenditure, in addition to what is proposed, the Government should go further and repudiate, not postpone, the recommended pay increases of the high level review group for Ministers and senior public servants. The same repudiation, not postponement, should also apply to the recently recommended increases in the salaries of chief executive officers of commercial semi-State bodies.

If the Government is to secure the co-operation of the social partners, to which the Minister of State, Deputy Kelleher, referred, it must lead by example. For the first time ever, a 24-month pay freeze must be introduced in the public sector for all grades above assistant principal, with a flat rate cash increase for all grades below that, which would have a progressive impact on the many lower paid public servants. Decentralisation should be postponed indefinitely and I welcome the Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Deputy Mansergh, who is partly responsible for that programme. In light of what we know is facing us as a nation, the programme is not sustainable. The cost of its carbon footprint and the effect on efficiency in terms of institutional memory and meetings was not foreseen when the proposal was first made, mad and all as it was at the time.

With regard to investment, the Government should move effectively and quickly to commit to capital projects that are ready to proceed and that are desperately needed. I will confine my remarks to the school building programme. A total of 40,000 primary school children are housed in prefabricated buildings. A number of schools building projects are ready to proceed, which could be undertaken immediately and which would pick up the slack in the building industry as a result of a reduction in house completions from 88,000 in 2006 to a projected 35,000 this year.

I refer to Our Lady's primary school, Templeogue, in a neighbouring constituency of mine. The builder was due to go on site on 23 June, but the school was instructed not to proceed on 22 June. The project involves a €4 million extension and the school, its pupils, parents and teachers have waited nine years for it to commence. Money is available within the borrowing capacity of our economy and the resources of the NTMA and it was an obscenity to learn that €500 million of taxpayers' money is invested on our behalf in Zimbabwe by the National Pensions Reserve Fund, which could be invested in our children's future education. If this is the type of leadership we can expect from this Administration at a time of crisis, then God save Ireland.

Deputy Liz McManus: I have serious concerns about the approach being taken by the Government, which is planning a swathe of staff cuts across Departments. A total of 5,000 public sector jobs will go if this plan is successful. It is a crude approach and there is a danger that the wrong cuts will worsen our position and damage, rather than assist, our chances of recovery. The need to invest in skills and technology does not reduce because of an economic downturn and in a more competitive environment, it becomes more acute.

[Deputy Liz McManus.]

Much attention has rightly been given to cutbacks affecting the old, the sick and the disabled, but I am greatly concerned by the absence of a strategic approach to what is proposed. Forfás has expressed alarm at the scenario where investment in information and communications technology puts Ireland almost at the bottom of the EU league. While the Government is expanding broadband penetration, Ireland is still lagging behind most OECD countries. Broadband access is still not available in some parts of the State and there is no sign of the long promised national broadband scheme. This is untenable and I have fears that the cutbacks announced yesterday will impact in ways that will hold us back as a community and disable our economic development.

In a recent paper on next generation networks, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources grandly promised €435 million in capital investment to tackle the digital divide, but that amount had been declared in the national development plan and since then the Taoiseach has said the allocation is subject to budgetary constraints. How much of that budget will survive? There is a great deal of debate about the knowledge society but, at the end of the day, the amount the Government is willing to invest will affect the delivery of aspirations. That includes investing in staff and expertise, yet we are aware, on the basis of recent freedom of information requests, that staff in the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources are under “extreme pressure”. Since 2006 officials have been warning of inadequacies in staffing and that it was “fast approaching major difficulties”. The people were not in place to carry out Government commitments in a complex, technical and essential area of public policy.

We have regions that cannot access broadband, yet in Northern Ireland access is universal. When he was Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Deputy Dermot Ahern promised that we would lead the way and be to the forefront in broadband development.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: No, the Deputy is wrong.

Deputy Liz McManus: However, other countries have powered ahead on the digital highway while we are struggling in Johnson’s motor car. Recent Governments squandered opportunities and the current Government is so conservative that it is too cautious to breach the 3% target in the Stability and Growth Pact and too myopic to recognise that, by failing to resource technological development, we are denying ourselves the best opportunity to emerge from this recession well armed to compete internationally.

This is an opportunity to raise individual cases in our constituencies. It would not be appropriate to do so unless the reasons were extreme. A section of the N11, a major European route, is so dangerous that people have lost their lives on it and more will be lost unless investment is made. I urge the Taoiseach and the Government to ensure that the money is safeguarded to carry out lifesaving work on essential infrastructure.

Deputy Arthur Morgan: We are supposed to be debating the economy, but the Government has not put in place even a short-term plan to stabilise it or to deal with the plight of those who have lost their jobs or are at risk of losing them in the near future. Stemming the rise in unemployment and creating alternative employment is crucial. State spending on unemployment benefits is increasing as tax revenue falls. Some 19,000 people joined the live register between May and June. How does the Government propose to meet these rising costs and how, for example, is the Department of Social and Family Affairs, which is expected to achieve a 3% cut in payroll costs, supposed to deal with the considerable increase in the volume of clients accessing its services?

For all the spin of yesterday, the reality is that the Government is introducing cutbacks that will hurt the most vulnerable. Yesterday's much hyped announcements will not address the wider problems facing the economy. Instead, we have a set of proposals to deal in a limited way with a gaping hole in the public finances. Clearly, we will need to wait until December's budget to determine how the Government intends to deal with the revenue shortfall, although it is becoming clear that serious cuts in public services are looming. Cutbacks in public services and failing to deal with those whose need is greatest will result in a prolonging of the period of recession being experienced. Recovery demands that investment in key economic and social infrastructure and services be maintained.

There has rightly been criticism of the Government's management of the economy during the past decade, primarily that the fruits of the boom were not distributed equally or fairly and that the money generated was not used to deliver necessary improvements in quality and capacity in public services. Had the Government acted differently, would it have been possible to minimise the negative effects of a global economic downturn? Undoubtedly, the answer is "Yes".

The Government's claim that we are facing economic and fiscal challenges from a position of strength is blatantly untrue. The argument that the economy's fundamentals are sound does not stand up to scrutiny. Since the start of the decade, economic growth has been driven by consumer spending rather than export growth, a fact that the Government failed to address. Measures announced yesterday testify that wastage and inefficiencies have been normal practice to date. Only now is the Government proposing to deal with tribunal costs and the unnecessary use of consultants and PR companies. Value for money must always be central when public money is being spent. There is no room for wastage or inefficiencies in times of recession or boom.

In addition to the money wasted through the failure to achieve value for money, including cost overruns, absence of fixed price contracts and so on, a significant amount of public money was misspent on tax breaks for the wealthy. While many people became almost obnoxiously wealthy on the back of tax breaks that had little social or economic value, the economy's overdependence on the property sector was further fuelled. We may never know the extent of the money wasted in the past decade, but it should and could have been used to deliver the necessary improvements in public infrastructure. That we failed to address the substantial deficiencies in public infrastructure — school buildings, hospitals, social housing and public transport — during the most sustained period of economic buoyancy is the disgraceful legacy of 11 years of Fianna Fáil-led Governments.

Today, the Taoiseach, Deputy Cowen, mentioned that the State is not unique in the economic difficulties facing it. While other European states are experiencing the effects of the global economic downturn, none of our neighbours is experiencing a similar dramatic contraction in public finances. The peculiar nature of and reasons for this contraction do not seem to have been recognised by the Taoiseach.

During the past decade, the Government cut income and other taxes to unsustainable levels, thus allowing the Exchequer to become precariously overdependent on revenue related to construction and consumption. This is a major reason for a collapse in public finances, the extent of which has not been witnessed elsewhere in Europe. The Government ignored warnings that revenue from construction and consumption was open to fluctuation and ignored the fact that the amount of revenue derived from an over-inflated property sector was unsustainable.

The problem with the Government's current approach to the public finances is that it is not based on addressing the root cause of the dramatic contraction in tax revenue. The Government

[Deputy Arthur Morgan.]

is approaching the current economic and fiscal problems in a shortsighted manner. In dealing with the shortfall in the public finances, it appears that the only option under consideration is cutbacks in public spending. Assertions that the most vulnerable will not bear the brunt of such cuts are not credible because experience tells us otherwise. While the Government is claiming that recruitment freezes and payroll reductions will not affect front-line services, this has not been the experience to date. There is mounting evidence across many services, including health and education, of cuts that are already beginning to hurt the most vulnerable.

The Government is spinning that these cuts do not affect the health services and pretends that it is safeguarding patient care. This is false. Long before yesterday's announcement, patient care was being affected by cuts. Since last September, the HSE has imposed major cuts, with its ban on recruitment putting patients and front-line workers in our public health services under further pressure. The Labour Court ruled that the HSE was in breach of Towards 2016 and the EU information and consultation directive in the manner in which it introduced, without prior consultation, those staffing restrictions in September 2007.

The IMPACT trade union points out that the €38 million budget cut for new developments announced by the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, means that planned service expansions in areas like disability, mental health and care for the elderly have been put on ice. With further cutbacks threatened for next year, these badly required services are effectively cancelled indefinitely.

At a meeting on Friday, 11 April 2008, the Irish Nurses Organisation and other health service unions were advised by the HSE that a range of measures were being considered, including the closure of wards, the reconfiguration of seven-day wards to five-day wards, the closure of accident and emergency departments that do not have consultants, the suspension of primary care developments and a limit on expenditure on statutory schemes, such as the drug refund and long-term illness schemes.

The cuts represent a base betrayal of the electorate that voted for the parties in government, which promised an improved health service. They also expose the gross mismanagement of our public health service by a Government that prefers to subsidise the private health care business. The Government must outline the measures that it will introduce in the short term to stabilise the economy and to introduce a medium-term recovery plan that includes steps to restore competitiveness and measures to retrain and upskill workers. We must also start planning for a longer-term reorientation of the economy to ensure that it will be built on a solid foundation and that future economic prosperity will be used to eliminate economic inequalities and to develop proper infrastructure.

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): May I share time with the Minister of State, Deputy Barry Andrews?

Acting Chairman (Deputy John Cregan): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: It is difficult to listen to lectures from Deputy McManus, who has left the Chamber, on broadband. We have one of the fastest growing broadband markets in the EU.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: From a low base.

Acting Chairman: The Minister without interruption.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: That is accepted, but it is an historical issue. To be lectured by the Labour Party, which hardly mentioned broadband in its election manifesto, is difficult. The Labour Party's record in office was abysmal, as was Fine Gael's.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Some 11 years of shame. The Minister should tell the House about the cuts.

Deputy Dermot Ahern: Deputy Morgan lectured the Government on the economy. Were this and previous Governments not required to spend so much money chasing paramilitaries out of the country, we might have had more money today and in previous economically difficult years. However, I am pleased to have this opportunity to support this motion and to join with my colleagues in calling attention to the substantial economic and social progress of the past ten years, including the achievements under the NDP which are documented in the 2007 annual report. There is no doubt we face real challenges both now and in the immediate future but we do so from what many other countries would regard as a very enviable position. The priority now is to continue to manage the current situation sensibly, to take prudent, corrective action so that we are well positioned for future growth and prosperity. No one is denying that the necessary financial economies will be difficult. It is clear they will require discipline and prioritisation across all Departments and Government agencies. As we discuss and plan the implementation of these measures, however, we must not lose sight of the great extent of the resources that will continue to remain available for the provision of public services. Prudent financial economies need to be made but they should be viewed in a proper perspective.

In the areas under my Department's aegis, we are taking immediate steps to deliver the required savings of €8.731 million in the current year. This will not be easy but with an overall budget in this sector of €2.68 billion in relative terms, this amount is modest, being less than 1%. When one considers the dramatic rise in the Vote between last year and this year — in the region of 11% — this is a very dramatic increase, year on year. With good management, it will certainly be possible to deliver this saving without material damage to the extent or quality of public services provided.

One of the areas highlighted by the Government has been the need to achieve efficiencies between and within agencies, including through sharing of services. My Department has already made major progress in reducing costs by way of shared financial services within the larger justice agencies such as the Garda Síochána, the Irish Prison Service and the courts. It is estimated that the overall saving to the Department and its agencies has been in the region of €2 million annually. This initiative has been developed further with the Department's financial shared service centre, which operates out of Killarney and which now provides financial services, including payment processing and payroll to a number of other Departments and agencies. As stated by the Taoiseach, the payroll for the Department of the Taoiseach is paid out of the financial shared service centre run by my Department in Killarney. This is a clear example of sharing these services to achieve best value for money. These organisations are already achieving real savings as a consequence. This project has established a proof of concept that the Civil Service and the wider public sector can provide business support services by adopting a highly successful private sector business model. I suggest that Deputies or a committee of the House should investigate the organisation in Killarney because it is a very good template for future sharing of services.

Similar opportunities exist in the field of human resource services, as well as information and communications technology. Furthermore, pooled procurement activity, particularly in respect of telecommunications and energy services, can maximise our economies of scale and yield savings across the board.

[Deputy Dermot Ahern.]

All these opportunities are already being aggressively pursued by my Department and this is precisely the type of thinking we will be bringing to the task of achieving the savings required by Government. Individual budget headings are now being examined in each of the justice sectors Votes with a view to confirming exactly where these savings will be made. Expenditure on advertising and consultancy will be heavily pared back under all headings and general administrative and payroll economies will also be identified in each of the Vote areas.

We expect to be able to deliver in the region of €5.5 million of the required €8.7 million savings from efficiencies within the agencies and other bodies associated with the Department and we will be reviewing the scope for achieving future savings on this front. More than 30 bodies, both statutory and non-statutory, are associated with the Department and we intend to take a long, hard look at the function and role of each. We will be asking whether the function continues to be an essential one and whether the role could be performed as effectively by the Department. Where the need for a separate identity exists, there may be opportunities for functions to be merged and the organisational structure of the body will need to be the most efficient and cost-effective. In recent years, where it has been necessary to establish a new specialised public service, my Department has favoured doing so by means of an executive office as a leaner alternative to a fully separate agency. This is a move which all Departments should consider. This would avoid the need to set up expensive separate support functions and structures. Where such offices have been established they have tended to energise and refocus existing resources within my Department.

There will not always be straightforward solutions to be had in each instance, but at a minimum the overall justice sector will be brought to work together to take advantage of its size, pool its resources, eliminate wasteful overlap and face the current economic challenges intelligently and creatively.

By taking this approach we will be able to ensure that what has been achieved in terms of effective service delivery continues to be sustained. Those achievements have been made possible by the enormous investment which has been made in the justice sector over the past ten years. Services to prevent and detect crime have expanded enormously, management of the courts has been transformed and prison capacity has been hugely expanded and modernised, and this will continue to happen. Land registration has been modernised and innovative new approaches have been pursued to manage young offenders. The structures and supports to promote equality in our country have been expanded significantly.

We need to bring a rigorous and creative approach to squeezing efficiencies in all quarters. This drive for coherence and efficiency will not exclude those elements of our national human rights infrastructure where an element of overlap and customer confusion may be emerging at this juncture.

I reiterate my support for the motion and my commitment to managing the considerable resources in the justice sector so that we can sustain our economic and social progress into the future.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Barry Andrews): The House is debating the national development plan and the current health of the Irish economy against the background of a global economic slowdown. I had occasion to watch “Newsnight” on the BBC last night and I was struck by the similarities between the circumstances affecting the UK economy and ours. I refer to reports of construction workers losing their jobs because of a slowdown in the construction sector, the credit crunch and the lack of availability of finance. Strangely enough, the opposition there is accusing the British Govern-

ment of having been the architects of the slowdown or the correction in the UK economy, or however one wishes to describe it. This would be the case in any other economy similarly affected by the global credit crunch and the global economic circumstances. One could hold up a mirror and see the same circumstances as are pertaining here. We sometimes exaggerate our successes but there is no doubt that the Opposition has completely underestimated the degree to which we exist in a global economy. We are an open economy and are more affected by global conditions than any other economy in Europe.

Nevertheless, we are in a good position to recover from the prevailing economic winds when circumstances change. This is because we have been planning long-term strategies from day one. It must be acknowledged that since 1987 we have invested heavily in education and training and more recently in the National Pensions Reserve Fund. Some people have asked what we did with all the money from the past ten great years. We brought down the national debt from 53% ten years ago to a net figure of 14% today, when the money put into the National Pensions Reserve Fund is included. Any objective analysis of the Irish economy will come to the conclusion that we are in an extremely strong position.

However, this is of little or no consequence or consolation to anybody who has lost his or her job in the past six months. It is a gross insult to the many people who were forced to emigrate in the 1980s to draw a comparison between now and then. We have moved on significantly in this economy and we are in a much stronger position under any heading. Some 2 million people are employed in the economy compared with 1.4 million ten years ago. We have the second strongest purchasing power of any European nation. We have a much lower national debt than the European average. We will create 13,000 new jobs this year. Our banking structure is much stronger than that in the UK, our biggest trading partner. People are blaming the European Central Bank and the fact that we have no control over interest rates. However, if we were in an independent monetary situation and had our own currency we would be in a considerably worse position than we are in the euro zone. Let us forget about that canard that has been circulated by many people.

There are increases in international oil and commodity prices. The easing of domestic demand and exchange rate factors should result in some moderation in the rate of inflation in the second half of this year. Inflation is forecast to average at 4.3%. I hope this will provide some comfort to those negotiating the new national partnership agreement. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance have consistently urged the need to continue the roll-out of the national development plan, which is vital to our sustained economic growth. The taxpayers' money is now being invested in fixed-term contracts, which is welcome as we are now in a buyer's market. We could not get contractors to work for us for anything of that sort in the past. We now have much tighter capital projects than we had in the past, which is to be welcomed.

We are making vast improvements in the transport system, which are reducing travel times throughout the State as anyone with their eyes open would accept. Even the Opposition Members, in their very brief intervals of generosity and lucidity, would concede that. We are improving competitiveness under many headings. We will need to concentrate almost exclusively on the issue of competitiveness in the next 18 months as it will put us in a position to recover more strongly. I believe we will recover and be in a position to take advantage of either lower interest rates or the euro easing against the dollar, which will also be a significant influence.

The national development plan is committed to delivering many child care places in coming years and that continues to be the case. These are real measures that provide for improvements in social inclusion. Regarding the savings announcement of yesterday, the Labour Party had described the HSE as a "bureaucratic Frankenstein" that required a reduction in staff numbers.

[Deputy Barry Andrews.]

There was not a word of welcome on any Opposition lips last week when the Minister, Deputy Harney, announced the HSE reform process and the redundancy package that was being discussed with trade unions. Instead, there was condemnation and criticism. A voluntary redundancy scheme for health service staff has been sanctioned by Government. I am confident that the Minister for Health and Children will deliver on her commitment to save €144 million within the sector. The Minister made clear this morning that the national children's hospital will proceed without delay. Regardless of the argument about its location, all patients and their parents will benefit from its construction without delay. It is about services, not about parking and all the other extraneous factors that are often brought into the discussion.

Much was said yesterday about youth justice and the question of Oberstown campus in Lusk, County Dublin. The development will increase the accommodation capacity in the detention school system from 77 to 167 places and it will be carried out on a phased basis between now and 2012, with a second phase by 2014. A notice inviting tenders from interested parties to provide a full team to design the new facilities was published in June with the closing date for receipt of tenders next month.

It is also an opportune time to discuss the question of capital efficiencies that can be achieved at community level. Those of us who have been politicians for any length of time will often arrive in a town and find a community facility on one side of the road and a national lottery funded facility on the other side of the road. There will be a community crèche down the road and empty rooms in primary and secondary schools, all of which are funded by the State. There seems to be a lack of coherence and of joined-up thinking that could lead to inter-agency savings.

We now need to focus our attention — perhaps we should have done so all along — on what savings can be achieved by asking all these community groups to begin to pool their resources. They need to agree to sharing community halls with people operating crèches, providing facilities for older people and discharging their obligations under the national recreational policy to provide youth services, whether they be youth cafés or youth clubs, or even to accommodate youth work. If all these can be achieved within the one campus a mechanism must be created whereby those types of capital applications will attract either fast-tracked funding, extra funding or ring-fenced funding, or some other mechanism to encourage people in a community setting to apply for funding in a more pooled and joined-up way. In this way we will make capital savings appropriate to the circumstances in which we now find ourselves. In any case they are the kinds of efficiencies we should be achieving.

I am confident that we will weather the current economic downturn and will be prepared to take advantage of the upswing when it arrives. The Government has taken proactive action in recent days. We have not sat back and waited for the budgetary process to roll round. The savings being sought will not come without difficult choices but that is what the people expect. In 2001 and 2002 Ireland faced similar economic troubles on that occasion induced by the slump in the ICT sector. Better than most, we quickly recovered our ground and within 12 months recorded growth rates of 7% to 8%. Owing to the swift action of the Government, I expect the economy to return to trend growth rates in the very near future.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I wish to share time with Deputies Timmins and McCormack.

Acting Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: I am somewhat disappointed that neither the newly appointed Minister of State at the Departments of Health and Children, Education and Science, and

Justice, Equality and Law Reform, nor the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform availed of the opportunity while in the House to tell us exactly where the savings are to be made and where the axe is to fall because it will fall. It is disappointing that the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform did not tell us how he proposes to reduce the payroll in his Department by 3% by the end of 2009. The Minister spoke about inefficiencies and said he planned to make savings in the order of €5.5 million by addressing inefficiencies. However, he did not identify or if he did he did not inform the House of the inefficiencies where savings can be made.

He talked about a review of bodies and agencies associated with the Department. However, the specifics are sadly lacking. Does he propose to cut frontline gardaí or Garda overtime in an era of rising crime rates where gardaí on the beat and engaged in intelligence gathering have never been more vital? He received a warning from Department of Finance officials about the Garda overtime bill and yet he remains mute and silent about what is about to happen.

During the boom time successive Ministers for Justice, Equality and Law Reform were happy to squander taxpayers' money. The last Government paid €30 million for the site at Thornton Hall, which was eight times the market value. The vastly inflated price that the then Minister was willing to hand over to buy land for a new prison is indicative of the attitude of the Government that squandered the country's hard-won wealth. According to the former Minister for Finance, Deputy McCreevy, his Government colleagues partied like there was no tomorrow. Now we are paying for that and today is just the start of it.

Not every incident of waste by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is as obvious as the Thornton Hall saga. The bastion of the Minister, Deputy Dermot Ahern, is also guilty of wasting money in more subtle ways. For example, every prisoner in the State is costing Irish taxpayers almost €100,000 per annum but our ability to rehabilitate prisoners is nil. Consequently, half of prisoners reoffend within four years of release, while 27% are back in prison within a year.

Money is also wasted in a myriad of other ways. For example, the criminal fraternity, which costs the State a fortune, is far better equipped than the Garda, which until recently had no place to engage in firearms training while gangs travelled overseas for target practice and expert training on a regular basis, a practice that has not been stopped. After ten years the Garda lacks a reliable digital radio service. In 1999, when the current Ceann Comhairle, Deputy O'Donoghue, was Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, he promised that a national digital radio service for the emergency services would be fully operational by 2003. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has since squandered money on two pilot projects in the same Dublin area to test the technology and report on it. We were told earlier this year, after ten years, that contracts have been signed for a national scheme to replace the current obsolete technology. That announcement was made in fanfare of publicity. I am pleased that the use of spin doctors is to be reduced. The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources has since intervened to delay the process and, potentially, to undermine the recent contract agreement. How much has this mess cost the State at this stage? Is duplication or triplication of pilot projects one of the forms of inefficiency the Minister has isolated as a means of saving money in the future? We do not know because he has not told us.

My issue with spending in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform does not relate to how much is spent *per se* but to what the money is spent on. Is the money being spent wisely? I would have thought the Minister would have commented on that in his speech. How much has been spent on drugs task forces, for example? How much do we spend on all such quangos? We are spending money on Garda initiatives aimed at tackling illegal narcotics at a time when our coastline is wide open. Many of our ports and smaller airports are not much

[Deputy Charles Flanagan.]

better. The Customs and Excise is resourced with a single cutter and a single container X-ray scanner to intercept the masses of illegal drugs coming into this country on an almost daily basis. Many of our private and smaller airports have never seen customs officials. They might as well not exist because they do not visit. Is it any surprise that the State is awash with drugs? Is it any surprise that cocaine abuse has trebled in the past five years? Is it any surprise that the level of heroin addiction has never been higher? Cost is the reason given for the Government's skeletal approach to customs. What is this disgraceful neglect ultimately costing the State and the citizen?

I would like to speak briefly about my constituency. I was interested to hear that gateway funding, under the much vaunted national spatial strategy of 2002, is to be slashed. It is disappointing that the strategy in question has been as much of a disaster as the failed decentralisation programme. The rate of unemployment in County Laois is the highest in the country. It has increased by approximately 60% in the past 12 months. IDA Ireland, which is the key Government agency responsible for attracting industry to the regions, has systematically neglected County Laois over many years. My constituency colleague, Deputy Fleming of Fianna Fáil, was quoted in a national newspaper today as saying he does not "believe the IDA even know where the county is". I respectfully suggest he might have a word in the ear of his party colleague, the Tánaiste, Deputy Coughlan, if he wishes to do something proactive about this problem. Portlaoise business park has just one tenant — it is a ghost park, in effect. It is not enough for the Government to take a "build it and they will come" approach. The Government and agencies such as IDA Ireland must be more active in bringing investors to the midlands, particularly the towns of counties Laois and Offaly.

The Minister for Education and Science said today that the VEC sector will suffer cutbacks. What impact will the cutbacks have on the provision of second-chance education, which is more vital than ever in counties such as Laois as the unemployment figures spiral out of control? What will happen to the rapidly increasing numbers of unemployed people in County Laois, mainly in the construction industry, now that the Government has decisively blown the boom? What solutions can the Government offer the county, which has the most rapidly rising unemployment figures in the State? I called last week on FÁS to engage in training and upskilling, but I learned today that the budget of that organisation is to be cut by €1 million. How does that tally with the need for training and upskilling in the interests of shortening dole queues?

I am aware of a primary school in Portlaoise that has been waiting ten years for a new complex. Over 15 months ago, the parish priest in the area spent €2.25 million on a site for the school. The Government took no action despite having been handed a free site. After ten years of economic boom, 80% of the children attending Scoil Bhríde in Knockmay are being taught in prefabricated classrooms. The Government's solution to this problem is to convert the local ice skating rink, which is supposed to operate as a recreational facility for young people, into an educational shanty town from next September.

The existing schools in Portlaoise, which is one of the fastest growing commuter towns in Leinster, are bursting at the seams. The State was willing to spend €22 million on fighting parents who were looking for special needs education for their children, but it is unwilling to provide the basic classroom infrastructure needed to educate the children of Portlaoise and the rest of County Laois. What is the future for the pupils and teachers in the county in this era of cuts?

The maternity unit at the Midland Regional Hospital in Portlaoise is a health and safety hazard. The proposed 50-bed unit will not be developed. While an accident and emergency

unit has been built, it remains idle while patients and staff work in the old unit, in conditions that are reminiscent of the days of Charles Dickens. There is a shortage of beds for elderly people throughout County Laois who require residential care. The Minister for Health and Children has announced that the fair deal is not going ahead. There are ridiculous waiting lists in the midlands. Mammography services were suspended in Portlaoise after years of financial neglect eventually led to a crisis. Deputies will remember that the House debated this matter of life and death last autumn. Neither the Minister, Deputy Harney, nor the head of the HSE, Professor Brendan Drumm, visited the county to offer a solution to the problem. If such circumstances are being encountered in the good times, what hell will the sick and vulnerable of counties Laois and Offaly face in the era of cutbacks?

The Minister of State, Deputy Barry Andrews, spoke about child care, for which he is responsible. Foster carers in counties Laois and Offaly have received correspondence that I regard as offensive. They have been informed that a stinging swathe of cuts would result in costs heretofore incurred by the HSE being passed on to them. The HSE officials in question, such as all Fianna Fáil Ministers for Finance in the past ten years, should hang their heads in shame. They have demonstrated nothing but incompetence. Elderly people, children and foster carers, the most vulnerable people in society, are about to pay the price, in terms of loss of quality of life, of the reduction in services. I will return to this most serious matter in the autumn. It is disappointing that the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister of State with responsibility for youth justice are not here to listen to this important aspect of the debate.

Deputy Billy Timmins: I am sure the Acting Chairman, Deputy Cregan, is tired of listening to Government spokespeople coming in here to make announcements. I have heard many such plans in the past 11 years, but none of them has come to fruition. I do not believe the measures outlined by the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance yesterday will come to pass. They will unravel with the passing of time, not over the years, but over days.

My old friend, the Commissioner, Charlie McCreevy, used to speak about breaking open the champagne. I do not know how the Government managed to move from the champagne-opening era to the gruel-stirring era. It did not happen in a flash — if one glances casually at the speeches made by Deputy Bruton in recent years, one will learn that signs of economic concern were there to be observed. If the members of the Government were working as lighthouse keepers, they would have been sacked a long time ago as we would have had many shipwrecks.

The Taoiseach made three main blunders when he was Minister for Finance. First, he introduced inflationary budgets which meant that current spending was running at two and a half times the rate of growth of the economy. Second, he sanctioned an increase in day-to-day expenditure which was politically motivated for electoral purposes. The increase, which killed our competitiveness and, accordingly, led to a dramatic reduction in export levels, was financed by unsustainable property taxes. Third, he failed to make any reform decisions and abandoned value-for-money discipline. These three errors gave rise to what I call “Cyclone Clara”, which left a trail of destruction in its wake. The rate of GDP growth reduced by 5.7%, the general government balance, as a percentage of GDP, decreased by 3% and the rate of unemployment increased by 1.3%. That is what we got from Cyclone Clara in the past four years. Like St. Peter at the Garden of Gethsemane, the Government fell asleep on its watch. Unlike St. Peter, however, it has not awoken.

Some €35 million was wasted on the vanity project that was Media Lab Europe, with nothing to show for it but some empty buildings on the quays of Dublin. Some €19 million was wasted on unused accommodation for asylum seekers. There was an overrun of €201 million on pre-1953 pensions. It is unfortunate that the great futurologist and philosopher, the Minister,

[Deputy Billy Timmins.]

Deputy Dermot Ahern, who introduced that scheme, has left the Chamber. When one mentions other wastes of money, such as the Stadium Ireland project and the Dublin Port tunnel, one feels like one is reading the rolling credits from a horror movie. The Government has failed to reform the public service and to complete the decentralisation programme. I spoke once to the former Minister, the late Séamus Brennan — may the Lord have mercy on him — after we had appeared on “Prime Time”. When I asked him when the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism would be relocated to Killarney, he told me he hoped it would happen by 2012. He was a realistic politician, God be good to him. The decentralisation proposals are the greatest scam ever perpetrated on this State, destroying efficiency. I instance the moving of 30 or more employees of Bord Bia to Enniscorthy when ten or more of them were working abroad. There was no thought to it and it was a complete political sham.

With respect to the cutback of €45 million to Irish Aid, the Government will argue that we are still on target for 0.54 of GNP this year, with the hope of reaching 0.7 in 2012. However, due to the ineptitude of the Government the most vulnerable people on the planet will be short of €45 million this year. That is the cutback in real terms without reference to an improved health service. I note that the Minister of State, Deputy Power, is entering the Chamber. We are talking about putting food in the stomachs of people and basic health requirements, which are affected by the loss of the €45 million.

The Fine Gael spokesperson on finance will outline the measures proposed by our party which he has termed “Through recovery to reform”. We envisage cutting the growth of day-to-day spending to 4%, requiring all Departments and agencies to find a saving of 1%, and cutting back on the 250 new quangos created by Fianna Fáil in the past decade. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle will not sleep lightly in his bed tonight, thinking of that figure.

I spoke to an individual recently who told me he had visited the offices of a Department of State. He went into the canteen at 10 a.m. and found it packed. At 10.45 a.m. not one person had left it. That is the reform we have in the public service. What are the legacies the Taoiseach will leave us? The housing crash. Since 2005, 100,000 house owners have moved into a situation of negative equity, we have the slowest rate of growth since 1983, the biggest balance of payments deficit in the history of the State, the highest rate of unemployment in a decade, with 50,000 extra workers out of a job since December last year, and the biggest deterioration of public finances in the history of the State, from boom to bust, from champagne to gruel. It is sad because in this society the vulnerable will suffer.

Deputy Pádraic McCormack: The Government cutbacks illustrate how its chickens are coming home to roost. They result from its mismanagement of the economy and the way resources were squandered when money was freely available during recent years.

The Taoiseach has given false assurances that frontline services will not be affected by the proposed cutbacks. He and the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, have said that the most vulnerable in our society will be protected. This has already been proved incorrect and I offer an example of how such people are being hit. In the western area, the HSE has notified all providers of services to the disadvantaged sections of our communities that their budgets have been cut by 1%. Those cutbacks will directly affect, among others, the service provided by Ability West, formerly the Galway Association, the Irish Wheelchair Association, Enable Ireland, Rehab Care, the Brothers of Charity and Autism West. This week, Ability West was obliged to inform the parents of 430 adults and children in Galway city and county about the cutbacks it has been forced to adopt because of a reduction in its budget, despite rising costs this year. The same will apply to other services. In the case of Ability West, parents

have been informed of cutbacks under eight headings. I have a copy of that letter, sent to 430 parents, outlining where the cutbacks will fall.

The most heartless examples are, first, the cutbacks in food which had been available to day users of the service and, second, the cessation of the weekly allowance paid to workers in the various work centres. The allowance amounted to only €5 or €6 a week in some cases and up to €25 or €30 in others but it gave the participants a sense of the value of their work.

In addition, Ability West will not now be able to guarantee occasional respite care for families of mentally or physically handicapped offspring. This will be the last straw for the parents of such children who struggle to continue to provide critical services for the disadvantaged members of their families. How much more will they be able to take? How much more will it cost the State to provide institutional care for such persons? The cutbacks in all social services make an enormous difference in the quality of life of the sick, the old and the disadvantaged, and their families. What galls the parents and families in such cases is seeing the vast amount of money that the Government has squandered in recent years. It gave millions in tax breaks to the rich and now the most vulnerable in society are being punished.

Parents who have dedicated their entire lives to the welfare of the disadvantaged family member must find it impossible to understand why their services are being cut back by the Government and the HSE. At the same time they see the HSE has awarded 111 high-ranking administrative staff over €1.2 billion in bonuses, an average of €11,000 each, over and above their annual salaries, which in some cases amount to over €400,000. I got those most recent figures from the Committee of Public Accounts. The HSE also created an extra 263 managerial and administrative grades between 2005 and 2006. That figure is also extracted from the minutes of the Committee of Public Accounts, page 227.

The Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, is silent at this time of cutbacks. The Taoiseach stated, falsely, that the most vulnerable sections of our community will not be affected. The Minister is not here. She is not interested and will neither listen nor hear. She has deserted the most vulnerable in their hour of need. Action speaks louder than words. I call on the Minister to discontinue the order of cutbacks to those bodies which provide such excellent services and to ensure that they receive at least the same budget as last year. Let the Minister find her cutbacks from the bonuses and inflated salaries of the monster she created when she established the HSE. The disadvantaged families have taken enough of them.

This morning the Taoiseach referred to cutbacks as a down-payment for the future. He is damn right, the cutbacks he imposes on the most vulnerable in society are a down-payment for what those people and their families will suffer over the coming years. The disadvantaged will pay for the rest of their lives. I appeal to the Minister of State, Deputy Devins, who is in the Chamber, the Minister for Health and Children and the Taoiseach to reverse those charges. The eight service providers I mentioned have been cut back in the same way. I gave only the example of Ability West. Let the Taoiseach tell the Minister to restore the grant to the HSE in order that those bodies can continue to provide the great service they have provided down the years.

Deputy Charles Flanagan: Hear, hear.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Jimmy Devins): Our economy is at a watershed. Today my colleagues in government spoke of difficult and prudent savings decisions taken across a range of areas to correct the current fiscal downturn. The downturn affects not only the Irish economy but a number of major global economies, which in turn impact negatively on the situation here. What we have done is appropriate,

[Deputy Jimmy Devins.]

prudent and timely and is a mature recognition that the nettle needs to be grasped very firmly indeed.

Notwithstanding the difficult economic situation, the Government has recognised the vital importance of sustained investment in my area of research, development and innovation. The major investment, begun under the strategy for science technology and innovation in 2006, has been underpinned and the agreed funding will be substantially maintained in 2008. In 2008, just under €320 million is available under subhead F of the Vote of my Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to build the skills needed for a modern knowledge-based economy and to strengthen Ireland's research base.

This funding is provided to build a robust research system and to support efforts to bring the output of Ireland's growing research base to the marketplace. By allocating these moneys the Government is supporting the efforts of the enterprise community to develop new products, stay competitive and win new markets. Under the national development plan these investments enable Enterprise Ireland to meet its export targets and IDA Ireland to win high quality foreign direct investment.

Deputy Billy Timmins: That is no bother to the Minister of State.

Deputy Jimmy Devins: To survive and prosper, Irish companies must develop innovative and relevant products and services, which are targeted at the right geographic markets.

Debate adjourned.

Private Members' Business.

Public Private Partnerships: Motion (Resumed).

The following motion was moved by Deputy Joe Costello on Tuesday, 8 July 2008:

That Dáil Éireann:

- noting the collapse of five public private partnerships agreements in Dublin city, namely, St Michael's Estate, Inchicore, Dublin 8, O'Devaney Gardens and Infirmary Road, Dublin 7, and Dominick Street and Sean McDermott Street, Dublin 1;
- noting that a single developer, Michael McNamara and Company, was selected as the preferred bidder for all five projects with Dublin City Council, which are estimated at €1 billion;
- noting that the same developer abandoned plans for the regeneration of Finglas village, Dublin 11, last week;
- concerned that the housing lists in Dublin have grown steadily despite the construction boom of the past 15 years;
- concerned that Dublin City Council has had to close its affordable housing list which exceeded 8,000 earlier this year because of its inability to cope with the growing list;
- concerned that hundreds of families awaiting new homes and community facilities now have their hopes dashed; and
- concerned that the public private partnership mechanism has provided no risk or penalty to the private developer while the local authority is left to pick up the pieces;

calls on the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government:

- to take whatever steps are necessary to remove the developer from the five projects;
- to ensure that in future developers are not allowed to walk away from commitments entered into under public private partnership arrangements without appropriate sanction;
- to take direct responsibility for funding and delivering the five long-awaited social and affordable housing projects;
- to meet the residents to reassure them of the Government's commitment and good faith; and

determines to review the State Authorities (Public Private Partnership Arrangements) Act 2002 with a view to ensuring that the public interest is protected in future public private partnership agreements.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

notes:

- the comprehensive framework for the further development and modernisation of housing in Ireland as set out in the Government's housing policy statement *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*;
- the record investment of almost €9 billion in housing programmes over the past five years and the continuing major investment being provided under the National Development Plan 2007-2013;
- the progress made in the delivery of social housing, with completions in 2007 reaching their highest levels in over a decade;
- the continued increase in the delivery of affordable housing in recent years and the efforts currently being made by Dublin City Council to enhance its affordable housing application system and establish a more reliable perspective on the level of demand for affordable housing;
- the important role of public private partnership arrangements as one of the suite of approaches employed for the delivery of a range of housing programmes; and
- the capacity of such approaches to deliver communities with households of mixed tenures and incomes, together with good quality social and physical infrastructure, through effective leadership by the local authority and full engagement with the communities concerned and the relevant State, private and voluntary sector organisations;

shares the disappointment arising from the announcement that a number of Dublin City Council's housing PPP projects are not to proceed as originally planned;

welcomes the actions taken by Dublin City Council, as the contracting authority, to resolve the issues involved, with a view to progressing the projects concerned as speedily as possible, in close consultation with the relevant communities and regeneration boards; and

commends the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Minister of State with responsibility for housing, urban renewal and developing areas for:

- the very significant levels of financial resources they are providing to support housing programmes in the Dublin City Council area, including the regeneration of Ballymun, with €250 million being provided in 2008 alone;
- their clearly stated commitment to continuing to engage actively with Dublin City Council in progressing the regeneration of the areas affected by the recent announcement and in ensuring that priority continues to attach to meeting the accommodation requirements of the affected communities; and
- their initiation of a review of the implications which the announcement in relation to the Dublin PPP projects concerned may have for the approach to housing PPP projects more generally.

—(Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government).

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I welcome the Labour Party motion. Since the announcement in May that five public private partnership projects — including St. Michael's Estate in Inchicore, where I live — were not going ahead because the developer, Bernard McNamara, was pulling out, there has been much confusion, disappointment, and anger in our local community. However, I do not intend to criticise PPPs, because such projects have been effective in many parts of our city where regeneration was badly needed. People were drawn to PPPs because they offered the possibility of new and improved facilities and services in areas in which they otherwise would not have materialised. These facilities include libraries, health centres, home-work clubs, youth cafés and so on.

Examples in my area of successful PPP projects include the regeneration of Fatima Mansions and St. Teresa's Gardens. I have been a member of the regeneration board for both of these projects for several years, as well as for St. Michael's Estate. The Fatima Mansions regeneration project, which is beginning to wind down, has been a great success because it allowed people from the community, residents' associations and public representatives to have a say in the future of their area. Fatima Mansions, a housing complex owned by Dublin City Council, had failed for many years to offer an acceptable standard of living to residents. Now they have access to a range of new facilities. The St. Teresa's Gardens regeneration board is in the process of completing its plans for the PPP regeneration project. I spoke to residents yesterday who informed me they that they are pleased with the process thus far and hope it will continue.

However, this week's announcement by Dublin City Council that the developer, Bernard McNamara, will no longer proceed with the PPP for the regeneration of St. Michael's Estate is extremely disappointing, especially in light of the amount of time and effort which has gone into this project in the past ten years on the part of residents, community workers and city council officials. This is undoubtedly a major setback but we cannot allow ourselves to get caught up in the blame game. Our priority now must be to save the project and to ensure another developer is brought on board so that the regeneration of St. Michael's Estate is finally made a reality.

The cost of the failure of this project is not merely financial. The residents of St. Michael's Estate and the wider community of Inchicore are the ones who will suffer if this project does not go ahead. I have lived and worked in the area all my life and have made many friends there over the years. The proposed redevelopment was promised for many years. Unfortunately, many of my friends have moved out of the estate. It is important that we take up the banner in support of the residents who want to make better lives for their families.

The community spirit in St. Michael's is something to which we should all aspire. The residents have worked tirelessly, in spite of poor living conditions and serious social problems, to keep the idea of regeneration alive. After many long nights and countless meetings with the

developer, they finally agreed a plan they were confident would greatly enhance their community. They were promised new homes, health facilities and sport and recreational amenities. Now they are faced with the prospect of losing it all.

Regeneration is not just about bricks and mortar, although it is often our main focus. Regeneration is about communities working together to improve the fabric of the area in which they live. It is about better housing standards, improved education and health services and building a strong social agenda. Regeneration should not be about profit for the developer or countless launches of glossy documents. We should always bear in mind that it is, first and foremost, about people.

Since the regeneration of St. Michael's Estate was first given the green light, the hopes and dreams of the area were a topic of conversation throughout Inchicore. Now that the future of the entire project is in danger, disbelief, disappointment and anger have become the new topics of conversation. The residents are justified in feeling they have been abandoned. Commitments made by the Government, the local authority and the developer have been withdrawn.

In the current uncertain economic climate, where we are faced with wide-ranging cutbacks, it will undoubtedly prove difficult to get a new developer to come on board and pour millions into the project. However, we must push forward and ensure the regeneration of St. Michael's Estate is given the full support of the Government and Dublin City Council and that they deliver on their promises to the people of Inchicore. The Government is continually talking about helping those most in need and supporting and protecting the disadvantaged. However, these are the very people who did not benefit from the last ten years of economic prosperity, just as it is they who will be first to suffer in the current economic downturn. The weak and vulnerable in our society deserve the same level of commitment from the Government as everybody else, in good times and in bad.

How can the Government simply look on as thousands of people on Dublin City Council's affordable housing list are told there is now a freeze on housing allocations? How can the Government commit to sorting out the housing problem for young couples and those on lower incomes only to press the pause button on the entire system? With more than 8,000 people currently on the housing list in Dublin and thousands more applications not even processed, the housing situation is in crisis.

Those people who remain in the final 17 units in St. Michael's Estate have been left with no guarantee that they will get the new homes they were promised. It is time for the Government to step up and fulfil the commitment that was made 18 years ago. The residents, the wider community and everyone who has worked hard on this project have waited long enough. The Government must take responsibility for this situation and give a guarantee that the regeneration of St. Michael's Estate will continue as planned and be brought to a successful conclusion. This community must be allowed a new beginning, with opportunities for employment and an effective health service. It is a community which has struggled and worked hard. Above all, the residents have been committed to each other for the past 18 years. I ask the Government to take urgent action to bring this development further. People must not have to wait another ten years for a decision to be made.

Deputy Seán Ardagh: I propose to share time with Deputies Cyprian Brady, Mulcahy and Cuffe.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Seán Ardagh: The Central Statistics Office's small area population statistics, SAPS, indicate that the number of family units comprising mothers with children in Dublin South-

[Deputy Seán Ardagh.]

Central is 7,066. This is 25% greater than the next highest figure in the State, which is 5,600 in Dublin South-West. There is a significant poverty indicator in these figures. The developments we are discussing are located in areas with the greatest proportion of single parent family units and where the unemployment level is some 60%. They are living in a community where about 75% of households are headed by women. Apart from the five projects mentioned, there are areas where regeneration is to start or continue, such as St. Teresa's Gardens, Dolphin House and Oliver Bond House. All these areas are in desperate need of improvement, regeneration or rebuilding. It is a challenge to us all. Public representatives must bear some responsibility in so far as they did not get people together and consult them quickly enough in order to do the job when the good times were here.

I commend all the groups involved in the various consultation processes. I acknowledge that Deputy Catherine Byrne has been very involved with St. Michael's House and the group in Fatima Mansions. These groups have consulted widely with the community, including the residents they represent, and in large measure they have developed projects that are acceptable to those residents who want to continue with them.

There is no doubt that PPP projects allow for that type of regeneration due to the way they are funded. Essentially they serve two purposes — helping to fund social and affordable housing, while at the same time providing private accommodation so that the social mix will bring about better integration. In that way all the children in an area will have the same opportunities at the highest level.

Dublin City Council has been engaging with the regeneration boards of St. Michael's Estate, O'Devaney Gardens and Dominick Street. The council continues its commitment to the regeneration process. We are aware that St. Michael's Estate and Dominick Street have been left totally in the dark and, effectively, hanging out to dry.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: By the Deputy's Government.

Deputy Seán Ardagh: The preferred partnership arrangement that has been in place between Michael McNamara and Company has ended. Both sides have agreed that the second bidder will be approached to see whether it can be brought on board. The other three projects in place at O'Devaney Gardens, Convent Lands, Seán MacDermott Street and Infirmary Road look like they are going to mediation. Having read *The Irish Times* on Tuesday, however, the assistant manager of Dublin City Council does not appear to have too much faith in the developer in so far as he said that if the mediation does not work he will go directly to the High Court. Hopefully, the mediation will work and those developments in O'Devaney Gardens, Convent Lands and Infirmary Road will continue.

Dublin City Council must re-examine all the options available for advancing these public private partnership projects. In hindsight, we would all agree that it was not the most prudent thing for one developer to be responsible for five projects. The council and the Department need to examine that process to ensure there is a spread of risk not only between the developer and Dublin City Council regarding the private and social and affordable elements of a development, but also the potential for the project to happen in the first place.

I have been in touch with the managers involved in Dublin City Council and am aware of their commitment to progress these projects. There is a big commitment on the part of the council to move forward with the projects that have run into trouble. We must accept there are economic problems for the developer and the council regarding the market for private accommodation. In Fatima Mansions recently the developer took control of a large number of

apartments to let because he was unable to sell them to private individuals. There are still a couple of hundred apartments for sale. These problems must be overcome.

There were also questions concerning outside walls, energy configuration and the size of the apartments. Just to nail that, however, Dublin City Council had agreed to accept the costs of the increased size and the energy configuration improvements.

It is a difficult situation and I will work with my colleagues in Dublin South-Central to do all I can to progress these projects. In that way, the people in St. Michael's House and Dominick Street will be housed as soon as possible.

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: I commend the Labour Party for having tabled this motion.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Will the Deputy be voting with us?

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: Housing is one of the most important things that any Government or local authority can provide. On this occasion, it is appropriate to focus on the housing issue. I was privileged to be a member of Dublin City Council for 17 years, from 1985 to 2002. For all of that period I was on the council's housing committee. I have a deep commitment to all types of social and affordable housing. I remember the days when the manager would come in to the housing construction committee with proposals for building hundreds of houses. I am sure other Members who were on local authorities will attest to this. At that time, the council had many large sites and was still in the business of building, particularly in the Tallaght area. There is no doubt that the days of any local authority — certainly Dublin City Council, with which I am very familiar — building large numbers of houses seem to be at an end. There may be different reasons for that. In my constituency, some 107 such houses were built a few years ago but the management turned out to be so poor they were not able to manage them.

We must be fair in addressing this matter. There is a serious housing situation in Dublin city at present.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: It is unbelievable. Where has the Deputy been for the last few years?

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: We must examine the causes of that. From 2002 to 2007 in particular, Dublin City Council failed for whatever reasons, although I will exclude one reason presently. The council has not managed to build the requisite number of social houses needed for its jurisdictional area.

Deputy Joe Costello: That is because the Deputy's Government withheld the money.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Funding was not made available.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Please allow the Deputy to make his contribution.

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: As I understand it, there has not been any significant, or indeed any, limit on funding for housing projects from national Government to local authorities in the 2002-07 period. I received a document only yesterday from the management of Dublin City Council, the figures of which were given to the council's SPC. The document contains charts which clearly show a target, a revised target and actual starts. Under every single category, the actual starts have been significantly fewer than the council's target or revised target. The Labour Party Deputies can jump up and down, but the reality is that for much of that time their party had a majority on Dublin City Council. If they want to look for responsibility for the inability of the council to deliver on housing, they should look in the mirror.

Deputy Mary Upton: They did not get funds from the Government.

Deputy Joe Costello: The Government holds the purse strings and it failed totally.

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: We have a new Minister of State with responsibility for housing, Deputy Finneran, and I spoke to him about what is going on in Dublin city. I believe that the city needs a housing action plan, driven by a clear indication of need. The last analysis carried out by Dublin City Council for which we have figures dates back to 2005. I am aware that the council is preparing another analysis that it intends to publish in September or October of this year. When that analysis is available, we will need a plan that is co-ordinated between the four Dublin councils, which should then be told by the Minister of State to get their act together with regard to housing construction in Dublin.

One of the areas in which the council has failed is that of empty houses. There are possibly hundreds of empty houses around the city. People come into our clinics and wonder why they cannot have the houses in certain streets that have been boarded up. The reality is that the local authorities have not been quick enough to take repossession of these houses and get them out to new tenants. People across all parties have said this and it has been acknowledged as a problem.

I welcome the decision of the Labour Party to put down this motion, but it is considerably unbalanced. It seems to be blaming entirely the developer who won these contracts for different PPP schemes.

Deputy Mary Upton: No, we are not. The Deputy should read the motion.

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: The developer would say that half way through these schemes, the goal posts were moved and higher specifications were put in which would make the projects unviable.

Deputy Joe Costello: The Deputy is an apologist for the developer.

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: I am sorry to see that the Labour Party is still stuck in the 1960s. Developers are not in the charity business and we cannot attract private capital if the developer is not able to make a profit on projects. The whole idea behind public private partnerships is that a developer comes in, is able to sell a certain number of units at a profit and thereby assist the council's housing programme.

Deputy Mary Upton: Is it all right if he makes a deal and pulls out?

Deputy Michael Mulcahy: The whole point is that the deal is kept. I welcome the motion because there is a serious issue regarding housing in Dublin. The primary fault for this lies with the city councils. I call for a three-year action plan. I want the Minister of State to bring in the four city managers, perhaps in conjunction with all the relevant TDs for Dublin, produce a plan and execute it. I demand action now.

Deputy Joe Costello: We look forward to the Deputy's vote and we thank him for his support.

Deputy Cyprian Brady: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion as the majority of the projects affected by the collapse of these PPPs are in my constituency. In spite of very difficult circumstances, these communities have continued to grow and remain strong and close today. Public private partnerships were put forward five years ago as an effective way to regenerate the social living conditions of these Dublin City Council tenants. The communities bought

into this process and contributed hugely to it, by bringing it forward to the detailed design stage in most cases. While no contracts were signed for the Dominick Street regeneration project, the demolition of several blocks had taken place already and the tenants had looked forward to progress being made. Detenancing had begun in O'Devaney Gardens and people in the community had invested much of their time in reaching the point of detailed design. Expectations in all these complexes were extremely high.

The current position is unacceptable. It is not right that Dublin City Council and a developer can put financial and administrative issues in front of the tenants' concerns. It is also worrying for people in other flat complexes around the city who were hoping for work to take place in their areas. I accept that the Minister and the Department are conscious of the plight of the tenants in these complexes, but some issues need to be tackled immediately. The residents must be fully consulted and must be involved in efforts that are being made to resolve the situation. Dublin City Council, in consultation with the tenants, must continue to progress the scheme of transfers and rehousing that has already begun in most of these projects, and any tenant who wishes to move should be accommodated as a matter of priority. While decisions are being made on the future of these projects, it is essential that Dublin City Council continues to improve the scheme of maintenance, cleansing and security in the complexes. There was an incident in O'Devaney Gardens last night which contributes to the stress and strain on tenants in this area.

Other complexes in the city have been reassured that any regeneration in planning is given priority when decisions on capital budgets are being made and that consideration has been given to how the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Dublin City Council can proceed with the developments at Dominick Street and O'Devaney Gardens, be it as a PPP or as a local authority development. Tenants have invested so much time and effort in these projects that it is only right that decisions made on their future must be considered. It is essential that the momentum that has built up over the past few years is continued and that we do not start to go backwards.

We have seen that PPPs have worked, for example in the docklands. The public and private sectors have come together under the auspices of the Dublin Docklands Development Authority and high class, modern accommodation has been provided to city council tenants, private individuals and individuals under the affordable housing scheme. Therefore, PPPs work if they are managed properly.

People have bought into this process and have given up their personal time and even sometimes the opportunity to move on. They decided to stick it out on the basis that agreement would be reached, the facilities and services promised would be provided and the accommodation promised would be adequate. We cannot turn around and tell these people that they have to start again. Much work has gone into this and much money has been spent on this process to date. Whether the projects continue as public private partnerships or the Department intervenes with Dublin City Council, it is only right that any of the plans or designs discussed to date should continue to be used. The regeneration projects in many complexes have been brought to an advanced stage. They cannot be undone and must be progressed. The immediate problem with the five particular regeneration projects is an issue. However, the wider issue is how Dublin City Council does business as a local authority and how communities can be involved in the regeneration process. It must be recognised many communities have become involved in the consultation process. I look forward to the Minister seeing what is happening in these projects. Some of these estates were left deteriorate over the past several years because of a promise of a regeneration project. It is only fitting these communities are consulted and given every consideration for whatever future decisions are made.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: This motion addresses important and interesting issues. Much of the responsibility in the five PPPs in question lies with the local authority, Dublin City Council. It is worthwhile to have a fairly robust critique of the council's role in the provision of housing. In the past, it relied too much on developers to pick up the tab for the physical, economic and social regeneration of areas. In the 11 years I spent as a Dublin city councillor, I was critical of the role it played in, for instance, the regeneration of the Iveagh Markets. The council paid off the remaining tenants in the building and waited for a single developer to proceed with development. Ten years after those plans were announced, the Iveagh Markets still lie abandoned and derelict. It is a shameful neglect of the heart of Dublin's Liberties, an area I represented as a councillor. History repeats itself. In this case, Dublin City Council was over-reliant on a particular developer to pick up the pieces in areas that did not receive the attention they deserved.

The recently retired Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. John Purcell, stated in his parting remarks that public private partnerships should not be seen as a panacea to all our ills. Those words ring true in this instance. I have always had a certain nervousness about PPPs and believe we should not rely on them.

In estates such as O'Devaney Gardens and St. Michael's, the State and the local authority wanted to overcome the historic problem whereby housing was provided either as private housing or local authority housing. This has created a housing apartheid within the State, whereby one is tagged as a private resident or a local authority tenant. This is a large obstacle that needs to be overcome. This process has begun to a certain extent. Considerable investment has been made in housing co-operatives, housing associations, the voluntary housing sector and in the role of the traditional housing trusts such as the Iveagh Trust and the St. Pancras Housing Association. These, along with other voluntary and charitable bodies, are providing a much broader range of housing in different areas.

There is the residual issue, however, of relying on the private sector or the local authority to provide the bulk of housing in the State. We must move beyond this and broaden the middle ground. Many of these regeneration projects attempted to do that. If there is a problem with them, it is that they relied unduly on the private sector to do all the donkey work in making the regeneration happen. The alternative is for the local authority to play a strong role in master-planning the area. It should parcel out much smaller portions of the redevelopment to the private sector and to voluntary housing bodies while carrying out works directly itself in providing housing and community facilities.

The problem of putting all eggs in the one basket has been repeated many times this evening. This is what happened with these five regeneration projects. To depend on a particular developer to carry out the bulk of regeneration projects in the city is a dangerous road to go down. I have had my run-ins with Bernard McNamara to stop him parking his helicopter beside a protected area on the shores of Dublin Bay. Bernard McNamara is in there to make a buck; if he cannot make a buck, he leaves. This is the essence of the difficulty faced in this instance.

We must move on from the immediate categorisation of people by the housing in which they live. The State needs to provide housing benefit directly to the beneficiary to avail of housing through a local authority, the voluntary housing sector or private housing.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Is Deputy Cuffe for or against the motion?

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: The motion is over-simplistic in its analysis of the private sector's role. The PPP process must be reformed.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Deputy sounds more and more like a Fianna Fáiler every day.

Deputy Ciarán Cuffe: Some of the seeds of what needs to be done are in the motion. Regeneration, however, to happen requires both public and private sector investment.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I wish to share time with Deputies Pat Rabbitte, Liz McManus, Joanna Tuffy and Tony Gregory, with the permission of the House.

In the short time available to me I want to concentrate on the part of this motion which deals with Finglas village. Members may be aware — I hope the Minister of State is — that the same developer who is the subject of this motion made a decision last week which has profound implications for the people of Finglas. The long-awaited and desperately needed regeneration of Finglas village is to be abandoned with little prospect that the situation will improve in the short to medium term.

Finglas has a population of approximately 50,000 people. It has been acknowledged for many years that the village needed to be upgraded. Much of its centre is comprised of poor quality, unsympathetic commercial developments from the 1960s. It has lacked a competitive edge and an attractive physical character and in recent years struggled to compete with the new shopping centres around the M50.

On the plus side, however, it has a great deal of potential. Apart from the rich history and strong spirit, it enjoys a prime location just 6 km from the city centre. It has DCU on its doorstep and is the primary hub for an increasingly prosperous hinterland or catchment area. Finglas is designated as a prime urban centre in Dublin City Council's current development plan. Prior to this, much work was done in developing a regeneration strategy. This entailed widespread public consultation and agreement on the optimum framework for commercial and residential development for the future. What was needed then was a developer with vision and commitment who could ensure that Finglas would realise its potential.

In the early 2000s Cunningham Brothers had a short involvement in the area but were soon bought out by the firm of McNamara, with Spain Courtney Doyle acting as agents. The three separate shopping precincts in the village were bought by McNamara and planning permission was sought for the main centre. Permission was granted in July 2004 for a substantial retail and office development, 166 residential units, a public library, car park and crèche. Residents and traders in Finglas were delighted that at last things were moving in the village. The long overdue regeneration was to start. That was July 2004 and everything was ready to go.

This is July 2008, not a sod has been turned and unfortunately it seems there is no prospect of any substantial work being carried out for the foreseeable future. The regeneration of Finglas has been abandoned. Finglas has missed the boat and the hopes of many thousands of residents and indeed traders have been dashed.

Responsibility for this lies at a number of doors, certainly with the Government and with our planning laws and probably most of all with the developer, McNamara. The Government, despite the boom years, has neglected to invest in Finglas to the extent necessary to bring it up to modern day standards in terms of infrastructure, policing and education services. For example, a critical project in terms of the attractiveness of Finglas for private investment was the metro. A metro line from the city centre to Finglas and on to Dublin Airport was proposed in 2000 and adopted as Government policy by the then Minister for Transport, Deputy Mary O'Rourke in 2001. In spite of the fact that Finglas went on to elect two Fianna Fáil Deputies, the metro never materialised.

The prospects for regeneration of the village were not helped when Fingal County Council granted planning permission to Bovale Developments for a major new town centre development less than half a mile from the village, in Charlestown. This was done without any reference whatsoever to the city planners in respect of existing plans for the regeneration of Finglas.

[Deputy Róisín Shortall.]

Thus, the Finglas plans were significantly undermined by Fingal's actions in this regard. Time dragged on and various excuses were put forward for why McNamara could not go ahead. These ranged from disputes over the ownership of part of the site, which seemed to go on forever, to claims that some small traders were holding up the development. The fact was that Finglas did not rate as a priority for Bernard McNamara and so it received very little of his attention. In the context of Mr. McNamara's vast property portfolio, Finglas and its people did not rate. He did not have the vision and commitment which the regeneration proposals required.

Bernard McNamara is estimated to be worth in excess of €230 million and is ranked 54th on the *Sunday Times* Irish rich list. He heads up a company which has a declared turnover of €500 million per annum. Over the past couple of years he has acquired an impressive portfolio of properties which include the Burlington Hotel — €288 million, Carrickbrook House in Ballsbridge — €412 million, the Montrose Hotel — €40 million, the Superquinn chain — €450 million, and a stake in the Conrad Hotel — €45 million, among many others. It is not hard to see how Finglas and indeed the five housing PPPs were merely small change in the McNamara scheme of things.

While the projects might have been small change to Mr. McNamara, they represented something hugely important for the communities and the people concerned, giving grounds for hope in the future and a better life. Those hopes have now been cruelly dashed by the decision of this developer to simply walk away, and it seems the Government is quite happy to stand idly by.

Bernard McNamara has been an immensely successful businessman. He has amassed a massive property portfolio. He has received and continues to be awarded substantial Government contracts as well as umpteen private contracts and is among the top three building contractors in the State. To say he has done well is an extreme understatement. He has been greatly facilitated in this success by a friendly Government and a very benign tax regime.

I suggest that at this point——

Deputy Michael Finneran: The county councils gave him the contracts, not the Government.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: ——after 15 years of good times, and all the profits that have been clocked up and wealth amassed, it is time for McNamara to be motivated by something other than profit, and for the Government to consider this and to restore hope to those communities who were not so lucky in the boom years.

At a political level, of course, there are responsibilities too. It is not as if Fianna Fáil and Bernard McNamara are strangers. There is a long close relationship there going back to the 1970s when Mr. McNamara was a Fianna Fáil councillor, and of course the involvement and the contacts have been close and frequent since. Yet incredibly, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the Fianna Fáil Deputies, either in Finglas or in any of the areas where the housing PPPs have fallen through, have lifted a finger to get these contracts back on track. Why have none of the Ministers who are so close to Mr. McNamara sought to influence or put pressure on him to honour his earlier undertakings to these communities?

It really is very hard to stomach the type of bleeding heart guff we have heard tonight from Members such as Deputies Mulcahy, Ardagh and others, crying about what has happened as if it has had nothing to do with them and as if they had no role in it whatsoever. In respect of Finglas, I will be expecting the Minister of State to provide a response tonight to the issues

raised. I shall be listening carefully to hear what he is proposing for the future of Finglas village and how it is intended to get investment back into that important area.

Now that the Galway tent is gone, I want to make an appeal to Mr. McNamara tonight. Why not make it payback time for those whose futures he holds in his hand? He has had it very good. What about giving others a chance now?

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: The purpose of this debate is to highlight the crisis that has been created for hundreds of families at the locations mentioned because of the collapse of public private partnerships. Following years of discussion and planning, these families' hopes and dreams for new homes and community facilities have been dashed. It seems odd, on the face of it, that in the same week that this developer pulled back from the housing projects, this House, on the recommendation of the Government, recommended that he be the preferred bidder for the construction of Thornton Hall, the new prison, which is a sure-fire thing.

I came into the House just in time to hear Deputy Cuffe express the worry that we should not put upon private developers too much. I have listened to an array of Fianna Fáil speakers and the one thing they had in common was an approach to the effect of "let us protect public private partnerships". The people affected should know that it is the PPPs that failed them here. I question whether it is always suitable that a PPP is the way to proceed.

I would like to put on the record an article written by a Northern Ireland writer, Newton Emerson, on PPPs in *The Irish Times* of 28 May. He wrote:

AS A British taxpayer, . . . [I am] often asked: "How do public-private partnerships [PPPs] work?"

The answer is surprisingly simple. Suppose a government has strict rules on the amount it can borrow but it wants to spend more on houses, schools and hospitals.

If a private firm takes out a loan to build them instead, the government can pay it back over decades in regular instalments without officially increasing the national debt.

As a British taxpayer, I am often asked: "Isn't that just another type of government borrowing?"

The answer is yes. However, it is not strictly the type of borrowing that the government has strict rules about.

As a British taxpayer, I am often asked: "Why in God's name would the government pay a private company to take out a loan when nobody can borrow as cheaply as the government?"

The answer . . . is that there are strict rules about government borrowing, and breaking them openly might be even more expensive than a PPP.

As a British taxpayer, I am often asked: "Is that the only official excuse for this exciting policy development?"

The answer is no, of course not. There are dozens of official excuses for this exciting policy development. For example, PPPs stimulate the economy by using private firms to build houses, schools and hospitals.

As a British taxpayer, I am often asked: "Didn't the government always use private firms to build houses, schools and hospitals?"

The answer is yes, I suppose it did. But by using them to arrange the finance as well, civil servants benefit from private-sector expertise.

As a British taxpayer, I am often asked: "Doesn't the private sector actually use its expertise to run rings around civil servants?"

[Deputy Pat Rabbitte.]

The answer is yes, if you insist on putting it in such a negative ... [way]. But private firms have to negotiate the best deals for themselves to offset any risks.

As a British taxpayer, I am often asked: “What risks? Aren’t PPP contracts always guaranteed by the government come hell or high water?”

The answer is that you should calm down. You sound like a communist. Private firms need cast-iron guarantees to justify the extra cost of borrowing on the open market.

As a British taxpayer, I am often asked: “Isn’t that a circular argument? Also, as this borrowing takes place on the open market, don’t the markets know all about it [anyway]?”

The answer is no, it’s really more of a triangular argument and yes, the global financial system has now noticed the UK’s hidden PPP liability and is starting to question our national accounts and downgrade our international credit rating. But it will take years to rewrite the auditing rules and a week is a long time in politics.

As a British taxpayer, I am often asked: “So this is your government’s brilliant idea for public service delivery? Turning an obscure ideological experiment into the biggest accounting trick since Enron, dumping all the needless extra costs and risks on to future taxpayers and wrecking the public finances for decades, just to create the passing illusion of fiscal responsibility?”

“What other country would be stupid enough to entertain such madness

I would like to hear the Minister of State rebut that. I would like him to say whether PPPs are suitable in all circumstances. I would also like him to respond to the people and the families who have lost their expectations of homes and community facilities because of the failure of PPPs, whatever about the personality of the developer, and I do not want to go there.

Deputy Michael Finneran: The Deputy has given a simplistic view.

Deputy Pat Rabbitte: With respect to the Minister of State, whatever this man is, he is not simple.

Deputy Liz McManus: I congratulate Deputies Costello and Upton on bringing forward this important motion. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has a reputation for not being too concerned about social housing, therefore, I listened intently when he spoke on this motion last night. There was something familiar about many of the phrases he used such as “integrated approach”, “holistic outlook” and “area planning partnership”. Then I remembered that many of these phrases were used when I held the position now held by Deputy Finneran, as Minister of State with responsibility for housing. I do not know if the same scriptwriter is there, but certainly the phrases were all the same. However, there was one important difference. In those days partnership meant a partnership between the community and Government, whether it was local government or national Government. It was a new approach in terms of building social cohesion. Now partnership means a PPP. That is about essentially enabling the private sector to come in and very often to make a killing in terms of projects to provide for social need. It also means that the community has essentially been squeezed out of a true partnership arrangement. They are consulted and included——

Deputy Michael Finneran: What about the projects in Fatima Mansions and Ballymun?

Deputy Liz McManus: ——but as soon as the players start to play rough, the community are isolated and they are powerless. That is the reality.

This is an ideological issue. It is not about good housing management. We have many examples of where good area planning and mixed developments produced the right result. The Leas-Cheann Comhairle will remember when he was Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government successful projects were begun during that time in which we can all take pride. There is a place for PPPs, but it certainly is not the inflated place it is now and we simply cannot afford to have cases arise where people's lives are being blighted because of ideology. It is a matter of concern.

One depends, perhaps erroneously, on the Green Party to bring something new to Government. That is what it promised when it came into Government. The speech that I heard the Minister, Deputy Gormley, give last night was essentially to the effect of it being business as usual, that it was a pity this happened but that we were certainly not going to change our ways.

Separate from the issue of PPPs, there are other problems arising as a result of changes within the Department that I presume have flowed from the Minister, Deputy Gormley's new tenure. For example, there now appears to be some bureaucratic stranglehold on housing developments and projects coming on stream. Difficulties have arisen in regard to the carrying out of small-scale refurbishment projects. Progression of a small refurbishment scheme in Little Bray in my constituency has come to a complete stop. People's sense of isolation and bewilderment with regard to these big projects in Dublin also applies to people's expectations in regard to small projects.

This fixation about PPPs has led to an extreme example, again in my constituency, of how matters can go wrong. The heart of the town of Bray has been blighted because of a PPP that has never been realised. We waited for the project to commence for 14 years and at the end of this month the council will have to make a decision to take back lands. If that is not enough to get the Government on to a new track, it is difficult to accept that any sense is being taken of what is happening on the ground.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: I wish to focus on the general issues related to the Government's housing policy during the past ten years. We debated this issue a number of times in this House and it was the subject of a number of debates when I was a Member of the Seanad. The

8 o'clock Minister at the time, Deputy Noel Ahern, used to come in and give statistics such as the fact that there were 50,000 completions this year and 60,000 the following year and so on. He was giving the figures for private housing in reply to motions on the need for more social and affordable housing. The Government has emphasised meeting people's housing needs through the private market and that has led to this unsustainable situation. The price rises and unaffordability of houses could not go on forever. There has been a nod by the Government to a policy of providing a certain amount of affordable housing. The Government brought in that policy but never implemented it. A minimal amount of affordable housing was delivered over the years. For all that time the core should have been a sustained delivery of council housing every year but that never happened. When I was on a council we used to complain that it was not committing itself to enough social housing, but it never delivered even what it promised. That is not all the council's fault because there was a pattern of the Government's committing so much but not giving the councils the capacity to deliver the number of council houses for which it promised money.

Today I got a printout of the Central Statistics Office's figures for new dwellings completed since 1992. For the bulk of that time, until 1998, approximately 10% of housing delivered was social housing. In 2006, which is the latest year for which figures are available on the CSO's website, 5% of housing was social housing. I read an article by Fr. Peter McVerry that reported that at one stage 30% of our housing stock was social housing.

Deputy Joe Costello: That was when the Labour Party was in Government.

Deputy Joanna Tuffy: That was when the Labour Party was in Government. That was the right policy. In places such as Crumlin and Sarsfield Park in Lucan, where I live, those people went on to buy their houses and their children eventually went to university. They were given a good chance in life and housing policy was good then. Since this Government has got in it has fallen apart and has been totally developer-driven.

I had some questions today on housing statistics and the Minister of State, Deputy Finneran, came in and gave promises that 27,000 social housing starts would be delivered over the period 2007-09. Going by the past record of this Government, there is no way that is going to happen. Apart from the fact it is too little too late, one could not believe it. The Government has constantly made promises about social housing which it has not kept. Today I asked how many people are on the housing list and I was told the latest figures go back to 2005 and was referred to the website to get the figures. Does the Government not have the up-to-date statistics? The best it can do is direct me to a website for figures from 2005 instead of answering my oral parliamentary question.

The human side of this is that family formation has not happened. People have been put out in rented accommodation where they are not encouraged to have their partners with them for years and they never have the bonds that go with forming a family. By the time they get into their council house, eight years later, the unit is a single mother with two children or a single man with, perhaps, a one-bed house and his children visiting. Money has been wasted on private rented housing. The Government is repeating all the mistakes of the past in the type of housing it is building. It is not integrated social housing. It is cutting out any amount of green space and leaving people in terrible conditions in social housing. One needs sustained delivery of council housing, to deliver proper communities and homes and to stop relying on private developers to provide housing.

Deputy Tony Gregory: I thank the Labour Party Whip for the opportunity to speak briefly in support of this important motion. I am an elected Member of Dáil Éireann for the constituency in which four of the failed public private partnerships are located. In a previous Dáil I was elected to represent the constituency in which the fifth one, St. Michael's Estate, is located. I have a particular responsibility to voice the disappointment, frustration and understandable anger of the local people. The residents have suffered Dickensian and unacceptable living conditions for far too long in flats complexes such as O'Devaney Gardens, Lower Dominick Street and St. Michael's Estate. I want to refer to the residents of the surrounding communities, who have been impacted by the negative spin-off blight, the result of the failure of the Government to redevelop and regenerate these areas that have cried out for redevelopment for decades.

The essential element in tonight's motion must be that this Government cannot force the residents of the flats complexes to continue to live in their present conditions, which in many instances are deteriorating by the day and which nobody in this House would tolerate for a single night. The Government must make the necessary funding available directly to the local authority to build new homes for the existing residents of O'Devaney Gardens, Lower Dominick Street and St. Michael's Estate, in line with the already agreed plans. Beginning construction of this one aspect of the PPPs must be an immediate first step. The only source of funding is central Government. These plans were hammered out over several years involving the residents of these areas, who believed, as they were told, that this was a definite and genuine commitment by Government, stated and restated before elections and since.

There is a moral responsibility on Government to honour those commitments now. This issue alone will tell us whether this Government cares a damn about the most vulnerable. Any attempt to put this on the long finger would be a scandal, just as it would compound the existing scandal that these housing conditions exist at all in this day and age in the centre of Dublin, our capital city, after more than a decade of the affluence of the Celtic tiger. This Government should not, as it appears to be doing, attempt to use any threat of recession as an excuse not to make the required funding available, nor should it be allowed to pass the buck to the local authority, as I have already heard here tonight. If anybody needs to tighten their belts and pay up for the threatened recession it should and must be the developers who have made billions of euro over the last ten or 15 years from property speculation. It must not be the disadvantaged families of city centre flats complexes who have been left behind by successive Governments. This is a very real test case for this Government. The action it will or will not take will make clear whether it cares for the most vulnerable in our society, that well-worn phrase used so often in recent times.

I want to mention a similar flats complex, Liberty House in Dublin 1, on which the Minister's Department, in Dáil replies to me, has been passing the buck to Dublin City Council and forcing families to live in appalling conditions in E and F blocks and other families from the now demolished D block to live in temporary homes. I ask the Minister to take responsibility and to direct officials from his Department to meet next week with officials from Dublin City Council along with local residents and public representatives and expedite the redevelopment of the already demolished D block now.

For my part, if the Government acts on its responsibility and makes the funding directly available to start the construction of the essential new homes now, I will support it on this issue. I say that, however, in the sad belief and knowledge that this Government will not act in the interests of social justice, yet again, on this occasion.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael P. Kitt): I thank all the Deputies who contributed to this useful debate. The discussion has highlighted a measure of agreement across the House, at least on the point that the individuals and families living in the regeneration areas must be at the centre of all our considerations.

As my colleagues, Deputies Gormley and Finneran, mentioned yesterday, Dublin City Council is placing a high priority on meeting the accommodation needs of the remaining residents of O'Devaney Gardens, Dominick Street and St. Michael's Estate. The council is working to ensure that communities are not broken up by regeneration and will offer all households moving from an estate to facilitate regeneration the option of returning once the development is complete.

As we approach the end of this debate, I wish to take the opportunity to respond to some of the points raised by the Deputies opposite. I reassure the House as to the robust value-for-money considerations of the PPP procurement process. For each project a full value for money assessment, including a cost-benefit analysis, is undertaken, drawing on the substantial expertise of the National Development Finance Agency. There is a fair and transparent procurement process in all cases. Overall, the approach underpins the significant social benefits that come with mixed-use, mixed-tenure developments.

The alleged lack of sanction against developers was another matter of concern for Members on the Opposition benches. It is important to make a distinction between projects where contracts have been signed and those where there is no contract. With the former, the contracts contain detailed conditions concerning the circumstances under which one or other party

[Deputy Michael P. Kitt.]

terminates the agreement. These matters are yet to be resolved but I thank Deputy Hogan for his support of the council's efforts at mediation. It is not accurate to suggest that where no contract exists a developer may walk away scot free. In general, PPP developments require considerable investment of resources by developers in terms of preparing detailed plans, consulting with the community and so forth and provide an incentive for developers to stay the course.

Public private partnerships are one of a range of options used by Dublin City Council to renew and regenerate its social housing estates and provide new social and affordable housing in the city. These PPP regeneration projects exist within the context of the wider social housing investment programme as set out in the statement on housing policy, Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities. Accordingly, I am pleased to be in a position to conclude this debate by referring to the significant progress being made by my Department and the local authorities in delivering not just social houses but sustainable communities across the country.

This year we will spend a record €1.2 billion on new social housing and improvements to existing stock, with close to 1,290 units completed in the first quarter of this year. To assuage Deputy Hogan's concerns, delivery under the Part V mechanism, which increased very significantly last year, is surging ahead even further this year, with a 70% increase in delivery for the first quarter, as compared to the same period in 2007. The rental accommodation scheme also continues to meet its transfer targets with 1,425 transfers of households from rent supplement in quarter one.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: It does not.

Deputy Joe Costello: That is a ridiculous claim. It does not meet any targets. It is going nowhere.

Deputy Michael P. Kitt: In response to points raised by Deputy Terence Flanagan, affordable housing output in 2007 exceeded 3,500 homes nationally.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Government promised 10,000.

Deputy Michael P. Kitt: In addition, delivery of affordable homes for the first quarter of this year reached almost 950, double what was achieved in the same period last year.

While I acknowledge we are in more challenging times, I am confident this Government will continue to respond positively to meeting housing need and to the delivery of more and better quality housing within sustainable communities that will transform the lives of the people in areas like O'Devaney Gardens, Dominick Street, and St. Michael's Estate.

I commend amendment No. 1 to the motion to the House.

Deputy Eamon Gilmore: I wish to share time with Deputy Joe Costello.

This motion, which will be voted on in 15 minutes, is not about bricks and mortar. It is about hope — hope for a better place to live, for a better future and hope for children. I have been very disappointed at the Government's response to what I had hoped would be a non-partisan motion in this House. I am disappointed at the amendment that the Government has tabled and at the lack of conviction on the part of the Government in dealing with this problem.

With my colleagues, Deputy Joe Costello, Councillor Emer Costello and the local Labour Party representative, Claire O'Regan, I visited O'Devaney Gardens and Dominick Street and spoke with local residents there. At the invitation of my colleagues, Deputy Mary Upton and Councillor John Gallagher, I also intend to visit St. Michael's Estate in the near future.

What I learned is that hope is what these regeneration projects represented for the communities in St. Michael's Estate, O'Devaney Gardens, Infirmary Road, Dominick Street and Sean MacDermott Street. Hope is what kept them working so tirelessly to forge a vision of the kind of place in which they wanted their children to grow up. Regeneration is about more than badly-needed new homes. It is about a fresh start for communities which, over the years, have accumulated more than their fair share of burdens. It is about an end to the segregation of social and private housing and about saying goodbye to the days when apartment blocks or housing estates were built without a thought for the families who would live in them — without shops, community centres or space for children to play. These regeneration projects, designed in partnership with residents, promised not only new homes, but new community facilities, crèches and businesses. They promised a different future.

Now the hopes of these communities are fading along with those unfulfilled promises. The Labour Party has laid this motion before the House to attempt to rescue the abandoned regeneration projects and with them, the hopes of their communities. These regeneration projects and others like them around the country are an urgent national priority. Some of the plans currently on hold have been urgent for up to a decade. With every year that passes, these flat complexes and estates sink further into decline. Ironically, the regeneration process itself has speeded up this process. Families moved out to let the developers in, but when the developer never came, drug dealers, drinking parties and gangs moved into the abandoned blocks instead. For example, there are four empty apartment blocks in O'Devaney Gardens, which were de-tenanted in order to begin demolition and re-development. Now they are standing derelict, an eyesore for remaining residents, a danger for local kids and a magnet for anti-social behaviour.

If the regeneration projects are left to languish at this stage, starved of investment because no one knows what is going to happen to them and haemorrhaging tenants, the residents of these estates will find themselves living in conditions that are worse than before the regeneration process began. As one mother told me on Monday last, 18 months after residents were promised a transformed neighbourhood and the homes of their dreams, there is nothing in O'Devaney Gardens for kids to play with except bits of rubble. Will another generation of children grow up knowing nothing except the failed policies of the past, with decaying blocks of flats, no green space or safe place to play, and more and more of their own neighbourhood becoming a no-go area? That is what is at stake here tonight.

We in Dáil Éireann cannot let another generation of children grow to maturity in housing that is not fit for them or their families. After all, what is our national wealth for, if not to improve the future of the nation's children? This is as true in the boom times as it is in this more sober economic climate. In fact, I would argue that at a time when talk is of cutbacks and hard decisions, it is even more incumbent on us to ensure that our collective wealth is used to protect those who stand to suffer the most.

Even during the boom years, it is clear that the trickle down of wealth did not travel very far. It is disturbing that in a country which built over 600,000 new houses and apartments in the past decade, 44,000 households find themselves on local authority housing waiting lists.

The construction boom fuelled our economic growth for the past five years sending unprecedented amounts of money in stamp duty and VAT receipts flowing into the Exchequer. Meanwhile in the private sector, big developers were the biggest winners in a property bubble that kept prices high. Yet it seems the profits of the construction boom stopped at the thresholds of the neighbourhoods which needed them most. There are still pockets of the 1980s in our 21st-century capital city. It is a particularly cruel blow to the residents of these complexes that, despite regeneration plans that were so long in the making, they should be the first victims of a downturn in profits in the construction industry.

[Deputy Eamon Gilmore.]

Public private partnerships were lauded as the risk-free solution to public housing provision. Instead, it turns out that all the risk has been borne by Dublin City Council and the residents of St. Michael's Estate, O'Devaney Gardens, Infirmary Road, Dominick Street and Sean MacDermott Street while the developer, Mr. McNamara, was able to walk away without consequence. With respect, Mr. McNamara does not have to live in O'Devaney Gardens or Dominick Street. He does not have to look out every morning onto empty flats in a state of half-demolition or worry about where his children are playing. The residents of these complexes have to live with the consequences of the collapse of this PPP every day just as they have been living with the consequences of poor housing and planning for years.

However, we are not here tonight to argue over who is to blame. We are here to find a solution so that these regeneration projects can go ahead as soon as possible. This is why we are asking the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to remove the developer from the remaining projects. These regeneration schemes are simply too urgent to be tied up for years in the courts.

Second, we are calling on the Minister to take direct responsibility for funding and delivering the five social and affordable housing projects in question. These regeneration projects need to be undertaken regardless of whether a private developer is willing to take them on or not. The future of these communities and the children growing up in them cannot be dependent on the whims of the housing market.

Years of hard work and commitment by the residents of these communities has gone into creating a vision of what their neighbourhoods could and should be. They have fulfilled their part of the bargain. It would be unconscionable to squander that effort and goodwill and leave these projects to gather dust. Now is the time for the Government to take the responsibility which has been bestowed on them by the people and deliver the homes and the social and physical regeneration that these areas so desperately need.

Our motion is not about party politics. It is about finding a solution to the collapse of these PPP agreements so the homes promised to the residents of St. Michael's Estate, O'Devaney Gardens, Infirmary Road, Dominick Street and Sean MacDermott Street can be built. It is about rectifying the mistakes of the past — mistakes whose consequences we see every day in all of our constituencies. Most of all, it is about restoring hope and acting on the principle that all of the nation's children deserve the best future we can offer them. This is why I ask for support for this motion and for the Government to withdraw the mealy-mouthed amendment it has tabled.

Deputy Joe Costello: I am pleased to have the opportunity to conclude the debate on the Labour Party Private Members' motion on the collapse of the five public private partnerships between Dublin City Council and Michael McNamara and Company. I thank all the Deputies who spoke. A total of 20 Deputies from all sides of the House contributed to the debate over the past three hours or so last night and tonight.

I will single out a few of them. Deputies Upton and Byrne spoke eloquently about the devastation in St. Michael's Estate. Deputy Shortall spoke equally eloquently about the destruction of Finglas village by Bernard McNamara in the context of what he has done to a sixth-century village that has now been ruined by the manner in which he has handled it and by neglect. My colleague and party leader, Deputy Gilmore, came out to O'Devaney Gardens and Dominick Street, met the residents and assisted us in every way with the motion. My constituency colleague, Deputy Gregory, made a very special effort to be here tonight to make his contribution. I compliment them and all of the Deputies who contributed during the two

days. It is very heartening to see the concern expressed at the plight of so many hundreds of residents who have been affected so drastically by the collapse of these regeneration projects.

Most of all, I salute the residents from the three major projects, namely, O'Devaney Gardens, Dominick Street Lower and St. Michael's Estate who worked so closely and co-operated in full with Dublin City Council and the developer over a number of years in planning new homes and new communities for themselves and their children. Many of them attended the debate last night and are here tonight in the Gallery.

We must not allow their efforts and vision of a better future for themselves and their children to be dashed. This is why the Labour Party decided to table this motion in the form it did. It is a Private Members' motion that is non-partisan and non-controversial. It does not seek to attach blame to any political party or particular group but to explore a way forward out of the current quagmire as expeditiously as possible.

We do not want the summer to fade into the autumn and the autumn to fade into the winter with recriminations and litigation clouding the horizon and frustrating the residents. We want the Government to put the people of O'Devaney Gardens, Dominick Street Lower and St. Michael's Estate before any other consideration. If Michael McNamara and Company is not committed to these public private partnership agreements, it should vacate the pitch immediately and allow the regeneration process to continue unimpeded.

The Government must now amend the procurement procedure for public private partnerships to ensure no State authority puts all its eggs in the one basket in the future, as happened with these projects. Moreover, strict deadlines and penalties should be mandatory.

I am pleased the Minister of State with responsibility for housing, Deputy Michael Finneran, accepted our proposal last night to meet the residents of O'Devaney Gardens and St. Michael's Estate to see for himself the atrocious conditions in these estates in which men, women and children live. I note that he has already visited Lower Dominick Street.

I am also heartened that Dublin City Council has now effectively removed the developer from the St. Michael's Estate and Lower Dominick Street projects where no contract had been signed and that in the case of Infirmity Road where a contract has been signed, a hefty financial penalty clause is about to kick in. This leaves O'Devaney Gardens as the outstanding project involving large numbers of residents — 186 tenants currently on site — which is bogged down in talks of mediation and reconciliation and where some of the negotiating principals are already on their holidays.

Meanwhile, the economic recession deepens so time is of the essence. It is essential that O'Devaney Gardens be freed from the tentacles of the present public private partnership quagmire and be free like St. Michael's Estate and Dominick Street Lower to embark on a new initiative as quickly as possible before the hundreds of residents and their families lose all faith in the regeneration process. I can assure the Minister that this faith is dwindling very fast. After the debate last night, I was called up to O'Devaney Gardens around midnight where a man was threatening to jump off a roof because of stress and frustration over the debacle in which he found himself in respect of the O'Devaney Gardens project. Thankfully, that situation was defused for the time being but the stresses and strains are enormous in all of these areas, including St. Michael's Estate, Dominick Street and O'Devaney Gardens.

The Government should agree tonight to take direct responsibility for funding and delivering the three outstanding regeneration projects and should set the wheels in motion immediately. I regret the Government's decision to table an amendment opposing our motion. Even at this late stage, I urge it to withdraw the amendment and accept our motion in the all-party spirit in which it was tabled.

Amendment put.

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 62.

Tá

Ahern, Dermot.
 Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Aylward, Bobby.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Áine.
 Brady, Cyprian.
 Browne, John.
 Byrne, Thomas.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Pat.
 Collins, Niall.
 Conlon, Margaret.
 Connick, Seán.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cregan, John.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Cullen, Martin.
 Curran, John.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Fahey, Frank.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Michael.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Flynn, Beverley.
 Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Gormley, John.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Hanafin, Mary.
 Harney, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Healy-Rae, Jackie.
 Hoctor, Máire.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kelly, Peter.

Kenneally, Brendan.
 Kennedy, Michael.
 Killeen, Tony.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Michael P..
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 Lowry, Michael.
 Mansergh, Martin.
 McEllistrim, Thomas.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M.J..
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 O'Brien, Darragh.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keefe, Batt.
 O'Keefe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 O'Sullivan, Christy.
 Power, Peter.
 Power, Seán.
 Roche, Dick.
 Ryan, Eamon.
 Sargent, Trevor.
 Scanlon, Eamon.
 Smith, Brendan.
 Treacy, Noel.
 Wallace, Mary.
 White, Mary Alexandra.
 Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
 Barrett, Seán.
 Breen, Pat.
 Broughan, Thomas P.
 Bruton, Richard.
 Burke, Ulick.
 Byrne, Catherine.
 Carey, Joe.
 Connaughton, Paul.
 Coonan, Noel J.
 Costello, Joe.
 Coveney, Simon.
 Crawford, Seymour.
 D'Arcy, Michael.
 Deasy, John.
 Deenihan, Jimmy.

Doyle, Andrew.
 English, Damien.
 Enright, Olwyn.
 Feighan, Frank.
 Flanagan, Charles.
 Flanagan, Terence.
 Gilmore, Eamon.
 Gregory, Tony.
 Hayes, Brian.
 Hayes, Tom.
 Higgins, Michael D.
 Hogan, Phil.
 Howlin, Brendan.
 Kehoe, Paul.
 Lynch, Kathleen.

Níl—*continued*

McCormack, Pádraic.
 McEntee, Shane.
 McGinley, Dinny.
 McHugh, Joe.
 McManus, Liz.
 Morgan, Arthur.
 Naughten, Denis.
 Neville, Dan.
 Noonan, Michael.
 Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
 O'Donnell, Kieran.
 O'Keeffe, Jim.
 O'Shea, Brian.
 O'Sullivan, Jan.
 Penrose, Willie.
 Perry, John.

Quinn, Ruairí.
 Rabbitte, Pat.
 Reilly, James.
 Ring, Michael.
 Sheahan, Tom.
 Sheehan, P.J.
 Sherlock, Seán.
 Shortall, Róisín.
 Stagg, Emmet.
 Stanton, David.
 Timmins, Billy.
 Tuffy, Joanna.
 Upton, Mary.
 Varadkar, Leo.
 Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pat Carey and John Cregan; Níl, Deputies Paul Kehoe and Emmet Stagg.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 63.

Tá

Ahern, Dermot.
 Ahern, Michael.
 Ahern, Noel.
 Andrews, Barry.
 Ardagh, Seán.
 Aylward, Bobby.
 Blaney, Niall.
 Brady, Áine.
 Brady, Cyprian.
 Browne, John.
 Byrne, Thomas.
 Calleary, Dara.
 Carey, Pat.
 Collins, Niall.
 Conlon, Margaret.
 Connick, Seán.
 Coughlan, Mary.
 Cowen, Brian.
 Cregan, John.
 Cuffe, Ciarán.
 Cullen, Martin.
 Curran, John.
 Dempsey, Noel.
 Devins, Jimmy.
 Dooley, Timmy.
 Fahey, Frank.
 Finneran, Michael.
 Fitzpatrick, Michael.
 Fleming, Seán.
 Flynn, Beverley.
 Gallagher, Pat The Cope.
 Gogarty, Paul.
 Gormley, John.
 Grealish, Noel.
 Hanafin, Mary.

Harney, Mary.
 Haughey, Seán.
 Healy-Rae, Jackie.
 Hoctor, Máire.
 Kelleher, Billy.
 Kelly, Peter.
 Kenneally, Brendan.
 Kennedy, Michael.
 Killeen, Tony.
 Kirk, Seamus.
 Kitt, Michael P.
 Lenihan, Brian.
 Lenihan, Conor.
 Lowry, Michael.
 Mansergh, Martin.
 McEllistrim, Thomas.
 McGrath, Finian.
 McGrath, Mattie.
 McGrath, Michael.
 McGuinness, John.
 Moloney, John.
 Moynihan, Michael.
 Mulcahy, Michael.
 Nolan, M.J.
 Ó Cuív, Éamon.
 Ó Fearghaíl, Seán.
 O'Brien, Darragh.
 O'Connor, Charlie.
 O'Dea, Willie.
 O'Flynn, Noel.
 O'Hanlon, Rory.
 O'Keeffe, Batt.
 O'Keeffe, Edward.
 O'Rourke, Mary.
 O'Sullivan, Christy.

Tá—*continued*

Power, Peter.
Power, Seán.
Roche, Dick.
Ryan, Eamon.
Sargent, Trevor.
Scanlon, Eamon.

Smith, Brendan.
Treacy, Noel.
Wallace, Mary.
White, Mary Alexandra.
Woods, Michael.

Níl

Allen, Bernard.
Barrett, Seán.
Breen, Pat.
Broughan, Thomas P.
Bruton, Richard.
Burke, Ulick.
Byrne, Catherine.
Carey, Joe.
Clune, Deirdre.
Connaughton, Paul.
Coonan, Noel J.
Costello, Joe.
Coveney, Simon.
Crawford, Seymour.
D'Arcy, Michael.
Deasy, John.
Deenihan, Jimmy.
Doyle, Andrew.
English, Damien.
Enright, Olwyn.
Feighan, Frank.
Flanagan, Charles.
Flanagan, Terence.
Gilmore, Eamon.
Gregory, Tony.
Hayes, Brian.
Hayes, Tom.
Higgins, Michael D.
Hogan, Phil.
Howlin, Brendan.
Kehoe, Paul.
Lynch, Kathleen.

McCormack, Pádraic.
McEntee, Shane.
McGinley, Dinny.
McHugh, Joe.
McManus, Liz.
Morgan, Arthur.
Naughten, Denis.
Neville, Dan.
Noonan, Michael.
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.
O'Donnell, Kieran.
O'Keeffe, Jim.
O'Shea, Brian.
O'Sullivan, Jan.
Penrose, Willie.
Perry, John.
Quinn, Ruairí.
Rabbitte, Pat.
Reilly, James.
Ring, Michael.
Sheahan, Tom.
Sheehan, P.J.
Sherlock, Seán.
Shortall, Róisín.
Stagg, Emmet.
Stanton, David.
Timmins, Billy.
Tuffy, Joanna.
Upton, Mary.
Varadkar, Leo.
Wall, Jack.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pat Carey and John Cregan; Níl, Deputies Emmet Stagg and Paul Kehoe.

Question declared carried.

National Development Plan: Motion (Resumed).

The following motion was moved by the Taoiseach today:

That Dáil Éireann:

- commends the Government on the progress made under the NDP as evidenced by the 2007 NDP Annual Report, particularly the substantial investment made in consolidating and enhancing Ireland's economic competitiveness;
- acknowledges important economic and social progress made over the last decade and the fact that we face the present economic and fiscal challenges from a position of strength; and
- commends the Government on the measures it is taking to address the current challenges, particularly the maintenance of policies that support economic and budgetary

sustainability, thereby positioning Ireland to benefit from a future upswing in the global economy.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

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

notes that the Government has contributed to the current economic downturn through:

- the introduction of reckless inflationary budgets, driven by electoral needs, that killed competitiveness;
- implementing huge increases in day to day spending financed by unsustainable property tax revenues; and
- stalling public sector reform and abandoning any credible value for money discipline;

condemns the Government for producing a package of measures which:

- fails to introduce serious reform in the way the public finances are managed;
- ignores the need for a credible medium-term strategy to address our declining competitiveness and provide training and upskilling support for the increasing numbers of unemployed; and
- misses the opportunity to embark on a process of economic recovery through reform.

—(Deputy Enda Kenny)

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Jimmy Devins): It is in this context that investment in research and development becomes an all-important factor for success. The Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006-2013, launched in 2006 and underpinned in the national development plan, has marked a great shift in the investment in research and development in Ireland. While this shows we are moving in the right direction, we must be mindful our competitors are not standing still. In the face of strong competition from other economies, it is imperative that we sustain our investment over the lifespan of the NDP and the strategy for science, technology and innovation and secure our economic prosperity for the future.

As Science Foundation Ireland funding drives the growth in the number of researchers, adding more than 30 world class principal investigator teams each year and contributing to the doubling of our PhD output by 2013, the demand from industry must be in place to absorb the research outputs and PhD numbers. Recent survey data from the foundation indicates that SFI-funded researchers are engaged in more than 500 separate industry-university collaborations, involving 400 separate companies. This is remarkable given the relatively short period during which SFI funding has been available. The launch of the €500 million research and development grant scheme last January was a significant milestone in making it as easy as possible for companies to access research and development supports. These new schemes bring together financial supports for company-led research projects, providing an integrated and unified approach capable of meeting company needs flexibly and efficiently.

An Ceann Comhairle: I must ask for silence in the Visitors Gallery while the debate is ongoing. I cannot hear the Minister.

Deputy Jimmy Devins: In 2007 the IDA concluded negotiations for 54 new research and development investments, resulting in a series of significant industrial and academic research

[Deputy Jimmy Devins.]

collaborations. Enterprise Ireland has set a target of more than doubling the number of indigenous companies engaged in research and development in excess of €100,000 per annum and to increase fivefold the number of indigenous companies spending in excess of €2 million per annum on research by 2013.

However, these targets are only a means to an end. Indigenous companies that are innovative compete effectively internationally, drive our export performance and create sustainable employment. By continuing to win research and development investments from the multinational sector, the IDA is bringing the core knowledge creation activities of these companies to Ireland, enhancing the importance of the Irish operation to the global corporation and placing the Irish operation in pole position to sustain or win new business investment in the future. Enterprise Ireland and the IDA support a range of measures to develop and enhance collaborative links between industry and academic researchers. In 2007, Enterprise Ireland provided €73 million for schemes aimed at ensuring we have the capacity to capture and transform the ideas and advances coming from higher education research into commercial reality.

In the future, Ireland will make its living by producing innovative products, designs and services. Overall the trends to date from our investment in the strategy for science, technology and innovation are positive. It is critical to our future success that we continue to invest in the human infrastructure to achieve our goals of transforming Ireland into a cutting-edge knowledge economy. The ramp up in investment in research in Ireland is very recent by international standards and other countries are also investing in this area. However, by sustaining our projected strategic investment in research and development, we will realise economic and employment gains and improve our competitive advantage. The increased pressures of globalisation, and the emergence of newly industrialised players in the world's economy, lead to one conclusion. We must innovate or we will stagnate. Notwithstanding the difficult circumstances, the Government has chosen to put its weight behind planned, substantial, sustained investment in research development and innovation, which I am sure will continue to be justified and proven in the years to come.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Seamus Kirk): Is the Minister of State sharing time?

Deputy Jimmy Devins: I am sharing time with the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Peter Power, and Deputy Edward O'Keeffe.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Peter Power): Notwithstanding the decisions taken by Government yesterday, my Department will meet its target for spending on overseas development aid, ODA, this year, which is 0.54% of gross national product. We also remain committed to our 2012 target of 0.7% of GNP. Unlike other Departments, ODA spending is linked to GNP rather than year on year expenditure. Accordingly, the Government decisions taken yesterday reflect the realities of slower economic growth. This is the same for all countries that link ODA to GNP.

It is worth reiterating how great Ireland's contribution is to fighting world poverty. Ireland is the sixth largest donor in *per capita* terms. Even with the decisions yesterday, spending on ODA this year will amount to €900 million or more than €200 per citizen. This leaves us well ahead of most other European Union member states in terms of the proportion of our GNP allocated to this area. The measures announced yesterday are intended to restore the conditions for strong economic growth and to protect the future of the Irish Aid programme as with other areas of public spending, which is important. We were in a position to expand the programme almost fivefold over the past ten years because of our strong economic performance.

On the wider macro-economic issues, it is very much the duty of our generation of politicians, who were only in school the last time the economy was in free fall in the mid-1980s, not to repeat the mistakes of previous years. We should never return to borrowing to meet current expenditure. That would inevitably lead to borrowing to pay for borrowing to pay for interest on borrowing. Every penny paid in tax in the 1980s was used to service interest on our national debt. We can never go back to that and it is important to bear that in mind throughout this debate.

The spending priorities will remain as set out in the White Paper on Irish Aid. Assistance to sub-Saharan Africa will continue to be the top priority, as will measures to counter climate change and rising food prices, investment in education, health, the fight against HIV-AIDS, good governance and efforts to promote gender equality. These are issues that have the most impact on those least able to cope. Adjustments totalling €45 million will be made across the programme in such a way as to minimise the impact on any one area. The continuity of our programmes will be maintained, but funding timeframes in some cases will be extended and disbursement rates modified. I am particularly concerned that funding provided to Irish non-governmental organisations and our missionaries should be protected so that no reduction would be made in their allocations this year.

More taxpayers' money will continue to be channelled through the Irish Aid programme this year. This funding will allow us to continue to make a difference to the lives of people in developing countries. Within the last two weeks, I have seen how Ireland is considered a leader in the field. Our taxpayers' money is saving countless lives throughout the world. Two weeks ago I visited Malawi, a programme country where we have invested in increasing agricultural productivity among small holdings. More than 400 villages and tens of thousands of people have had their lives changed immeasurably by the money generously provided by Irish taxpayers. These real and tangible benefits have improved lives immeasurably. In terms of quality and quantity, the money provided by taxpayers is effective and is being used for its intended purpose. How much time is left?

Acting Chairman: I am somewhat confused, as there are three speakers in the slot — the Minister of State, Deputy Devins, the Minister of State, Deputy Peter Power, and Deputy Edward O'Keeffe. Each speaker has eight minutes.

Deputy Peter Power: I am determined to maximise the impact of recent initiatives, such as the hunger task force and the rapid response initiative. Our target is challenging but realistic. While the precise details of how these savings will be achieved is still to be determined, the Minister, Deputy Martin, and I are confident that the Department will be able to make them without impacting on the delivery of frontline services to the public.

Deputy Edward O'Keeffe: I will speak in support of the Government motion. Since 1998, our economy has been one of the most successful in the West and experienced growth until 2006. However, we are now the meat in the sandwich — the US economy entered a recession due to extensive subprime lending and the failure of its construction industry, and the UK economy has encountered difficulties and its construction industry is in trouble. Difficulties lie ahead for us.

I am critical of the Central Bank in its role as protector of the banking system. Due to the Standards in Public Office Commission, I must declare my position as a shareholder in many major banks. I got into trouble in this respect previously.

Deputy Billy Kelleher: Is it a liability for the Deputy now?

Deputy Edward O’Keeffe: I do not feed any meat or bonemeal now. The Central Bank claims that it has used stress testing. When I was stress tested recently, I was found to be a perfect candidate. The Central Bank lost control of the banking system. Many foreign banks have entered the island and some people were unhappy with the performance of Irish banks, but competition and a liberal approach to lending have left us in this serious crisis. Many banks will be short of capital. Day after day, I meet people who require further capital and must borrow if their businesses are to be successful, but the capital is not present. Liquidity in the banking system is an issue that is causing a crisis for the Government, which cannot do anything in this regard.

A number of corrective actions can be taken in one respect. We must not hide from the fact that there is a world recession, particularly in the West. We must consider increasing taxation, borrowing and cutbacks. There are many regulatory systems — the HSE, the Competition Authority and other agencies — with no role to play in this matter. Until recently, we relied on civil servants and Ministers to regulate and run the economy. The cost factor of the public service is an issue. I do not know the exact figure of how many people are employed therein, but I believe it is significant. The Central Bank has played a questionable role.

We have lost out in terms of capital tax. For example, honest, ordinary farmers sold development land on the outskirts of villages and towns for €1 million, developers built walls and sold the same land for €5 million. I know of more than one example in my constituency in which development land originally sold for €1 million subsequently changed hands for €40 million. This situation obtained across the country. The developers paid the same capital gains tax rate as the farmers who received €1 million. This situation is not good enough. We must place a capital gains tax on developments if we are to reduce the economic crisis.

Government policy did not bring the crisis about, given that Fianna Fáil has run the country successfully and ably for decades. One can see where the country has come from. With Deputy Brian Lenihan as the Minister for Finance and given his ability and his success at the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Health and Children and elsewhere, the economy will be put right. A stitch in time saves nine and he will place that stitch in the right place. We will be successful again.

The increasing unemployment rate is just one of the issues that must be addressed. We have lost our manufacturing industry. We must return to reality and examine what has occurred in the various economic sectors. In the past five to ten years, many factories closed because the chief executives of companies who saw the development and construction of houses and apartments as being more lucrative were given large cheques. The salaries of politicians and Ministers have been criticised, but they receive approximately 10% of that received by chief executives. We are moving towards asking for pay freezes and pay controls. How could one expect an ordinary industrial worker to agree to a 2% or 3% reduction when there are people in the private sector who are, via different mechanisms, earning millions of euro, particularly in terms of development?

Share options can make millionaires of a few people. While I am an investor, I believe in equity. Without a proper taxation system, there is no equity, making the poor poorer and the rich richer. Fianna Fáil has never been about that. From Eamon de Valera in the 1930s onwards, it has driven the economy. This side of the House must return to such a policy and I am confident that the Minister for Finance will do so. We must also consider the capital taxation structure, but we have missed the boat. We would have significant funds in the Exchequer had we got the structure right. I have provided examples of land being sold in my constituency.

Unemployment is a hardship on the people. A figure of approximately 200,000 has been cited. We have heard about auctioneers, builders, architects and solicitors letting people go

because they cannot face the challenging times. Due to high costs, Hibernian Insurance's parent company, Aviva, will relocate it to India. However, we did not hear anything when other companies, of which there were many, relocated their administrative staff to India. We must put our house in order and get the cost base right. If we do not do so, the job of the Minister of State with responsibility for labour affairs, Deputy Kelleher, will become untenable. What is wrong in the economy is our cost base. It must be corrected. The people at the top — those I have identified — have a major role to play in this regard because their large salaries and share options are causing jealousy among lower paid people.

We have a job to do and I am confident in the Administration. We have kept our borrowings as low as possible and within the framework of EU regulations. The national development plan has been successful in respect of infrastructure. When I drive from my constituency to Dublin, I can be proud, as can the Minister of State, Deputy Kelleher. We will open another section of that road from Mitchelstown to Cashel on 27 July. This will be a significant step forward in the infrastructure.

Our cost base is wrong and more people will be going to India if this is not corrected.

Acting Chairman: I call Deputy Ring who is sharing with a number of other speakers.

Deputy Michael Ring: I am sharing with Deputies Hogan and Connaughton. We will have seven minutes, six minutes and five minute respectively. I ask the Acting Chairman to tell me when my time is up.

I listened to Deputy Edward O'Keeffe and I want to remind him that in 1996 and 1997, when Fine Gael and Labour were in Government, we handed over this economy to Fianna Fáil with the first surplus in many years——

Deputy Billy Kelleher: The Democratic Left as well.

Deputy Phil Hogan: And Labour now.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Deputy is correct. It was a very good Government. The country was in great shape. Fianna Fáil claimed it created the boom but it has busted the bubble and the economy. Now they are blaming Fine Gael by saying we are talking down the economy. What they want us to say when it is raining is that the sun is shining and they want us to say that Fianna Fáil gave us the fine day.

This Government squandered and does not know if it is a cutback or a saving. If this is a saving, why was it not done during the past ten years? Did we allow every Department and every agency squander away for ten years? If that is the kind of Government we had, it is no wonder this economy is in the state it is in. Those who are going to suffer will be the sick, the weak, the old and people with mental illness. It has started already with cutbacks in my constituency. The Mayo mental health service has been cut back, the home care package is gone and enhanced subvention is gone. Now they are talking about reducing the home help service and they cannot provide a bed in hospitals or in nursing homes for people who are sick. The weak will be the first to be hit by the cutbacks. Why do we not start at the top with the millionaires? Why do we not target the people who spend six months in this country, come back for the all-Irelands and the race meetings yet do not pay tax in this country? Instead we start with the weak, the sick and the old.

I agree with Deputy O'Keeffe; Fianna Fáil has lost its way, but not today, nor yesterday. They lost their way many years ago because they spent too much time at the Galway races and in Leopardstown, Punchestown and at all these race meetings because these people meant

[Deputy Michael Ring.]

more to them than the grass roots and the ordinary people of Ireland. They forget about the people who put them there for the past 20 years.

Deputy Edward O’Keefe: The Deputy accepts my views so he might join me.

Deputy Michael Ring: I would if he were independent enough to come with me because I believe I am the only Independent in this House.

I want to ask a few questions of the Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív, as I am spokesperson on community, rural and Gaeltacht affairs, and I hope he will answer them. What is the position about decentralisation to Mayo? Will it go ahead? An agreement has been made about a site. Has the site been purchased and will the building be constructed? I will be happy if it goes ahead and if not, I will have things to say.

What cutbacks will there be in that Department because it represents rural Ireland? Deputy Flynn will agree with me. We both met the National Roads Authority and Iarnród Éireann. The NRA will not forget meeting me today because I spelled it out for them. It has let us down with the N5 and the N26.

The west has no developments that compare to those on the east coast. This is the third round of infrastructure funding which the east and south coasts have received but in the west we have not been given the necessary infrastructure since the foundation of the State. I come from Westport and Deputy Flynn is also well acquainted with it and she is very welcome there. I would like her to start shouting a bit more about the N5 which was ready to commence in 1997 but now it has been decided to design a new road. In 20 years the Deputy may still be here but I will not be and that road will not be ready. This is what I told the NRA today. I am asking the NRA and the Government to make this road a priority because it is necessary infrastructure. We need that infrastructure and it must be put in place if Westport, Castlebar and the county towns are to develop.

Gaelscoil na Cruaiche is waiting for the Minister for Education and Science to announce funding but nothing has happened. The school is in temporary accommodation and this is the third move the school has made and it is not fair to children who must wait. Now that there is a downturn they will probably have to wait another few years and the same applies to Bonniclon national school. The planning has been completed and it is waiting for funding to be approved.

I ask the Government not to make the same mistakes as in the past. I refer to what action Departments should take to make savings. I put down a parliamentary question to all Departments requesting their expenditure on programme managers, consultants and advertising. I ask Deputy Hogan to note that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has 2,239 mobile phones but when one rings the Department, one cannot get anyone behind any phone. It goes to Mr. and Mrs Voicemail. The person is not there but they will not hand out the mobile phone number of the person and yet there are 2,239 mobile phones in the Department. A total of €950,000 was spent last year on mobile phones in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food while schemes such as REPS and payments to farmers are being discontinued all over the country because they are over-regulated.

I have dealt with the old, the sick and the weak. It is time to look at the wastage in every Department with expenditure on consultants and reports. Last week I raised with the Tánaiste and the new Minister of State, Deputy Curran, the publication of lovely booklets with photographs dealing with drugs. Someone is making a fortune out of printing them but people put them in the bin when they are delivered to homes and taxpayers are paying for them.

It is time a decision was made about e-voting. The Minister should announce that there will be no e-voting and he should get rid of all the stored machines and save the money being paid for storage of these machines. The machines could be distributed to schools to educate children about politics and to show them how to vote. That would at least give some value to them but they should no longer be in storage.

This Government has probably been the greatest waster since the foundation of the State. We are in crisis and there is no point blaming the Opposition or the people. The Government did not take corrective action on the building industry even though it was warned three years' ago by Deputies Hogan and Bruton, Fine Gael and the Labour Party, that they needed to take action. We all said this economy was built on the building industry and that we would have a problem when it dried up. We need to do something now to revitalise it. The banks give the umbrella on the fine day and they take it back on the wet day.

Acting Chairman: I am very reluctant to interrupt the Deputy but time has expired.

Deputy Michael Ring: The Government has got us into this mess and it must make decisions to get us out of the mess.

Deputy Phil Hogan: I wish to say a few words on this motion and to acknowledge the confirmation by Government in the announcement of its package of measures yesterday that it has taken 11 years to blow the boom. It ignored all warnings from the IMF, the Central Bank and the National Competitiveness Council that there was a problem on the horizon with jobs and the construction industry. I agree with Deputy O'Keeffe that there should have been a financial framework under the auspices of the Minister for Finance to ensure the construction industry did not become such a dominant feature in the economic welfare of the State that we would inevitably be in difficulty when the housing market softened. Nobody could predict what has happened but we could certainly have introduced anticipatory policy initiatives that might have ensured a softer landing.

What is disappointing about the package of measures announced by the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance is that it provides no economic stimulus to deal with the harsh reality of such a precipitative and speedy deterioration in the construction industry. That deterioration has had a significant impact on the Exchequer finances as a result of declining capital gains tax, stamp duty, VAT and excise duty receipts. The State benefited by as much as €100,000 from the sale of individual properties in recent years. This source of funding provided for the development of services in many other areas.

The Government has not addressed the extent of the current difficulties in so far as it has professed satisfaction at the increasing prevalence of negative equity. It is satisfied that no initiative is required to help people on to the first rung of the property ladder through reform of the social and affordable housing schemes. The capping of local authority borrowing for capital programmes at €200 million by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will mean a reduction in services and the scrapping of many of the projects that were promised. In the case of projects to meet local infrastructural needs, for example, an allocation of €10 million or €12 million in the past was often supplemented by the local authority by the same amount to ensure the project was viable. That additional €10 million or €12 million which was generally heretofore sanctioned by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will no longer be available to the local authorities and, therefore, these projects will not proceed. This will have an impact on essential infrastructural development in respect of which promises were made last year before the election.

[Deputy Phil Hogan.]

The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Gormley, must reduce payroll costs by 3%. That 3% will have to be taken from the local government fund, which will impact on services such as libraries, roadworks, footpath repairs and so on. I welcome the abolition of consultancies, public relations agencies and quangos, of which an additional 260 were created in the past seven or eight years. These quangos and consultancies were always a waste of money. That funding could have been used to provide essential services throughout the public services. It is only now, however, with its back against the wall, that the Government has decided to get rid of some of its friends in these agencies.

The Minister, Deputy Gormley, says he must achieve cutbacks of €48.3 million, but he has not outlined in detail where those cutbacks will be made. Like other Members, I suggest he begins with the e-voting machines which were purchased at a cost of €51.3 million and have accrued storage costs of €2.8 million in the past four years. To dispose of those obsolete machines would be a popular and meaningful way of yielding savings. The Minister has acknowledged they will not be used in the local and European elections next year — it is clear they will never be used — so why are they being stored at enormous cost to the taxpayer when available funding is much reduced?

Much of our prosperity was built on the construction industry. In addition, we have moved from a position where we had a low rate of personal debt to a situation of high individual indebtedness. We will hear many difficult personal stories in the coming years. This situation has been exacerbated by the lack of Government action on competitiveness and other issues. Many people are struggling to meet loan and mortgage repayments as they grapple with the nine interest rate increases that have occurred in the past two years. Professional jobs will no longer be available to the same extent as in recent years. The housing market is at a standstill and there is no economic stimulus to rectify that. As Minister for Finance, the Taoiseach was stubborn about reforming stamp duty. He said he has no problem with the fall in house prices and the decline in construction activity. He acknowledged that the housing boom was unsustainable but did nothing about it for the four years he was Minister for Finance.

These proposals represent a confession of failure by the Minister for Finance. This package of measures is a clear indication that he has delivered on the low-hanging fruit. However, the devil will be in the detail in regard to decentralisation, the 3% reduction in payroll costs and so on. A commitment has been given that frontline services will not be affected, but we are already seeing the effects on those services with cutbacks, for example, in many health and education programmes. A tightening of the purse strings, with the resultant impact on frontline services, has been apparent since last January or February.

All the elements of this package point to wilful inadequacy. I did not hear the Minister, Deputy Gormley, say whether he will withdraw the funding of €15 million for the climate change promotion package, which is an advertising contract for the purposes of promoting himself rather than explaining the important aspects of climate change. People are aware of the importance of taking action on this issue. It does not require €15 million to tell them that. What is needed now is action to resolve these issues.

The Fine Gael Party, through our spokesperson, Deputy Bruton, has put forward constructive proposals in recent days to deal with some of those issues. However, it is only right that we should expose the failure of the Government to reform public services. It neglected to do so through the benchmarking process and it missed another opportunity yesterday by not going far enough in many areas.

Deputy Paul Connaughton: It seems we have gone from riches to rags, the opposite direction to what one would desire, and from imprudent spending to hair shirt misery in just six months. The deterioration in the public finances has necessitated a move from the culture of immoral recklessness where problems were overcome by throwing more funds at them, without due attention to value for money. That is where the problem lies. Ministers were cock of the walk in this House in recent years, with phoney forecasts such as the decentralisation programme. I will never forget the day the former Minister for Finance, Mr. Charlie McCreevy, let fly in the middle of a budget on his wonderful proposals for decentralisation. It was an act of sabotage which gave decentralisation a bad name forever as a result of the way the initiative was handled. It should be a source of shame to the Government that it has tarnished what is an absolutely positive concept by the manner of its delivery.

One can only imagine what might have been achieved if moneys expended in recent years had been managed more wisely. The road-building programme is an obvious example. A price tag of €6.6 billion was placed on the inter-urban project four or five years ago, but it ended up costing €16 billion. Even allowing for inflation, €6 billion or €7 billion could surely have been saved if there had been any degree of effective management. That €6 billion or €7 billion could have been used, for example, to upgrade the N17 and N18 and construct the Tuam health campus and the Tuam bypass. Despite the protestations of the Minister for Transport, we can have no doubt that the verb “pause” will feature prominently in the coming months. Projects will be “paused” throughout the State.

The Taoiseach outlined this package of measures because he had no choice but to do so. He was brought screeching to this point because something had to be done. He introduced it in a clever way because many people will have responded to the proposal for a 3% payroll cut with the conviction that it will not affect them. However, when these cutbacks are implemented, we will all feel the impact. To achieve the saving of €1 billion next year which the Taoiseach has said is necessary, somebody will have to endure a significant amount of pain. If the economy deteriorates further before the end of the year, there may be a shortfall of €2 billion or €3 billion. Anybody who has a part-time job or is employed in a temporary capacity is on thin ice. Many people are up to their necks in debt through the credit card system and there is no doubt that there will be misery as a result. Only this time last year, the Government was talking about 4% growth, but it is now less than 0%. I had hoped it would be otherwise but that is the way it is going and against that background many people will be hurt.

The building sector has been rattled. It was obvious three or four years ago, however, that a number of people had become wealthy at the expense of thousands of young couples who will pay through the nose for the enrichment of those fat cats. Unfortunately, the service industries are now being hit, which is something the two Ministers opposite know a lot about. Confidence has gone out of the domestic market, while people back away from buying furniture and other hardware. In recent years, our economy was built on services but we have a problem when the service industry begins to dip. I sincerely hope that for everyone's sake the situation is not as bad as it looks. In years past, no matter what the problem was, the Government knew the goose would continue to lay golden eggs. It never thought the goose would die, but she did.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I wish to share time with Deputy Beverley Flynn and Deputy Frank Fahey.

Acting Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy John Gormley: I welcome the opportunity of contributing to this debate on foot of announcements by the Minister for Finance on the measures agreed by the Government to

[Deputy John Gormley.]

take action in addressing our public finances. Yesterday, the Taoiseach made a particularly apt comment when he said:

While we must not overstate the difficulties, equally we must not understate the necessity for decisive action. We must act responsibly to secure the long-term future of our economy and our people.

I agree with the Taoiseach's succinct analysis and the Government has made decisive interventions to address and manage the pressures on our public finances. Our tax revenues are significantly lower than expected and it is incumbent on the Government to tailor planned expenditure within the resources available in a manner that contains the emerging pressures.

The adjustments that have been announced by the Government are measured, appropriate, proportionate and targeted in a manner that minimises the impacts on frontline public services that we are delivering in the current year. It is to be acknowledged, however, that we are in a period of change from sustained economic growth to more challenging conditions nationally and globally. Higher energy costs, tighter credit and economic conditions internationally are having an inescapable impact on our ability to sustain domestic growth. This is a challenge we face, however, and the Government has moved in a decisive way. Corrective action is needed now and it will carry through into the budgetary position for 2009. Taking action now to curb public expenditure lays a sounder foundation on which public spending in 2009 can be better managed within the resources available.

It is my responsibility as Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to oversee the spending of over €3 billion in current and capital expenditure. This is a substantial public expenditure and I assure the House that we will continue to implement our key programmes as vigorously and effectively as ever. My Department's capital expenditure of €2.233 billion will be reduced by €40 million this year. There are some capital areas where expenditure has been less than expected in the first half of the year or where capital spending has not begun as in the case of the Gateways innovation fund. Rather than unspent capital being available to me to carry forward into 2009, as is normally allowed under the multi-annual capital arrangements, this amount is to be returned to the Exchequer. None of this is being taken from the local authority housing construction or the water services investment programmes. These are key infrastructural areas for economic development and environmental protection.

As regards current expenditure, the provision of €964 million is being reduced by €8.3million for 2008. Essentially this reduction is focused on achieving more effective administration and I am reviewing various current provisions to achieve this level of saving overall. I accept that we have to find greater efficiencies in the way we operate and this will be a challenge for my Department and the agencies that operate under it. There will have to be new discipline in managing administration and no area is immune from retrenchment because expenditure reduction will have to carry through into 2009 and subsequent years. This will certainly cause discomfort for current practice. Tough choices will have to be made but they will be based on prudent judgment.

My Department plays a pivotal role in framing policies and delivering a wide range of programmes that impinge on the lives of citizens across the length and breadth of the country. The major programmes are delivered mainly through the local government system but the Department also has a critical role in delivering on key measures. Our overarching objective is to ensure that the appropriate frameworks are in place to progress sustainable development and to foster a local government sector that is capable of high quality service delivery across a diverse agenda. In practical terms, this means we must provide for good planning and balanced

regional development, ensure that the appropriate infrastructure is in place to deliver quality water supplies and improved waste management practices. We must continue to provide for a broad range of housing needs as well as using the resources available to us efficiently and effectively.

Nowhere is the test of environmental sustainability greater than in relation to climate change, which is much more than an environmental challenge in the traditional sense. It threatens the world as we know it and the future of people everywhere. We know we have a relatively short time to act decisively. While the Kyoto Protocol fell far short of an effective solution, it represents an important first step on the international response to climate change. This is what we are trying to do not just concerning the Kyoto Protocol, but also the post-Kyoto situation. As I said at today's leadership forum on climate change, I am confident that we will have a binding agreement in Copenhagen in 2009.

In presenting my first carbon budget last year, I said it marked the beginning of a new era, one in which climate change moves to the heart of Government decision-making. It puts our responsibilities to tackle climate change on an equal footing with our responsibilities to manage the economy. That is real progress on which we will build to make an effective transition to a low-carbon society. It is absolutely essential therefore that any investment decisions are taken in light of our international climate change commitments. That was part of the Government's decision announced yesterday by the Minister for Finance. I was very glad when I heard it.

We have ramped up our performance, moving forward in the first six months or so of this Government's term, with regard to vehicle taxation, building standards and energy standards for lighting. We will measure the impact of climate measures in presenting the second carbon budget later this year.

My responsibilities include heritage matters and I am pleased that substantially increased funding is available this year for the programme of work undertaken by my Department's national parks and wildlife service. Over the past 20 years, Ireland has experienced an unprecedented period of growth and development that has seen us narrowing the historic development gap with our western European neighbours. Substantial population growth, large increases in our housing stock, major expansion in transport infrastructure, changed farming practice, more intensive development and climate change have placed increasing pressures on our natural heritage. The issue here is sustainability. Increased emphasis on heritage protection will ensure that as Ireland continues to develop, the quality of our environment will not be compromised. Investment of the kind we are making is vital to safeguard our architectural heritage and the increased funding, which the Government is providing this year, underlines our commitment in this area. I am confident the package of funding measures we are undertaking is encouraging an integrated and multidisciplinary approach to built heritage conservation as a whole.

Local authorities will spend over €10 billion in 2008, supporting increased investment in housing, water and waste services, national and non-national roads, and an ever-expanding range of other services. Between capital and current funding, my Department will contribute more than €3 billion of this figure. Deputies opposite who have expressed concerns about that can be assured that the funding for major infrastructural projects will continue.

Deputy Beverley Flynn: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I welcome the corrective action that has been taken by the Government in the last few days to bring the public finances into line. Public confidence is critical and we have seen great improvements over the last 15 years. As a percentage of our GDP, national debt was almost 100% in 1991, while in 1997 it was 64% and 25% in 2007. Debt interest absorbs 4% of our tax revenue

[Deputy Beverley Flynn.]

compared with 27% in 1991. As an economy, we are certainly in a much stronger position to cope with the current downturn that we are facing.

The Government is carrying out a review of its capital programme, and it must focus on areas that benefit the country economically, socially, educationally and regionally. I agree with Members of the Opposition that we need to stimulate growth in our economy. In particular, it is vitally important that we continue with the schools building programme. This is critical because the programme represents a lot of small projects that are strategically placed around the country. They mainly involve local builders and keep many local construction workers in jobs. It is necessary infrastructure and it represents an investment in our future. I urge the Minister for Finance to ensure that the Department of Education and Science has the necessary funding in place to enable the schools building programme to continue.

I also think it is important to front-load spending from the national development plan on affordable housing. House prices have been reduced, and in many counties it is now cheaper to buy a house on the open market than under the affordable housing scheme. It is important to free up money at this stage when housing is cheap, and these houses could be located in towns and villages across the country.

However, the key issue is to turn the tide on sentiment in Ireland. It is currently very negative, especially in the property market and construction. Representatives from the banks have been before the Joint Committee on Finance and the Public Service and they have said that all is well, and that their loan books are strong. However, the evidence from the marketplace is that banks are effectively closed to new loans. We should get an open statement from the banks on their affairs in order to generate confidence in the economy and the banks themselves. If the banks are in a position to return to lending, we will not need any other message on their confidence in the Irish economy.

The perception is that the banks are not open for new business. This is partially due to the global downturn, but is also due to our own domestic situation. If the banks are in a position to assure the public that they remain strong and represent a good investment, then we will have to look at ways of injecting liquidity into the market. How can we do that at the moment? The banks could sell their mortgage books to third parties to generate capital. We could also look seriously at raising a rights issue through the banks. However, at a time when confidence in the market is low, this would have to be underwritten by the National Treasury Management Agency. If this were to happen, it would bring about the necessary liquidity and free up money in the market that is not there at the present time. It would also represent an opportunity for the NTMA to show confidence in the Irish banking sector. This would have a very positive influence and could create the necessary momentum to turn around the current economic situation.

The Government should look at this proposal seriously. The NTMA is independent and it is important to bring liquidity into the marketplace. There are many people in a position to buy. They are sitting on the fence, possibly because they feel house prices and commercial property might fall further. The reality is that even if they approach the banks in order to enter the sector, the banks simply do not have the money to lend them in the first place.

The Government should also examine a reduction in stamp duty on commercial property as a once-off measure. It could be a 4% reduction for one year. I ask that the Government do this as a stimulus to the market. Stamp duty on UK commercial property is at 3.5% and many Irish investors have gone overseas as it is cheaper to make such investments. This could be done as a specific contained measure for a 12-month period, purely to stimulate growth in the economy.

While it is important to take corrective action, any measures taken on capital spending should be focused on the regions. If projects have to be cut back, I would not like to see projects on the west coast suffer while projects on the east coast move ahead. Any change in capital programmes should be made on a strategic basis so that the economy of the entire country can be kept afloat. I welcome the action taken by the Government, but the banking community and the Government also need to take measures to stimulate growth in the economy.

Deputy Frank Fahey: Our economy is currently experiencing some difficulties, but a sense of perspective is required as we seek to adjust to the changed circumstances. We must acknowledge that the housing market is going through a painful but necessary correction, that conditions in global financial markets are very challenging, that the outlook for our trading partners has deteriorated and that our currency has appreciated markedly on international exchanges. The immediate outlook is difficult and growth this year will be modest by our recent standards, but there is still much for us to be positive about. We should discourage any attempts to talk down the economy. I have little time for the prophets of doom. Now is the time for us to pull together and do our utmost to return the economy to its previous position of high growth.

The measures announced yesterday by the Minister for Finance are designed to ensure that public spending in the current year is managed so that emerging pressures can be accommodated within the planned expenditure level for 2008. It is about laying down a sound strategy for the next few years. This is a period of transition for our economy. We are moving from a time of unparalleled economic growth to a reduced rate of growth. It is worth bearing in mind that our economy is still one of the best performing in the EU. Now is the time for us to lay the groundwork for our economy to take advantage of future upturns in the international market.

Government is about confronting challenges. This particular challenge, as the Taoiseach has made clear, will be managed in a form that will protect the most vulnerable in our society and will minimise the impact on those who are dependent on crucial public services. We all have a role to play in the successful management of this difficult economic period. Compromises will have to be made, but we should keep the long-term view in mind at all times.

Our remarkable economic progress has not been reversed overnight. Talk of Ireland returning to the dark days of the 1980s, when emigration was rife and taxes high, is unhelpful and untrue. Our economy continues to be strong and dynamic. We have a very low level of public debt, which is down from 53% of GDP in 1998 to 25% at the end of 2007, that is 14% in net debt terms. We have very flexible markets, a low burden of taxation, and we have over 2 million people at work. Budget surpluses have been produced in ten of the past 11 years, so the Government's record speaks for itself.

Now is not the time for panic merchants to be espousing messages of negativity. Careful and sensible management of the economy over the last 11 years has positioned us well to weather the current economic downturn. The Government's policy has always been focused on improving the competitiveness of the Irish economy, and that is the most important issue that must be addressed. The indications are the next few years will require corrective action if we are to sail through the choppy waters we are experiencing. The Government will not resort to quick fixes. There will be no borrowing for the time being, no cutbacks in capital investment and no increase in taxes. Capital investment is still a priority for the Government. Prudent and intelligent management of the economy is what is required and is what will be delivered.

We can learn from others' experience. Germany regained its competitiveness over the past decade by containing wage growth and inflation, resulting in a boom in German exports. The Opposition is promoting policies reminiscent of the Italian experience. In Italy, wage settlements have not properly reflected economic realities in that country. Wage growth has been

[Deputy Frank Fahey.]

too rapid and, as a result, Italy's exports have performed poorly. Ireland needs to follow the German model rather than the Italian one.

I disagree with my colleague and good friend, Deputy Beverley Flynn, on the housing market. Making an intervention in the housing market by lowering stamp duty or other short-term measures will not solve its problems. The Japanese Government tried to prop up an ailing property market for years with the result that its recession lasted ten years. The housing market must be allowed to bottom out. It will be difficult, particularly with failures in the construction industry, but that is part of the economic cycle. For the Government to intervene and not allow the housing market bottom out would be a disaster. We must hold our nerve.

There will be people in difficulty but one of the silver linings is that house prices will fall over the next six to 12 months. It gives an opportunity and incentive for first-time buyers to get on the market. I am equally confident the housing market will come back and the market will grow again.

We must all work together to ride through the economic turbulence we are experiencing. Our economy is one of the most robust in the EU and, thanks to prudent management, will be in a strong position to take advantage of any future upturns.

In my 26 years as a Member, there have been two defining moments in politics. The first was the policy pursued by the then Minister for Finance, Ray MacSharry, after the 1987 general election. He decided to stick to his guns and bring in the hard medicine. The second was the Tallaght strategy of Alan Dukes, then leader of Fine Gael, in which he decided, in the interest of the country, the only way forward was to control public expenditure. I hope we will see that type of responsibility from the current Opposition.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: Deputy Fahey can dream on.

Deputy Frank Fahey: I can guarantee the Opposition will gain more votes by taking that courageous and responsible approach.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Deputy Fahey should start pretending he is in the Opposition.

Deputy Jack Wall: I wish to share time with Deputies Jan O'Sullivan, Shortall and Kathleen Lynch.

Acting Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Deputy Jack Wall: When debating an economic downturn, the obvious course of action is to plan our way out of it. There is no use in being negative when faced with the economic statistics we have. Some of the suggestions to tackle the downturn by the Taoiseach in the past several days, however, do not augur well for forward planning. When it is proposed to save €10 million from FÁS apprenticeships, it is difficult to see this as a thought-out process. Having an apprentice's background myself in the good days when many were offered by the Irish Sugar Company, Bord na Móna and the ESB, I know there is a need to positively plan for future industrial development. If this funding is taken away from current FÁS apprenticeships, it will be a negative approach to industrial development and erasing unemployment.

Last week, Mr. Rody Molloy, a fellow Kildare man and chief executive of FÁS, explained to the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment his plans to negotiate the completion of apprenticeship courses for those unfortunate apprentices in the building trade who have been laid off. It must be devastating for a youngster who was proud of being, say an electrician, to believe FÁS would look after him with a placement. I have heard the developers

and others claim the upturn will come. However, the tradesmen necessary to ensure the upturn happens are being ignored by the Government's proposal to save funding in this area. I hope the Minister of State, Deputy McGuinness, will argue for the importance of having tradesmen for the next economic phase and industrial development. Unfortunately, the Taoiseach has not seen this and this negative approach does not augur well for us planning our way out of this recession.

Small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs, are vitally important to every town, village and city. They have always been a solid source of employment. Some counties have never experienced the massive job creation by one factory. It was the SMEs that provided employment in those areas.

In Kildare South, IDA Ireland acquired four sites for industrial development in the past 30 years. A farmer is grazing cattle on one since 1973, an absolute disgrace. The local football club used one of the other sites but the authority tried to move it on. For the remaining sites, IDA Ireland sold them to the local authorities and the county enterprise board not at the price it paid for them 30 years ago but at today's prices. It wanted to get the profit out of its own failures.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: We have heard a terrible abuse of the English language over the past several days. We have heard terms such as "adjustments" and "corrections". Deputy Fahey used the term "a time of transition". The Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, has described the cutting of €144.35 million of her budget as budgetary conciliation measures. They should be talking about cuts, because that is exactly what we are faced with. They are standing by watching this as if it were an act of God, as if it was like thunder and lightning that they could do absolutely nothing about. What we need is leadership, and sadly we have not had it. The economy was handed over to this Government in perfectly good health, with 1,000 jobs per week being created. It rolled on the crest of that wave and all that was made in the construction industry — much of it went back to its friends. There was no sense that it needed to intervene at some stage and actually lead the country. At some stage a hard or a soft landing was going to happen and matters were not always going to be quite so good. There was a need to plan and do the type of things my colleague, Deputy Jack Wall, has just talked about as regards apprenticeships. There was a need to transfer investment from property to, for example, small industry and innovative ideas. I can cite the example of two young men in my constituency, the Collison brothers, one of whom won the Young Scientist exhibition, who had to go to Silicon Valley to get somebody to invest in their ideas in relation to the Internet.

We have had an absolute paucity of ideas and leadership from Government, and now the weak and afflicted are paying for the consequences. I want to quote from the Fianna Fáil manifesto of 21 years ago for the 1987 general election. I do not know whether the Minister of State, Deputy John McGuinness, remembers it.

Deputy John McGuinness: I do.

Deputy Jan O'Sullivan: The words were: "Health cuts hurt the old, the sick and the handicapped". We would use the term "disabled" now instead of "handicapped". That is exactly what health cuts do, and the Department of Health and Children has borne the brunt of this, despite what was said yesterday to the effect that somehow or other health and education would be protected. Precisely the opposite has happened. The Minister of Education and Science said today that the 3% cut would apply to his Department after all. The Minister for Health and Children has admitted that €144.35 million will be cut from her budget. A very small part of it

[Deputy Jan O’Sullivan.]

will be cuts in advertising, consultancy and so on. The bulk of the cuts will affect precisely those three categories of people, the old, the sick and disabled. My colleague, Deputy Kathleen Lynch, will talk about what is happening to the disabled. However, some €110 million was set aside on foot of the fair deal legislation concerning the elderly and practically all of that — €85 million — is going back into the Department and the HSE to be spent on God knows what, but certainly not on the elderly.

We have, in that context, people who cannot afford to pay for nursing homes and cannot get public beds. In some cases they are in acute hospitals, where they should not be, when other people need those beds. They are at their wits end and should not have to worry at that stage in their lives about the type of things they are concerned about. If it is not too late, I again urge that this money be used to alleviate that level of hardship.

There are other savings which we are told are coming from the development funding in the budget. That money was identified for things such as care of the elderly, the disability sector, the roll out of cancer services, national screening services, radiation oncology and immunisation. Are we to see these things cut and no effort to bring about any type of proper planning as regards what should be done about the HSE? It was set up with an enormous bureaucracy and the Minister, Deputy Harney, explained this last week. The entire edifice was put in place, and then she said, “Now is the time to take out the bits we do not need”. That is like building a 50-room house and then deciding that only six are needed. To take out the rooms is a crazy idea. The HSE should have been properly set up from the outset.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: In the few minutes available I want to talk about what are, basically, cutbacks in the area of social and family affairs. The Minister concerned, in effect, pre-empted Government announcements last week as regards these cutbacks or savings, when she said there would be no cuts in frontline services in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Patently, that is not the case. When one examines the details that have started to trickle out, and the Minister’s contribution last night, one can see that cutbacks are taking place within the Department of Social and Family Affairs and these are affecting frontline services, contrary to what the Minister had given us to understand.

For example, five new family resource centres will not now be approved this year, in spite of the fact that they had been promised for some time. There will be no expansion of staff in the existing centres, as promised under the national development plan. The personal advocacy service for people with disabilities has been postponed indefinitely. If these are not the most vulnerable and weakest people, I do not know who are.

There is an increasing problem as regards family breakdown and problems associated with children in general. Most communities are crying out for greater supports for family support services and more funding to be provided so early intervention can take place and problems are not left to become almost insurmountable before any State agency gets involved. There is a crying need across the country for improved investment in these services, yet they are to be cut back, in line with yesterday’s announcement. People with disabilities have been campaigning and fighting for a personal advocacy service for many years. They thought they were going to get it eventually this year. Indeed, just last week on Question Time, the Minister told me funding had been secured and that the service was going ahead. Apart from the extreme disappointment at the Government’s failure to put the service in place as promised, I am interested to know what will happen as regards the director of this service, recently recruited. That person was to have staff provided over the coming months, but this is not going to happen. So what will the director be doing? The person, I know, has been recruited. Has he or she been appointed yet and what is his or her role?

We see cutbacks in other areas, without doubt. There has been an extraordinary delay in the proposed expansion of services to lone parents, for example, which are desperately needed to facilitate them in moving from welfare to work. They need help in identifying what their education and training needs are to enable them to apply for employment. This seems to have fallen victim to the Government's cuts because so much was promised as regards the document it launched some time ago, entitled Supports for Lone Parents. However, there is no funding for it this year it seems, and people will have to wait yet again before they have an opportunity to move into employment.

The focus of the Government should be on trying to ensure there is growth in employment, not cutting public service jobs. The latest unemployment figures show astonishing increases right across the country, with 54,000 extra people signing on since June last year and 67,000 since May last year. The most recent live register figures show an increase in all local social welfare offices since May 2007, indicating major problems right across the country, particularly in those commuter areas surrounding Dublin and in some Border counties.

We must ensure the people who become unemployed today are not among the long-term unemployed next year and in future years. That is why it is so important to ensure those services required to provide retraining for people are put in place before they get deeper into debt. We know that people attending MABS have been presenting with higher levels of debt over the last couple of years. Those people are most vulnerable, for example, if one partner in a couple loses a job and they are already overstretched as regards their mortgage. Very quickly they can get into a very difficult debt situation. That is the focus on which the Government should be concentrating.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: As Deputy Jan O'Sullivan has said, the English language has taken a battering over the last two days. I have never heard cuts defined in so many different ways, and with words that we normally do not associate with withdrawal of funding. We spent six years waiting for the Disability Bill to be published and it was then withdrawn because of objections from the disability sector. When it was eventually introduced we spent six months going through page after page of amendments, meeting delegations from all the various groups, bearing in mind that the disability sector covers a wide area. We consistently asked during all the debates that funding be ring-fenced for the sector and that future embargos would not apply to it. At the time we were told there would be no cutbacks and that there never be another embargo. As the disability sector was starting from such a low base, we consistently asked that it be protected from any embargo on the recruitment of staff. We were told there was no need for such a provision, that we should not worry about it and that capacity would be built in the sector. The first people to fall off the end of bench when things got a little tighter were those in the disability sector.

Last week I asked the Minister of State, Deputy Moloney, about the €50 million that was earmarked for disability services for this year. We were told in no uncertain terms on two different nights that the €50 million was protected and that it would be rolled out within the next ten days. We heard today that only €33 million of that funding will be rolled out. The excuse given is that as we are half way through the year, we could not possibly expect to get €50 million funding; that funding was supposed to be only for one year. By virtue of the sheer location of the population, the bulk of that €33 million will have to be spent in the Dublin and Leinster area. What are those in the rest of the country to do?

Last week I met representatives of the Centre for Independent Living in Cork. They had put in place a service system of personal assistants. Personal assistants do not have medical training but they have other training. Their training is in respect of the individual who needs their help. They get people out of bed, wash them, feed them, take them out, take them to

[Deputy Kathleen Lynch.]

work, drive them on holidays and ensure they can do, in so far as possible, the activities we take for granted. This service is equivalent of our having a helper and a carer in circumstances when we would need one. The funding for that service in Cork was pulled; it was never given, therefore, it did not exist. Some €220,000 was needed to maintain the service and last week they were assured they would get it, but this week that is not so certain.

When one reflects on what has been achieved in this economy in recent years and on those who contributed to achieving that, one will note that the people who contributed most are those who will be hit first. They are various areas that need to be considered in this respect. We have heard that some €85 million has been withdrawn from the fair deal scheme, but such funding was never given. I am not certain how such funding can be called a saving if it was not given in the first instance.

How can we possibly stand over a situation where a woman is living in a nursing home, the cost of which is €950 per week, and she is in receipt of a subvention payment of only €140 per week? How can the Government stand over that? How can it stand over a situation where because of one's age, one is treated differently in this country from other people? One does not suddenly lose one's citizenship on reaching the age of 65. Someone someday is going to take a case about this and that person will be successful. We would not say to a 30 year old who became chronically ill and was in need of long-term care that he or she had to sell his or her house to obtain such care. We would not dream of saying that——

Deputy Jack Wall: Hear, hear.

Deputy Kathleen Lynch: ——but we say it to the elderly. What is being done is a disgrace. It is fundamentally wrong and immoral. That is what is happening in this country because we now care more about developers than we do about our citizens.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy John McGuinness): I wish to share time with Deputies O'Connor and Kennedy.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: That is agreed.

Deputy John McGuinness: I wish first to extend my sympathy to the Brennan family on the death of Séamus Brennan, a colleague with whom I worked in Fianna Fáil headquarters when I participated in the 1977 general election campaign. I learned a good deal from him at that time. I found him to be a very compassionate and decent man. He will be a great loss to his family and to the political system.

I listened carefully to the four Deputies who spoke before me. I listened even more carefully to Deputy Bruton, whom I have heard interviewed on many television programmes on the debate on the economy. I respect greatly what he has said. I served with him on the Committee on Finance and the Public Service. I have respect for his point of view and for the manner in which he puts it across. It is both constructive and informed. As much as I would learn from the Opposition, particularly from colleagues such as Deputy Bruton, I hope they will learn from the process in which we are now engaged and that we can share our views in a constructive way.

I could also raise many of the issues, raised by my four Labour Party colleagues, namely, specific personal issues with which one cannot argue because they touch one's emotions and one probably has experienced some of these issues in one's family. However, that must be put in context. First and foremost, I wish to advise those present and my colleagues in Cabinet, the junior Ministers and the backbenchers in government that it is hugely important that the Government ensures that those who are less well off, the marginalised and the elderly are

looked after in terms of what is currently happening and the changes that are taking place in the economy. That must be uppermost in the minds of those who are doing the adjustments and in the minds of the staff, whether they be in the HSE, local government or the various Departments. That must be not only their priority, but there must be a set piece beyond which they cannot go.

To take up a comment on the English language made by one of my colleagues who has left the Chamber, I do not care what this process is called. I do not care whether it is called a U-turn, a cut, a recession or whether it is dressed up or dressed down. The fact is we are at this point and, regardless of what language one uses, this must be addressed. I take the view that what gets counted gets done. Therefore, we will start from that point.

If one faces a crisis in one's business, one would assess the business finances and the delivery of the service to the customers and make adjustments and the necessary cuts and decisions to ensure that business stays afloat and the customers are retained. What is different about that and what we are doing today? I suggest there is no difference. We are being prudent in setting aside provision for what must be done, namely the protection of the marginalised, the infirm and elderly.

Deputy Damien English: What about the nursing homes?

Deputy John McGuinness: The economy must be managed in a prudent manner. We are now living in different economic circumstances. What the Deputies opposite have failed to accept and I have heard all them debate——

Deputy Damien English: I have not made my contribution yet.

Deputy John McGuinness: They fail to accept that there should a difference in the management of the economy when a barrel of oil is \$142 as against when it was \$50 a barrel.

Deputy Damien English: We fully accept that.

Deputy John McGuinness: The Deputies opposite do not accept it because their colleagues have not accepted it.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: What about food prices?

Deputy John McGuinness: The necessary adjustments must be made. We must decide what we will do and we must show leadership. What we have done here in the past few days is set out our stall for the remainder of the year, how the Departments will function and how we will prepare for the budget that must be delivered at the end of this year. In that context, I will not refer to any politician but to business people and use the example of Enterprise Ireland. In the course of 2007 when things were going bad on the global markets, it was able to generate €13 billion worth of exports. It broke all the records it had set to be achieved. While it set the trend and the policy, it was Irish businesses that achieved €13 billion worth of exports. Irish businesses went to that global market and were successful. In the start of the first quarter of this year as they entered the Latin American market, they proved they can perform just as well out there, gaining €15 million worth of business in one trade mission. That is not Fianna Fáil or the Government telling the House that, but Irish business saying it can trade abroad, be successful and competitive and it knows what it is doing. I encourage Enterprise Ireland with those companies to continue to do that because those companies represent 154,000 jobs in the Irish economy, all of whom are paying taxes.

[Deputy John McGuinness.]

The Opposition can say what it likes about developers who made money in the boom time, they also contributed through their taxes. I am not defending them, but a balance needs to be understood. They also paid into every local authority through their charges and gave significant gains to local authorities, which passed those gains on to community projects. They made it worthwhile for the communities that local councillors represent. Maybe we should have caught them much earlier and got much more from them, but they did all that, gave employment and paid their taxes, so let us recognise the contribution they made.

Deputy Damien English: Let us help them.

Deputy John McGuinness: I hope that in the context of Enterprise Ireland and the new arrangement we have with the county enterprise boards, which performed well creating 1,100 jobs in their time——

Deputy Damien English: They are cash starved, and the Minister of State knows it.

Deputy John McGuinness: That is not true.

Deputy Damien English: It is true.

Deputy John McGuinness: I have the figures here.

Deputy Damien English: I also have the figures. I take them regularly.

Deputy John McGuinness: I will be down to see Deputy English's enterprise board very soon and he is welcome to come with me because I would like him to see and recognise at first hand exactly what they are doing.

Deputy Damien English: I hope the Minister of State does that. They are doing a great job. I will go with him. They do a brilliant job.

Deputy John McGuinness: I compliment them on their work. Deputy Wall raised a question on funding for another enterprise board. I sat with the enterprise board section of my Department this morning. I went through the figures and they need to be examined in terms of the measures, draw-down and so on. However, I want to recognise what they have done.

Deputy Damien English: They have done brilliant work; we agree.

Deputy John McGuinness: It costs approximately €7,000 to create a job and 1,100 jobs were created, and they give other supports. Let us recognise what is going on.

Deputy Damien English: I agree with the Minister of State.

Deputy John McGuinness: Not all Opposition Members agree and they do not always say it outside this House so people understand it, so let us be honest about it.

Deputy Damien English: Absolutely not. I complimented them but they need more money. The Minister of State knows that.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy English must allow the Minister of State to speak without interruption.

Deputy John McGuinness: During this year, in spite of how difficult Deputy English says it is, those companies continue to perform. They continue to come in their numbers to the enterprise boards. There is always going to be a case of needing more money and I will continue to address that as best I can in our current economic situation.

Deputy Damien English: I thank the Minister of State.

Deputy John McGuinness: Let us recognise where we are going with it and get back and work with them. Let us also recognise the fact that 55% of those who come to enterprise boards are women creating new companies and jobs.

There was a promotion recently through a mobile unit that went out to different counties. That mobile unit generated 1,000 new queries in the current economic situation. That is not me telling the House, but business people saying the environment we created for them to work in over the last ten to 15 years is working for them. They are able to operate in it, although there are issues on competitiveness which we have to address.

Having done all that for enterprise, the public sector needs to do something. I ask the public sector to adopt the same ISO9000 accreditation businesses have to adopt. There should be a pay freeze in certain sectors among those that can afford it.

Deputy Damien English: Yes, that is in Deputy Bruton's policy.

Deputy John McGuinness: That should go right across the board. We must become more efficient and 10% or another percentage point should be taken off the back office in terms of promotional material and all that goes on there. That is the saving that should be made. If they make a saving over and above that, it should go back to delivering front-line services to their customers. That is the type of imaginative approach we need in the public sector to reform it and make the sector as efficient as the private sector. I am not talking about individuals but the system within which they work. Having said what I said about ISO9000 I ask that all Secretaries General examine that and begin to benchmark themselves in a real way against the private sector.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: I welcome the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this very important debate. It is good to see the future generation of Fine Gael leaders here to support us.

Deputy Damien English: The Deputy can dream on.

Deputy John McGuinness: The lads are not even from Tallaght.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: I have had a very long day. As chairman of the Irish parliamentary friendship group with the Ukraine I had the opportunity to meet the Ukrainian President, Viktor Yushchenko, who is the true hero of the people. I reflected during the day on something he said, which I will paraphrase as follows. If one sat in the Parliament and listened to the various debates one would be afraid to go outside the door because one would think people will not be going about their business, driving their cars, enjoying themselves and going about their normal business.

Deputy Damien English: Deputy O'Connor should open his eyes.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: My eyes are very much open. I am very much on the ground and will not say things I do not want to say. It is very important we do not close down Ireland, that we do not give a totally negative message to the people that Ireland is closing down. The

[Deputy Charlie O'Connor.]

Minister for Finance has already made this point. I have no problem with people making their political points. We are all entitled to do that. However, it is important we inspire confidence.

Deputy Damien English: There was a chance to do that yesterday but it was not done.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: Listening to the Minister of State, Deputy McGuinness, I am reminded of that. Deputy Jack Wall made that point. If I had lots of time I would debate with Deputy English, but as I do not, I will get through my four minutes as best I can.

It is important we understand that with the economy being challenged, a number of issues are important, and one of these is to inspire confidence and ensure investment is still forthcoming, including from abroad, and jobs are being created.

Deputy McGuinness's contribution reminds me that 24 years ago I and other colleagues living in Tallaght got involved in an organisation called Get Tallaght Working which was involved with local enterprise. That organisation is thriving in Tallaght and providing jobs. It is very important that we continue to do that. To balance that, I agree with everything that has been said about the need for all of us to remain loyal to our social inclusion policies and ideals. When the economy was thriving, Deputy Bertie Ahern, my fellow Dubliner, said that when boats are rising one must remember the little boats. This week we must look after the little boats.

Deputy Damien English: We could have told him that.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: Deputy Hanafin's brave statement was correct. It is right——

Deputy Denis Naughten: Deputy O'Connor is provoking the Members on this side of the House.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy will have his opportunity shortly. Deputy O'Connor without interruption.

Deputy Damien English: I will also have only five minutes.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: Will the Leas-Cheann Comhairle give me some of Deputy English's time?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am hoping the Deputy will allow Deputy O'Connor to speak without interruption.

Deputy Charlie O'Connor: I would never give the Leas-Cheann Comhairle trouble, as he well knows. It is very important we support what Deputy Hanafin said, namely, that we look after the disadvantaged, unemployed, elderly and people who need our help at this vulnerable time.

I want to acknowledge that the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Deputy Ó Cúiv, needs our support as he fights for resources. He knows I am a fan of his so he will not mind my saying so. The RAPID programme has been of great benefit to many of our communities, certainly in Dublin South-West and particularly in the Tallaght area. Deputy Curran would want me to say the same about Clondalkin. The Minister should understand that funding is still required for these programmes. The visit by the Minister of State, Deputy Curran, to Tallaght also reminds me that we should be careful that drugs and family support programmes that are required at the best of times are certainly required when times are a little more challenging. It is very important we make that point.

I do not want to be parochial but the Leas-Cheann Comhairle's good friend, Deputy Quinn, was kind enough to mention a school in my constituency, Our Lady's secondary school on Templeogue Road, which will be the subject of a debate on the Adjournment tonight. We could all list all the projects we want, and I would want to support that school and Holy Rosary national school in Ballycragh. The Minister for Education and Science should understand that, as supportive as we on the back benches will be, we must also maintain pressure regarding these very important projects. I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle and look forward to Deputy English's contribution.

Deputy Michael Kennedy: I wish to begin by passing on my condolences to the family of the late Séamus Brennan. He was a marvellous politician and a true gentleman.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important national debate tonight. The situation the Irish economy is now facing is not one for which any one party or individual is responsible. Despite what Opposition Deputies might suggest, the fault does not lie with the Government. Ireland is a small member in an international marketplace and we are suffering an economic downturn in the same way as our European counterparts. However, because of the Government's measured lead in the last decade, Ireland has not been hit as hard by the worldwide credit crunch of recent times.

Undoubtedly, there are pressures emerging. However, we all realise that economic growth is cyclical and we are experiencing a period of readjustment from the strong growth we had in the late 1990s and in this decade. The Government measures announced yesterday are designed to cope with these pressures within a framework of continued capital spending. The Government is acting in a responsible manner. We are moving forward in a dynamic and pragmatic way. We are not relying on further borrowing and are not blindly continuing on in the hope that the worldwide economy picks up. We are taking the positive action that is needed now.

I echo the Taoiseach's remarks yesterday about maintaining a clear focus on our capital investments. Priority infrastructural investment must continue because they are the key ingredient of the country's economic recovery. The national development plan and, specifically, projects such as the Luas, the metro, road-building programmes, water and sewerage programmes and broadband must be maintained to continue the momentum for growth. Infrastructure is the one factor which sustains our tourism and trade industries and it encourages foreign investment. To continue to remain attractive and competitive we must continue investing.

The decisions that the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance have to make are not nice and I am sure they would prefer not to have to make them, but we must remain pragmatic and continue forth in a constructive manner. Comparing this situation to the 1980s is unfair. There are now fundamental strengths in our economy due to the many years of solid growth, unlike the 1980s, which were characterised by zero growth for a prolonged period and bank interest rates of over 20%. Ireland today is a totally different country. We must not talk ourselves into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Doom and gloom could frighten off a number of inward investors, even the current metro bidders.

There is a saying that when the going gets tough, the tough get going, and this applies to the Government and the action it is taking. I welcome a number of the measures announced and in particular I welcome the Government's commitment to the national development plan. It is wise for the Minister for Finance to seek to prioritise capital infrastructural projects. On a personal note, I welcome the Taoiseach's comments on metro north yesterday.

I welcome the Government's stalling of decentralisation. I never believed that full-blown decentralisation was correct in economic terms. While I accept that the Minister for Com-

[Deputy Michael Kennedy.]

munity, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is doing a fantastic job, there are other ways of promoting the rural economy.

The Mahon tribunal should be closed down now rather than in few years' time. The public has lost confidence in it and it has only sought to make fat-cat lawyers even fatter. The public has lost interest and we would save a lot of money by closing it down now.

With regard to the construction sector, the National Treasury Management Agency should be allowed to lend to banks on a strictly commercial basis as a way of promoting house building. Many Irish investors abroad should consider investing in this country, particularly as this is where they made all their money. Perhaps the Government should introduce measures to ensure that moneys will come back into the country. Similarly, I suggest that the worldwide shortage in food presents us with a major opportunity in terms of food exports. We should not be tying up good agricultural land with bio-fuel crops, particularly when they have a minimal impact on our energy supplies.

Deputy Damien English: I wish to share time with Deputies Dinny McGinley, Terence Flanagan and Denis Naughten.

It is a pity that the Minister of State, Deputy McGuinness, has left the Chamber because I hoped he would come in here and give us a ten-minute talk on how he would help businesses. We all know that Enterprise Ireland and the enterprise boards do plenty of work, but they need more help. They need the rules to be changed and they need more cash to distribute to the people who need it. They cannot give enough to help businesses. While there are some incentives in place, they are not enough. That is what I wanted to hear from the Minister of State, Deputy McGuinness. I wanted him to outline the wonderful things he is planning to do, not what was done in the past. We know all about the past and how wonderful it was.

It was suggested earlier that Deputy Richard Bruton and other members of my party should listen to the Government in terms of how it conducts its business. The Government has decided to refocus after ten years in office. In yesterday's announcement, the Government told us about the new arrangements, as follows:

The measures agreed by Government are clearly focused on:

- savings in administrative spending,
- economising on the services we buy,
- driving efficiency,
- reducing the proliferation of agencies,
- squeezing consultancy and PR spending,
- streamlining the delivery of services,
- re-prioritising certain capital spending going forward.

This is the new focus of a Government that has been in power for over ten years. The Minister of State, Deputy McGuinness, claims that the Government acts like a business, but the seven points listed are actions that all businesses engage in all the time, not just as of yesterday. That is how one runs a country, with all those priorities in place. One does not just start to do it in the middle of a recession. That is the way businesses are run. Deputy McGuinness has been a Minister of State for the past few months but it is a pity he does not have any influence in the Government because this is the way business should have been done before now.

Yesterday we were told that the Government had a big plan that would restore confidence in the country but it will do no such thing. The plan contained no concrete announcements and did not bring clarity to the potential cutbacks. It left everything in limbo. It referred to a 3% payroll reduction, as if it could be achieved just like that. It is not as simple as that. Such a reduction will result in reduced services and will affect the work of county councils and other bodies. It will result in cutbacks in services.

Yesterday, the Minister for Finance did not have the guts to announce the cuts and passed the job of relaying the bad news down the line. Details will come out every month for the next 18 months, through announcements by county councils, enterprise board, FÁS and various other bodies. We will have announcements by everybody except the Minister in this House, who will not take responsibility for cutbacks. The announcement yesterday has not restored confidence but has simply fudged the issues. People are still not sure what will happen. They will continue to wait and wonder what the Government will do in September or December in the budget. It has not restored confidence or given anybody reassurance. It has stalled the process again and we know what happened when the Government stalled on stamp duty — it created serious problems.

I wish to take issue with a comment made by the Minister of State, Deputy Billy Kelleher. He claimed, as did the Minister of State, Deputy Barry Andrews, that the Government has been wonderful in reducing the national debt. However, while it may have reduced the public debt, it most certainly did not reduce the private debt. Public debt has gone down but private debt has risen enormously. We are probably the most privately-indebted country in Europe, if not the world. The people of this country are carrying the Government and have been for a long time. They are paying for houses, 42% of the price of which went into the Government's coffers in tax. The Minister of State, Deputy Kelleher, spoke about previous Governments causing his generation major problems because of the spiralling national debt. I wish to remind him that the Government has caused my generation major problems by saddling us with 30 or 40 years of a burden in terms of mortgages for houses that are not worth even half what we have paid for them, given that almost half of the price was tax. I ask the Deputy not to try to tell me that the Government has done the country a favour.

Part of the plan announced yesterday was supposed to be related to cost-savings. Part of our job as politicians is to point out where savings can be made, but yesterday's plan did not do that. There are a number of areas from which savings could be gleaned. In the past few months I managed to obtain a number of replies from the Government to parliamentary questions. I found out that consultancy costs in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 2007 were €10.5 million, the Department of Transport, €3.3 million and the Department of Social and Family Affairs, €10 million. The plan refers to cutting back on such costs but does not give any figures. To what level will such spending be cut back? We were also told that the Government will cut staff but if it does that, it may have to hire more consultants. Was this plan really thought out properly? I do not think so. The Government has been talking for a long time about e-procurement. It produced a report in 2000 telling us that it was going to introduce e-procurement which would save us €177 million per year. Seven times that figure for the past seven years is well over €1 billion. Why was this not done?

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform boasted about all the shared services we are going to have. We did not have them. It was recommended years ago that we should share services yet this Government spent €60 million or €70 million on putting a new financial services system in all 15 Departments when two or three shared would have done it.

I have a long list of things we could do but I will not go into them tonight. There are plenty of things we could do to help this country but we do not see any plans here to save or protect

[Deputy Damien English.]

jobs or to give confidence. Hopefully, the Ministers might listen to my ideas in September when I return. We must have a proper plan, not a load of crap like that which we received yesterday because this is what it was.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Tá áthas orm deis a bheith agam cúpla focala rá faoi seo. No matter what side of the House we are on, we all agree at this stage that there is a very sudden downturn in the economic situation in this country. It took the Government some time to recognise that and to try to face up to it because the alarm bells had been ringing for some considerable time.

It is almost unbelievable that from June 2007 to June 2008, more than 55,000 people became unemployed in this country. This is probably a record number for one year. I do not think it ever happened before, certainly not since I or perhaps anyone else entered this House.

Inflation in this country is well above the European norm. The rate of 4% or 5% is three times the European norm and will make our production costs more expensive. We are losing jobs, mar atá a fhios ag an Aire, fiú amháin sna Gaeltachtaí. The jobs were not lost to the world economy. They went to eastern Europe, north Africa and the Far East and that was a contributory factor.

As my colleague, Deputy English, noted, the national debt is down. However, every young man and woman in this country for the next two or three generations will be paying the huge personal debt incurred because the price of housing in the past ten years has increased by almost 400%. I could not believe it. I am talking about the price of a simple home in this country. As far as I know, it did not happen anywhere else in the world.

At the same time, we were building 90,000 housing units every year for a population of 4.5 million. The UK, which is our next door neighbour and has a population of 50 million or 60 million, was building 160,000 new houses per year. We are talking about 160,000 units for 60 million and 90,000 units for 4.5 million. This is unsustainable.

The Government allowed this to continue year after year simply because, as Deputy English said, it was getting the money hand over fist. It was very pleasant being in Government during the past ten years. If any problem arose, the money that was coming in was thrown out like snuff at a wake. No preparation was made for - fá choinne lá na coise tinne. An dtuigeann an Aire é sin? Is é an botún atá déanta ag an Rialtas ná dearmad a dhéanamh airgead a chur i dtaisce le haghaidh lá na coise tine, agus de thoradh ar sin táimid san áit ina bhfuilimid.

What happened yesterday lacked courage. The Government was very vague and had no targets only ball park figures. The only definite decision I can find in it relates to overseas aid which will be cut by €45 million. This is a very cheap shot. Any Government, or indeed any fool, could come up with that. I do not like saying it but the poor Africans who depend on this sort of money do not have any vote and will not have any effect. The Minister should name one other definite decision there and I will back down but that is the only one I can find. It is a real cheap shot.

Maidir le mo chontae fhéin, tá ardú de 27% tagtha ar an dífhostaíocht le bliain anuas. Tá lúcháir orm go bhfuil an t-Aire anseo. Beidh sé in ann déanamh cinnte de nach gcuirtear isteach ar Údarás na Gaeltachta, atá ag déanamh obair iontach tábhachtach. Tá súil agam go gcuirfí na hacmhainní ar fáil fá choinne an obair atá á dhéanamh ag an údarás sna Gaeltachtaí. In respect of health services in Donegal, the day unit at Letterkenny General Hospital is being closed down and 20 beds will be closed down indefinitely. These are more knocks from the local HSE area for the general welfare of the people of Donegal. What about the Ballybofey-Stranorlar bypass and other infrastructural projects in the county? Will they suffer? What about all these schools on the waiting list? Tá Pobalscoil Ghaoth Dobhair ag lorg halla spóirt agus tá

muintir Gort a' Choirce agus an Bhun Beag ag lorg scoileanna úra. Tá cúpla scoil á lorg i mBealach Féich agus i Srath an Úrláir. What effect will these so-called cuts have on these projects for which we are waiting?

It is very easy being in Government when times are good but it is a different matter when they are difficult. The Government has presided over what has happened in the past ten years so it is the Government's responsibility to ensure this mess is cleared up as soon as possible without hammering the less well-off and the vulnerable sections of our society.

Deputy Terence Flanagan: I agree with fellow Deputies on this side of the House that Fianna Fáil has blown the boom. Certainly, it has brought us to where we are now, namely, a recession. I agree that there are international factors which have contributed to this situation but the Government has made some really bad and silly decisions which resulted in millions upon millions of taxpayers' money being wasted.

As Deputy McGinley said yesterday, there is a lack of detail in the recovery package. There is no full breakdown of where the €440 million in savings for this year will come from or where the €1 billion in savings for next year will come from. There is no detail on the cutbacks that will be enforced in health and education and no guarantee has been given that front-line services will not suffer. The decision to halt decentralisation is certainly correct. It is a belated recognition of the waste of taxpayers' money on this project. I wonder why this did not happen a lot sooner.

The Government's so-called recovery package does not address the lack of competitiveness in this country. Last week, Deputy Richard Bruton produced a detailed plan entitled Recovery through Reform which contained many key action points on how to deal with the economic crisis facing the county. We need to cut down on avoidable waste and keep prices, particularly food prices, under control and inflation down. We need to change the way our finances are managed. There are many inadequacies and inefficiencies in the way the budget process is dealt with. We need to scrutinise expenditure more regularly than we do at the moment. Our public services need to be reformed and regulated far more.

This Government certainly wasted millions and millions of taxpayers' money. A total of €52 million was wasted on electronic voting machines which will not be used in next year's local and European elections. Yet thousands upon thousands of euro are being squandered each year to keep these machines, which will probably never be used, in storage.

Our Fianna Fáil-led Government has created 250 quangos over the past number of years. The HSE is a bureaucratic nightmare. Deputies who write to the HSE and the Department of Health and Children find that it takes a very time to get a response if they do get one. The downturn in the construction industry over the past number of years has had a devastating effect on this country. A total of 25,000 construction workers are out of work. There has been a record increase in unemployment this year and this is expected to exceed 6% by the end of the year. Unfortunately, 19,000 more people have joined the dole queues between May and June of this year.

There is no detail about reforming the housing market and providing for the thousands of people on social and affordable housing lists who have very little chance of getting a home. If reform had taken place regarding stamp duty in the housing market earlier last year, it might have improved matters for young people. The NDP target for 2007-13 is 17,000 affordable homes but it is hard to see that being delivered. As we face a downturn, the Minister for Finance and the Government have insisted that the NDP projects should be prioritised by undergoing a cost-benefit analysis. It should apply to all projects over €30 million. Unfortunately that is not happening in the case of the Dublin Airport Authority, which avoided doing

[Deputy Terence Flanagan.]

such a cost-benefit analysis for the new runway, terminal and Pier D projects. Perhaps the Minister can revisit this and prioritise the projects in the NDP. In this way we can see the priorities for the years ahead, particularly at a time when the money has dried up.

Deputy Denis Naughten: We could all speak for 20 minutes on this subject and highlight savings. It galled me to hear the Minister for Social and Family Affairs refer to her savings plan. Some €25 million will be saved in anti-fraud initiatives. Why were these not done over the past 11 years?

The fact we are paying child care costs in Warsaw, Tallinn and Riga has been highlighted by my colleagues. This is because we do not have our act together to bring in legislation in respect of the early child care supplement. The Minister did not refer to that during her contribution. It was brushed under the carpet. Some €1,100 per year is spent on every child under the age of six in Warsaw, Tallinn and Riga or other member states when the parent resides in Ireland. I have no difficulty with every child resident in this country, no matter what his or her background, receiving that payment but I cannot see the justification for the current situation. The Government continues to ignore it, while we are subventing the payment of child care in other EU countries. The Minister made no reference to that.

The Minister referred to €25 million of extra savings in anti-fraud initiatives yet in respect of child benefit, some €36 million per year in fraud is being detected by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Of all the areas, child benefit should be easy to resolve because we should know whether a child was born in this country and registered. Some €30 million of that €36 million refers to Irish born children. Another €5.4 million concerns children, many of whom do not exist in other countries, where child benefit is being paid by the Irish taxpayer. Nevertheless, the Minister is only talking about savings of €25 million across the board.

Another galling area is justice. At the moment, in respect of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Social and Family Affairs, social welfare and accommodation for asylum seekers is costing the taxpayer €521.25 per asylum seeker per week. It is taking up to eight years to process an application. It is not fair on those who genuinely seek asylum. It is not fair on the Irish taxpayer who must fund it. It would make more sense for the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to use its consultancy money to bring in experts who can process these applications, ensuring people are dealt with fairly and quickly so that they get a decision rather than spending eight years wasting away in asylum accommodation.

Regarding the quality of the asylum accommodation, some €83 million was spent on asylum accommodation last year. In one facility, the public health nurse reported that the accommodation was so cramped that there was not room for babies to learn to crawl or toddlers to learn to walk. That is not value for money but it is occurring up and down the country.

The level of vacancies in the immigration services is one in five. We do not have the staff resources to process applications. It would make more sense to fill these vacancies, process the applications, give refugee status to those entitled to it and send home those who are not entitled to it rather than the way we are funding it at present.

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): Tá áthas orm deis a bheith agam labhairt sa díospóireacht seo. Ar ndóigh, tá go leor le phlé agus tá go leor moltaí le déanamh ag an bhFreasúra, cuid acu a bhfuil bunús leo agus cuid eile atá bunaithe ar míthiiscintí maidir leis na fíricí. Tá mé cinnte, ma phléimid na fíricí, go mbeidh an bhFreasúra sách mór le hadhmháil nach bhfuil cuid de na rudaí atá ráite acu cruinn.

Tá dualgas ar an Rialtas déanamh cinnte go gcoinneofar srian ar chaiteachas ag am go bhfuil cúlú eacnamaíochta domhanda agus dúshlán nua ann. Á dhéanamh sin, caithfear a chinntiú go ndéanfar cosaint orthu siúd is mó atá faoi bhrú sa phobal. Maidir le mo Roinn féin, tá na sábháiltí ar fad bainteach le cursaí riaracháin agus pháigh na Roinne agus na háisíneachtaí atá ag obair faoin Roinn. Níl aon athrú ar an méid airgid atá ar fáil le haghaidh na cláir éagsúla atá á reachtáil ag an Roinn. Tá sé seo amhlaidh mar go bhfuil tábhacht faoi leith ag baint le cláir na Roinne atá ag plé le cuid de na pobail is leochailí sa tír agus atá ag cur seirbhísí riachtanacha ar fáil.

Ní shin le rá, áfach, nach mbeidh mé, agus nach bhfuil mé, agus nach bhfuil mo Roinn, ag scrúdú an caiteachas iomlán atá á dhéanamh ag an Roinn féachaint leis an tairbhe is fearr a bhaint as agus freisin féachaint le déanamh cinnte go bhfuil an t-airgead atá á chaitheamh ag an Roinn ag dul chuig na daoine ar an talamh agus go bhfuil a laghad agus is féidir á chaitheamh ar chúrsaí riaracháin nó oraibh súid atá ag riaradh na gcláracha éagsúla. Le bliain nó dhó anuas tá comhtháthú déanta idir an clár Leader agus na comhlachtaí páirtnéireachta. Tá an obair sin curtha i gcrích anois. Céim sa treo ceart é seo. Chomh maith leis sin, ar ndóigh, cuireadh curamaí Bhord na Leabhar Gaeilge faoi chúram Fhoras na Gaeilge agus ar ndóigh Dé hAoine seo caite rinneadh cinneadh gur faoin bhforas a bhéas riaradh an tionscnaimh Colmcille. Fógraíodh an chúig phost do Gaoth Dobhair freisin.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: An mbeidh siad ag dul ar aghaidh mar sin?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Beidh go deimhin. Ná bíodh imní ort faoi sin.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: An-mhaith.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá, áfach, gá le hathscrúdú a dhéanamh ar gach líne den chaiteachas atá á dhéanamh ag an Roinn, féachaint go bhfuil an tairbhe is fearr á bhaint as. Cheana féin, tá scrúdú géar á dhéanamh ar chuid de scéimeanna na Roinne agus beidh mé ag teacht ar aghaidh le moltaí éagsúla á dhéanfaidh cinnte go bhfuil gach scéim atá ag an Roinn ag freagairt do na riachtanais nua atá ann i láthair na huaire.

Ar an mór-scála, taispeánann cinneadh an Rialtais i leith mo Roinne, an tábhacht a fheiceann an Rialtas leis an obair atá ar bun ag an Roinn maidir le mí-bhuntaíste, ceantair tuaithe, Gaeltacht, oileáin agus an Ghaeilge, i measc nithe eile.

In reviewing all of the policy options of the different Departments, we can ensure that all our programmes are focused towards delivery to our citizens. It is incumbent on us, particularly at this time, to ensure that a minimum amount of money is spent on administration and intermediaries and that all schemes are the best schemes for delivering services to people on the ground. In recent years, my Department has been active in a number of ways in cutting down on duplication and ensuring better services. Amongst the decisions taken was to transfer responsibility for administration and decision-making in respect of the dormant account funds back into the Department.

Deputy Denis Naughten: The Minister could teach his Cabinet colleagues a few things. He is doing a good job.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: Sin moladh.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The Minister has less than half a minute left. Deputies should let him continue.

Deputy Denis Naughten: We are complimenting him.

Deputy Dinny McGinley: He will give way for that.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The cohesion process, by which the number of partnerships, community partnerships and Leader companies has been reduced dramatically, from 95 to 55, was part of an ongoing process in my Department to examine structures to ensure efficient delivery.

Regarding the Irish language, Bord na Leabhar Gaeilge, which had existed for many years, has been subsumed into the work of Foras na Gaeilge, as has the administration of the Colmcille initiative which was decided by myself and Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure in the Northern Ireland Assembly, Mr. Campbell, last Friday. With the Minister of State, Deputy John Curran, and the officials in my Department I have been engaged in an exercise to examine every programme and every line of expenditure in the Department to ensure they are focused in the best way.

Despite the challenging times, major new opportunities can be exploited, particularly this year with the commencement of the largest ever rural development programme. I look forward to the building of a strong diversified economy in rural Ireland through this programme which is due to come into operation later this year. I fully recognise the challenges faced by people at this time, particularly by individuals who have lost their jobs. My heart goes out to them because I worked for a long time in employment creation. However, I am equally convinced that if we have courage, vision and confidence, we can overcome these challenges, ensure the resumption of economic growth and at the same time protect the weakest in society.

11 o'clock

Debate adjourned.

Message from Seanad.

An Ceann Comhairle: Seanad Éireann has passed the Dublin Transport Authority Bill 2008, without amendment.

Adjournment Debate.

Hospital Services.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Is maith an rud é go bhfuil deis agam an ceist rí-thábhachtach seo a ardú. Baineann an cheist le páistí atá faoi chúram Ospidéal Mhuire na Leanaí, Cromghlinn. The children we are discussing are at major risk of infection through Ireland's most common life-threatening inherited disease, namely, cystic fibrosis. These, more than many other children in hospital wards, are at major risk if their environment is contaminated. Everybody, from the medical to the lay person, will understand the need to ensure those who suffer from cystic fibrosis and who have had to be hospitalised have proper sterile environments so they can recover in a short time to allow them to carry on as normal a life as possible for as long as possible.

Moving children at 6 p.m. on Fridays from a sterile environment in St. Michael's ward, which is dedicated to treating those children who are unlucky enough to have cystic fibrosis, into St. Joseph's ward, which has children with other ailments, puts their lives at risk. It is not good enough to state, as has been stated, that housing these children in single rooms will suffice. That not true and it is a cop-out.

This is about cost-cutting and shaving a few euro off the HSE budget. I have not heard of Professor Drumm shaving money off his wages or his bonus. Despite the Trojan work of the

staff of Crumlin children's hospital, the nurses and doctors must suffer not only this cut but also a number of others which occurred during recent months and which I have tried to raise in the House. Porters have been let go. The orthopaedic service now works part time from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Phones are left unmanned for entire days and, in one case, for almost two weeks because of HSE cost-cutting. The chaplaincy service has been reduced from a 24-hour service to 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dieticians have also suffered.

Cutbacks have occurred across the board at Crumlin children's hospital. This cutback has been aimed at the most vulnerable children, namely, those at risk of cross-infection. Consider the risk involved in these children going to hospital in the first place given the other infections we have heard so much about, such as MRSA, and this increases the chance they will not come out of hospital alive. That is not good enough.

Major steps must be taken to ensure that at least this cutback is reversed so that the advances we have made in Ireland and throughout the world to extend the life expectancy of people who have inherited this disease are not reversed for the sake of a few measly euro.

Those with cystic fibrosis suffer in terms of their lung capacity and digestive system. The result of this is that sufferers are prone to constant chest infections and malnutrition. Most try to live a normal life but they must regularly attend hospital to regain the ability to breathe by themselves. Putting their lives at risk by forcing two hospital wings to coalesce at weekends is not good enough. I have not heard of any cutback in the private health service and that alone says it all.

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Mary Wallace): I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. Each hospital funded by the HSE is required to deliver services within the financial allocation provided. The HSE is involved in ongoing discussions with hospital management regarding its 2008 financial allocation and service plan. The hospital has an overrun of €10 million from last year and a projected overrun of €14 million for this year.

As part of the discussions on the budgetary position, the HSE has made an agreement with the hospital, on a once-off basis, to deal with last year's overrun of €10 million and to provide a further €7 million this year. However, the additional funding arrangement is contingent on the hospital working within its budget, which will be amended from €137 million to €144 million for this year, up from €128 million in 2007. The hospital must achieve savings of €7 million from the projected overrun of €14 million for 2008.

The priority of the HSE and hospital management is to ensure that services for children at the hospital are maintained at an optimum level. The initial focus of the discussions on budgetary issues between hospital management and the HSE is on ensuring that all areas of non-pay expenditure are critically examined.

In this regard, the hospital made a recent decision to close St. Michael's ward, which treats a mix of medical patients, a proportion of whom are children with cystic fibrosis, at weekends and move them to an adjacent ward, St. Joseph's, which also treats a mix of patients, including orthopaedic patients. The hospital took this decision as the occupancy on both wards was approximately 50% at weekends. As a result, five to ten patients from St. Michael's ward, a small proportion of whom are cystic fibrosis patients, are transferred to an adjacent ward at weekends.

The infection control team in the hospital is satisfied that there is no additional risk to children as a result of this move. The very same standard of care is being delivered to these children. There is no change in the specialised doctors and nurses and medical team caring for the patients who are transferred. On transfer, the children with cystic fibrosis are nursed in single rooms. The medical care delivered to these children remains the same. All patients and

[Deputy Mary Wallace.]

families are contacted by the nursing staff before they are transferred and there is an opportunity for families' concerns to be addressed by the multidisciplinary team. The only change for these children and their families is the location and there is ongoing monitoring and assessment of the situation by the infection control team.

The Minister has been assured by the HSE that patient care has not been compromised at the hospital as a result of the weekend closures of this ward.

Deputy Pat Breen: I am delighted to be a voice for cystic fibrosis sufferers and to highlight the issue on their behalf. There are approximately 1,100 sufferers in the State and life can be difficult for them. I wish to raise the issue of facilities for cystic fibrosis sufferers in the mid-west region. Cystic fibrosis is Ireland's most common life-threatening inherited disease, with one in 19 people carriers of the CF gene. CF affects the glands and damages many organs, including the lungs and the digestive system, and sufferers are prone to constant chest infections and malnutrition. Many advances have been made in recent years but more remains to be done.

There are approximately 1,100 CF sufferers in Ireland and we all hear stories of how sick they are and how they are afraid to enter hospital in case they pick up an infection, such as MRSA or *C. difficile*. The situation is more acute for CF patients because many of them are afraid they will die. They cannot mix with other patients and going through an accident and emergency department is not an option. I recently witnessed a case of a 19 year old who was afraid to go to an accident and emergency department because he thought he would pick up an infection and die and we had to try to bypass the department to have him admitted to hospital.

Approximately 30 CF patients from County Clare attend for treatment at the Mid-Western Regional Hospital in Limerick. The current CF service at the hospital is provided by two consultant respiratory physicians providing inpatient and outpatient services in addition to their normal work. A full-time consultant with a speciality in CF is required. The present consultant is due to retire and when the position is advertised, a consultant with a speciality in CF should be appointed. The provision of a dedicated adult outpatient unit is also essential. Such a unit is available for children but adults cannot avail of same.

Progress has been made in some areas and funding was allocated in 2006 and 2007 to put in place a full medical multidisciplinary team, following an audit by the HSE in 2005 of the staffing levels at the hospital. However, while a number of positions have been filled, there is serious concern regarding the position of two CF nurse specialist positions, which have not been advertised, even though funding has been allocated. When will these positions be advertised and filled?

There are also other issues. For example, Internet access is not available in the CF area of the hospital for immobilised patients and no television remote controls are available. I recently met representatives of the Clare branch of the Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland and they outlined the stories of the battles they fight every day for services. I met a woman whose son died six weeks ago aged 23 and I admire her courage in playing a part with the association to highlight the plight of other sufferers. I was amazed by her strength in speaking about her son's plight. She wants to do something for other CF sufferers in County Clare. I hope that news of cutbacks will not affect progress on this matter. CF patients and their families cannot wait and I urge the Minister of State to put in place the facilities in Limerick regional hospital because they deserve a better quality of life.

Deputy Mary Wallace: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. The need to improve services for persons with cystic fibrosis has been identified by the Minister for Health and Children as

a priority in the Estimates process in recent years. Since 2006, additional revenue funding of €6.78 million has been allocated to the HSE to develop services for CF patients. The executive has advised that 44 additional staff dealing with cystic fibrosis have been appointed to date in Limerick regional hospital and eight other hospitals. The necessary funding is available to facilitate the recruitment of a further 37 staff nationally, including staff for the mid-western region.

With regard to the specific issues raised by the Deputy, the HSE has advised that the current adult CF service for the mid-west region is provided in Limerick regional hospital by two consultant respiratory physicians providing inpatient and outpatient services for adult patients. The CF service for children is provided by a consultant paediatrician providing inpatient and outpatient services. Two nurse specialists currently cover both the paediatric and adult CF services. Both services are supported by a dedicated team, which includes a social worker, a dietician, a physiotherapist and a pharmacist.

An audit of CF staffing at the Mid-Western Regional Hospital was carried out in 2005. The HSE has since earmarked funding for the creation of 8.5 additional posts to enhance both the adult and paediatric CF service. The additional staff include a consultant respiratory physician with a special interest in cystic fibrosis and a consultant paediatrician with a special interest in respiratory medicine, supported by specialist nurses, a physiotherapist, a dietician, a social worker, a pharmacist and a medical scientist post. The HSE has advised that the dietician, the social worker and 0.5 of the physiotherapist post have been filled, the consultant posts are under consideration and it is in the process of recruiting the remaining posts.

The Mid-Western Regional Hospital, Limerick, has provided three dedicated rooms, which are ring-fenced for adult CF patients. These rooms may be used for other patients if not required for CF patients. Paediatric CF patients are accommodated in the paediatric unit. The Minister is confident that these developments will significantly enhance the service provided for persons with cystic fibrosis.

Deputy Joan Burton: I am delighted the Minister of State is present because, like myself, she has long-standing connections with Connolly Hospital in Blanchardstown and she will be aware of the excellence of the staff, how hard they work and the service they provide to people in Dublin 15 and County Meath.

The hospital is being forced to wait again for at least three more years for vital diagnostic and imaging equipment, including an MRI scanner, because the HSE has taken a decision in principle to wait until after a proposed new private hospital is built and opened on the hospital grounds under the Minister for Health and Children's controversial private hospital co-location scheme. The preferred bidder for the private hospital is the Mount Carmel group and the HSE is considering its bid. However, the difficulty is the private group is insisting it should have the exclusive rights to imaging, particularly as it pertains to MRI scanners, in order that the public hospital cannot acquire such a facility. The public hospital will, therefore, have to pay for the services provided by the private hospital. Not only will the private hospital receive all the tax breaks and other lucrative incentives from Government, it will be provided with an income stream from the sale of services to the public hospital.

HSE management and its predecessors promised updated MRI scanning, imaging and radiological equipment for Blanchardstown hospital nine years ago. It was due to be installed at the conclusion of phase 1 of the new hospital building. It was then deferred to the beginning of phase 2, which is nearing completion, but now it has been long-fingered until the private hospital is built.

[Deputy Joan Burton.]

The Minister of State may enlighten the House as to whether the HSE has agreed to proceed with the private hospital. Once approval has been given, the private hospital will go to planning and tendering, be built and commissioned and finally opened, all of which will take three years. In the meantime, the thousands of patients in Connolly Hospital, many of whom come from the Minister of State's constituency in County Meath, will be ferried by ambulance or taxi and accompanied by ambulance and nursing staff to Beaumont Hospital, the Mater Hospital, the new private hospital in Hermitage or the Bon Secours to have necessary imaging undertaken. The cost to Connolly Hospital will outweigh the capital cost of buying and using a scanner and facilitating the hospital's teams by providing full diagnostic equipment. There is imaging equipment in relatively small hospitals in European countries that have not experienced the Celtic tiger, such as rural areas in France or the Czech Republic, and one would not be carted off in an ambulance or taxi with accompanying hospital staff to undergo diagnostics.

The situation in question is an extraordinary feature of life at Connolly Hospital and is inefficient and cruel to many of its patients. It is also costly. On ideological grounds, the Government appears to have decided that public patients at Connolly Hospital who have paid their taxes cannot have vital services because the private hospital wants a lucrative element of private medicine. Given the downgrading of Navan hospital in County Meath and the population on the western side of Dublin West, Dunboyne, Clonee and Navan, it is extraordinary that the Government should allow a blinkered ideology that seems to favour private medicine even though taxpayers, including those insured by VHI, pay for public medicine. It is also extraordinary that we in Blanchardstown and County Meath must wait a minimum of three years before people can access services locally. It is ideology gone mad and I hope that the Minister of State will tell the House that she may have been able to persuade her colleague, the Minister for Health and Children, Deputy Harney, to see some sense in respect of the Connolly Hospital situation and to provide the facility.

Deputy Mary Wallace: I thank Deputy Burton for raising this important matter and I concur with her comments on the excellence and hard work of staff at Connolly Hospital. As a former staff member of the hospital, there is no doubt about the wonderful work that occurs therein.

The prioritisation of capital requirements is a matter for individual hospitals, including Connolly Hospital in Blanchardstown. A hospital must indicate to the HSE the priority attaching to each development with regard to other competing needs within the hospital. When Connolly Hospital identified its capital requirements for 2008-09 to the executive, an MRI scanner was not among the hospital's immediate capital priorities. This was on the basis of the current numbers of patients presenting at the hospital for the service and the clinical requirement to treat large volumes of patients so as to ensure consistent quality service provision. The HSE has indicated that there is no waiting list for MRI services at Connolly Hospital. The clinical requirements of the hospital's patients for MRI services are currently being met through Beaumont Hospital or via the purchase of private capacity.

The potential for developing an MRI service at Connolly Hospital was identified in the context of the development of a co-located private hospital on the campus and associated increased patient volumes. I understand that the executive will take a decision on this matter in the context of proposals for developing a co-located private hospital at the Connolly Hospital site. This is in the context of the co-location initiative allowing for new ways for the public and private sectors to work together on a single campus.

The HSE is aware that Connolly Hospital has experienced increased activity levels for diagnostics and will continue to monitor these on an ongoing basis with a view to developing increased capacity, if required.

School Accommodation.

Deputy Brian Hayes: I thank the Acting Chairman and the Ceann Comhairle's office for giving me the opportunity to raise this important matter for Dublin South-West. I appreciate the attendance of the Minister of State, Deputy Wallace, at this late hour.

In my constituency, Templeogue in particular, there is a considerable degree of disappointment concerning the manner in which the Department of Education and Science has dealt with this issue for some time. Our Lady's school in Templeogue serves a student population of approximately 730. A substantial number of communities in the area — Knocklyon, Terenure, Walkinstown, Greenhills, Firhouse and Tallaght — send young women to that distinguished school, which has waited patiently for a green light from the Department in respect of a proposed extension. The proposal has been on the desk of the Minister for Education and Science for the past eight years. The school was given a firm indication that a decision to allow it to commence extension work would be made in June. Unfortunately, the decision has been stalled and placed to one side.

This matter is of significant concern in the local community and the school's catchment area. By raising this issue, I wish to highlight the community's deep frustration with the fact that a project that has been a matter for the Department for nearly a decade is still waiting to proceed to full construction stage. We want an early decision to ensure that we can proceed. Approximately €500,000 has been spent by the school in consultancy fees, planning fees and so on to bring the proposal to fruition. It is an example of a school that has waited for the Department's green light for too long.

What is involved in the proposal? The extension comprises four general classrooms, two lecture rooms, one learning support room, two science laboratories and preparatory areas, two arts and crafts rooms, two home economics rooms, one technological room, one woodwork, machining and preparatory room, one deputy principal's office, six pastoral offices, etc. It is not an add-on. Rather, it is the essential infrastructure expected of any school the size of Our Lady's school in 2008 and 2009.

It is a matter of deep frustration for the school authorities and parents that the decision to proceed to construction in June has been stalled under the school building and modernisation programme. Last week, the Minister for Education and Science told the House he expects to make a decision on the next phase of the schools building programme in September. I urge the Minister of State and her Department to ensure that Our Lady's School in Templeogue is a central part of that announcement so the school authorities can be allowed to proceed with their plans which are not extensive but are plans that deliberately aimed at providing the kind of modern, updated school infrastructure one would expect of a school of this size. I await the Minister's reply and I speak on behalf of the 730 students in the school and their families who expect their Government to respond to this issue.

Deputy Mary Wallace: I thank the Deputy for providing us with the opportunity to outline to the House the position of the Department of Education and Science regarding the proposed building project for Our Lady's School in Templeogue Road, Dublin.

This school is an all-girls' post-primary school with a current enrolment of 708 pupils. The Department intends to refurbish the school and to extend it to cater for a long-term projected enrolment of 800 pupils.

As the Minister for Education and Science has explained to the House previously, all applications for large scale capital funding are assessed in the Department against published prioritisation criteria. Each project is assigned a band rating under these criteria which reflects the type of works required and the urgency attaching to them. A band rating of 2.4 has been

[Deputy Mary Wallace.]

assigned to the project for Our Lady's School which reflects the fact that the building needs refurbishment and that while it has an accommodation deficit this is not as substantial as higher band-rated projects.

The project for Our Lady's School was listed on the 2007 school building programme to proceed to tender and construction. It is currently at stage 4-5 of architectural planning which means that planning permission has been granted and tender documents have been prepared. The next stage would be to allow the project to proceed to tender.

Unfortunately the Minister is not in a position to give the go-ahead for any more school building projects, including that for Our Lady's School, at the present time. Indeed, as he has previously said, he will not be making any decision on further capital expenditure until he has completed a review of the Department's spending plans for 2008. This process is currently under way and the Minister expects it will take a number of months to complete.

The Minister understands that some schools will be disappointed that their projects will not be proceeding as quickly as they might have hoped but, it would be disingenuous to create an impression to the contrary.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Minister has to manage his Department's capital budget in a responsible manner and in so doing must ensure that funding is targeted at the schools most in need. This is the reason the Department introduced prioritisation criteria for large-scale building projects, which were formulated following consultation with the education partners.

Thousands of building projects were carried out under the last national development plan, providing new and modernised educational infrastructure and thousands more will be carried out under the new NDP. However, there has to be an order as to how this happens and a realisation that not all building projects can proceed at the same time.

The extent of the demand on the capital budget is enormous providing as it does, accommodation for new communities together with accommodation for the unprecedented number of extra teachers which the Government has put into the system. The Department has also carried out substantial and major improvement works to hundreds of schools throughout the country, in an effort to address the historic under-investment in school buildings and this process will continue.

This cannot be achieved overnight——

Deputy Brian Hayes: That is certainly the case.

Deputy Mary Wallace: ——but we have made significant inroads and we will continue to build on the success achieved under the last NDP when we delivered over 7,800 building projects. This must be done in an orderly and planned manner and on the basis of the most pressing needs. Projects will be advanced incrementally over time, consistent with the priority attaching to them. This approach is critical to ensuring that schools know that their individual projects will be allowed to proceed, in order of priority, as and when the funding situation allows. This approach will apply to the building project for Our Lady's School under the Department's school building and modernisation programme.

I thank Deputy Hayes for giving us the opportunity to outline the current position and to reassure the House of the Minister's commitment to this project.

The Dáil adjourned at 11.35 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 10 July 2008.

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 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 10 to 36, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 37 to 47, inclusive, answered orally.

Public Service Charges.

48. **Deputy Ulick Burke** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to introduce domestic water charges to fund local government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27656/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Government policy since 1998 has been to exempt from water charges water services used by households for ordinary domestic purposes. That policy has been accommodated in the wording of Article 9 of the EU Water Framework Directive, is reflected in legislation and was reiterated in section 105 of the Water Services Act 2007. Accordingly, I have no plans to introduce domestic water charges.

Planning Issues.

49. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if it is his policy to encourage marina developments; the steps being taken in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27137/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I have no specific function in relation to the encouragement of marina developments.

Section 10(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 requires development plans to include objectives for the preservation, improvement and extension of amenities and recreational amenities. The First Schedule to the Act states that development plans may also include objectives for regulating, promoting or controlling tourism development; regulating, restricting and controlling the development of coastal areas and development in the vicinity of

[Deputy John Gormley.]

inland waterways; and regulating, restricting and controlling development on the foreshore, or any part of the foreshore.

Section 19 of the Act requires local area plans to be consistent with the objectives of the development plan for the area.

In order to assist planning authorities in the preparation and implementation of development plans, my Department published Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Development Plans in June 2007. These guidelines, inter alia, emphasise the mandatory objectives for the preservation, improvement and extension of amenities and recreational amenities. The guidelines are available on my Department's website at *www.environ.ie*.

The making and varying of a development plan is a reserved function of the elected members of a planning authority.

Homeless Persons.

50. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he expects a new national homeless strategy; if budget restraints are hampering efforts to tackle homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27683/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The new homeless strategy is now being finalised and I expect that it will be published shortly, following the resolution of a number of outstanding issues. It will set out a vision to address adult homelessness over the next five years. In particular, key objectives will be the elimination of long-term occupancy of emergency homeless facilities and the need to sleep rough by the end of 2010.

Very significant resources have been committed to the development of homeless services since the publication of the first integrated Government strategy on homelessness in 2000. Over the 2000 to 2007 period, some €540m in current funding was provided through my Department, local authorities and the HSE for accommodation and care costs in homeless facilities.

My Department is responsible for funding accommodation and related costs of services for homeless persons under section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 and recoups 90% of eligible expenditure by local authorities for such purposes. Following significant increases in funding to local authorities under section 10 in recent years, in excess of €53 million is being provided in 2008. I am satisfied that this funding is adequate to meet current levels of accommodation and related costs of homeless services.

Funding for the care costs arising in homeless facilities is a matter for the HSE. While some €33m has been earmarked for this purpose in 2008, the HSE has experienced difficulties in providing adequate care funding for a number of new and expanded homeless services. Now, following extensive discussions, there are indications that through collaboration between service providers and some rationalisation of existing services, a resolution in the case of a significant new facility at James' Street in Dublin has been reached and that it is likely to open in August. Discussions are continuing with a view to reaching satisfactory solutions in relation to a number of other facilities.

Social and Affordable Housing.

51. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position in relation to the local authorities who have accepted money in lieu of the provision of social and affordable housing under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and that this information be provided by year and by local authority since the

inception of the scheme; the steps being taken by his Department to ensure the money in lieu of provision is used as a last resort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27582/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The vast bulk of the delivery to date under Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2006 has been in the form of completed homes, land and individual sites. Financial settlements account for only a small share of the delivery and any such monies received by a planning authority must be used as capital for its functions under Part V or for its functions in relation to the provision of housing under the Housing Acts.

The default option for satisfying Part V remains the transfer of a proportion of the land which is the subject of the planning application. In other words, when accepting a financial contribution, the local authority does so in lieu of a percentage of land and not in lieu of housing. It must be emphasised that the legal obligation under Part V can be satisfied by way of a financial contribution only if the local authority considers it appropriate in the particular case concerned.

My Department has issued comprehensive guidelines to local authorities in relation to Part V, including advice in relation to the use of Part V funds. Since January 2007, local authorities no longer require the prior sanction of my Department for the expenditure of Part V monies in certain cases. This delegated sanction set out a number of purposes for which the funds could be utilised, including the purchase of completed turnkey units, acquisition of sites, supplementing an authority's housing land bank, procuring additional accommodation units for the Rental Accommodation Scheme or improving the general affordability of Part V units.

So as to ensure that Part V funds are put to productive use as soon as possible after they are received, earlier this year my Department advised local authorities that where they have unused Part V funds, these would be taken into account when allocations to authorities for the main social housing programmes were being finalised.

The Government's clearly stated preferred option remains the delivery of housing units on site and the available evidence suggests that completed homes or land constitute the vast bulk of Part V agreements to date.

Detailed information on the financial contributions received under Part V in each local authority area since activity commenced in 2002 up to the end of 2007 is available on my Department's website.

Special Areas of Conservation.

52. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps he has taken to address the threat to a number of protected species including the freshwater pearl mussel, otter, hare and Atlantic salmon, that was identified in the report compiled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, *The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Wildlife Species in Ireland*; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27574/08]

63. **Deputy Eamon Gilmore** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the report *The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland* compiled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service that found that of 59 protected habitats only 4 or 7% had good status overall with the remainder either poor or bad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27572/08]

81. **Deputy Michael D. Higgins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps that have been taken in response to the recent findings of the report compiled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland, that found that since the transposing of the European Union Habitats Directive over a decade ago the condition of many protected habitats have deteriorated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27575/08]

89. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps he has taken to provide more resources to the relevant authorities to address the poor and bad status of over 90% of protected habitats as found by the report compiled by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27576/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52, 63, 81 and 89 together.

My Department's Report on the Status of Habitats and Species in Ireland is the first comprehensive compilation of the status of those habitats, animals and plants in Ireland which have protected status under national and EU law. The Report highlights the pressures and threats that habitats and species face in Ireland including through peat cutting, overgrazing and undergrazing, pollution, unsustainable exploitation, and from alien species and recreational activity.

My Department is working with the relevant stakeholders to maintain and restore habitats and species, especially in Special Areas of Conservation, and to monitor and report on changes achieved. Ireland is currently moving from a phase of designation to one of more targeted management and protection. This requires the involvement of land owners, Government Departments, planning authorities and licensing agencies, research institutions and experts. The Programme for Government includes a commitment to strengthen Ireland's implementation of the Habitats Directive and this is reflected in significantly increased funding for my Department's National Parks and Wildlife Service in 2008.

Many significant policies and programmes are already in place to address the conclusions in this Report including, for example:

- designation of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, respectively;
- continued enforcement of the Habitats Regulations to protect SACs and SPAs;
- protection of designated areas in County Development Plans and by planning authorities, including An Bord Pleanála;
- the Single Farm Payment scheme which removes incentives for overgrazing,
- the application of Commonage Framework Plans to deliver appropriate grazing levels on commonages; and
- the ban on drift netting of salmon.

We are tackling unsustainable grazing levels, especially in uplands and commonages and this will improve many of the habitats in unsatisfactory status. The phased ending of the derogation for domestic turf cutting on designated raised bogs will be important in conserving and restoring this important habitat. Further developments under the Water Framework Directive, the Nitrates Action Programme, and projects under the Water Services Investment Programme

will improve the quality of many of the other habitats at risk and will improve the status of species such as the freshwater pearl mussel, otter and crayfish.

Cooperation and commitment will be required from the public as whole, social partners and other Government Departments and agencies. I will continue to work with all relevant stakeholders in order to meet the major challenge we face, as demonstrated by the Report on the Status of Habitats and Species.

Local Government.

53. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if, following the publication of the Green Paper on Local Government, it is intended to publish a white paper, as envisaged in the Programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27588/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I published the Green Paper, Stronger Local Democracy — Options for Change on 22 April 2008. The Green Paper presents a set of options which share a common theme of strengthening local democratic leadership. For example, Stronger Local Democracy proposes a Regional Mayor for Dublin to meet the strategic challenges the city faces. The Paper also suggests that local leadership, accountability and connection with the citizen would be achieved through the provision of directly elected mayors with key powers of initiative in other areas. A suite of further proposals in relation to issues such as town government, participative democracy, regional governance, and service delivery are also included in the Green Paper.

Stronger Local Democracy represents the initial phase of a transparent, inclusive policy formulation process. The purpose is not to arrive at a single solution, but to present options for further consideration. Copies of Stronger Local Democracy have been sent to all members of the Oireachtas.

My Department is conducting a public consultation process to inform the drafting of the White Paper, which I hope to finalise by year end. I look forward to receiving the views of all concerned. I have also recently concluded a series of 6 regional seminars on the Green Paper, held over June and early July to gather as full a range of perspectives as possible. Details on how to contribute to the consultation process, which will remain open until 31 July, are available on my Department's website.

Water Quality.

54. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he is satisfied that ground water sources here are of an acceptable level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27729/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The obligation to protect groundwater quality derives, in the main, from its suitability for use as a source for drinking water supply.

In line with the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive, the EPA carries out a national groundwater monitoring programme which is used to assess the general state of groundwater quality and groundwater levels in Ireland.

The key indicators for groundwater quality are faecal coliforms and nitrates. In relation to faecal coliforms, approximately 29% of the samples taken by the EPA between 2004 and 2006 as part of its monitoring programme, tested positive. As regards nitrates, relatively low concentrations of nitrate are found in groundwater in its natural state. However, the mean

[Deputy John Gormley.]

nitrate concentration found by the EPA exceeded the statutory guide concentration of 25 milligrammes per litre at approximately 25% of monitoring sites over the same period.

Groundwater is the only aquatic system showing a trend of decline in water quality and this is a matter of concern. The greatest degree of groundwater pollution is found in karst limestone areas and in areas with more intensive agricultural activities. Agricultural run-off has been identified by the EPA as posing the greatest threat to the quality of the groundwater resource.

Against this background, measures for the protection and improvement of water quality continue to be progressed on a systematic basis, particularly within the context of the Water Framework Directive. My Department's Water Services Investment Programme and the Nitrates Action Programme are key contributors to improving water quality in line with the requirements of the Directive. Some €2 billion has been invested since 2000 in new and upgraded waste water services. The Nitrates Action Programme promotes good agricultural practice and provides strengthened statutory support for the protection of waters against pollution from agricultural sources.

In addition, I will be making regulations over the next few months to transpose the EU Groundwater Directive. These regulations will establish quality standards for groundwater and provide for measures to prevent or limit inputs of pollutants into groundwater.

I am satisfied that these measures will lead to an improvement in groundwater quality. The most recent EPA report on water quality notes that with the type of groundwater pollution occurring in Ireland, chiefly nutrient enrichment, there is a relatively short recovery time for our aquatic ecosystems.

Homeless Persons.

55. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to establish a housing needs monitoring programme to annually assess the extent of homelessness and housing needs, including the flow of people in and out of homelessness, which would utilise several methods and combine prevalence studies to provide figures of hidden homelessness; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is currently no one method in use that will provide an accurate account of homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27591/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The triennial statutory assessment of housing needs provides information on homelessness, including details of the number of homeless households by local authority area. The Government's housing policy statement, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, published in February 2007 announced a new means of assessing housing need. My Department is currently considering the implementation of this new model with local authorities and relevant groups. It is not proposed to undertake a separate annual assessment in relation to homelessness.

In addition, a focused count of homelessness in the Dublin area, Counted In, has been undertaken by the Homeless Agency every three years since 1999. This year, this count has also taken place in Galway, Cork and Limerick city areas.

It is proposed, in the context of the new homeless strategy now being finalised, to develop an integrated national information system to support the effective operation and budgeting of homeless services and to inform policy development. This will, for example, be used to develop profiles, review trends in homelessness, improve understanding and knowledge and to maximise and monitor the effectiveness of interventions to achieve the best possible outcomes for each

homeless person. The proposed information system will be complemented by continuing periodic assessments or counts of homelessness.

Register of Electors.

56. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on moving responsibility for the electoral register from local authorities to a centralised authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27703/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): 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.

The Programme for Government contains a commitment to establish an independent Electoral Commission. The Commission's responsibilities will include taking charge of the compilation of a new national rolling electoral register.

The establishment of an Electoral Commission will be a major body of work with issues arising for consideration including international best practice, the Commission's structure and functions, who it reports to, its relationship with other bodies currently involved, and the approach to be followed in relation to the extensive legislation that will be required.

As a first input to this process, my Department has appointed consultants to carry out preliminary research on the issues arising in relation to the establishment of the Electoral Commission. The consultants' work is underway and is expected to be completed in August.

Environmental Legislation.

57. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of EU environmental compliance cases in existence against Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27651/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): In areas for which my Department has responsibility the European Commission is currently in correspondence in respect of 29 cases relating to possible infringements of EU environmental legislation. These cases are at various stages of proceedings. My Department is working hard to resolve these cases as soon as possible.

I propose to circulate in the Official Report a tabular statement listing the directives involved and setting out the various stages of proceedings in respect of these cases.

Stage in Proceedings

Directive/Decision Number and General Reference	Article 226 Letter of Formal Notice	Article 226 Reasoned Opinion	Being Referred to the European Court of Justice	Before the European Court of Justice for a hearing or awaiting judgement	European Court of Justice Decision to be Implemented	Article 228 Letter of Formal Notice	Article 228 Reasoned Opinion
75/439/EEC on the disposal of waste oils	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
75/442/EEC the waste directive	2	1	0	1	0	1	0
76/464/EEC on dangerous substances in water	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
79/409/EEC on wild birds	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
80/68/EEC on groundwater	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
80/778/EEC on the quality of drinking water for human consumption	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment	1	0	1	1	1	0	0
91/271/EEC on urban waste water treatment	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
92/43/EEC on habitats	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
98/81/EC on the contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
99/31/EC on landfill	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
2000/60/EC the water framework directive	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
2002/96/EC on waste electrical and electronic equipment	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
2003/35/EC on public participation in certain plans and programmes relating to the environment	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
2004/35/EC on environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
2004/107/EC on Arsenic, Cadmium, Mercury, Nickel and Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons in ambient air	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
2006/21/EC on the management of waste from extractive industries and amending Directive 2004/35/EC	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL NUMBER AT EACH STAGE	9	4	3	4	4	1	4

Environmental Pollution.

58. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the measures being taken to remove hazardous and toxic waste from the former steelworks site at Haulbowline Island; his views on reports that a high level of chromium VI, mercury and other potentially toxic matter was found on and in the vicinity of the site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27645/08]

59. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he still considers there is no health risk from the Haulbowline site in Cork Harbour; if so, the reason he intends to carry out a health study on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27698/08]

74. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of material removed from the former Irish Ispat site at Haulbowline, County Cork to date; the location to which this material was transported; the method of transport; whether an analysis for the presence of toxic matter in the material was conducted prior to removal; the results of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27644/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58, 59 and 74 together.

The environmental challenge presented by the former steelworks on Haulbowline is a considerable one. It is the legacy of an industrial past. It is also the case that for many years the steelworks were a significant employer in the Cork area and an important part of the local economy. The site has the potential once again to contribute to the economic, and indeed social, life of the area. This should be kept in mind in dealing with the legacy issue which must first be addressed.

Since 2003 my Department has had responsibility for the management of the facility on an interim basis pending a decision by Government on the future use of the site. This has included enabling a site investigation to be carried out to assist the Government in determining the best option, environmentally and economically, for its future use.

In the light of the situation created by the unauthorised actions of contractors on the site I have moved to address the more immediate, very understandable and legitimate concerns of the local community.

I have made available the entire report on the site investigation, including the full suite of technical data which it generated. I have also made available the reports on the ongoing monitoring of the site which has been carried out over the intervening period. My Department has arranged with the consultants who produced the 2005 report that they will clarify any technical issues which may be raised.

This information is the total of the reports and investigations of the site arranged by my Department. The 2005 report in particular summarises earlier desk studies and, more importantly, reports on comprehensive intrusive site investigation which included extensive analysis of soil, water and air, including sub-surface testing for heavy metals. I base my reassurance to the community on these reports, which have indicated no immediate threat to human health or the environment in the locality, while of course recognising that this is a problematic site which will ultimately require an extensive and co-ordinated resolution.

To further allay the concerns of the community in light of the recent events my Department has now re-engaged the consultants to carry out an independent and rigorous assessment of

[Deputy John Gormley.]

current site conditions. This assessment is now underway and will involve analysis of soil, slag, dust, surface and ground water samples for all likely contaminants, including heavy metals such as chromium. The results will be published. I will then advise Government for purposes of decision-making on whatever actions are shown to be necessary, including the question of any studies in regard to human health.

Since 2003 my Department has arranged for the removal and proper disposal of a large quantity of waste materials from the site. All the information requested in the question regarding the quantity of waste removed will take some time to collate and will be forwarded as soon as it is available. Examples of materials collected from site to date for certified disposal include:

- Licensed radioactive sources and low-level radioactive waste;
- Over 10,000 tonnes of scrap metal;
- Over 1,000 tonnes of hazardous dust vacuumed from the steelworks buildings before demolition;
- Contaminated filter bags from the steelworks dust extraction system;
- Various forms of asbestos removed from the steelworks buildings before demolition;
- Refractory waste;
- Contaminated soil from site clearance;
- Contaminated water from site clearance;
- Transformer oil;
- Electrical capacitors — PCB and Non PCB;
- Sulphur hexafluoride gas from circuit breakers;
- Assorted gas cylinders;
- Battery acid;
- Millscale;
- Assorted other wastes including timber and plastic.

My Department and other relevant agencies are properly engaged in the management of this legacy site in a manner which is consistent with good practice and minimisation of risk to human health and the environment. A coherent overall approach rather than piecemeal action, which could inadvertently cause problems to the local community and the environment, must be taken and that is the objective being pursued by my Department.

Private Rented Accommodation.

60. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that many people in receipt of rent supplement are forced to live in substandard accommodation; and his plans to rectify this situation. [27593/08]

72. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he proposes to introduce the new standards regulations for rented accommodation that were promised by him to ensure that the interiors of rented properties would be maintained to acceptable standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26937/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 72 together.

Standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations, 1993. Responsibility for enforcing the regulations rests with the relevant local authority, supported by a dedicated stream of funding allocated by my Department.

The revision of these regulations is an important element of An Action Programme to Promote Improvement in Standards, which was launched on foot of the Towards 2016 social partnership agreement, and is also a core component of the Government's housing policy statement, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*. A general review of the regulations has been carried out, in consultation with relevant interests, and account has been taken of relevant recommendations in two reports published in November 2007 by the Centre for Housing Research on measures to promote improvement in private rented accommodation standards.

On foot of that work, a small working group comprising local authority and sectoral representatives was convened by my Department to input into the final drafting of the revised regulations. That group has met a number of times and consultations have also taken place with the Community and Voluntary Pillar under Towards 2016.

A significant number of very useful proposals emerged from these consultations and I intend to address these to the greatest extent possible in the revised regulations or, where necessary, in primary legislation. While the issues raised were of considerable scope and complexity, I expect to be in a position to submit proposals to Government in September, with the associated regulations being made shortly thereafter. Any issues requiring primary legislation will be addressed in the context of the passage through the House of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which I expect will be published shortly.

The revised regulations will cover all private rented accommodation, not just properties which are the subject of rent supplement payments. My Department has ongoing discussions with the Department of Social and Family Affairs, which has lead responsibility for the operation of the rent supplement scheme through the Community Welfare Service, regarding the need to match rent supplement payments to accommodation of an adequate standard. In addition, my Department has recently written to all housing authorities to emphasise the importance of ensuring regular liaison with, and appropriate action between, housing authorities and Community Welfare Officers to ensure that rent supplement-supported private rented accommodation meets the requirements of the minimum standards regulations.

Social and Affordable Housing.

61. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to fast-track the provision of social housing in order to deliver the commitment to end long-term homelessness by 2010; the details of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27592/08]

85. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of people listed as homeless, by local authority area, for the years 2003 to 2007 and to date in 2008 in tabular form; the steps being taken to reduce the numbers of homeless people; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27579/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 61 and 85 together.

The triennial statutory assessment of housing needs provides information on homelessness, including details of the number of homeless households by local authority area. These are published in the Annual Housing Statistics Bulletins, which are available in the Oireachtas Library and on my Department's website at www.enviro.ie. The most recent published figures relate to the position at March 2005. The latest triennial assessment took place in March 2008 and results will be published in due course.

Significant progress has been undertaken to address homelessness since the adoption of the Integrated Government Strategy on Homelessness in 2000 and the Preventative Strategy in 2002. This has included an improvement in both the quality and range of services for homeless persons. Homeless fora have been established throughout the country and local action plans on homelessness adopted. A range of new services, in relation to emergency, transitional and long-term accommodation has been provided and settlement and tenancy sustainment services have been developed to assist people out of homelessness.

A revised Government strategy to underpin future action on homelessness has been developed by my Department in conjunction with the Cross Department Team on Homelessness, with input from the National Homeless Consultative Committee, which includes representatives of local authorities, the HSE and voluntary bodies. A core objective of the strategy will be the elimination of long-term occupation of emergency homeless accommodation. An important factor in pursuing this objective will be the provision of accommodation in the social and voluntary housing sectors, including exploiting the significant potential of the Rental Accommodation Scheme in this area and ensuring the availability of appropriate outreach and settlement support. Local circumstances and the needs of individual homeless people must be taken into account in delivering the optimum response in each case. The new strategy, now being finalised, will be published following the resolution of a number of outstanding issues.

Departmental Surveys.

62. **Deputy Leo Varadkar** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of health safety studies he has initiated in the past five years; the subject matter of these studies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27733/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Neither I, nor my predecessors, have initiated any health and safety studies related to the functions of the Department in the past five years.

Under the terms of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and subsequent regulations, the Department must ensure the safety, health and welfare of all staff in the workplace. The Department is committed to ensuring that appropriate measures and resources are in place to comply with the relevant statutory provisions, and that these are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. A Safety Management structure outlining particular roles and responsibilities has been put in place, with overall responsibility in relation to health and safety being held by the Secretary General.

In line with best practice regarding health and safety, specific safety reviews, utilising in-house expertise and external expert advice, are carried out on a regular basis. These relate, in particular, to the work of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and the National Monuments Service, and include reviews on the safe use of technical equipment, the conduct of survey work and inspections, and risk assessments. In addition, site-specific health and safety

surveys have been completed in relation to various Departmental offices and properties and these are reviewed on a regular basis.

Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 52

Nuclear Plants.

64. **Deputy John Perry** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the action he has taken in the past year on attempting to have the nuclear plant at Sellafield closed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27722/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Ireland has long been concerned about the threat to this country posed by the large and complex nuclear reprocessing site at Sellafield. The policies and actions of this Government continue to reflect the firm position that Sellafield is an unacceptable threat to Ireland and that it should be decommissioned and closed in a safe and orderly manner. Since coming into office I have articulated this position at all appropriate opportunities.

For some years now, the UK and Ireland have developed a process for regular high level exchanges on the matter of Sellafield and its related facilities. These exchanges have embedded the package of measures for enhanced co-operation and information exchanges announced by my predecessor in December 2004.

The background to that announcement is that, in 2001, in response to the then imminent commissioning of the MOX fuel manufacturing plant at the Sellafield site, Ireland instituted legal proceedings against the UK under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Pending the hearing of the case, Ireland applied for and received a Provisional Measures Order from the Arbitral Tribunal, which ordered a review by Ireland and the UK of the mechanisms for inter-governmental notification and co-operation. Arising from this, a series of co-operative measures was developed, agreed and put in place.

These measures are valuable from Ireland's viewpoint and are working well. They represent real and considerable added value to the necessarily co-operative relationship between Ireland and the UK. The measures include the Bi-Lateral Agreement on Early Notification of a Nuclear Incident; direct access to the UK Radiation Monitoring System (RIMNET); access for the Garda Síochána to Sellafield, significantly improved information exchanges; co-operation on emergency planning with the UK; improved and ongoing contacts at regulator and official level on nuclear issues; and access for the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) to Sellafield and other facilities. This latter measure has resulted in two visits by the RPII to sites in the UK, one to Sellafield and one to Wylfa. The Reports of the Institute on these visits are available on the RPII website, www.rpii.ie. These visits are extremely useful to Ireland. They enhance the co-operation between technical experts in both countries and provide us with a high level of knowledge of the operation of these UK nuclear facilities which would not otherwise be readily available.

I consider that the co-operation measures are being utilised fully by Ireland and, with the co-operation of the UK, the level of exchange is deepening with each meeting. These all provide objective evidence of real improvements in the quality of the information available to Ireland and enhancement of our understanding of the site. In this way, we are better able to assess the full nature of the threat posed, and ensure that we are well placed to deal with such threat, however remote.

I emphasise, however, that the Government is continuing and will continue to pursue all political, diplomatic and, where necessary and appropriate, legal options to secure the safe and

[Deputy John Gormley.]

orderly decommissioning of the Sellafield facility. It is my view that the ongoing discussions between the two administrations in relation to Sellafield have resulted in increased recognition by the UK Government of the depth and seriousness of Ireland's concerns about Sellafield and of the priority that is rightly accorded to the issue by the Irish Government.

Ireland has supported and will continue to support efforts by the European Commission to develop an increased role for itself in the area of safety within the European Nuclear Industry. Adoption of European Council Conclusions in regard to the establishment of the EU High Level Regulators Group is a significant development in this area. In Ireland's view, the trans-boundary risks and impacts arising from nuclear installations should be fully reflected in the instruments, structures and institutions of the EU.

Library Projects.

65. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of public access internet PCs in libraries here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21377/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael P. Kitt): Over the period 1999 to 2007, my Department has provided over €12 million in grant aid towards various ICT projects in the public library service. The funding enabled the provision of public access Internet PCs, the automation of library systems and the development of a significant number of other grant aided ICT services/projects, including the Ask About Ireland and Borrow Books websites.

Public library authorities report a total of 1,634 ICT terminals in 329 out of a total of 352 library service points at the end of 2006, which is the latest complete year for which details are available and represents a 93% infiltration across the public library network. There has been a further significant increase in the number of internet PCs since then as 15 new/extended libraries have opened during 2007 and to date in 2008. In a national survey of public library users carried out in September 2007, 87% of users rated public library internet provision as either good or very good.

I recently launched the new public library policy document *Branching Out — Future Directions*. The new policy document sets out a redefined vision for the public library service through a series of priorities and recommendations which include the further enhancement of ICT provision throughout the library service. This document will drive the policy for the public library service in Ireland over the next five years.

Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 47.

Waste Management.

67. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps he is taking to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill following a report by the Environmental Protection Agency in 2008 that found that the volume of waste going to landfill is increasing and that Ireland is in significant danger of missing its European Union targets for diverting recyclable waste from landfill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27571/08]

90. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps being taken to reduce the amount of waste going to landfills in view of the recent ESRI report that found that 80% of household waste is going to landfills, that there

is a discrepancy between the stated policy of the Government and the policies in place regarding landfill, and that European Union targets on reducing waste going to landfills will be missed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27570/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 and 90 together.

Council Directive 1999/31/EC on the landfill of waste sets challenging targets for the diversion of biodegradable municipal waste from landfill. In the case of Ireland, the diversion rates required are projected to equate to 59% for 2010, 73% by 2013 and 80% by 2016 for this particular waste stream. The recent National Waste Report 2006 published in January 2008 by the EPA presents the scale of the challenge in sharp focus: while the recovery rate for this waste stream increased to 38% from 35% in 2005, the quantity of this waste going to landfill rose by 15%.

A National Strategy on Biodegradable Waste, published in 2006, sets out a wide range of integrated measures, designed in accordance with the waste hierarchy, to support biodegradable municipal waste minimisation and diversion from landfill. The Programme for Government is clearly committed to the effective implementation of this Strategy.

My Department is supporting the roll-out by local authorities of segregated “brown bin” collections for food and garden waste; this will make a significant contribution to diversion of household waste from landfill as we have already seen in places like Galway and Waterford. In addition, it has become clear that landfill gate fees have fallen thereby making landfill more attractive as a waste disposal option. I have, therefore, recently signed an Order and associated Regulations giving effect to an increase in the landfill levy from €15 per tonne to €20 per tonne from 1 July this year. This is the maximum increase permissible under the current legislation and is the first increase in the landfill levy since it was first introduced in 2002.

In line with the commitment given in the Programme, a major review of waste policy is now commencing. The review will examine the potential contribution that mechanical-biological treatment (MBT) and other technologies can deliver towards our landfill diversion targets, particularly in the context of recovering the biodegradable fraction in residual waste arising from domestic households. I have already placed on the record my position that an over reliance on incineration is not the answer for residual waste treatment.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

68. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if, in view of the challenging EU 20% reduction target, he will update and redraft the National Climate Change Strategy to take into account this new target; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27689/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Since the publication of the National Climate Change Strategy, work has continued across Government Departments on the development of further measures to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. I reported on these when I presented the Carbon Budget in December 2007 and this will be updated each year.

The National Climate Change Strategy was focused primarily on the achievement of our targets for the Kyoto period, 2008-2012, and included a commitment to prepare a new Strategy for the post-Kyoto period when our target for that period had been finalised on foot of the international negotiations on a new global agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol. My hope is that, in the context of a new international agreement, the EU will be in a position to adopt

[Deputy John Gormley.]

a 30% greenhouse gas emissions reduction target for 2020. Ireland's target will then be agreed within the EU's effort-sharing of its overall commitment.

Under the direction of the Cabinet Committee on Climate Change and Energy Security, Departments have intensified their work on developing measures both for the Kyoto period and the longer-term; in that respect work towards a new National Climate Change Strategy is already underway.

Social and Affordable Housing.

69. **Deputy Liz McManus** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of affordable houses built here for the years 2003 to 2007 and to date in 2008; the steps being taken by him to ensure adequate and timely supply of affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27580/08]

84. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the percentage of the numbers of houses built for the years 2004 to 2007 and to date in 2008, that were social, voluntary or affordable housing, as required by Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000; the steps he is taking to ensure this requirement is realising adequate numbers of affordable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27581/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 69 and 84 together.

Information on housing activity, including under Part V, up to the end of 2007 is available on my Department's website at www.environ.ie. Information is also published in my Department's Housing Statistics Bulletins, copies of which are available in the Oireachtas Library. My Department is collating data on output for the first quarter of 2008, which will be published in the near future.

It is important to stress that not all housing output in the State is subject to agreements under Part V. Part V applies only to housing developments of five or more units or on lands of 0.1 hectares or more which is zoned for residential use, or a mixture of residential and other uses. It does not apply to planning permissions granted prior to the introduction of Part V, many of which, until recently, were still being built out.

Up to end 2007, 5,133 affordable and 2,482 social units were acquired on foot of agreements with developers. Over 114 acres of land have been transferred by developers to local authorities, with an estimated capacity to yield over 900 further homes and 419 partially or fully serviced individual sites had been transferred to local authorities and voluntary housing bodies. In addition, housing authorities had accepted approximately €84.3 million from developers in lieu of land as part of Part V agreements. A further €11.6 million had also been received under the "withering levy". These funds are ringfenced for use by authorities for Part V purposes or for their housing functions generally.

Local authorities have been regularly advised by my Department to conclude Part V agreements at the earliest possible stage to ensure the successful delivery of social and affordable housing. The continued increase in output under Part V indicates that local authorities generally are acting in accordance with this advice.

In relation to affordable housing supply generally, the Affordable Homes Partnership, working closely with my Department, continues to focus on specific initiatives to increase the supply in the Greater Dublin Area and provides comprehensive advice to local authorities country-

wide on many aspects of affordable housing. In addition, the Partnership was requested to conduct a study on ways in which the range of existing affordable housing mechanisms might be improved or expanded in order, principally, to increase supply and accelerate delivery. The resultant report, “Increasing Affordable Housing Supply”, was published in April 2008 for public consultation and my Department is also consulting with the social partners in relation to the report’s recommendations. The report recommends some improvements in aspects of programme delivery and also recommends a new product to replace the existing range of schemes. I will give careful consideration to the results of this consultation process, in deciding on future directions in relation to affordable housing.

Question No. 70 answered with Question No. 47.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

71. **Deputy Jim O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if, in view of the fact that the sanctions by local authorities for housing adaptation grants for older people and people with a disability schemes have been stopped in many, if not all, local authority areas as a result of shortage of funding, he will either restore or increase the capital allocations for 2008 or alternatively relax the terms of the scheme in order that essential work done by applicants following applications and pending approval will not subsequently be excluded from the terms of the scheme. [27618/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The administration of the Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability is a matter for individual local authorities.

My Department made a combined capital allocation of €71.4 million to all local authorities on 21 May for the operation of the adaptation grant schemes in private houses in 2008. The schemes are funded by 80% recoupment available from my Department, together with 20% contribution from the resources of the local authority. It is a matter for each local authority to decide on the level of funding to be provided for the schemes from within the combined allocation notified to them and to manage the operation of the schemes from within this allocation. Furthermore, it is a matter for each local authority to prioritise applications under the schemes, within available funding, in line with the administrative guidance issued by my Department in October 2007 regarding the operation of the schemes.

Requests by any local authorities for additional funding for the operation of the schemes are dealt with by my Department in the context of the reallocation of surplus resources from other authorities and, as such, allocations provided to local authorities are generally revised during the course of the year where expenditure is higher or lower than anticipated. Applications from authorities for additional funding will be considered by my Department in the light of any savings emerging later in the year in other local authority areas.

Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 60.

Archaeological Sites.

73. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on a claim (details supplied) that the report of an archaeologist regarding the M3 motorway at Tara, County Meath was falsified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [26938/08]

78. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has taken steps to establish or investigate if the necessary archeological information was available when the decision to approve the M3 Motorway route was made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27565/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 73 and 78 together.

The decision to approve the M3 Motorway route was made by an Bord Pleanála in August 2003. Under the relevant provisions of the National Monuments Acts, the statutory functions of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the matter relate only to the regulation of archaeological works associated with an approved road scheme, such as the M3.

According to my Department's records, the archaeologist who wrote the report referred to in recent media allegations was granted six licences under the National Monuments Acts in 2004 to carry out test trenching on the approved route of the M3 motorway in accordance with the requirements of the EIS for the scheme. The licences related to archaeological investigative works on the Navan to Kells (including the Kells Bypass) section of the motorway, but not on the Dunshaughlin to Navan section, which passes through the Gabhra valley, between Tara and Skryne.

The test excavations were carried out following the standard methodology used in such cases i.e. a 2 metre wide trench was excavated along the centre line of the approved route with offset trenches at 20 m intervals extending to the edge of the land-take for the road. Reports on the results of the test excavations carried out were submitted to the Department and Ministerial directions were issued for the full archaeological excavation and recording of all the archaeological sites identified in the test excavations. These excavations were carried out under the direction of qualified and experienced archaeologists and work on all the sites has been completed. Archaeologists from my Department carried out inspections of the foregoing works on a number of occasions. The reports of the test excavations submitted to my Department were comprehensive and were considered accurately and fully to reflect what was found during these excavations.

In later High Court proceedings, *Vincent Salafia v. the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Meath County Council, Ireland and the Attorney General*, the High Court considered, inter alia, the archaeological trench testing that took place on the route of the M3 between March and December 2004 and the reports on that testing. In its judgement in the case, the Court found that the Minister at the time considered carefully and in detail the material supplied to him before issuing the foregoing directions and having sought the advice of the Director of the National Museum, as required under the National Monuments Acts, he was entitled to issue the directions in the circumstances in which they were issued.

A Code of Practice on archaeological heritage protection between my Department and the NRA has been in place for a number of years. The Code commits the NRA to a number of principles including the appointment of its own staff of project archaeologists to oversee archaeological works associated with road developments. The Code also provides that where any dispute arises between the relevant project archaeologist and a consultant archaeologist carrying out archaeological works, the matter will be referred to the Department for a decision. There is no record of any dispute between the NRA's project archaeologists for the M3 motorway and any of the consultant archaeologists working on the scheme ever having been referred to the Department.

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 58.

Electoral Commission.

75. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when it is intended to establish the independent electoral commission to take responsibility for electoral administration and oversight; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27590/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to establish an independent Electoral Commission which will take responsibility for electoral administration and oversight, implement modern and efficient electoral practices, revise constituency boundaries, take charge of compiling a new national rolling electoral register, take over the functions of the Standards in Public Office Commission relating to election spending, and examine the issue of financing the political system. My Department has appointed consultants to carry out preliminary research on issues arising in relation to the establishment of the Electoral Commission. Their report is expected in August 2008. The research findings will inform further consideration of the approach to be taken in relation to an Electoral Commission.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has issued instruction to the various local authorities the result of which is that contracts already entered into in respect of water, sewerage or housing schemes will be deferred; the degree to which this is expected to delay investment in infrastructure; the extent to which this is expected to postpone remedial or upgrading works necessary to prevent the issue of pollution of ground water, rivers, streams and lakes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27625/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): In October 2006, the Department of Finance, which is responsible for public procurement rules, issued instructions requiring all traditional public works projects to use new forms of construction contracts from February 2007 onwards. The new forms of contract were introduced to achieve greater cost certainty, better value for money and more timely and efficient delivery of publicly funded projects. Contracting authorities were given the option of either switching over to the new forms of contract or completing any contract documents on which detailed drafting was already underway. This interim arrangement was brought to a conclusion in February 2008.

Since then, the Minister for Finance has agreed that, in order to avoid delay in project delivery, there should be some flexibility in relation to the application of the new forms of fixed price contract and that, subject to certain conditions, tenders for water services contracts received before 6 May 2008 using the old form of contract should be allowed to proceed. Relevant local authorities have been informed accordingly.

Waste Disposal.

77. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his policy in respect of incinerators or landfill as a means of waste disposal and management; his preferred options in this regard; if current thinking is in line with or anticipated in the Programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27624/08]

372. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to meet current and expected requirements in terms of waste management and disposal; the extent to which landfill, recycling or incineration is expected to play a part; the extent of environmental impact under each heading; when he expects to achieve best practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28256/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 and 372 together.

The Programme for Government contains a range of commitments in respect of waste management policy centred on the Government's continued support for the internationally recognised waste hierarchy which places major emphasis on the prevention, reuse and recycling of waste while minimising reliance on landfill and incineration. This commitment to the waste hierarchy has added significance in the context of the requirements of the EU Landfill Directive to divert waste from landfill. Meeting this obligation will entail doubling the existing level of diversion from landfill by 2010 and further increases in diversion in subsequent years. The Programme also signalled a move away from mass burn incineration towards alternative technologies.

This is a process which will be assisted by the major review of waste policy, also provided for in the Programme, which is now commencing and which will address how best to implement waste prevention and minimisation, and the emergence of new technologies in waste management, particularly those for the mechanical and biological treatment of waste, which can reduce the need for incineration or landfill.

Undue emphasis on incineration as the cornerstone of waste management policy is detrimental to the development of alternative solutions. The review may well indicate some residual role for incineration in our future waste management strategy but I do not envisage it being on anything like the scale that was previously planned.

Question No. 78 answered with Question No. 73.

EU Directives.

79. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the warnings and opinions Ireland has received from the European Commission in respect of lack of compliance with the Landfill Directive 1999; the matters on which the European Commission has sought rectification in these warnings; his response to these warnings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27569/08]

91. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps he has taken to respond to the final warning sent by the European Commission in respect of Ireland's failure to properly transpose the Landfill Directive 1999; if he sent a reply by the deadline of the 1 May 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27568/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 79 and 91 together.

The European Commission sent a letter of formal notice to Ireland in March 2007 concerning a number of technical issues regarding the transposition of the EU Landfill Directive. A detailed response to the issues raised was sent to the Commission in May 2007.

In January 2008 a reasoned opinion was received from the Commission in relation to the transposition issue and a reply issued on 16 May 2008. Most of the issues raised have now been

resolved and a meeting between my Department and Commission officials has been requested to resolve the outstanding matters.

Election Management System.

80. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will propose amendments to election finance laws to prevent persons from making political donations of more than the €2,500 limit by spreading donations between multiple business entities in which those persons may have a controlling interest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [21949/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Programme for Government contains a commitment to establish an independent Electoral Commission which will take responsibility for a range of electoral matters including the functions currently exercised by the Standards in Public Office Commission relating to election spending. The Electoral Commission will also examine the issue of financing of the political system.

Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 52.

82. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if it is intended to use electronic voting machines in the next local government elections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27587/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I am at present considering the next steps to be taken in relation to the electronic voting project. In this, I am taking into account the work of the Commission on Electronic Voting, which has examined the system, relevant experiences and developments internationally, the need to maintain public confidence in the electoral process, as well as the provisions in the Programme for Government relating to electoral reform generally.

I am not in a position, therefore, to be definitive regarding the timing of future use of the system. I am conscious of the extensive work inherent in the recommendations of the Commission on Electronic Voting, including the replacement of the election management software, as well as adaptations to the equipment and further end to end testing. At the very least, it will be problematic to envisage use of the current e-voting scheme at the Local and European Elections in 2009.

My Department has appointed consultants to carry out preliminary research on the issues arising in relation to the establishment of the Electoral Commission. The work is currently underway and is expected to be completed in August.

Environmental Policy.

83. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to establish universal design and lifetime adaptability guidelines and incorporate them as a legal requirement for all newly built houses, with a national monitoring system for implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27596/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The concept of Universal Design centres on achieving a built environment that can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size or disability. The achievement of this objective is being greatly assisted by the ongoing work of my Department in developing new comprehensive guidance on interrelated housing and

[Deputy John Gormley.]

planning issues, focusing on house design, residential density and best practice in relation to the planning and design of residential neighbourhoods. My Department has also been engaged in an extensive review of Part M of the Building Regulations. Following a public consultation on the existing provisions in 2006, a draft revised Part M and associated Technical Guidance Document will be published for a final round of public consultation shortly. This will represent a step change in standards for accessibility and underpin the principle of Universal Design. A national housing strategy for people with a disability is also being prepared under the aegis of a National Advisory Group, chaired by my Department and involving the Department of Health and Children, the Health Service Executive, the social partners and other relevant stakeholders including the National Disability Authority. The strategy is to be completed by end 2009 and the concept of Lifetime Adaptable Housing will be considered in that context.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 69.

Question No. 85 answered with Question No. 61.

Local Authority Housing.

86. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that certain local authorities have developed a separate interview system for the allocation of Part V housing to the routine social housing allocations; and the impact that this may have in developing socially cohesive communities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27595/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The allocation of social housing is undertaken by a local authority under its scheme of letting priorities, the making of which is a reserved function of the authority under section 11 of the Housing Act 1988. Guidance issued by my Department in respect of the making of these schemes made it clear to local authorities that the primary objective of their schemes should be to promote equality of opportunity in gaining access to housing support. The application of allocation policy is a matter for each local authority.

Local Authority Customer Service Charter.

87. **Deputy Seán Sherlock** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when it is intended to publish the local authority customer service charter as promised in the programme for Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27589/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The programme for Government contains a commitment to put customer service in local authorities to the forefront of local government reform. This was addressed in the Green Paper on Local Government Reform, which I launched in April 2008. The Green Paper is undergoing nationwide consultation, which will feed into a White Paper by the end of the year. In this regard, I look forward to constructive comments and suggestions as to how quality customer service in local authorities can be further improved. A local authority customer service charter setting out customer service standards is one of the steps which will be addressed in the context of the reform process. In the interim, quality customer service in the local government sector is one of my priorities. It has been a key pillar of the local government modernisation programme over the past decade. Significant progress has been made by local authorities in service delivery under the programme. This has been confirmed by the performance verification group

for the sector under the national partnership arrangements. Substantial support and resources have been provided by my Department to local authorities on specific initiatives in the area of customer service. These include €31 million to support a one-stop-shop programme, which will make access to services and information easier and more efficient for customers. A further €9.8 million has been provided to improve efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery through the use of information technology. Many local authority services, including planning and motor tax, are now more accessible on-line.

As part of the modernisation programme, a Local Government Customer Service Group, representative of my Department, the local government sector at both elected member and official level and the Institute of Public Administration, was put in place to develop and promote specific customer service initiatives. A number of initiatives have been introduced, including local authority service indicators, under which authorities report annually to me as Minister on their performance across 42 indicators. The indicators, which were a first for the public service, are quality assured by an Independent Assessment Panel. The Local Government Customer Service Group recently completed a review of the indicators, resulting in a number of additions and amendments which will apply from 2008. The group has issued separate guidelines to local authorities on best practice in handling customer complaints and engaging in customer consultation. In addition, a high level Task Force on Customer Service, chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and on which my Department and the local government sector are represented, was established in September 2007. The task force is charged with promoting quality customer service across the entire public service, including local government. While the significant progress made by local authorities in the area of customer service generally should be acknowledged, I am committed to ensuring they continue to intensify their efforts in this most important area.

Question No. 88 answered with Question No. 47.

Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 52.

Question No. 90 answered with Question No. 67.

Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 79.

Local Government Elections.

92. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his view on to the reports of the local electoral areas committees and on all the recommendations made; when these will be implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27586/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): On 16 June 2008, I received the reports of the two Boundary Committees I established last January to review local electoral areas. The reports were published on 17 June 2008. I am accepting the recommendations contained in both reports and will make the necessary orders to give effect to them in due course.

Environmental Policy.

93. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will phase out incandescent light bulbs over a period of years, as opposed to his original announced intention to ban incandescent bulbs completely by January 2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27583/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I refer to the reply to Question No. 929 of 17 June 2008. The position has not changed. I will announce details of the proposed energy efficiency standard for lighting, including arrangements for public consultation, as soon as they are finalised.

Tax Code.

94. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the finding in the survey on people's attitudes to climate change that when specific prices were given for carbon taxes that the majority of those surveyed opposed the specific carbon taxes suggested to them; and the reason these findings were not published when he first announced the results of the survey in February 2008. [27584/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I have noted the findings in the survey relating to carbon taxes. The Programme for Government includes a commitment to investigate fiscal measures to protect and enhance the environment, including the introduction of a carbon tax. I refer to the reply to Question No. 91 of 27 May 2008 in this regard. The survey was commissioned at the end of February 2008, the questionnaire was designed and the fieldwork carried out in March, following which the headline results were announced in April. A full analysis of the findings was carried out by the researchers in April and presented to the Department in late April for consideration. The findings were subsequently published in full in May.

Housing Strategy.

95. **Deputy Arthur Morgan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his plans to introduce an implementation plan outlining funding commitments and roll-out targets as an appendix to the new housing strategy; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that his predecessor gave a commitment to doing so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27594/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The new homeless strategy will incorporate both national and local actions to underpin the achievement of its strategic aims. It is also intended that an implementation plan will be finalised following the publication of the strategy.

Departmental Publications.

96. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Taoiseach the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27977/08]

The Taoiseach: Details of publications and booklets published on behalf of my Department as requested by the Deputy are listed in the following table:

Publication	Consultants	Date of Publication	Production and Design Cost	Printing Cost	Overall Cost
Department of the Taoiseach Scheme (2005-08) under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003	Design: Comarsaid Creative Translation: eTeams	September 2005	N/A	Design and printing — €5,250 Translation of scheme into Irish €972	€6,222
Production of February 2007 edition of LINK Newsletter Issue No. 48	Boyd Freeman Design Maxwell Photography Pixels Media National Council for the Blind DCULS Ltd. Department of the Taoiseach	February 2007	€3,737.30 €399.24 €417.99 €910 €1,132.02 €350	€17,721	€24,717.55
Towards 2016 ten-year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-15 First Progress Report	N/A	February 2007		€3,134.61	€3,134.61
Report of the Commission of Investigation (Dublin and Monaghan Bombings 1974)	Cahill Printers	March 2007	€2,801	€3,048	€5,849
ESRI Survey of Business Attitudes to Regulation	ESRI	March 2007	€1,000,279.79 (inc. VAT)	€24,955.52	€125,235.31
Production of April 2007 edition of LINK Newsletter, Issue No. 49	Boyd Freeman Design Maxwell Photography Mick Quinn Photography DCULS Ltd. Department of the Taoiseach	April 2007	€3,182.30 €649.22 €72.60 €1,048.37 €200	€17,038.82	€22,192.31
Easter 1916 Commemorative Ceremony Brochure (2007)		April 2007			€2,523.11
Daniel O'Connell and Slavery		April 2007			€12,996
Production of OECD Questionnaire booklets	Department of Finance	May 2007		€132.78	€132.78
Production of publicity Brochure to advertise the Taoiseach's Public Service Excellence Awards 2008	Boyd Freeman Design	May 2007	€3,321.45	€4,080.33	€7,401.78

Publication	Consultants	Date of Publication	Production & Design Cost	Printing Cost	Overall Cost
Production of Fitzpatrick Associates Evaluation of the Customer Charter Initiative in the Civil Service Castle, June 2007	Boyd Freeman Design	June 2007	€7,786.35	€28,892.00	€36,678.35
Production of brochures for the QCS Seminar in Dublin Castle, June 2007	Department of Finance	June 2007		€448.22	€448.22
Towards 2016 Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015 Second Progress Report	N/A	July 2007		€3,329.50	€3,329.50
Production of Guidelines on the Preparation of Strategy Statements, July 2007	Department of Finance	July 2007		€421	€421
Production of July 2007 edition of LINK Newsletter, Issue No. 50	Boyd Freeman Design Maxwell Photography DCULS Ltd. National Council for the Blind Department of the Taoiseach	July 2007	€5,046.70 €1,317.17 €1,078.91 €776.25 €200	€17,289.95	€25,708.98
National Day of Commemoration Ceremonial Order Booklet		July 2007			€3,820
Taoiseach's Address to Westminster	Brunswick Press	August 2007 September 2007 (reprint)	€3,859.92	€6,910	€10,769.92
Annual Report 2006	Brunswick Press Ger Garland eTeams	August 2007	Design €4,809.75 Translation €2,503.34	€4,870	€12,183
The Flight of the Earls 1607		Sept 2007			€11,281
Review of the Irish Annuities Market	Indecon Economic Consultants	17 October 2007	€133,100 (inc VAT)	€1,014	€134,114
Production of October 2007 edition of LINK Newsletter, Issue No. 51	Boyd Freeman Design Maxwell Photography DCULS Ltd. National Council for the Blind	October 2007	€4,089.80 €45.40 €998.25 €925.50	€18,389.90	€24,448.85

Publication	Consultants	Date of Publication	Production & Design Cost	Printing Cost	Overall Cost
Towards 2016 Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015 Third Progress Report	N/A	November 2007		€10,914.20	€10,914.20
Production of December 2007 edition of LINK Newsletter, Issue No. 52	Boyd Freeman Design DCULS Ltd.	December 2007	€3,551.35 €1,270.17	€18,622.50	€23,444.02
Strategy Statement 2008-2010	JDK Design Europus	December 2007	N/A	N/A	Awaiting invoices for design and translation costs.
Louvain, Lobhain, Louvain 1607		January 2008			€11,695
Towards 2016 Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015 Summary Report on Progress November 2007 to February 2008	N/A	February 2008		€5,140	€5,140
Production of March 2008 edition of LINK Newsletter, Issue No. 53	Ashville Media Ltd. Maxwell Photography DCULS Ltd.	March 2008	Combined total = €499.21 €1,373.25	€20,520.80	€22,393.26
Easter 1916 Commemoration Ceremony Brochure (2008)		March 2008			€3,019.10
Production of Conference Brochures for the Taoiseach's Public Service Excellence Awards 2008	Boyd Freeman Design	April 2008	€1,995	€3,240	€5,235
Production of Project Summaries booklets for the Taoiseach's Public Service Excellence Awards 2008	Boyd Freeman Design	April 2008	€4,833.95	€10,103.90	€14,937.85
Production of May 2008 edition of LINK Newsletter, Issue No. 54	Ashville Media Ltd. Maxwell Photography MacInnes Photography	May 2008	Combined total = €532.40 €620.00	€20,520.80	€21,673.20
Commemorative Booklet for the Official Opening of the Battle of the Boyne site	Oval Printing	May 2008	€0	€3,058.83	€3,058.83
"Towards an Integrated Public Service" — OECD Review of the Irish Public Service	NIL*				

* An additional voluntary contribution was made towards the research efforts of the OECD.

Departmental Expenditure.

97. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the amount of money paid in fees or expenses to outside consultants in respect of each year since 2002 to date in 2008; the amount of this money that related to public relations in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28244/08]

The Taoiseach: The table that follows this reply outlines expenditure from my Department's Vote on consultancy services and expenses and the amounts that related to public relations in each case from 2002 to 2008 (to date). The figures also include consultancy spend recouped from the Change Management Fund in the Department of Finance. The expenditure on public relations services relate primarily to the National Forum on Europe and the Task Force on Active Citizenship.

Year	Spend on Consultancy (incl. PR)	Spend on Public Relations
	€	€
2002	995,032	95,167
2003	272,942	54,666
2004	477,398	88,858
2005	405,188	93,143
2006	527,924	72,661
2007	663,870	150,524
2008 (End of June)	385,896	76,964

Decentralisation Programme.

98. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance further to Question No. 213 of 24 April 2008, the position regarding this matter; when he expects the preferred tenderer to apply for planning permission; when he expects construction to begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27817/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Preferred Tenderer is finalising the application for planning permission at present and will be lodging the application with Roscommon County Council shortly. The programme for construction will be determined following completion of the planning process.

Flood Relief.

99. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the Clonmel flooding works at present; if the funding for the second two parts of the works are secure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28047/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Clonmel Flood Relief Scheme is divided into separate phases. Work on the first phase has commenced and is ongoing. Provision for the completion of all phases of the scheme has been included in the provision for Flood Risk Management in the National Development Plan.

Tax Code.

100. **Deputy Brian Hayes** asked the Minister for Finance his views on changing benefit in kind arrangements from businesses instead of allowing a mileage offset in terms of reducing the tax liability for employees who obtain company cars; his further views on allowing an

offsetting arrangement on the basis of fuel emissions, which would be a more environmentally friendly tax strategy for businesses and their employees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28238/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The benefit-in-kind system on company cars was substantially revised in 2004. Under the revised system the benefit to an employee of a car provided by his or her employer is calculated by reference to the original market price of the car and the employee's annual business mileage. For example, where an employee's annual business mileage is 15,000 miles or less the benefit of the car is calculated at 30% of the original market price of the car. This falls to 6% where the employee's business mileage is 30,001 business miles and over. The tapering of rates ensures that employees who genuinely need to travel significantly in the course of their work incur a lower benefit-in-kind charge. Overall the current system is seen as relatively neutral in terms of its effect on the environment. Any changes to the present system would be a matter for consideration in the context of future budgetary policy.

Departmental Expenditure.

101. **Deputy Jim O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if a study has been carried out as to the cost to the Exchequer on average of dealing with Parliamentary Questions; if so, the details thereof; and if not, if he will provide an estimate of such costs. [27810/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am not aware of any study having been carried out into the cost to the Exchequer on average of dealing with Parliamentary Question and I am less than convinced that any such study would result in a meaningful average cost. As the costs of answering a parliamentary question vary according to the nature and phraseology of the questions asked, an average cost for any period on the basis of the costs to Departments generally may differ significantly from that applicable to any individual Department. Since the nature and the demands made on staff may differ from day to day, the average may also fluctuate depending on the period over which it is calculated.

Decentralisation Programme.

102. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the decentralisation of the Office of Public Works to Claremorris, County Mayo; the number of staff decentralised; the numbers to be decentralised; the timetable for same; the status of property acquisition and the cost involved; when the property will be ready for occupation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27819/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Deputy Martin Mansergh): The Office of Public Works (OPW) commenced operations in the OPW advance office in Claremorris in September 2007. There are 29 staff in place out of the 142 posts to be transferred to this location. The OPW has acquired the site for their permanent offices in Claremorris at a cost of €2.5 million. In accordance with protocols, the OPW is consulting with the Department of Finance in respect of moving to the tendering phase of the project. Following this consultative process, the timeline for the construction of permanent accommodation in Claremorris will be determined.

Departmental Correspondence.

103. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Finance further to Question No. 172 of 1 July

[Deputy Pat Breen.]

2008, the status of the application by a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27876/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I understand from the Chief State Solicitor's Office that it is in correspondence with the applicant's solicitor and that, as noted in my reply to the Deputy on 1 July last, it is awaiting certain information to progress this matter. I should also explain to the Deputy that this type of case normally involves the Chief State Solicitor taking out letters of administration and advertising for next of kin who may have a legal claim to succeed. It is only following the completion of these procedures that any application for waiver of the State's interest would be considered.

Decentralisation Programme.

104. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on succession issues arising in particular among technical specialists from the former tax inspector grades. [27923/08]

105. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of principal officers and above being relocated to the Revenue Commissioners as a consequence of the Government decentralisation process; the number of and the Departments from which these staff are to be transferred; the qualifications and expertise in respect of taxation matters that the staff subject to these particular transfers are supposed to have; the implications for the efficient functioning of the Revenue Commissioners if generalist staff as opposed to specialist staff are appointed to senior positions within it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27924/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 104 and 105 together.

From the outset the Government made it clear that participation in the decentralisation programme is voluntary. Across the public service, recruitment and promotion practices are being managed in a way that facilitates the achievement of the Decentralisation Programme in an efficient manner. Agreement has been reached with the unions representing general service staff that an assignment will not be made to a decentralising post until alternative arrangements have been identified for an existing post holder who does not wish to decentralise. The primary mechanism for placing civil servants who are in posts which are due to decentralise but wish to remain in Dublin is by way of bilateral transfer. As staff who have applied to decentralise continue to be transferred into decentralising organisations, the posts they vacate become available to those wishing to remain in Dublin.

Further arrangements have been initiated for general service grades where a bilateral transfer is not possible. The objective of the arrangements, known as "the Dublin Arrangements", is to provide to the Public Appointments Service details of staff who wish to remain in Dublin at each grade level so that a proportion of vacancies arising in Dublin based posts may be filled by such staff. The arrangements seek to balance the need to facilitate the effective achievement of the decentralisation programme with the business needs of Departments and the aspirations of staff to be placed in appropriate posts in Dublin. To achieve this, they allow for prioritisation at certain times of staff in organisations who have an immediate need to be placed in Dublin posts due to the timing of the relocation of their current Department or office. It is intended that the arrangements will continue over the full transition phase of the programme and my

Department is monitoring them in co-operation with Departments and the relevant unions to ensure they are operating efficiently.

Under the terms of Towards 2016 and previous Social Partnership Agreements, 50% of all posts at principal level in all civil service organisations are filled on an interdepartmental or open competition basis to increase mobility and bring new perspectives and talents to each grade. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they welcomed these agreements and saw considerable merit in arrangements which opened more posts in Revenue to staff from other Departments and the general public. To the extent that Principal posts fall to be filled in Dublin, this 50% liability is met from the agreed Dublin arrangements. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they have no difficulty with the arrangements. Revenue advises that it is not in a position to estimate the eventual number of Principals and above that will come into Revenue under the Decentralisation Programme. To date a total of nine Principals have joined Revenue under this programme. Three have come through the Central Applications Facilities for locations outside of Dublin. The balance of six have come to Revenue through the Dublin arrangements agreed with the Civil Service Unions. Of the total, three have come from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, two from the Department of Education and Science, two from the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and two from the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Revenue also advises that it fully appreciates the challenge it faces in relation to succession planning arising mainly from the particular age profile of its staff. It has developed a range of technical programmes aimed at addressing specific tax skills needs across all the grades in Revenue. It has an innovative partnership with the University of Limerick (UL) under which their modular tax technical training programme is accredited by the University to National Diploma level. This diploma programme is a detailed business oriented training programme developed and delivered by Revenue experts and aimed at ensuring that capability in tax technical issues is maintained and continues to grow. The programme delivers detailed training on tax specific issues, e.g. VAT, Income Tax, Corporation Tax, Employer issues, and includes modules on Accounting, Company Law and Revenue audit related issues. The academic accreditation of the in-house training, which addresses the skills needs of the organisation in respect of technical and audit issues, has the added benefit of enhancing the professionalism, status, effectiveness and reputation of the Revenue organisation.

The partnership with UL also encompasses a BA in Applied Taxation. The first such degrees were conferred earlier this year. This programme delivers advanced technical training to a small number of technical experts throughout the organisation on national and international taxation developments, accounting, economics, revenue law, and on specialised subjects such as financial services and property. There is no “one size fits all” prescription for succession planning. Throughout Revenue, skills transfer initiatives are being taken by local management and mobility and mentoring programmes are in place. The Board and Management Committee pay particular attention to succession in the context of placement decisions. I might add that many of the staff joining Revenue in recent years are very well qualified.

Official Travel.

106. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Finance the number of representatives of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27952/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): In response to the Deputy's question I can confirm that neither myself nor the Minister of State have any plans to visit Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games. Similarly, there are no plans in relation to advisers or Department officials.

Departmental Publications.

107. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Finance the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27972/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The table that follows this reply lists the publications and booklets produced by my Department between 1 January 2007 and June 2008. Costs associated with the production of these publications are listed in the table. As most of the publications and booklets have been prepared internally by the Department's staff or with the assistance from other public servants and published on the Department's web site, the portion of staff time relating to the preparation of the reports cannot be costed without unwaranted expenditure or effort.

Title of publications or booklets	Cost
Value for Money and Policy Review initiative Guidance Manual — March 2007	Published in house
Analysis of Exchequer Pay and Pension 2002-2007	Published in house
Annual Report of the Committee for Performance Awards for 2006	Published in house Translation cost €210
Terms and Conditions of Employment in the Irish Civil Service Staff Information Booklet	Published in house
Code of Practice for the Employment of People with a Disability in the Irish Civil Service	Published in house
Decentralisation Implementation Group report (October 2007)	Published in house
9th Annual Report by the Minister for Finance on Freedom of Information (English and Irish) 2007	€2,250 translation costs Published in house
National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) — document agreed with the European Commission setting out the strategic orientation for the EU Structural Funds allocated to Ireland under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective 2007-2013	€24,000 Includes production, translation and launch costs
ERDF Financial Control Unit — Annual Report 2006.	€17,804 Costs include design, printing and distribution costs.
Training Management & Language Development Programmes Spring/Summer 2007	Published in house
Training Management & Language Development Programmes Autumn 2007	Published in house
Training Management & Language Development Programmes Spring/Summer 2008	Published in house
Gaeleagras Clár an Fhomain 2007	Published in house
Gaeleagras Clár Ama 2008	Published in house
Gaeleagras Clár an Fhomain 2008	Published in house
Civil Service Language Programme 2007/2008	Published in house
Civil Service Language Programme 2008/2009	Published in house
Brochure for Certificate in Human Resource Management for Civil Servants — April 2007	€299
Integrated Performance Management Development System-Frequently Asked Questions — February 2007	Published in house

Title of publications or booklets	Cost
Department of Finance Progress Report 2006 (July 2007)	Published in house Translation costs €1,131
Department of Finance Statement of Strategy 2008-2010 (February 2008)	Published in house Translation costs €855
Annual Output Statement 2007	Published in house
Annual Output Statement 2008	Published in house
NDP/CSF 2000-2006 Review Irish and English	€14,901
National Development Plan 2007-2013 Information Leaflet	€2,411
NDP/CSF 2000-2006 County Information Brochures	€20,631
National Development Plan 2007-2013 Irish and English, Executive Summary Irish and English and CD Roms	€339,966
National Development Plan — Annual Report 2007 Irish and English	€31,355
National Strategic Reference December 2007	Published in house
ERDF Financial Control Unit Annual Report 2006	Published in house
Revised Estimates Volume 2007	Published in house Translation costs €679
Public Capital Programme 2007	Produced in house Translation costs €2,580
Revised Estimates Volume 2008	Published in house Translation costs €555
Public Capital Programme 2008	Published in house Translation costs €2,505
Analysis of Exchequer Pay and Pension 2002-2007	Published in house
Annual Report of the Committee for Performance Awards for 2006	€210 translation costs
Civil Service Initiatives Report 2006 (published May 2007)	Published in house
9th Annual Report by the Minister for Finance on Freedom of Information (English and Irish) 2007	Published in house Translation costs €2,250
Annual Report of Ireland's Participation in the International Monetary Fund and World Bank 2006	Translation into Irish €2,170 Published in house
Annual Report of Ireland's Participation in the International Monetary Fund and World Bank 2007	Graphic Design: €605 Translation into Irish €2,218.68 Published in house
Technical Note on the Compilation of a Public Sector Benchmark for a Public Private Partnership	Published in house
Guidelines to State Authorities regarding the National Development Finance Agency	Published in house
Value for Money and the Public Private Partnership Procurement Process	Published in house
Brochure for Certificate in Human Resource Management for Civil Servants	Published in house
Integrated Performance Management Development System — Frequently Asked Questions	Published in house
Review of Patent Royalties Exemption Goodbody Economic Consultants	Published in house
Review of Capital Allowances for Residential Units associated with Nursing Homes, Indecon International Economic Consultants	Published in house
Review of Business Expansion Scheme and Seed Capital Scheme	Published in house
Publication of Tax Strategy Group papers	Published in house
Review of film relief	Published in house

EU Funding.

108. **Deputy Ruairí Quinn** asked the Minister for Finance the net receipts by Ireland on an annual basis from 1973 to 2007 of all EU transfers under the Agricultural, Social, Regional and Cohesion Funds in constant money terms at 2007 prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27982/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The value of Ireland's net receipts from EU transfers over the period 1973 to 2007 totals €69.242 billion in 2007 prices. Table 1 provides an annual overall breakdown between EU receipts and payments in 2007 prices. Table 2 provides information for Ireland's net annual receipts (in 2007 prices) under the different funds. Ireland has been a net recipient from the EU receipts mainly because of substantial funding for agriculture.

Table 1: Ireland's Net EU Receipts from 1973 to 2007 (2007 prices)

	EU Receipts	EU Payments	Net Receipts
1973	449.0	54.4	394.6
1974	697.3	56.9	640.4
1975	933.9	83.9	850.0
1976	866.8	97.2	769.6
1977	1,742.0	141.1	1,600.9
1978	2,432.9	273.4	2,159.5
1979	2,771.5	317.5	2,454.1
1980	2,483.9	393.9	2,090.0
1981	1,864.7	387.8	1,476.9
1982	1,891.6	429.5	1,462.1
1983	2,069.3	525.2	1,544.1
1984	2,269.7	530.3	1,739.4
1985	2,803.3	529.8	2,273.5
1986	2,743.2	574.9	2,168.3
1987	2,552.2	591.9	1,960.2
1988	2,638.0	562.8	2,075.3
1989	2,826.3	623.2	2,203.1
1990	3,676.6	597.4	3,079.2
1991	4,504.6	712.6	3,792.0
1992	3,956.8	701.3	3,255.5
1993	4,392.1	887.5	3,504.6
1994	3,520.9	966.6	2,554.3
1995	3,769.9	1,012.4	2,757.5
1996	4,073.7	992.4	3,081.3
1997	4,541.8	928.3	3,613.5
1998	4,191.5	1,375.4	2,816.1
1999	3,663.9	1,437.4	2,226.5
2000	3,370.9	1,392.7	1,978.3
2001	3,074.8	1,507.2	1,567.5
2002	2,961.4	1,193.9	1,767.5
2003	2,938.7	1,358.1	1,580.6
2004	2,904.9	1,323.5	1,581.4
2005	2,596.9	1,631.5	965.4
2006	2,307.7	1,604.1	703.6
2007	2,239.1	1,684.0	555.1
Total	96,721.7	27,479.7	69,242.1

Table 2: Ireland's EU Net Receipts from 1973 to 2007 (2007 prices)

	FEOGA Guarantee	FEOGA Guidance	ESF	ERDF	Cohesion Fund	Other	Total
1973	394.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	394.6
1974	606.2	0.0	34.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	640.4
1975	796.3	4.7	31.2	14.1	0.0	3.9	850.0
1976	656.9	16.7	29.6	54.7	0.0	11.6	769.6
1977	1,437.8	43.4	48.1	49.9	0.0	21.7	1,600.9
1978	1,924.7	51.1	101.6	58.4	0.0	23.7	2,159.6
1979	1,839.1	85.8	133.6	118.3	0.0	277.4	2,454.1
1980	1,420.8	118.6	174.1	173.0	0.0	203.5	2,090.0
1981	887.7	122.1	132.0	159.1	0.0	176.0	1,476.9
1982	836.1	144.7	177.7	160.5	0.0	143.0	1,462.1
1983	937.2	135.2	196.7	123.5	0.0	151.5	1,544.0
1984	1,293.6	98.9	169.2	130.9	0.0	46.8	1,739.4
1985	1,685.2	112.4	284.6	153.1	0.0	38.3	2,273.5
1986	1,671.7	88.1	240.9	145.8	0.0	21.8	2,168.3
1987	1,317.6	121.0	344.7	155.7	0.0	21.2	1,960.2
1988	1,498.0	115.1	226.5	231.5	0.0	4.1	2,075.3
1989	1,638.6	130.5	235.7	192.0	0.0	6.3	2,203.1
1990	2,275.7	166.1	227.3	398.1	0.0	12.0	3,079.2
1991	2,298.8	246.9	638.6	589.0	0.0	18.8	3,792.0
1992	1,818.1	240.7	452.7	725.9	0.0	18.1	3,255.5
1993	2,001.5	196.6	486.6	725.2	63.6	31.2	3,504.6
1994	1,628.2	181.6	384.4	243.6	94.6	21.9	2,554.3
1995	1,569.2	195.0	349.5	488.5	136.6	18.8	2,757.5
1996	1,892.9	208.9	350.8	412.1	192.7	23.9	3,081.3
1997	2,185.9	238.6	389.8	512.3	245.4	41.4	3,613.5
1998	1,511.8	220.1	371.3	557.4	133.2	22.3	2,816.1
1999	1,432.1	88.3	220.7	220.2	241.0	24.2	2,226.5
2000	1,278.4	26.4	167.7	390.1	115.7	0.0	1,978.3
2001	997.8	13.0	85.0	226.4	187.1	58.1	1,567.5
2002	1,204.5	8.0	75.8	313.1	145.2	21.1	1,767.5
2003	1,193.6	10.2	68.4	180.7	105.9	21.8	1,580.6
2004	1,112.0	37.6	126.6	267.2	15.7	22.2	1,581.4
2005	731.7	13.4	85.6	103.6	6.3	24.8	965.4
2006	551.0	13.2	51.5	61.5	12.6	13.9	703.6
2007	447.0	11.1	40.6	32.0	13.3	11.2	555.1
Total	46,972.3	3,503.8	7,133.3	8,367.4	1,708.9	1,556.4	69,242.1

FEOGA Guarantee relates to Direct Payments, Market Supports and Production Aid and Rural Development. FEOGA Guidance relates to Structural Fund aid for rural development which contribute to the structural reform of the agricultural sector and to the development of rural areas, e.g., LEADER and INTERREG programmes. ESF (European Social Fund) relates to supports for employment opportunities focusing on the mobility of workers and their adaptation to industrial changes. ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) relates to infrastructure, productive investment and regional and local development. Cohesion Fund relates to measures aimed at strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion by reducing dis-

[Deputy Brian Lenihan.]

parities in the level of development among regions and Member States. Other relates to Education-related programmes, Maritime surveillance and fisheries protection, FIG (Financial Instruments for Fisheries Guidance), the EEA (European Economic Area) and TENS (Trans-European Networks).

Motor Fuels.

109. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Finance the measures organised as the promised alternative to the fuel rebate for bus operators which his Department was investigating; if the increased cost of diesel and petrol have been taken into account when considering this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27986/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The 2003 EU Energy Tax Directive incorporated special derogations which allowed specific excise duty reliefs to be applied in a number of Member States. In the Irish context, these derogations allowed *inter alia* for reduced rates to apply to fuel used for public transport services which includes school transport services. While these derogations expired on 31 December 2006, Ireland, along with other Member States, sought retention of its derogations beyond that date. However the European Commission, who is the deciding authority, refused such requests. The Finance Act 2008, as the Deputies are aware, consequently provided the legislative changes to withdraw the relief in respect of fuel used for public passenger transport vehicles. The relief will be withdrawn with effect from 1 November 2008 and the appropriate full excise rates will apply from that date. In the circumstances outlined above the question of reconsidering or deferring the withdrawal of the existing relief does not therefore arise. The Department of Transport and other relevant line Departments have, in conjunction with my Department, explored alternative mechanisms that might be used to direct Exchequer resources toward such services from that date, subject of course to compatibility with competition and EU State Aid requirements. While the matter is still being considered it is necessary however to stress, despite the claims being made otherwise, that introducing an alternative suitable mechanism is not a straightforward matter.

Clinical Indemnity.

110. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has received a report from the State Claims Agency and the National Treasury Management Agency regarding the expected volume and estimates of possible costs of claims for patients who contracted MRSA in hospitals here; if the clinical indemnity scheme is the mechanism by which MRSA claims will be discharged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28050/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the State Claims Agency that to date 100 claims have been received relating to MRSA. Liability in those cases is still to be decided. Until the question of legal liability is settled, it is not possible to indicate what role, if any, the clinical indemnity scheme will play. In the circumstances, it is also not possible to estimate the number of cases, or the costs, that might arise in the future.

111. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has contacted and received a report from the State Claims Agency and National Treasury Management Agency regarding possible claims by persons whose homes have been damaged by defective pyrite infill and following the failure of national and local government to implement the building regulations before September 2007; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that such claims might constitute the costliest of class and individual actions ever taken against the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28051/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): I am informed by the State Claims Agency that it has not received any claims from people whose homes have been allegedly damaged by defective pyrite infill. Claims of defects in homes are a matter between the home buyer, the builder and the builder's insurer.

Tax Code.

112. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to the Exchequer of co-location hospitals in terms of tax relief to date; the estimated cost over the five year programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28087/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): The scheme of capital allowances for the construction or refurbishment of buildings used as private hospitals was introduced in the Finance Act 2001 and came into effect in May 2002. Provided that capital expenditure on the proposed co-located private hospitals, which are designed to free-up capacity in public hospitals, conforms with the existing legislation governing that scheme, normal tax relief will apply. The cost of such tax relief will ultimately depend on the level of qualifying capital expenditure and no such expenditure on the proposed co-located hospitals has yet been incurred. For each €100 million of qualifying capital expenditure on these hospitals, the cost of tax relief to investors (assuming a marginal tax rate of 41% for those investors) would amount in gross terms to €41 million spread over seven years. Of course, with the additional activity generated by the construction of the hospitals, the employment generated and the related services provided on which taxes will be paid, additional revenues would accrue to the Exchequer.

Motor Fuels.

113. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Finance the financial assistance or resources he has provided in pursuit of the development of hybrid cars; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28112/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Assistance is provided through the VRT system towards the purchase of hybrid vehicles. The Finance Act 2001 introduced a 50% VRT relief for category A (passenger car) and category B (car and jeep derived vans) series production hybrid electric vehicles. A hybrid electric vehicle is one which uses a combination of petrol and electricity for motive power, being capable of running on the electric motor alone, thereby increasing efficiency and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. The purpose of the VRT relief scheme is to promote innovation and the development of new green technology by car manufacturers, by encouraging the purchase of such vehicles. The relief consequently applies only to "series production" cars of this nature; that is, cars which at the point of manufacture employ the new technology. Section 81 of the Finance Act 2008 provided that, on the introduction of the new carbon dioxide emissions-related VRT system on 1 July, the existing 50% VRT relief would be replaced by a relief of up to €2,500 of the VRT payable on such vehicles during the period 1 July 2008 to 31 December 2010. This relief will be paid, where applicable, in addition to any benefits such cars may otherwise receive under the emissions-related VRT system, by virtue of their low carbon dioxide emissions. Similar VRT reliefs apply in the case of flexible fuel vehicles since January 2006. Electric vehicles, which had a similar VRT relief during 2007, have been exempted from VRT from January 2008 for a three-year period. The total cost of these VRT reliefs up to the end of May 2008 amount to approximately €38 million, of which some €30 million has arisen since January 2007. Of this total cost, hybrid vehicles account for €22.8 million, with around €15 million arising since January 2007.

e-Government Proposals.

114. **Deputy Simon Coveney** asked the Minister for Finance the date in July 2008 on which the Government's e-Government strategy is due to be published, as agreed by Dáil Éireann in a Private Member's motion on 30 April 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28143/08]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Brian Lenihan): Since 1999, two Information Society Action Plans were published by the Department of the Taoiseach. Both of the Action Plans contained sections dealing with e-Government. The Information Society Policy Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach was preparing a new Knowledge Society Action Plan which it intended to publish during the summer. I understand that this new Action Plan was to include a section on technology in Government. The Taoiseach announced, in his speech on 7 May 2008, that responsibility for production of the new Knowledge Society Action Plan was to be transferred, with immediate effect, from the Department of the Taoiseach to the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. With respect to e-Government, as mentioned in my response to Question No. 174 of 8 July last, I intend to bring proposals on e-Government to the Cabinet before the summer recess. I will arrange for the Deputy to be briefed directly by my Department after these matters have been considered.

Medical Cards.

115. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Donegal has had their medical card rescinded. [27850/08]

132. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason a person (details supplied) in County Donegal has had their medical card rescinded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27851/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115 and 132 together.

As the Health Service Executive has the operational and funding responsibility for medical card benefits, it is the appropriate body to consider the case raised by the Deputy. My Department has therefore asked the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to address this matter and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Child Care Services.

116. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the progress since 2000 to date in 2008 in setting up a national child care system; the further funding parents have received towards child care in this period; the studies carried out on the way child care is achieved internationally and the policies Ireland wants to implement; and if she will make a statement on the cost and availability of approved child care here. [28045/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): Since 2000, several key developments in child care have taken place. Between 2000 and 2007, the EU co-funded Equal Opportunities Child Care Programme was implemented. This programme was created to develop child care to meet the needs of parents in employment, education and training. It provided funding of €535 million in the form of capital and staffing grants to the community not-for-profit and private child care sectors and also provided funding for the development of infrastructural and quality supports to the sector including the development of 33 City and County Child care Committees. The EOCP was successful in creating almost 41,000

new child care places and supporting some 27,000 existing places. In Budget 2001, the Government announced a target to increase Child Benefit to €150 for the first and second child and to €185 for the third and subsequent child. These increases were intended to assist all parents with child care costs. Today, Child Benefit for the first and second child is paid at a monthly rate of €166 and €203 for each subsequent child. In December 2005, the Government announced a number of major new developments, under the national child care strategy 2006-10. As part of these developments and to facilitate the delivery of the new Strategy, the Office of the Minister for Children was established.

A key component of the national child care strategy is the national child care investment programme 2006-10. The programme aims to provide a proactive response to the development of quality childcare supports and services, which are grounded in an understanding of local needs. The programme has a budget of €575 million for the five-year period 2006-10, with a target to create 50,000 additional childcare places, this will include 5,000 after school places and 10,000 pre-school education places aimed at 3 to 4 year olds. To date, €220 million in capital grants has been approved and this is expected to create 30,763 new childcare places, of which 10,162 are pre-school and 6,137 are after school. The new community child care subvention scheme is also funded under the NCIP. The scheme came into effect on 1 January 2008 and supports community based child care providers with a focus on disadvantage to enable them to provide reduced childcare fees to qualifying parents. The national child care strategy 2006-10 also includes a commitment to develop a national child care training strategy in order to co-ordinate the provision of quality training to meet the growing needs of the child care sector. The Early Years Education Policy Unit of the Department of Education and Science, which is co-located with my office, is in the process of developing the National Training Strategy.

A number of additional new entitlements for parents were announced under the 2006-10 child care strategy. The early child care supplement was introduced for all children less than six years of age from April 2006. The payment was increased from €1,000 to €1,100 in budget 2008 and is a direct, non-taxable payment of €275 per quarter year, in respect of each eligible child. To further support parents, major increases in Paid and Unpaid Maternity Leave were introduced in 2006 and 2007. As a result, Paid and Unpaid Maternity Leave have increased to 26 weeks and 16 weeks respectively. A new child minding Relief was also introduced in Budget 2006, and extended in Budget 2007. Where an individual minds up to three children in the minder's own home and notifies his or her city or county child care committee that he or she is providing a child minding service, no tax will be payable on the child minding earnings, provided the amount is less than €15,000 per annum. I would like to point the Deputy in the direction of two international studies that have focused attention on how child care is achieved internationally: OECD (2006) *Starting Strong 11: Early Childhood Care and Education*; and Schonfeld, Kiernan and Walsh (2004) *Making Connections: A review of international policies, practices and research relating to quality in early childhood care and education* published by the CECDE.

Such studies have highlighted the significance of the provision of quality child care services, acknowledging the importance of merging the care and education aspects of child care. They also acknowledge the importance of appropriate curricula in the sector and the need for a highly skilled and trained workforce. Such issues are being addressed in Ireland through the National Training Strategy, the publication of *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education by the CECDE, and the development of the National Framework for Early Learning by NCCA. These developments together with the significant investment in infrastructure and the payments afforded to parents is evidence that the Government

[Deputy Barry Andrews.]

is increasing the availability of child care whilst also ensuring that it is affordable and of a high standard.

Pharmacy Regulations.

117. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the status of the negotiations between the Health Service Executive and the Irish Pharmaceutical Union; when the report from the independent body is expected to be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28474/08]

118. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children the status of the Sean Dorgan report into pharmacy service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [29131/08]

124. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children when she expects to submit to Government the report of the independent pricing body on a dispensing fee to be paid to pharmacists in relation to the medical card scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27834/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 117, 118 and 124 together.

The Health Service Executive, assisted by my Department, has engaged with the Irish Pharmaceutical Union on discussions surrounding a number of outstanding issues. These discussions commenced in the week beginning 5 May 2008. Progress has been made on these issues. I established an Independent Pricing Body, chaired by Mr. Seán Dorgan, who is the former head of IDA Ireland, to assess an interim fair community pharmacy dispensing fee to be paid for the medical card scheme, the DPS and other community drug schemes. The Independent Pricing Body has submitted its report to me. I am considering its findings prior to submitting it to Government.

Services for People with Disabilities.

119. **Deputy Chris Andrews** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a service will confirm to a school (details supplied) in Dublin 15 that the necessary supports will be provided in sufficient time to set up staffing requirements; if they are not able to issue this confirmation, the location where the six children waiting for entry will be educated from September 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27801/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The Multi Annual Investment Programme for Disability Services makes provision for the development of additional residential, respite places and day care places each year between 2006 and 2009 for people with Intellectual Disability and Autism and additional residential care and home support services for people with physical and sensory disabilities. €50m was provided to the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2008 to fund a range of additional services under the Multi Annual Investment Programme for Disability.

As the Deputy will be aware, the commencement of the planned developments in disability services this year had been delayed due to a financial review in the HSE. However, I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that the HSE has assured me that it is now in a position to roll out the planned developments as outlined in its 2008 Service Plan.

Planned services include additional residential, day care — including training places — and respite care places for people with intellectual disability and autism; additional residential care and home support services for people with physical and sensory disabilities; and additional multi-disciplinary therapy posts to provide assessment and ongoing intervention services to children with a disability.

I understand that the HSE hopes to be able to finalise the position in relation to the commencement of such developments over the next week.

My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the specific matter raised by the Deputy investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

120. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on the fact that by 2050, studies estimate that one in four people here will be over 65; and if future health services are being planned accordingly. [27816/08]

151. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of people currently aged over 90 here; the information she is in possession of with regard to the predicted number of people who will be over 90 years of age in 2020 and by 2050; the impact this trend will have on health-care requirements here; the way this will impact on residential care for older people; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27933/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hackett): I propose to take Questions Nos. 120 and 151 together.

There are currently just under 470,000 older people in Ireland equating to 11% of the total population. Of these, just over 48,000 are aged 85 years or older. Irish population projections suggest that the over 65 population will increase to over 740,000, or 14.6% of the total population, by 2020 and to over 1.53 million or 29% of the population by 2056. Within this, the increase of greatest magnitude is anticipated in relation to the numbers aged 85 years and over. The number of people in this latter category is set to increase to almost 75,000 in 2020 and to 305,112 by 2056 — an almost seven-fold increase on current levels. It is in this age group that the greatest need for long-term care can be expected.

In addition, the Deputy may wish to note that the recent Population and Labour Force Projections published by the Central Statistics Office predict that male life expectancy will increase from 76.7 years in 2005 to 86.5 years in 2041 while female life expectancy will increase from 81.5 years in 2005 to 88.2 years in 2041.

Secondly, the Deputy has asked how the demographic trends outlined above will affect future health care and residential care requirements. The demand for health and long-term care services will increase on foot of demographic trends. In relation to residential care, over 4.7% of older people are presently in long-term residential care. Even with a commitment to reduce this to 4% through sustained investment in community care services, it is estimated that the overall numbers in residential nursing home care will go up to 44,000 in 2036 and 61,000 in 2056.

In the latest social partnership agreement, Towards 2016, the government and the social partners respond to future demographic trends by agreeing a number of important principles in relation to policy on long-term care for older people. In particular, the partners agree to work together to develop an infrastructure of long-term care services for older people. They further agree that the financial model to support any new arrangements must be financially

[Deputy Máire Hctor.]

sustainable. Preliminary work has been undertaken in this regard and it is hoped to progress this work through the aegis of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Long-term Care.

The preliminary work indicates that consideration of future demand for health and long-term care services is extremely complex. It is not just a question of ageing but rather of healthy, positive ageing. Factors such as diet, lifestyle and healthcare innovations will all play a role in determining disability-free life expectancy and resulting demand for services. To this end, one of my key priorities as Minister for Older People will be to draw up and implement a Strategy for Positive Ageing.

Vaccination Programme.

121. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children when she expects to receive the final report of the Vaccine Damage Compensation Group; the funding provided in budget 2008 to implement the recommendations of the group; the steps she is taking to expedite the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27822/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Group is continuing with its consideration of this matter and I look forward to receiving its final recommendations.

Care of the Elderly.

122. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on the fact that almost half the budget amount is spent on older people on residential care, despite the fact that the number of older people in residential care number only approximately 5%; her plans to remedy the situation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27823/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): Older people in need of long-term residential care represent one of the most vulnerable groups in society. This Government's commitment to supporting those in need of such care is reflected in the considerable funding provided on an ongoing basis in respect of public nursing home places and the private nursing home subvention scheme. It is also reflected in the proposed new nursing home support scheme — A Fair Deal — which will be introduced in the near future.

However, this Government has also presided over unprecedented public investment in community care services for older people over the past four years, including:

- Investment of €110 million over 2006-2007 providing for a total of 4,300 Home Care Packages.
- Additional funding of €18m in 2007 resulting in 780,000 more home help hours.
- An additional €12.5m in 2006 and 2007 for day and respite care services.
- The development of four Community Intervention Teams in 2006 — one in each HSE area.

Finally, the Government is committed to exploring financially sustainable ways of funding all long-term care services, both residential and community-based, in the future and preliminary work has been undertaken in this regard.

Services for People with Disabilities.

123. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children her plans to provide additional funding for the intellectual disability services in the Ballinasloe area following the

recent visit by her Minister for State; if she will furnish a report on his visit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27833/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): Under the Health Act, 2004, as the Deputy is aware the allocation of funding to an individual agency, for disability services, is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive. A note of the meeting referred to above will be forwarded to the Deputy in due course.

Question No. 124 answered with Question No. 117.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

125. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position of the special housing aid for the elderly grant operated by the Health Service Executive; if the administration of the grant will be kept within the remit of the HSE; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27838/08]

126. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of applications received in 2007 by the Health Service Executive for the special housing aid for the elderly grant; the number of applications received to date in 2008; the number of staff that will be effected if the operation of this grant is completely administered by local authorities; the average cost of processing each application for this grant by the HSE; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27839/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 and 126 together.

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 operation 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 matters raised by the Deputy. The 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.

127. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the action being taken to address the surgical waiting list at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore, County Offaly; the reason it has become the fourth longest list here; the way she will ensure that this issue is addressed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27840/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary 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.

Hospital Services.

128. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of public

[Deputy Olwyn Enright.]

orthopaedic operations being carried out by each surgeon at the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore, County Offaly per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27841/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary 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.

National Treatment Purchase Fund.

129. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children the length of time people are waiting for assessment and then for treatment in audiology in South Tipperary; the number of staff employed in this service in the area; if the vacancies for audiologists in the area have been filled; if not, when they will be; and if the National Treatment Purchase Fund will be used for people who are waiting for up to two years on this waiting list. [27843/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the funding, 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.

With regard to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), the position is that the fund was established to arrange treatment for patients who have been waiting longest on surgical in-patient lists. Under the provision of its establishment order, the NTPF currently arranges hospital based treatment. As the type of services the Deputy refers to do not require in-patient care, they do not fall currently within the remit of the NTPF.

Tobacco-Related Diseases.

130. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if, in view of the public consultation on the introduction of combined text and photo warnings on tobacco products, she will make available research presented to her or her officials on the proposed warnings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27847/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Mary Wallace): I will arrange for a copy of the Report on Graphic Warning Research, that was commissioned by the Office of Tobacco Control at the request of my Department, to be forwarded to the Deputy.

Hospital Staff.

131. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of hospital consultants appointed since agreement on the contract negotiations; the number of such posts that have been approved but are not yet appointed; the location of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27848/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Subject to overall parameters set by Government, the Health Service Executive has the responsibility for determining the composition of its staffing complement. In that regard, it is a matter for the Executive to manage and deploy its human resources to best meet the requirements of its Annual Service

Plan for the delivery of health and personal social services to the public. 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.

Question No. 132 answered with Question No. 115.

Hospital Services.

133. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health and Children the overall budget for the running and maintaining of Letterkenny General Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27856/08]

134. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health and Children the amount of money donated annually to Letterkenny General Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27857/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 133 and 134 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 matters raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matters investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

135. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of people who are currently on a waiting list to be seen by the rheumatology unit in Galway Hospital; and the number of those people from County Mayo. [27872/08]

136. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a rheumatology unit will be established at Mayo General Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27873/08]

137. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children if transport facilities will be reinstated for rheumatoid arthritis patients from County Mayo who are forced to travel to the rheumatology unit in Galway as there is no such facility in Mayo. [27874/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 135 to 137, inclusive, together.

Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services is a matter for the Health Service Executive 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 issues raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matters investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Services for People with Disabilities.

138. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will reassure the Dáil that she will not oppose the full implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 across all ages. [27898/08]

139. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children the timeframe for the completion of negotiations between the Department of Education and Science and her Department with the Health Service Executive for the implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004. [27899/08]

140. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she carried out a study of the effect of only implementing the Disability Act 2005 for the nought to five years age group; and the effect of excluding the vast majority of persons with disabilities from the Act. [27900/08]

141. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children the provisions in place, in view of her stated policy and her Health Service Executive agents to implement the Disability Act 2005 in stages starting with the nought to five years age group, to maintain services for these children as they move out of this age group; the provisions in place for those children within the service at the other end of the age group; and if she will confirm that adequate provision is being made for these children. [27901/08]

142. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the provision of the Disability Act 2005 will be available to all persons with a disability. [27902/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 138 to 142, inclusive, together.

The National Disability Strategy, which was launched in September 2004, provides for a framework of new supports for people with disabilities. The Strategy builds on a strong equality framework, which is reflected in several pieces of equality legislation. The main elements of the Strategy are:

- The Disability Act 2005;
- The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004;
- Six Outline Sectoral Plans published by Government Departments;
- The Citizens Information Act 2007.

A Multi-Annual Investment Package, as committed to by Government, has been put in place to support these measures. One of the most important aspects of the Department of Health and Children's Sectoral Plan is the arrangements for commencing Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005. Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005 commenced for children aged under 5 years with effect from 1 June 2007. This prioritisation reflects the importance of intervention early in life, which can have a significant impact on the disabling effects of a condition or impairment.

The arrangements for further commencement of Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005 cannot be considered in isolation from the arrangements for the implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004 which is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Science and which provides for educational services for people with disabilities. It is proposed that Part 2 of the Disability Act 2005 will be commenced in respect of children aged 5-18 in tandem with the implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004. In preparation for its implementation, health related support services for children aged 5 to 18 and for adults continue to be enhanced to enable the Health Service Executive to meet needs identified for this group. In this regard, an additional €50m was provided for services for people with disabilities in 2008 and the HSE has confirmed that it is now in a position to roll out the planned developments as outlined in its 2008 Service Plan.

A Cross-Sectoral team, consisting of senior officials from the Office for Disability and Mental Health, the Department of Health and Children, the Department of Education and Science, the Health Service Executive and the National Council for Special Education was established in 2006 and meets on a regular basis. This group continues to address issues arising in relation to the implementation of both Acts. Proposals for implementation are being finalised at present and will be considered in the context of the estimates for 2009 and subsequent years.

Health Services.

143. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position in relation to a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; if, in view of their recurrent infections, they will be seen as matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27904/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services is a matter for the Health Service Executive 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.

144. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if they will be seen as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27905/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I understand that the Deputy has received a response from the Health Service Executive in this particular case. The matter has been referred for further consideration to the HSE and for direct reply to the Deputy.

145. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children the status of the implementation plan for the transfer of surgery and accident and emergency services from Roscommon County Hospital; when a detailed implementation plan will be published; the funding which has been ring-fenced to facilitate this plan on a capital and current basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27908/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Government is committed not only to ensuring the delivery of the best quality health services possible but to doing so in an effective and efficient way. Ensuring patient safety is of paramount importance, so that people can have confidence in the services and that the best possible patient outcomes can be achieved. It is essential that we prioritise patient safety and quality and that we organise and manage services accordingly. The priority is to provide safe services as close as possible to where people live.

In the past, Roscommon County Hospital and Portiuncula Hospital Ballinasloe have operated independently, with two consultant general surgeons in each hospital. The difficulties faced by Roscommon and Portiuncula in maintaining surgical services independently, and the need for closer co-operation between them, were highlighted by the former Comhairle na nOspidéal in March 2006. Advances in clinical care and ever-increasing levels of specialisation mean that the present model of care faces important practical difficulties, which we must address. Small stand-alone hospital services will not be able to offer their doctors the opportunity to treat a sufficient volume and variety of patients to maintain their skills, nor will they

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

be able to provide the range of experience required for doctors during training. As a result, it will prove increasingly difficult, and perhaps impossible, to fill consultant posts in these hospitals on a permanent basis.

In the light of these factors, the best way of retaining and developing services at Roscommon and Portlincula hospitals is for these hospitals to work closely together. I am confident that the development of joint departments of surgery and anaesthesia at the hospitals will provide a better service for patients of both hospitals. The Health Service Executive is in the process of undertaking a detailed planning and consultation process with stakeholders on how best to implement the proposed changes to how services are organised at the two hospitals. This will include examining the most appropriate arrangements for providing accident and emergency services. The resource implications of any new service configuration in revenue and capital terms will be considered in the context of the planning exercise which I have described.

Health Services.

146. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children the GMS ophthalmic budget for 2007 and 2008 in each PCCC area; her plans to address the long delays in some PCCC areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27910/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The provision of ophthalmic services for GMS patients is a matter for the Health Service Executive. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matters raised by the Deputy investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services.

147. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health and Children further to Parliamentary Question No. 209 of 27 September 2006, the position regarding the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27911/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): 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 Executive, therefore, 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.

148. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a Health Service Executive unit (details supplied) and the continued operation of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27912/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal 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.

Vaccination Programme.

149. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the administration of BCG vaccines to children; if stocks of the BCG vaccine have been fully replenished; if the administration of the BCG vaccine has returned to the status quo before shortages of the vaccine became apparent in 2007; the length of the waiting list of children needing this vaccine; the number of the children on the waiting list who are older than three months, six months, nine months and 12 months; if the administration of the BCG vaccine in the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street, Dublin 2, in particular, has returned to the previous level of administration before the shortage of vaccine stocks; if it has not done so, when is it expected that it will do so; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27922/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the funding, 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.

Environmental Pollution.

150. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children if, in view of recent reports of the presence of extremely toxic materials on the site of the former Irish Steel factory at Haulbowline Island, County Cork, she has proposals to introduce a health screening programme for people living in the immediate environs and for people who worked in the factory and the adjoining Naval Service base; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27925/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I understand that my colleague, the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government has arranged for an independent and rigorous assessment of site conditions at Haulbowline Island following the extensive unauthorised works by sub-contractors. The report from this assessment will inform subsequent discussions at Cabinet level including the question of any studies in regard to human health.

Question No. 151 answered with Question No. 120.

Health Services.

152. **Deputy John Cregan** asked the Minister for Health and Children when an appointment will be given to persons (details supplied) in County Limerick to meet with a geneticist in view of a possible hereditary illness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27935/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services is a matter for the Health Service Executive 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.

153. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason for the delay in confirming funding for a day-placement programme to be set up at a centre (details supplied) in County Kildare; if she will ensure that the funding is confirmed forthwith; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27939/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The Multi Annual Investment Programme for Disability Services makes provision for the development of additional residential, respite places and day care places each year between 2006 and 2009 for people with Intellectual Disability and Autism and additional residential care and home support services for people with physical and sensory disabilities. €50m was provided to the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2008 to fund a range of additional services under the Multi Annual Investment Programme for Disability.

As the Deputy will be aware, the commencement of the planned developments in disability services this year had been delayed due to a financial review in the HSE. However, I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that the HSE has assured me that it is now in a position to roll out the planned developments as outlined in its 2008 Service Plan.

Planned services include additional residential, day care — including training places — and respite care places for people with intellectual disability and autism; additional residential care and home support services for people with physical and sensory disabilities; and additional multi-disciplinary therapy posts to provide assessment and ongoing intervention services to children with a disability.

I understand that the HSE hopes to be able to finalise the position in relation to the commencement of such developments over the next week.

My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the specific matter raised by the Deputy investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Accommodation.

154. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of beds ring-fenced for cancer patients from County Mayo in University College Hospital, Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27940/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The National Cancer Control Programme has advised that there will be dedicated facilities for the clinic serving Mayo breast patients in University College Hospital Galway. This will be achieved by making available new clinic space which has become available for the management of breast cases. Two beds are required to support this service with the majority of surgery being day or overnight stay cases.

Official Travel.

155. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of representatives of her Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27954/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): There will be no official representation from my Department in Beijing to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games.

Departmental Publications.

156. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of her Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27974/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated within my Department and will be forwarded as soon as it becomes available.

Nursing Homes Repayment Scheme.

157. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children the status of the application under the nursing home repayment scheme for a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; when a decision will be made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27996/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Health Service Executive has responsibility for administering the Repayment Scheme and the information sought by the Deputy relates to matters within the area of responsibility of the Executive. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued to the Deputy.

Care of the Elderly.

158. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if, with regard to the provision of home help, she will guarantee that existing users of the service will continue to receive their current allocation of hours over the coming weeks and months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27997/08]

159. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if, with regard to the provision of home help for new applicants and patients being released from hospital over the coming weeks and months, these patients will receive the same level of home help hours currently available to users of the service throughout the country; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27998/08]

160. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if, with regard to the provision of home help, the existing level of service being received will be guaranteed to users of the service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27999/08]

161. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health and Children if, with regard to the provision of home help, budgetary cuts are proposed in this service in each county here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28000/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hackett): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 to 161, inclusive, 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. Therefore, the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular matters 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.

162. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a comprehensive review of the provision of dental services under the medical card scheme has been completed; if she will make public the findings of such a review; the way the situation affects patients; the length of time this service has been affected by this problem; and when a proposed solution will be implemented. [28048/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) Review Group was established in May 2006 to undertake a comprehensive review of Primary Care Oral Health Services provided under the DTSS. Represented on the Review Group are the HSE, the HSE Employers Agency, the Department of Health and Children, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Finance and the Irish Dental Association (IDA). The Group is chaired by Mr. Finbar Flood.

During the course of the review, based on legal advice made available to the HSE, an issue arose in relation to the Competition Act, 2002 and the collective negotiation of fees with the IDA. The HSE was advised that the coming together of the DTSS contractors under the auspices of the IDA to negotiate fees would constitute a breach of the Act. Officials in my Department are working with the Attorney General's office to clarify the way forward.

The existing contractual arrangements with private dental practitioners under the DTSS for the provision of dental services to eligible patients remain in place.

Services for People with Disabilities.

163. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Health and Children her views on the short-fall in funding for disability services that will be experienced in 2008 due to a failure to match payments from her Department to increases in inflation, food and fuel charges and staff costs; the number of disability services in south Tipperary that were not awarded the full revenue funding for 2008; if this includes residential services and schools providing essential services to people with disabilities; the way they are expected to make up this shortfall; the action the Health Service Executive will take to combat deficits within these services; if this means that fewer people with disabilities will be able to avail of respite, residential and day services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28049/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) submits to the Minister for Health and Children each year a National Service Plan (NSP), which represents the level of services which the HSE is committed to providing given the funding which the Dáil has made available to it as part of the Estimates process.

The Health Service Executive submitted its 2008 NSP in November 2007, which was approved. The plan provides for the delivery of the existing level of service which the HSE will provide in 2008. The HSE has also submitted an Addendum to the NSP which sets out the new developments and service priorities identified and agreed by Government and which were announced in Budget 2008.

The Multi Annual Investment Programme for Disability Services makes provision for the development of additional residential, respite places and day care places each year between 2006 and 2009 for people with Intellectual Disability and Autism and additional residential care and home support services for people with physical and sensory disabilities. €50m was provided to the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2008 to fund a range of additional services under the Multi Annual Investment Programme for Disability.

As the Deputy will be aware, the commencement of the planned developments in disability services this year had been delayed due to a financial review in the HSE. However, I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that the HSE has assured me that it is now in a position to roll out the planned developments as outlined in its 2008 Service Plan.

Planned services include additional residential, day care — including training places — and respite care places for people with intellectual disability and autism; additional residential care and home support services for people with physical and sensory disabilities; and additional

multi-disciplinary therapy posts to provide assessment and ongoing intervention services to children with a disability.

I understand that the HSE hopes to be able to finalise the position in relation to the commencement of such developments over the next week.

My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the specific matter raised by the Deputy investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Care of the Elderly.

164. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if, with regard to the need for additional long stay beds for the elderly in the greater Dublin area, she is satisfied that the 300 long-stay beds for the elderly currently being developed in the Health Service Executive south represents an appropriate prioritisation of the resources allocated to the HSE; if the planned expenditure, as reflected in the high capital cost of each project represents value for money; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28052/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hocht): The HSE, in conjunction with Prospectus, undertook a Needs Assessment of bed capacity requirements in the areas of long-stay, dementia-specific and respite care beds. This report was submitted to the Department of Health and Children in September 2006.

The report indicated among other issues the uneven distribution of beds between and within regions. In particular, HSE Dublin North East and HSE South were identified as having a requirement for additional beds.

In this context, proposals to progress individual projects are being pursued by the Executive under its annual Service and Capital Plans which are approved by the Minister for Health and Children. The Deputy has raised various specific issues in relation to the planned provision of long stay beds which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive. Accordingly 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.

165. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will confirm that an assessment of need for long-stay beds for older people was carried out in 2006; when the report on this assessment will be made public; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28053/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hocht): I can confirm to the Deputy that in 2006 the HSE, in conjunction with Prospectus, undertook a Needs Assessment of bed capacity requirements in the areas of long-stay, dementia-specific and respite care beds for the period 2006-2036. This report was submitted to the Department of Health and Children in September 2006 and has informed proposals to expand capacity through the provision of 860 additional public beds under the Fast Track Bed Initiative over the period 2007-2009.

While the report indicates a small national surplus of long-stay beds, it also notes that this surplus masks the uneven distribution of beds between and within regions. In particular, HSE Dublin North East and HSE South have an immediate requirement for additional beds.

The work is the subject of ongoing deliberations between the Department and HSE and feeds into the development of future policy and infrastructure in the area of long-term care services for older people. The report was commissioned by, and remains the property of, the

[Deputy Máire Hctor.]

HSE. I understand that it is commercially sensitive. However, its publication is a matter for the HSE and I am referring the Deputy's query to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services.

166. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if the Health Service Executive requires her approval to allocate and expend national development plan capital expenditure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28054/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Health Service Executive capital developments are subject to my approval with the consent of the Minister for Finance.

Health Service Staff.

167. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the levels of absenteeism in 2005, 2006, 2007 and to date 2008; the breakdown of absenteeism among staffing categories; the associated cost of agency staff as a result of this absenteeism; the action the Health Service Executive has taken to reduce absenteeism; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28055/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Almost 130,000 people work full-time or part-time in our public health services. In recent years, the Government's ongoing high level of investment in health has achieved and maintained significant increases in the numbers of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals employed in the public health services. The Government has also invested heavily in the education and training of such personnel in order to secure a good supply of graduates to provide for the healthcare needs of the population into the future.

Subject to overall parameters set by Government, the Health Service Executive has the responsibility for determining the composition of its staffing complement. In that regard, it is a matter for the Executive to manage and deploy its human resources to best meet the requirements of its Annual Service Plan for the delivery of health and personal social services to the public. 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.

168. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of staff employed in the Health Service Executive by grade category for the past six years to date; the number of staff employed by service pillars; the number employed on a regional basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28056/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Almost 130,000 people work full-time or part-time in our public health services. In recent years, the Government's ongoing high level of investment in health has achieved and maintained significant increases in the numbers of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals employed in the public health services. The Government has also invested heavily in the education and training of such personnel in order to secure a good supply of graduates to provide for the healthcare needs of the population into the future.

Subject to overall parameters set by Government, the Health Service Executive has the responsibility for determining the composition of its staffing complement. In that regard, it is a matter for the Executive to manage and deploy its human resources to best meet the requirements of its Annual Service Plan for the delivery of health and personal social services to the

public. 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 Staff.

169. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of permanent nursing and midwifery posts in each of the acute hospitals in the mid west and north east regions; the number of these staff who work fulltime; the number of posts which are currently vacant or being filled on a temporary basis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28057/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary 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. It is a matter for the Executive to manage and deploy its human resources to best meet the requirements of its Annual Service Plan for the delivery of health and personal social services to the public. 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 Accommodation.

170. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of public and private acute hospital beds in each hospital from 2005 to date in 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28058/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): My Department's records indicate that in 2005 the average number of public, private and non-designated acute hospital beds in each hospital was as set out in the following table:

Hospital	Public	Private	Non-Des	Total
Orthopaedic Hospital, Kilcreene	41	10	0	51
Our Lady's Hospital, Cashel	48	16	14	78
St. Joseph's Hospital, Clonmel	145	41	5	191
St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny	225	35	16	276
Waterford Regional Hospital, Ardkeen	428	88	12	528
Wexford General Hospital	177	40	20	237
Bantry General Hospital	66	6	4	76
Cork University Hospital	423	122	73	618
Erinville Hospital, Cork	98	39	0	137
Mallow General Hospital	64	13	5	82
Mercy Hospital, Cork	176	81	19	276
South Infirmery/Victoria Hospital, Cork	133	58	10	201
St. Mary's Hospital, Gurranebraher	72	38	13	123
Tralee General Hospital	280	32	19	331
Cavan General Hospital	194	34	14	242
Louth County Hospital, Dundalk	102	29	6	137
Monaghan General Hospital	119	15	6	140
Our Lady of Lourdes, Drogheda	205	106	18	329
Our Lady's General Hospital, Navan	122	24	10	156

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

Hospital	Public	Private	Non-Des	Total
Letterkenny General Hospital	226	78	21	325
Sligo Regional Hospital	218	109	32	359
Mayo General Hospital, Castlebar	197	50	45	292
Merlin Park Regional Hospital, Galway	203	30	6	239
Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe	117	73	14	204
Roscommon General Hospital	91	25	18	134
University College Hospital, Galway	440	113	35	588
Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar	165	35	7	207
Midland Regional Hospital, Portlaoise	128	23	1	152
Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore	182	28	8	218
Ennis General Hospital	70	18	6	94
Nenagh General Hospital	51	17	13	81
Regional Hospital, Dooradoyle, Limerick	363	128	20	511
Regional Maternity Hospital, Limerick	56	30	19	105
Regional Orthopaedic Hospital, Croom	51	27	0	78
St. John's Hospital, Limerick	53	46	3	102
Hume Street Hospital, Dublin	15	5	0	20
National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street	93	50	34	177
Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital, Dublin	48	24	0	72
St. Columcille's Hospital, Loughlinstown	112	18	5	135
St. Luke's and St. Anne's Hospitals	139	32	3	174
St. Michael's Hospital, Dun Laoghaire	87	24	5	116
St. Vincent's Hospital, Elm Park	439	45	36	520
Coombe Women's Hospital	123	76	37	236
Naas General Hospital	185	7	14	206
Our Lady's Hospital, Crumlin	157	58	21	236
St. James's Hospital	728	112	100	940
Tallaght Hospital	428	121	28	577
Beaumont Hospital	600	104	32	736
James Connolly Memorial, Blanchardstown	229	27	15	271
Mater Misericordiae Hospital	485	47	59	591
Rotunda Hospital, Dublin	104	54	30	188
St. Mary's Hospital, Cappagh	73	18	12	103
Temple Street Children's Hospital, Dublin	110	31	9	150
National Total	9,884	2,510	952	13,346

Hospitals Building Programme.

171. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the names of the proposed sites for co-location hospitals; the progress to date in each location; if the tendering process has been completed; the names of those awarded each tender; the cost of the facility in each case; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28060/08]

172. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the status of her co-location hospital plan with regard to recent reports that banks are reluctant to commit financing to operators; the action she will take in the event that an operator proves unsuccessful; her

plans to amend co-location agreements in order that the State will buy the hospital in the event of a default; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28061/08]

173. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the details of the assessors who established the commercial value of each co-location site; the commercial value identified for each site; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28062/08]

174. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the consortia involved in the provision of co-location hospitals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28063/08]

175. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of hospital beds which will be provided under the co-location hospital scheme; the number of beds which will be provided at each site; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28064/08]

176. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the cost to the Exchequer of co-located private hospitals with a breakdown of the cost for each of these hospitals; the amount of tax relief involved with these hospitals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28065/08]

177. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the assessment carried out on the staffing implications related to co-located hospitals; her views on whether this will increase the difficulties encountered in recruiting staff for certain posts in the public health system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28066/08]

178. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the details of all advice sought by the Health Service Executive regarding co-location; the cost of this advice; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28067/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 to 178, inclusive, together.

Under the Programme for Government, the Government is committed to providing an additional 1,500 public acute hospital beds. The co-location initiative aims to deliver approximately 1,000 of these beds for public patients through the development of private hospitals on public sites. The intention is to transfer private activity to those hospitals thereby freeing up capacity for public patients.

The process for the development of the co-located private hospitals is governed in each case by a detailed project agreement between the public hospital and the developers of the private hospital. The Health Service Executive (HSE) has retained external professional advisers in relation to the procurement, financing and legal aspects of the process in order to ensure that the public interest is protected at all times. Detailed provisions in relation to all aspects of the relationship between public hospitals and co-located private hospitals will be the subject of a service level agreement between the parties in each case.

The revenue cost to the public hospitals will be minimal. A very important benefit of the initiative is that the beds made available for public patients in public hospitals under the initiative will come staffed and the back-up services and facilities required to support them are in place. This contrasts with the position which usually obtains where direct capital investment is used to fund public hospital capital developments. The only staffing cost envisaged is the appointment of additional hospital consultants, something that the Government is now doing

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

in the light of the agreement on the new consultants' contract. The HSE, having considered the potential implications of the co-location initiative on public health service recruitment, has stated that it does not envisage any significant impact, given the terms and conditions applying in the public service, and in particular, the attractiveness of membership of a contributory pension scheme.

The loss of private health insurance income to the hospitals from private health insurers is estimated at €80 million in respect of the six sites where the co-location initiative is most advanced. This loss of income will be mitigated, in part, through income from the lease of the land and a potential share of profits from the co-located facility. It is recognised that provision will need to be made to allow the budgets of participating public hospitals to be adjusted appropriately to reflect the net private patient income forgone. Public patients will have access to the private facilities under the service level agreements between the public and private partners.

The scheme of capital allowances for the construction or refurbishment of buildings used as private hospitals was introduced in the Finance Act 2001 and came into effect in May 2002. Provided that capital expenditure on the proposed co-located private hospitals conforms to the existing legislation governing that scheme, normal tax relief will apply. Under the terms of the Finance Act 2001, the co-located hospital must ensure that at least 20% of its bed capacity be made available to the HSE for the treatment of individuals awaiting in-patient or outpatient hospital services as public patients. The fees charged must not be more than 90% of the fees that would be charged for equivalent treatment provided to a patient with private medical insurance.

The cost of such tax relief will ultimately depend on the level of qualifying capital expenditure and no such expenditure on the proposed co-located hospitals has yet been incurred. For each €100 million of qualifying capital expenditure on these hospitals, the cost of tax relief to investors (assuming a marginal tax rate of 41% for those investors) would amount in gross terms to €41 million spread over 7 years. With the additional activity generated by the construction of the hospitals, the employment generated and the related services provided on which taxes will be paid, additional revenues would accrue to the Exchequer.

A fundamental principle of the co-location policy initiative is that there is no State underwriting in respect of private sector risk. The banking arrangements for the co-location projects are of course a matter for the preferred bidders concerned.

The Board of the Health Service Executive (HSE) has approved preferred bidders for six co-located hospital sites: Beaumont Hospital, Cork University Hospital, Limerick Regional Hospital, St. James's Hospital, Waterford Regional Hospital and Sligo General Hospital.

The Project Agreements for Limerick Regional Hospital, Beaumont Hospital and Cork University Hospital have been signed. Planning permission has been granted by the local authorities concerned for the co-located hospitals at Beaumont and at Cork University Hospital. Planning permission for the Beaumont and Cork projects has been appealed to An Bord Pleanála. The HSE has advised my Department that a decision to grant planning permission for the Limerick Regional Hospital project was given in mid June and that this decision is scheduled to be made final later this month, subject to no planning appeal being lodged.

The HSE has also advised that the Project Agreements for St. James's Hospital and Waterford Regional Hospital are expected to be signed shortly. The HSE expects the Sligo Project Agreement to be concluded by the autumn.

Connolly Hospital and Tallaght Hospital, which are also participating in the co-location initiative, are at an earlier stage of the procurement process. Connolly Hospital is at preferred bidder stage and it is expected that the invitation to tender (ITT) for Tallaght Hospital will issue in the near future.

My Department has requested the HSE to respond to the Deputy in relation to the detailed operational information sought in respect of the successful preferred bidders approved by the HSE Board, the proposed number of beds for each project, and the advisors used by the Executive in relation to co-location.

Nursing Homes Repayment Scheme.

179. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the status of the nursing home refund scheme for the repayment of illegal nursing home charges; the number of claims received and completed to date; the amount refunded to date; the number of applications that have been rejected; the reason they have been rejected; the cost of the scheme; the cost of administering the scheme; the average time for an application to be processed; when she expects the scheme to complete its work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28068/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has responsibility for administering the health repayment scheme in conjunction with the appointed scheme administrator KPMG/McCann Fitzgerald.

The HSE has informed my Department that since the commencement of the scheme almost 39,000 claims have been received and to 27 June 11,483 payments totalling over €229m have issued while 15,299 offers of repayment totalling over €271m have been made. The HSE have also informed my Department that 12,663 letters of rejection have been sent to applicants who are deemed to fall outside the scheme. There are a variety of reasons for applications being rejected and these include instances where the relevant person died prior to 9 December 1998, where the relevant person resided in an institution not within the scope of the scheme and where duplicate applications were received on behalf of the relevant person.

An allocation of €150m was provided for the scheme in the estimates for 2008. All eligible applications received prior to the closing date will be repaid in full and an appropriate provision will be made as necessary to meet any costs arising under the scheme.

The overall cost of the scheme is expected to be in the region of €390m. The HSE has estimated the administrative costs associated with the scheme to be approximately €25m.

Mental Health Services.

180. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of catchment area teams established in regard to the Vision for Change strategy; the number that are fully staffed; the geographic area covered by these catchment areas; the population of each of the catchment areas; the name of the person with managerial responsibility for mental health services in each of the catchment areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28069/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): 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 Executive, therefore, is the

[Deputy John Moloney.]

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.

181. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of full medical cards issued as at year end 2007; the number issued for the first six months in 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28070/08]

182. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of general practitioner visit medical cards issued as at year end 2007; the number issued for the first six months in 2008; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28071/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 and 182 together.

Details of the numbers of medical card holders and GP visit card holders are provided to my Department each month by the Health Service Executive (HSE). The figures are provided on a net basis showing the balance after new cards have been issued and other cards, as appropriate, have been deleted from the Executive's database, e.g. following a review of a person's circumstances. The most recent figures provided to my Department are for 31st May 2008. The following table shows the number of persons with medical cards on 31st December 2007 and on 31st May 2008 and the number of persons with GP visit cards on the same dates.

Date	No. of persons with a medical card	No. of persons with a GP visit card
31 December 2007	1,276,178	75,589
31 May 2008	1,306,470	80,035

183. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the income thresholds for qualification for a full medical card and for a general practitioner visit card, indicating the thresholds for single persons, married couples and single parents; the way in which they vary between age categories and the category of married couples, one of whom is over 70 years and one of whom is not, and that of dependent children; her plans to review income thresholds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28072/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The following table gives details of the income thresholds used by the Health Service Executive to assist it in determining if a person qualifies for a medical card or GP visit card.

	Medical Card Weekly Rate	GP Visit Card Rate
	€	€
<i>Single Person Living Alone</i>		
Aged up to 65 years	184.00	276.00
Aged between 66-69 years	201.50	302.00
<i>Single Person Living with Family</i>		
Aged up to 65 years	164.00	246.00
Aged between 66-69 years	173.50	260.00

	Medical Card Weekly Rate	GP Visit Card Rate
	€	€
<i>Married Couple/Single Parent with dependant Children</i>		
Aged up to 65 years	266.50	400.00
Aged between 66-69 years	298.00	447.00
Aged between 70-79 years (see footnote)	596.50	895.00
Aged 80 years and over (see footnote)	627.00	940.50
<i>Allowances</i>		
Allowance for first 2 children under 16 financially dependent on applicant	38.00	57.00
For 3rd and subsequent children under 16 years financially dependent on applicant	41.00	61.50
Allowance for first 2 children over 16 yrs financially dependant on applicant	39.00	58.50
For 3rd and subsequent children over 16 yrs financially dependent on applicant	42.50	64.00
Dependant over 16 years in full-time education and not grant-aided	78.00	117.00

Footnote: The guidelines for those aged 70-79 years, and aged 80 years and over, are used when one member of a married couple is aged over 70, and their spouse aged under 70 is applying.

The Programme for Government commits to the following:

- Indexing the income thresholds for medical cards to increases in the average industrial wage;
- Doubling of the income limit eligibility of parents of children under 6 years of age, and trebling them for parents of children under 18 years of age with an intellectual disability.

In conjunction with the development of a new legislative framework to provide for clear statutory provisions on eligibility for health and personal social services, my Department is reviewing the assessment criteria in the context of financial, medical and social need in line with the commitment in Towards 2016. A Steering Group has been established which is expected to complete this work in autumn 2008. It is my intention to then consider how best to progress the commitments in the Programme for Government in relation to medical card eligibility.

Health Service Functions.

184. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of cases in which the Health Service Executive assigned its functions in regard to reviewing a recommendation, made by a complaints officer, to another body; the identity of the body to which it has assigned such functions under section 49(4) of the regulation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28073/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary 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. Therefore the Executive is the appropriate body to consider the particular matter raised by the Deputy. My Department has requested that the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive investigate the matter and reply directly to the Deputy.

Care of the Elderly.

185. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children when she will approve

[Deputy James Reilly.]

the National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28074/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hackett): The present standards for nursing homes are set out in the 1993 Care and Welfare Regulations and the HSE inspects private nursing homes on the basis of these standards. In January 2007, Minister Harney published Draft National Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People. The standards were developed by a working group chaired by DoHC and included the Health Service Executive, Social Service Inspectorate and the Irish Health Services Accreditation Board. Once introduced, these standards will apply to all nursing homes — public, private and voluntary.

As the Health Act 2007 provides that the enhanced inspection function will be taken over by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), the draft standards were formally referred to HIQA for consultation and finalisation. The Authority established a wide-ranging Working Group to finalise the draft standards. On the 25th February, 2008 the Board of the Authority approved their draft National Quality Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People and submitted them for the approval of the Minister for Health and Children, as required under section 10(2) of the Health Act 2007.

The draft Standards and the Regulations required to underpin them will be subject to a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) before finalisation. The RIA process has commenced and it is intended to have both the approved Standards and Regulations in place in early 2009.

National Treatment Purchase Fund.

186. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children how she expects the National Treatment Purchase Fund to negotiate the cost of private beds on behalf of the Health Service Executive in the absence of nursing home care standards [28075/08]

187. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of beds that will be standard beds in regard to the intention of the National Treatment Purchase Fund to negotiate the cost of private beds on behalf of the Health Service Executive; the number that will be medium and high dependency beds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28076/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hackett): I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 and 187 together.

The present standards for nursing homes are set out in the 1993 Care and Welfare Regulations and the HSE inspects private nursing homes on the basis of these standards. On 29th February 2008, HIQA submitted “Draft Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People” to the Minister for Health and Children for approval and these are currently under consideration. Once introduced, these standards will apply to all nursing homes — public, private and voluntary.

The NTPF’s negotiating role under the proposed Nursing Home Support Scheme- A Fair Deal- will be an ongoing one. The price agreed with private nursing homes for the purposes of the scheme will naturally be subject to periodic re-negotiation to take account of inflation and other developments. Accordingly, the NTPF will negotiate with private nursing homes based on the existing regulatory regime and market conditions at the time of negotiation.

Finally, under the scheme, the care needs assessment will determine whether a person needs long-term residential care. It will not categorise people as low, medium, high or maximum

dependency. A person assessed as needing long-term residential care will then be able to choose any nursing home, public or private, subject to availability and suitability of the home to meet the person's care needs. As such, the designation of beds as standard or high dependency will not be a feature of the scheme.

Infectious Diseases.

188. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the process by which a hospital acquired infection becomes a notifiable disease; if she will provide a complete list of notifiable diseases; the infections she will add to this list; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28077/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Under the Health Act 1947 the Minister for Health and Children may, by regulation, specify diseases which are infectious diseases. The current schedule of infectious diseases is contained in the Infectious Diseases (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2003, (Statutory Instrument No. 707 of 2003) which came into force on 1 January 2004. I am arranging to have a copy of the schedule forwarded to the Deputy.

The schedule of notifiable diseases is reviewed on a periodic basis. Changes to the regulations are based on recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC).

Health Service Staff.

189. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the category of staff to be recruited with regard to the 34.5 whole time equivalent infection-control staff that have yet to be recruited out of the 52 infection-control staff announced in 2006; when this recruitment process will be completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28078/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services was assigned to the HSE under the Health Act 2004 and funding for all health services has been provided as part of its overall vote. Subject to overall parameters set by Government, the HSE has the responsibility for determining the composition of its staffing complement. 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 have the matter investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Hospital Staff.

190. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children if a microbiologist has been appointed to St. Columcille's Hospital; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28080/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary 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 issue directly to the Deputy.

Health Services.

191. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average waiting times for speech and language assessment and treatment services for children, per Health Service Executive area, for each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28081/08]

192. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average waiting times for speech and language assessment and treatment services for adults, per Health Service Executive area, for each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28082/08]

193. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average waiting times for occupational therapy assessment and treatment services for adults, per Health Service Executive area, for each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28083/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 191 to 193, inclusive, together.

The Deputy's specific questions relates to the management and delivery of health and personal social services, which include occupational and speech and language therapy services, which are the responsibility of the Health Service Executive. 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.

194. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average waiting times for orthodontic assessment and treatment services for adults, per Health Service Executive area, for each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28084/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the funding, 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.

195. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average waiting times for orthodontic assessment and treatment services for children, per Health Service Executive area, for each of the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28085/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): The Deputy's question relates to the funding, 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.

Mental Health Services.

196. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the number of persons admitted as involuntary patients to approved mental health centres in the six months ending on 30 June 2008; the number of these admissions who have had their cases reviewed by a

tribunal; the number of cases where the tribunal has revoked the involuntary admission order; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28088/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The Mental Health Commission arranges legal representation and an independent medical examination/report for patients who are subject to an involuntary admission order and the subsequent independent reviews are carried out by Mental Health Tribunals within strict statutory timescales.

The tables below provides a summary of the number of orders and the subsequent independent reviews in the period 1st January to 30th May 2008.

	January to May 2008
Form 6 Admissions	602
Form 13 regrade of a voluntary patient	230
Renewal Orders	481
Proposals to transfer to Central Mental Hospital	4
Hearings held	818
Revoked at hearings	81

The Mental Health Commission validates each month's activity in the first two weeks of the month following the period under evaluation. The figures for June 2008 are therefore currently being validated and will be forwarded to the Deputy when the validation process is complete.

197. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will confirm that the Mental Health Commission has established an investigation, or review, into patient care issues at a psychiatric hospital in south Tipperary; and if she will further confirm the date on which the report is expected to be published. [28089/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): In June 2007 the Mental Health Commission decided to establish an inquiry into practices at the St. Michael's Unit, South Tipperary General Hospital, Clonmel and St. Luke's Hospital, Clonmel, with the following terms of reference:

“To review care and treatment practices in St. Michael's Unit, South Tipperary General Hospital, Clonmel and St. Luke's Hospital, Clonmel, including the quality and planning of care and the use of restraint and seclusion and to report to the Mental Health Commission”.

It is understood that the inquiry is nearing conclusion and it is expected that the report will be presented to the Mental Health Commission shortly.

198. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Health and Children the average cost of the conduct of the reviews which were considered by a tribunal under Section 18 of the Mental Health Act 2001; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28090/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The gross fees paid in association with the operation of Mental Health Tribunals during 2007 was approximately €10.685 million.

During 2007 there were 3,443 statutory orders notified to the Mental Health Commission that potentially required review by a mental health tribunal. As a result of these notifications

[Deputy John Moloney.]

2,248 mental health tribunal hearings were completed in 2007. This indicates an average of €3,103 per notification and €4,753 per hearing in 2007.

Health Services.

199. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Health and Children when the results of a 24 hour heart monitor procedure on a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will be sent to their consultant. [28092/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): Operational responsibility for the management and delivery of health and personal social services is a matter for the Health Service Executive 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.

200. **Deputy Paul Connaughton** asked the Minister for Health and Children the reason there are three male beds unoccupied at a home (details supplied) in County Galway; the number of males on the waiting list for this home; the number of occupants currently in the home; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28097/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): 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.

Services for People with Disabilities.

201. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if it is her policy to withdraw funds from a multi-annual funding package to cover 2004 to 2009 for new adult day places and training places for young adults with intellectual disabilities as in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28105/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The Multi Annual Investment Programme for Disability Services makes provision for the development of additional residential, respite places and day care places each year between 2006 and 2009 for people with Intellectual Disability and Autism and additional residential care and home support services for people with physical and sensory disabilities. €50m was provided to the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2008 to fund a range of additional services under the Multi Annual Investment Programme for Disability.

As the Deputy will be aware, the commencement of the planned developments in disability services this year had been delayed due to a financial review in the HSE. However, I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that the HSE has assured me that it is now in a position to roll out the planned developments as outlined in its 2008 Service Plan.

Planned services include additional residential, day care — including training places — and respite care places for people with intellectual disability and autism; additional residential care and home support services for people with physical and sensory disabilities; and additional

multi-disciplinary therapy posts to provide assessment and ongoing intervention services to children with a disability.

I understand that the HSE hopes to be able to finalise the position in relation to the commencement of such developments over the next week.

My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the specific matter raised by the Deputy investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Departmental Correspondence.

202. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Minister for Health and Children if her Department received an e-mail from a person (details supplied) in County Cork; if a reply has been issued; if she will publish that reply; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28106/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): My Office received an e-mail from the person referred to by the Deputy (details supplied). A letter of acknowledgement confirming same has been issued. The content matter of the e-mail is currently under investigation and a further reply will issue, in due course, to the sender.

Child Care Services.

203. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will respond to correspondence from an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28110/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Barry Andrews): As the Deputy will be aware, I have responsibility for the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP), which will invest €575 million over 5 years.

I understand from enquiries made that a miscalculation occurred when calculating the transitional and subvention funding for 2008 for the Group in question under the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme. Pobal, who manage the day-to-day operation of the childcare programmes, has since clarified that the rate of staffing funding for the Group in 2007 under the EOCP was €175,788. Therefore the Group has been approved an increase to their transitional funding for January to June 2008 to €87,894 with their subvention funding for July to December 2008 subsequently increased to €79,105. The amount of their staffing funding for July to December 2008 represents 90% of their transitional amount as their parent declaration forms did not exceed the floor my predecessor set for the Scheme. The Group has been notified of their amended funding levels. This Group was approved a total of €920,219 in EOCP staffing grant assistance.

Health and Safety Regulations.

204. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Health and Children if there is a licensing authority for persons who undertake ear piercing as a commercial business; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28122/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): There is no legislation in Ireland specifically regulating ear piercing businesses. However, these businesses are required to comply with general public health and safety legislation in the same way as any other business.

The responsibilities of business operators include taking all reasonable precautions for the safety of persons using the premises. The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 imposes

[Deputy Mary Harney.]

a duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of employees. Employers are also obliged to manage and conduct his or her undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that in the course of the work being carried on, individuals at the place of work, (not being employees), are not exposed to risks to their safety, health and welfare.

In addition, under the Infectious Diseases Regulations 1981, a medical officer of health, or a health officer on the advice of a medical officer of health, is empowered where there is reason to believe that a suspected case of an infectious disease or a probable source of infection exists, to take such steps as are necessary or desirable for investigating the nature and source of such infection, for preventing the spread of such infection and for removing conditions favourable to infection.

The European Commission has initiated a project to assess the need for regulatory control of tattooing and body piercing and related activities. The Council of Europe has also adopted a resolution on tattoos and permanent make-up (PMU) which recommends the principles that member states should take into account in their national laws and regulations. The principles relate to the composition, microbiological purity and labelling of products used for tattooing and PMU, the conditions in which they are applied, and the need to inform the public and consumers of the health risks involved.

My Department is reviewing policy regarding tattooing and body piercing in the light of these developments. In the first instance, the focus is on the development of “good practice” guidelines for practitioners rather than regulation. The main objective of these guidelines is to encourage best hygiene practice by tattooists and piercers, thereby minimising the risk of infection and so protecting both the artists and clients. It is also intended to produce information for the general public about the possible risks attached to body-piercing and tattooing.

As ear piercing is not regulated, there is no age restriction in place. However, this issue is being addressed in the context of the good practice guidelines for both tattooists and piercers.

Draft guidelines have been produced and these drafts have been the subject of consultation within the health sector and the wider public sector. Further consideration of the issues involved is necessary before my Department will be in a position to bring the guidelines to completion. The intention is to have this work completed by the end of this year.

Health Services.

205. **Deputy Billy 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 as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28141/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary 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.

206. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if the services will be provided by the Health

Service Executive as a matter of urgency; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28142/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The Deputy's question relates to the management and delivery of health and personal 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 case investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Nursing Home Subventions.

207. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position in relation to an application for additional nursing care funding for a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; if, in view of the circumstances, she will re-examine the decision in this case and allow the extra hours; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28237/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary Harney): I understand that the Deputy has received a response from the Health Service Executive in this particular case. The matter has been referred for further consideration to the HSE and for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services.

208. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children the position regarding the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 11. [28239/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy Máire Hctor): 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.

209. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will support the case of a person (details supplied). [28240/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): 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 Executive, therefore, 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.

210. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if she will assist in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5. [28241/08]

Minister for Health and Children (Deputy Mary 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.

Services for People with Disabilities.

211. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health and Children if persons (details supplied) in County Cork will be assisted. [28243/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children (Deputy John Moloney): The Multi Annual Investment Programme for Disability Services makes provision for the development of additional residential, respite places and day care places each year between 2006 and 2009 for people with Intellectual Disability and Autism and additional residential care and home support services for people with physical and sensory disabilities. €50m was provided to the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2008 to fund a range of additional services under the Multi Annual Investment Programme for Disability.

As the Deputy will be aware, the commencement of the planned developments in disability services this year had been delayed due to a financial review in the HSE. However, I am pleased to be able to inform the Deputy that the HSE has assured me that it is now in a position to roll out the planned developments as outlined in its 2008 Service Plan.

Planned services include additional residential, day care — including training places — and respite care places for people with intellectual disability and autism; additional residential care and home support services for people with physical and sensory disabilities; and additional multi-disciplinary therapy posts to provide assessment and ongoing intervention services to children with a disability.

I understand that the HSE hopes to be able to finalise the position in relation to the commencement of such developments over the next week. My Department has requested the Parliamentary Affairs Division of the Executive to arrange to have the specific matter raised by the Deputy investigated and to have a reply issued directly to the Deputy.

Land Acquisitions.

212. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Transport his plans to direct CIÉ and Iarnród Éireann or to change the directive that the boards of the stated companies must adhere to requests by local authorities that lands needed for very necessary infrastructure improvements can be compulsory purchase ordered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27825/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Decisions in relation to the disposal of land owned by CIE, whether by agreement or arising from compulsory purchase orders, are a matter for the CIE Board and I have no function in relation thereto. The making and determination of compulsory purchase orders by local authorities is a matter, respectively, for local authorities and An Bord Pleanála.

I have no plans to issue a direction to CIE or Iarnród Éireann in relation to the compulsory acquisition of land by local authorities.

Road Traffic Offences.

213. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the legal position regarding the qualified accompanying driver of a learning permit driver in regard to alcohol consumption and being breathalysed in their capacity as a passenger acting as an accompanying driver; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27828/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): With effect from Monday 30 June of this year, all learner drivers must be accompanied by a driver who holds a full driving licence continuously for the previous two years. This provision, introduced in Regu-

lations in October last year, amended the position where drivers on a second provisional licence could drive unaccompanied.

The current provisions relating to drink driving apply to the driver of a vehicle and not to an accompanying driver or any passenger. The introduction of a provision to make the accompanying driver subject to drink driving legislation would require primary legislation. Such a measure is not currently among those being finalised by the Minister for Transport in a draft Scheme of a Road Traffic Bill to be circulated to other Ministers for comment shortly.

Inland Waterways.

214. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Transport further to Parliamentary Question No. 4 of 8 May 2008, the position regarding the situation; if the recommendations have been acted upon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27835/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Further to the recommendations of the Marine Casualty Investigation Board (MCIB), in relation to the grounding and flooding of an Emerald Star hire cruiser on Lough Derg on 1st July 2006, my Department has met with Waterways Ireland who have responsibility for navigable inland waterways North and South, including the Shannon.

Waterways Ireland agreed to review their current system in relation to the recommendation on the buoyage system for inland waterways, and revert to Irish Coast Guard and Maritime Administration of my Department with proposals in this regard. The other recommendations relevant to my Department are being considered in the overall context of delivering improved maritime safety.

Road Traffic Offences.

215. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport the position regarding his discussions with an organisation (details supplied); the progress to date in introducing compulsory testing of all drivers involved in collisions attended by gardaí; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27845/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): Following representations received from various bodies, my Department has consulted the Office of the Attorney General on the amendment of current legislation to achieve compulsory roadside testing for intoxicants of drivers involved in collisions. The Attorney General has now advised on possible amendments to legislation, which continue to take overriding medical circumstances into account. This issue will be included in the next Road Traffic Bill, which I hope to bring to Government later this year.

Telecommunications Services.

216. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Transport the temporary location of the integrated communications system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27852/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): Two Coast Guard Integrated Communications Systems will be installed by mid-2009. One system will be co-located with the Marine Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Dublin. The location of the second ICS system and its technical support is currently under review.

Official Travel.

217. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Transport the number of representatives

[Deputy Ciarán Lynch.]

of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27958/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): No decisions have been made to date on this matter.

Departmental Publications.

218. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Transport the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27978/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Motor Fuels.

219. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Transport the measures taken to liaise with the Department of Finance to organise the promised alternative to the fuel rebate for bus operators; if the increased cost of diesel and petrol have been taken into account when considering this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27987/08]

220. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Transport the alternative scheme which was to be devised to replace the fuel rebate scheme that was available to passenger transport services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28004/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I propose to take Questions Nos. 219 and 220 together.

The EU Energy Tax Directive incorporated special derogations which allowed specific excise duty reliefs to be applied in a number of Member States below the EU minimum duty rate. In the case of public transport services under my responsibility, these derogations included reduced rates to apply to fuel used for scheduled bus services. Scheduled bus services comprise bus passenger services provided by Bus Atha Cliath, Bus Eireann, private operators in accordance with bus route licences under the 1932 Road Transport Act and holders of Authorisations pursuant to European Council Regulation 684/92 as amended. The position in regard to the school transport sector is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Education and Science.

While these derogations expired on 31 December 2006, Ireland, along with other Member States, sought retention of its derogations beyond that date. However the European Commission, which is the deciding authority, has to date refused all such requests. The Finance Act 2008 provided the basis for the removal of these excise duty reliefs with effect from 1 November 2008.

My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Finance and other Departments, has been exploring whether alternative support mechanisms could be appropriate and could be done in a manner compatible with EU State Aid and other legal requirements. While my Department is in discussion with the Department of Finance on these issues, it is necessary to stress that, despite claims being made otherwise, introducing an alternative suitable mechanism is not a straightforward matter in the current economic climate.

There has been extensive contact and correspondence with the Department of Finance on this issue. My colleague the Minister for Finance has already stated that our overall response to the increase in fuel prices is, as was adopted at the recent Ecofin and European Council meetings, that distortionary fiscal and other policy interventions should be avoided as they prevent the necessary adjustments by economic agents. Accordingly, I don't envisage any approval from the Department of Finance for a replacement scheme in the current economic circumstances.

Rail Network.

221. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport if he will confirm if the western rail corridor project is on schedule; and if it will be completed in the timeframe set out in Transport 21. [28101/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I refer the Deputy to my answer to Parliamentary Question 25380/08 of 1st July 2008. The position has not changed.

Taxi Regulations.

222. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to a report from the Road Safety Authority in relation to small public service vehicles, in particular to limousines, and the inability of the National Car Test to weigh or test vehicles over a certain weight, and the fact that many special purpose vehicles have been licensed, despite being over the allowed weight limit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28134/08]

223. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport the reason a decision in the case of persons (details supplied) in Dublin 10 who cannot get their vehicle passed for a special purpose vehicle licence because the National Car Test operators refuse to test the vehicle, even though they have recently passed other limousines of similar weight; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28135/08]

224. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport if he will confirm that his attention was drawn more than a year ago to the case of persons (details supplied) in Dublin 10 who have been trying for more than a year to get their special purpose vehicle passed by the National Car Test in order that they can begin trading. [28136/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport (Deputy Noel Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 to 224, inclusive, together.

As was indicated to the deputy in response to questions on this subject in March 2008, my Department is examining this matter in consultation with the Road Safety Authority and the Taxi Regulator. These consultations are not yet complete but I have asked my officials to finalise their consideration of the issues and to report to me very shortly.

Road Network.

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport if his attention has been drawn to the outstanding issues associated with the extra works authorised by Kildare County Council and carried out in the vicinity of Straffan, County Kildare and associated with preparations for the Ryder Cup 2007; the extent to which the local authority or his Department provided, approved or agreed funding and specification for such works; if the works were carried out satisfactorily or in accordance with understandings, written or otherwise; if the local

[Deputy Bernard J. Durkan.]

authority or his Department has received indication from the contractors of the costs involved; if such works were in addition to contracts previously entered into; if payment for an original contract has been made to date; the reason the extra works have not been paid for; the estimated cost of such works; if it is intended to make such payment directly or through the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28245/08]

Minister for Transport (Deputy Noel Dempsey): I understand this question relates to road works on the R403 road between Straffan and Barberstown Cross and that the contract between Kildare County Council and the contractor in respect of works at that location is currently the subject of arbitration in accordance with the conditions of contract. This is a matter between the parties to the contract and my Department has no function in the matter.

Passport Applications.

226. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if persons (details supplied) in Dublin 11 will be supported. [28094/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The Passport Office can only issue a passport to an Irish Citizen.

In this case, an application for an Irish passport was submitted on behalf of a child by his parents. The child was born in Ireland in 2005. Under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 2004, persons born in the State after 1 January 2005, where neither parent is an Irish or British citizen or otherwise entitled to reside without restriction in the State or in Northern Ireland, may claim citizenship by birth in the State (and thereby establish eligibility for a passport) only where a parent has been lawfully resident in the State for 3 years of the 4 years preceding their birth.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is responsible for citizenship issues. In line with guidelines issued by that Department regarding the 2004 Act, lawful residence is proven on the basis of immigration stamps in passports and Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) cards and registration books. On this basis, the child's parents provided evidence of lawful residence for a period of 13 months and 16 days. As evidence for three years lawful residence was not submitted, the child's entitlement to Irish citizenship was not established and it was not possible to approve the issuing of a passport.

The Passport Office contacted the applicant's father on 21 June, 2008 to advise him of this decision. The applicant's father stated that some of the evidence proving his lawful residence in Ireland had been stolen from his car. In response, the Passport Office advised that he should submit a letter from the GNIB setting out the full details of periods of lawful residence for himself and his wife from 2001 to 2005. This position was confirmed in writing by the Passport Office the same day.

No further response has been received to date. The Passport Office will ensure that the child's passport application is reviewed promptly on receipt of the requested information.

The Deputy may wish to be aware that as the child's older siblings were born in Ireland prior to 1 January, 2005, their entitlement to citizenship was based simply on birth in Ireland and it was not necessary in their cases to establish three years lawful residence in Ireland of a parent.

Foreign Conflicts.

227. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs his position on Zimbabwe;

the sanctions the Government and the diplomatic service are planning to take to isolate the Mugabe regime in the aftermath of a presidential election which was not free and fair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27862/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): The grave situation in Zimbabwe is of the utmost concern to the Government. I have consistently stressed Ireland's utter condemnation of the conditions in which the 27 June election took place. The widespread state-sponsored violence and intimidation, which resulted in the deaths of close to one hundred supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and led to Morgan Tsvangirai's forced withdrawal, mean that Robert Mugabe's purported election victory cannot be regarded as in any way valid.

Following the re-inauguration of Mugabe as President, the international community must continue to make clear that his position has not the slightest democratic legitimacy. The priority must be to find a peaceful way forward through dialogue, allowing a legitimate government to be formed that reflects the will of the Zimbabwean people. Ireland and the EU will continue to work closely with our African partners to increase pressure for democratic change and for the relief of the suffering of the Zimbabwean people. It is Zimbabwe's neighbours, and above all South Africa, which have the greatest potential influence and leverage, and therefore the greatest responsibility to act. In this regard, I met with the South African Ambassador last Thursday to review all aspects of the situation and, in particular, to emphasise the need for further intensive efforts to resolve the situation at the earliest possible date.

The Government fully supports the existing restrictive measures which the European Union has applied for some years against the Government of Zimbabwe. These include a travel ban and asset freeze directed against a list of individuals who have been responsible for anti-democratic and destructive policies over the last several years.

In the light of events in Zimbabwe since March and throughout the election period, Ireland is working with EU colleagues on how the EU can best act to promote a return to democracy, the rule of law and responsible economic management in Zimbabwe. It is probable that the EU's visa ban and asset freeze will be extended to include additional individuals who are known to have encouraged violence or to have undermined the democratic process in recent months. The feasibility of a number of other possible measures is currently being examined, with a view to ensuring that any new measures will actually be effective in bringing pressure to bear, while minimising the effect on ordinary Zimbabwean people.

Ireland strongly supports the imposition of further EU measures on those responsible for directing the recent political violence. Ireland would welcome action by the UN Security Council in this regard, as proposed by the United States. The aim of any new measures should be to have a real political impact, while not exacerbating the dreadful economic situation which the long-suffering people of Zimbabwe have had to endure for far too long.

228. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if EU negotiators were operating in Colombia at the time of the release of a person (details supplied); and the position regarding potential peace talks with the guerrillas. [27934/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): I warmly welcome the release last week of Ingrid Betancourt and fourteen fellow hostages on foot of an operation conducted by the Colombian army. I would also renew my call for the release of all hostages held in Colombia.

The European Union has not been involved in negotiations in Colombia. However, a number of EU Member States, which have a history of involvement in the region, have been active in

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

seeking to mediate between the Colombian Government and the left-wing guerrilla groups, efforts which are fully supported by Ireland and other EU partners.

The Government of Colombia has repeatedly stated its commitment to bringing to an end all terrorism in Colombia within the framework of the Justice and Peace Law. This Law, passed in 2005, provides an overall legal framework for the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of illegal armed groups into Colombian society. The Justice and Peace Law, which was adopted through a lengthy democratic political process, strikes a difficult balance between peace and justice.

The process of peace negotiations between the Colombian Government and the right-wing paramilitary group, Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) began in 2003, with between 30,000 and 40,000 combatants having been demobilized on completion of the process in 2007. The Government of Colombia is currently engaging in dialogue with the left-wing guerrilla group known as the Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Colombia (ELN) in pursuit of a negotiated peace agreement. Negotiations between the major left-wing guerrilla group, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), and the Government have not yet commenced.

The General Affairs and External Relations Council of the European Union most recently adopted Conclusions on Colombia on 19 November 2007. Ireland was actively involved in the negotiation of these Conclusions, which expressed the EU's total solidarity with the Colombian people, its full support for the Colombian Government in its search for a negotiated solution to the internal armed conflict and underlined the importance the EU attaches to the ongoing implementation of the Justice and Peace Law.

The Council further expressed its hope that progress would be made in taking forward negotiations in order to reach a humanitarian agreement, to secure the release of all hostages, to end the armed conflict and to bring lasting peace to Colombia. In the same spirit, the Council welcomed all initiatives taken with the Colombian Government's support with the objective of promoting a successful peace process.

My Department continues to monitor the situation in Colombia through our Embassy in Mexico City, which is accredited to Colombia, as well as in cooperation with our EU partners with resident diplomatic missions in that country. Ireland is fully supportive of efforts to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Colombia.

Official Travel.

229. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of representatives of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27953/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Neither I nor the Ministers of State at my Department have plans to visit China in an official capacity in August. Separate from the above, additional consular resources will be deployed in China to assist Irish citizens as the need arises.

Departmental Publications.

230. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008,

including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27973/08]

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Micheál Martin): Presented in tabular form are details of the various publications and booklets produced by my Department for the period in question.

Vote 28 (Foreign Affairs)	Cost (Design and Print)
	€
Report on Irish Prisoners Abroad	6,066
Department of Foreign Affairs, Annual Report 2006	341
Information Sheets containing biographies of Taoiseach and Ministers, primarily for use by Missions abroad	4,041
Good Friday Agreement (re-print)	1,611
Consular Charter, outlining the services available to Irish citizens travelling abroad and how they may access them.	16,227
Strategy Statement 2008-2010	18,454
Our Shared Japan, an anthology of contemporary Irish poetry (<i>Published as one of a series of events to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Ireland and Japan in 2007</i>)	20,888
Design, Printing, Advertisement and Distribution of Publications to mark the 50th Anniversary of the European Union in 2007	93,999.30
Design, Printing, Advertisement and Distribution of Explanatory Pamphlets on the Lisbon Reform Treaty	36,569.89
Design, printing and distribution of a Guide to the Lisbon Reform Treaty	103,234.49
Design, printing, and nationwide distribution of a Guide to the Lisbon Reform Treaty for households	371,615.00
Design, Printing, Advertisement and Distribution of the White Paper on the Lisbon Reform Treaty	189,911.01
Annual NGO Forum on Human Rights 2007, Conference Programme	1,349
Annual NGO Forum on Human Rights 2008, Conference Programme	9,103
Third Report on the Measures Adopted to Give Effect to the Provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.	12,759
Vote 29 (International Co-operation)	Cost (Design and Print)
	€
Review of Irish Aid Support to Tsunami Affected Countries	11,313
Evaluation of the South Africa Country Programme 2004-2006	9,824
Evaluation of the Mozambique Country Programmes 2001-2006	9,673
2006 Audit Committee Annual Report — English and Irish	6,884

[Deputy Micheál Martin.]

Vote 29 (International Co-operation)	Cost (Design and Print)
	€
<i>Environment Key Sheets:</i>	12,385
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting to Climate Change • Biodiversity and Poverty Reduction • Climate Change and Poverty Reduction • Dryland degradation and Development • Environment and Governance • Environment and Agriculture • Environment and Education • Environment and Health • Environment and Poverty Reduction • Trade and Environment 	
School Flyer for Information Centre	1,865
<i>Irish Aid Centre Leaflets:</i>	12,678
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on the Centre — Irish and English • Gender Inequality • Responding to Emergencies Brochure • Volunteering Brochure • Fairtrade Brochure 	
<i>Factsheets for Schools:</i>	4,516
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment and Development • HIV and AIDS and Development • Humanitarian Aid and Development • Introduction to Irish Aid • Mozambique • Poverty and Development • Tanzania 	
Mozambique Country Strategy Paper	7,995
Education Policy	5,565
Annual Report 2006 Irish and English	30,773
Irish Aid Calendar	5,535
Zambia Country Strategy Paper	5,135
Development Education Policy	4,516
Development Education Funding Guidelines	4,372
Tanzania Country Strategy Paper	5,565
Local Development Policy and Guidelines	4,516
Irish Aid Operational Plan 2008-2012	8,600
Rapid Response Leaflet	2,235
Introduction to Irish Aid, including map of Irish Aid Programme Countries (approx. 55,000 copies)	27,976
Environment Briefing Paper	1,135
Environment Policy	9,377
Africa Day Leaflet	1,555
Uganda Country Strategy Paper	4,302
Series of Information Documents on Home Based Care compiled on a CD ROM (3,000 copies) plus 3,000 hard copies. For distribution through Southern Africa HIV and AID S information dissemination service in Zimbabwe	30,700
Vietnam Country Strategy Paper	\$3,449*

*US Dollars

Advisory Board on Irish Aid (ABIA)	Cost (Design and Print)
	€
Policy Coherence For Development, 2007	13,005
ABIA Annual Report 2006	12,719
Research Findings Volume 1: Governance, Trade and Aid Effectiveness, 2007	20,675
Engagement with Civil Society for Poverty Reduction, 2008	8,175
Good governance, aid modalities and poverty reduction, 2008	17,125
Measuring Impact: The Global and Irish Aid Programme, 2008	13,420
ABIA Annual Report 2007	11,854

Overseas Development Aid.

231. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the amount of aid funding allocated to Ethiopia in 2007 and to date in 2008; the way this was dispensed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28266/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Deputy Peter Power): Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world and has been one of Ireland's Programme Countries since 1994. Irish Aid provided almost €41 million to development programmes and projects in Ethiopia in 2007 and it is estimated that assistance amounting to around €45 million will be provided in 2008.

In 2007, assistance to Ethiopia addressed a wide range of basic needs with an emphasis on health, education, food security and governance. For example, approximately €9 million was allocated to a social "safety net" programme designed to ensure that over seven million poor Ethiopians were provided with cash or food in exchange for labour, thus preventing them from becoming absolutely destitute.

Over €7 million was provided to Irish missionaries and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), including Concern, Goal, Self Help Development International and Trócaire, to support their development efforts in Ethiopia. In addition, some €1.2 million was allocated to Concern, Goal and the World Food Programme to provide emergency responses to vulnerable communities, while, almost €7 million was allocated to a capacity building programme designed to reduce poverty in the Tigray region.

We also supported the purchase of essential medicines, the construction and equipping of about 500 health centres and the training of health professionals in Ethiopia. Furthermore, we work with local NGOs in addressing HIV/AIDS. Finally, Ireland contributed to a teacher development programme which provided training to an estimated 250,000 education personnel.

Governance is an important component of our aid programme in Ethiopia and in 2007 over €3.5 million was spent on public and civil service reform, strengthening parliamentary institutions, economic initiatives and support for local NGOs involved in human rights and governance issues.

In 2008, the Irish Aid programme is continuing very much along the same lines and is, in particular, addressing the basic needs of the poor, especially the rural poor.

Decentralisation Programme.

232. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the status of the decentralisation of FÁS to Birr, County Offaly; the number of

[Deputy Denis Naughten.]

staff decentralised; the number to be decentralised; the timetable for same; the status of property acquisition and the cost involved; when the property will be ready for occupation; the number it will cater for; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27821/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan):

Under the Government's decentralisation programme, FÁS is due to transfer its head office including some 383 posts to Birr, County Offaly.

FÁS has completed the purchase of 5.59 acres (approximately) in Birr, Co Offaly for about €1.6 million. A Planning Application for the FÁS portion of the site access road and site entrance is currently being progressed.

In the meantime, FÁS has leased a floor of a building within the Birr Technology Centre to accommodate staff in the decentralised location pending the construction and fitting out of a permanent Headquarters. As of June 2008 there were 23 Head Office staff based in these premises, which has capacity for approximately 40 staff.

Economic Competitiveness.

233. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment her views on trends towards the outsourcing of jobs from Ireland to countries with cheaper labour costs and of retailers sourcing products in such countries with cheap labour, and sometimes questionable labour practices according to the International Labour Organisation, ILO; the discussions she or her officials have had with colleagues in countries, such as but not confined to India, which are viewed as centres of cheap labour or with the ILO or other multilateral institutions in respect of labour standards in those countries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27921/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan):

Outsourcing and relocation are inevitable in a free market and open economy. Many of the jobs in this economy, especially in the multinational sectors, could be looked upon as having been outsourced to here and we still continue to capture a significant share of such employment. Inter-firm outsourcing is also an important part of enterprise activity.

Our economic performance has benefited considerably from winning this type of investment from other economies in the past. Indeed for some firms, outsourcing of low-end operations makes complete financial and strategic sense and may be the only means to ensure their continued viability. However, outsourcing should not lead to unethical labour market practices or exploitation of workers and both consumers, suppliers and retailers should be vigilant to ensure that goods are produced under fair and decent conditions.

Outsourcing can, of course, make a valuable contribution to the efforts of developing countries to develop and increase their exports, thus earning valuable foreign exchange, as part of their drive to industrialise and diversify their economies. Not only does this provide employment but it also makes a longer term contribution to development of production and management expertise.

However, outsourcing should not lead to unethical labour market practices or exploitation of workers and both consumers, suppliers and retailers should be vigilant to ensure that goods are produced under fair and decent conditions.

While discussions have not taken place with the ILO on a bilateral basis on the issue of labour standards in other countries, Ireland has consistently supported the International Labour Organisation in its efforts to promote core labour standards. In 1998, we supported the

adoption by the ILO of a Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. This commits the ILO's approximately 180 member states worldwide to respect the principles inherent in the core labour standards and to promote their universal application.

Additionally, at the most recent June Conference, ILO members, including Ireland, adopted the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation. This provides the ILO with a rejuvenated and strengthened mandate to enable it to better respond to its members' needs to tackle changes arising from the globalisation process. Ireland, alongside its EU counterparts, also fully supported the accompanying Resolution that includes concrete modalities in support of implementation of the Declaration. The new Declaration is an important tool and promotional framework for the achievement of the ILO's four strategic objectives that comprise the Decent Work Agenda.

Official Travel.

234. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of representatives of her Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27950/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): There are currently no plans for any representatives or officials from my Department to visit Beijing in an official capacity to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games. Accordingly, there is no projected cost involved.

Departmental Publications.

235. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of her Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27970/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): In the time available it has not been possible to compile the information requested by the Deputy in relation to my Department and the Offices of my Department. This information is being compiled at present and I will communicate the details to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Industrial Development.

236. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the action she has taken to work with the IDA Ireland to organise prospective inward investment to south Tipperary for 2008 and 2009; the number of scheduled visits by the IDA Ireland with investors planned for 2008 and 2009 to south Tipperary; the plans to use a factory (details supplied) in Tipperary Town; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27983/08]

237. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the strategies and policies that have been formed to prioritise job creation and inward investment in Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary following the visit of the Oireachtas Joint Committee of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in January 2008. [27989/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 236 and 237 together.

IDA Ireland is the agency with statutory responsibility for the attraction of foreign direct investment to Ireland and its regions. The marketing of individual areas, for new or expansion FDI investments and jobs, including the arrangement of site visits, is a day-to-day operational matter for the Agency. While I may give general policy directives to the Agency, I am precluded under the Acts from giving directives regarding individual undertakings or from giving preference to one area over others.

The strategies and programmes of the development agencies under the aegis of my Department are very much in line with the National Development Plan and the National Spatial Strategy, which have been specifically designed to overcome any impediments that may exist to economic development and job creation across the country as a whole.

In marketing South Tipperary for new foreign direct investment, IDA Ireland is focused on attracting overseas companies in the services and knowledge based industries, including advanced manufacturing. The Agency is actively engaged with its existing client base in Co. Tipperary to encourage their transition to higher value activities and to embed their operations within Ireland. In addition, IDA Ireland continues to work closely with third level educational institutions and FÁS in the region so that the skill sets necessary to attract high value added employment to the county are being developed.

In line with the above, IDA has purchased c. 20 hectares of land in the South Tipperary Co. Council owned Ballingarrane Estate in Clonmel. The future development of the Ballingarrane lands, incorporating the IDA Business Park and Tipperary Institute, will be a key asset in attracting foreign direct investment into South Tipperary.

While there are no itineraries planned in the immediate future, any prospective investors will be advised regarding the range of property solutions available in the County.

As Ireland competes for investments at the highest end of the value chain the concept of scale is crucial to our economic destiny. Leading corporations require a significant population of highly qualified talent, effective physical and digital infrastructure coupled with availability of sophisticated professional support services. If we are to continue being successful in realising a large proportion of our investments outside of the larger cities, all economic and social stakeholders will need to adhere to the framework on which the NSS is constructed. Future thinking and action must have a regional rather than a local bias and this requires a significant change in mindset.

Departmental Properties.

238. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the status of the interdepartmental project team established in August 2006 to develop proposals for the redevelopment of Haulbowline Island; the person who conceived this proposal; if plans have been finalised for the hotel, luxury apartments, marina, museum and office space; the members of the project team; the expenditure incurred to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28003/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The possibility of developing the former Ispat site at Haulbowline from an enterprise, tourism and leisure perspective was first suggested by a former executive of Enterprise Ireland.

The issue has been under consideration in my Department which has consulted with other interests including the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, OPW

and the County Manager with a view to identifying both the needs of Departments and State Bodies insofar as the Ispat site is concerned.

A range of issues have been under consideration including site boundary issues, zoning issues and other regulatory matters. Consideration has also been given to the best mechanism for taking the project forward prior to any formal establishment of an interdepartmental group.

My Department has also been considering the results of site investigations, the status of current works on the site, the identification of on-going site management issues and the identification of possible constraints to the remediation and redevelopment of the site.

In response to recent safety concerns which have arisen on the site the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government has engaged consultants to carry out a site investigation and to determine what, if any, are the implications for the site of recent unauthorised works. Options for the further development of the site, will be informed, inter alia, by the outcome of this investigation.

FÁS Training Programmes.

239. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment her views on the closure of the Carrick-on-Suir jobs club; the rationale behind the decision in; the alternative job creation facilities and advice centres that will be put in place in the town; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28046/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The range and make-up of supports and services provided by FÁS at local level is a day-to-day operational matter for them, and is not an area in which I have any role to play.

I understand that in early 2008 FÁS raised concerns about the capacity of the Carrick-on-Suir Jobs Club to meet the agreed targets. Representatives were advised by FÁS that if there was no progress towards achieving the targets funding would be discontinued.

Due to the Carrick-on-Suir Jobs Club's continuing inability to achieve nationally agreed targets FÁS notified the Jobs Club of its decision to discontinue funding with effect from 30th June 2008. However this closing date has now been extended to 31st July 2008 to allow the Jobs Club another opportunity to produce an Action Plan showing how it intends to achieve the nationally agreed targets.

I can assure the Deputy that FÁS is continuing to liaise with community representatives in Carrick-on-Suir to explore options which will best serve Carrick-on-Suir in the months and years ahead in terms of employment and training supports.

Grocery Industry.

240. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment if, in the view of the recent survey by the National Consumer Agency on the price of grocery goods in the Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, she will request the Competition Authority to carry out a study jointly with the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland, into the basis for the differentials in the price of grocery goods at retail, wholesale and supplier level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28123/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Deputy will be aware that I have raised my concerns about the price of grocery goods on a number of occasions recently with the National Consumer Agency and the Retail Association of Ireland.

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

It continues to be my view that retailers have a duty to their customers and to the economies in which they operate to explain why there are such price differentials between their stores in the two jurisdictions. The Competition Authority has undertaken a study into the grocery market in Ireland. Earlier this year, the Authority published two reports as part of the Grocery Monitor Project. The first report, *A Description of the Structure and Operation of Grocery Retailing and Wholesaling in Ireland: 2001 to 2006* provides a description of the market structure at the wholesale and retail levels of the Irish grocery sector.

The second report is entitled *Price Trends in the Irish Retail Grocery Sector: A Description of the Evolution of Retail Grocery Prices between 2001 and 2007*. In this report, the Competition Authority has considered the impact of the removal of the Groceries Order by examining the evolution of the aggregate retail grocery price trends since 2001, by analysis of price data published by the CSO. A third Report examining the Retail Planning System as applied to the Grocery Sector 2001-2007 was recently finalised.

I have asked Forfás to do an assessment of the comparative costs of operating a retail business in Ireland and how the costs facing retailers could be addressed. The study should be finalized in the Autumn.

Departmental Properties.

241. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the land and buildings in her Department's ownership in County Wicklow; the length of time they have been in the ownership of her Department; when a site visit was last carried out on each of these locations with a view to locating an industry there; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28267/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): Under the Industrial Development Acts, the management of IDA Ireland's industrial property portfolio is a day to day operational matter for the Agency and not one in which I have a function.

I understand from IDA Ireland that it owns a total of total of 69.09 hectares of land in Wickow, a 20 hectare Business Park in Bray, a 24.9 hectare Business Park in Greystones and a 24.19 hectare Business park in Arklow. These lands have been in IDA ownership since 1990, 1984 and 1998 respectively. In addition, the Agency has only one building in the county-Ballynattan House on the Arklow lands.

When prospective investors are being brought to visit the county they are advised regarding the range of property solutions available and I am informed that the last such visit to Wicklow took place in late 2006. Through its range of overseas offices, IDA Ireland continues to promote Wicklow for further foreign investment across all sectors. Wicklow's proximity to Dublin, together with the rail and road links combine to enhance its attractiveness as a site for overseas mobile investment. The Agency promotes its own parks in Greystones and Arklow as well as other public and private parks in several Wicklow locations in collaboration with the enterprise staff in Wicklow County Council.

Job Creation.

242. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment the number of jobs created by her Department on a county basis since 1 January 1998 to 1 January 2008; the cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28268/08]

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Deputy Mary Coughlan): The Forfás Annual Employment Survey reports on job gains and losses in companies that are clients of the industrial development agencies. Information is aggregated on an annualised basis at county level.

The number of jobs with support from the Enterprise Development Agencies on a county basis in each of the years from 1998 to the end of 2007 are set out in the attached tabular statement. Data on the cost of individual jobs created is not available. However, both Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland compile overall figures on the cost per job created and sustained on a rolling seven year basis. The figure is calculated by taking into account all agency expenditure to all firms. Only jobs created during and sustained to the end of each seven-year period are credited in the calculations; those figures are attached and are based on Constant 2007 prices.

The enterprise agencies aim to support sustainable, high value added enterprise, in all regions through the provision of mentoring and developmental supports, the enhancement of management capabilities and critical workforce skills in client companies, support for the creation and implementation of strategies for market entry, development and growth, and strong supports for innovation and for research and development. Furthermore, we are continuing to pursue policies to promote lifelong learning and up-skilling to improve labour market flexibility and, where necessary, ensure that appropriate training supports are provided for workers in sectors that are no longer competitive, and who may need to find alternative employment.

I am satisfied that the policies being pursued by Government, together with the work of the Enterprise Development Agencies on the ground, as well as the roll-out of the National Development Plan will continue to bear fruit in terms of investments and employment in the country.

Cost Per Job

Period	1998-2004	1999-2005	2000-2006	2001-2007
	€	€	€	€
Enterprise Ireland	8,518	5,961	3,907	6,111
IDA Ireland	16,408	14,432	13,097	12,577

Full time Jobs Created by Enterprise Development Agencies * 1998-2007 on a county Basis

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Totals
Carlow	461	287	162	217	188	183	196	205	287	327	2,513
Kilkenny	274	317	320	337	638	301	260	256	276	279	3,258
Tipperary (SR)	378	693	545	569	334	238	281	295	362	958	4,653
Waterford	1,116	742	636	938	995	909	548	513	1,106	606	8,109
Wexford	415	421	544	449	583	657	510	484	335	436	4,834
Cavan	407	463	384	375	699	493	547	1,064	781	400	5,613
Donegal	419	479	635	834	379	382	408	708	526	611	5,381
Leitrim	91	162	66	387	181	601	178	63	70	45	1,844
Louth	742	618	1,252	664	443	258	615	618	698	584	6,492
Monaghan	459	452	385	355	376	330	348	540	425	343	4,013
Sligo	349	270	298	261	261	263	316	306	334	147	2,805
Clare	1,207	1,240	1,224	839	590	639	632	692	732	561	8,356
Limerick	2,372	2,813	2,082	1,007	814	682	1,038	1,137	1,830	1,053	14,828
Tipperary (NR)	213	376	449	347	342	251	233	233	208	278	2,930

[Deputy Mary Coughlan.]

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Totals
Cork	3,426	3,399	6,404	3,206	3,805	2,595	3,024	2,715	3,605	3,084	35,263
Kerry	464	849	1,029	550	335	255	257	386	313	363	4,801
Dublin	12,189	16,583	17,425	11,510	8,926	7,870	9,421	9,929	10,670	9,106	113,629
Galway	1,369	1,129	2,775	1,227	1,044	1,357	1,636	1,902	1,199	1,118	14,756
Mayo	744	503	898	670	324	294	329	485	352	468	5,067
Roscommon	303	200	288	213	250	214	184	184	126	225	2,187
Kildare	986	1,349	2,438	691	1,027	971	1,135	1,020	910	679	11,206
Meath	509	459	734	509	289	547	467	635	1,032	773	5,954
Wicklow	594	1,189	863	1,120	1,002	1,261	560	772	383	439	8,183
Laois	112	217	83	277	133	70	62	132	207	103	1,396
Longford	299	216	231	432	120	359	257	417	326	145	2,802
Offaly	294	647	275	242	671	230	355	261	440	444	3,859
Westmeath	508	290	711	547	565	366	515	574	475	610	5,161
Total	30,700	36,363	43,136	28,773	25,314	22,576	24,312	26,526	28,008	24,185	289,893

*IDA Ireland Enterprise Ireland, Shannon Development.

Source: Forfas Business Information System.

Sports Capital Programme.

243. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism if an application has been received from a club (details supplied) in County Donegal for funding under the sports capital programme; if the application is currently being considered; and when a decision will be made. [27805/08]

244. **Deputy Jimmy Deenihan** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism when a grant will be awarded to a club (details supplied) in County Kerry under the sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27938/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): I propose to take Questions Nos. 243 and 244 together.

Under the sports capital programme, which is administered by my Department, funding is allocated to sporting and community organisations at local, regional and national level throughout the country.

Applications for funding under the 2008 programme were invited through advertisements in the Press on 13th and 14th of January and the deadline for receipt of applications was 29th February for paper-based applications and 7th March for online applications. All applications received before the deadline, including those from the organisations in question, are currently being 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.

Official Travel.

245. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the number of representatives of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27945/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): The Government has been invited by the Olympic Council of Ireland to be represented at the Beijing Olympic Games. I will be attending on behalf of the Government. As the travel and accommodation arrangements are not yet finalised it is not possible at this stage to provide the costs of such attendance or confirm the numbers travelling.

Departmental Publications.

246. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27965/08]

Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism (Deputy Martin Cullen): The requested details relating to publications on behalf of my Department are set out in tabular form below:

Title of Publication/Booklet	Cost of Production	Cost of Distribution	Cost of Graphic Design	Cost of Launching	Other Costs	Total Cost of Publication
	(€)	(€)	(€)	(€)	(€)	(€)
Annual Report 2006	4,833.95	0	Included in cost of production	0	181.50 (courier)	5,015.45
Launch Folder of Arts and Culture Programme 2008	2,601.50	0	2,238.50	0	48.40 (courier)	4,888.40

Social Welfare Benefits.

247. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs her views on increasing the living alone allowance for older people in line with the increased cost of food and fuel; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27984/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The living alone increase is an additional payment of €7.70 per week made to people aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of certain social welfare payments and who are living alone. It is also available to people who are under 66 years of age who are living alone and receiving payments under one of a number of invalidity type schemes.

The policy in relation to support for older people has been, for many years, to give priority to increasing the personal rates of pension in addition to enhancing the Household Benefits Package which includes TV Licence, Telephone, Electricity/Gas and the Fuel Allowance rather than supplements like the living alone increase. The objective is to use resources to improve the position of all pensioners to the fullest extent possible rather than focusing on particular groups. Under this policy, the rate of contributory pension has increased from €147.30 per week in 2002 to €223.00 per week in 2008 and the non-contributory pension has increased from €134.00 per week to €212.00 per week.

Decentralisation Programme.

248. **Deputy Rory O'Hanlon** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding decentralisation to Carrickmacross County Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28115/08]

249. **Deputy Rory O'Hanlon** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the position regarding accommodation for decentralisation in Carrickmacross, County Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28116/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 248 and 249 together.

Under the current programme of decentralisation, 85 posts in the Department are to be relocated to Carrickmacross and in excess of 90 applications have been received to date to move there.

The Office of Public Works is charged with securing accommodation in Carrickmacross for this Department. They have advised that they are still exploring a number of options including one which involves Monaghan County Council.

Social Welfare Benefits.

250. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if she will increase the fuel allowance in view of the recent increase in fuel costs here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27798/08]

251. **Deputy Catherine Byrne** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if she will make the fuel allowance available all year round in view of the cold and wet weather being experienced here during the summer months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27799/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 250 and 251 together.

This Department's role is to assist social welfare recipients with heating costs, both through their basic payments and through the household benefits package with fuel, electricity and gas allowances. These schemes have been improved significantly in recent years.

The national fuel allowance scheme assists householders on long-term social welfare or health service executive (HSE) payments with meeting the cost of their heating needs during the winter season. The allowance represents a contribution towards a person's normal heating expenses. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Fuel allowance is now payable for 30 weeks and benefits over 290,000 people at an aggregate cost of €170 million this year. The payment rate has increased to €18 per week or €21.90 for recipients living in designated smokeless areas; this is a doubling of the rate of payment since 2005.

Electricity and gas allowances under the household benefits package, are payable throughout the year to over 355,000 pensioners, people with disabilities, and carer households towards their heating, light and cooking costs at an estimated overall scheme cost of €159m in 2008. The electricity allowance covers standing charges plus VAT and up to 2,400 units of electricity in each billing period, increased from 1,800 units in January 2007. The gas allowance covers a cash equivalent amount.

The supplementary welfare allowance scheme can also be used to assist people in certain circumstances with specific heating needs due to infirmity or a particular medical condition.

Fuel allowance is incorporated into a person's weekly social welfare payment. Government policy in recent years has focused on significantly increasing primary social welfare rates to ensure that people on social welfare can meet their basic living costs, including heating, throughout the year and achieve an improvement in quality of life. This is a more costly approach than increasing fuel allowance as the increase is paid for the full year and not just for the 30 weeks of the winter heating season. Social welfare rates have increased at a significantly greater rate than inflation in recent years. Since December 2001, the consumer price index has increased by over 27% while energy product prices have increased by 65%. However,

increases in social welfare payments (including fuel allowance) have been between 71% and 88% in the same period.

Improvements to the fuel allowance scheme, such as an increase in the rate of payment or an extension of the duration of the fuel season, would have considerable cost implications. Payment of the fuel allowance for a full 52 weeks of the year would cost an additional €123m, bringing total annual expenditure to over €293m. Any changes to the scheme will be considered in a budgetary context and in the light of resources available for improvements in social welfare payments generally.

Pension Provisions.

252. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if a national pension awareness campaign has been planned for 2008/2009; the amount such a campaign would cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27814/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The National Pensions Awareness Campaign has been run by the Pensions Board on behalf of the Department annually since 2003. A total of €1million has been provided to support the campaign in 2008. The campaign has been very successful in creating and maintaining a high level of awareness amongst the general public in relation to pensions issues.

The allocation of resources for a campaign is reviewed annually in the context of the overall estimates and budget process. At this stage, no decisions have been made in relation to a campaign for 2009.

253. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs her views on the fact that by 2050, studies estimate that one in four people here will be over 65; if future pension entitlements are being planned accordingly; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27815/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): As the Deputy will be aware, the needs of older people have been a priority for Government for many years and very significant improvements have been made in social welfare pensions. The rate of contributory pension has increased from €147.30 per week in 2002 to more than €223 per week in 2008 and the non-contributory pension has increased from €134.00 per week in 2002 to €212 per week this year.

As the House is aware, the Green Paper on Pensions, published on 17 October 2008, sets out a comprehensive discussion on the issues relating to both social welfare and occupational pensions. The purpose of the Green Paper is not to recommend any particular approach, but rather to facilitate a debate on the issues and possible approaches to future policy.

With regard to private and occupational pensions, the Green Paper discusses approaches for the development of the pension system, largely based on the conclusions of the Pensions Board in its two reports published in 2006, the National Pensions Review and Special Savings for Retirement. These discussions are in the context of criteria ranging from coverage and adequacy to competitiveness. The approaches discussed include maintaining the status quo, the use of SSIA type tax incentives in a pensions context, soft mandatory approaches and mandatory provision. A more prominent role for the social welfare pension in improving retirement income is also considered.

The consultation process on the Green Paper on Pensions has recently closed and the Government is committed to developing a new framework for future pensions policy by the end of the year.

Social Welfare Benefits.

254. **Deputy Mary O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if she will review the case of persons (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [27859/08]

255. **Deputy Mary O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if she will review the case of persons (details supplied) in County Westmeath. [27861/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 254 and 255 together.

Rent supplement is administered on behalf of the Department by the community welfare division of the Health Service Executive (HSE), as part of the supplementary welfare allowance scheme.

The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is provide short-term income support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. Rent supplement is calculated to ensure that a person, after the payment of rent, has an income equal to the basic rate of supplementary welfare allowance, appropriate to his/her family circumstances, less a specified minimum contribution, currently €13, which recipients are required to pay from their own resources. Many recipients pay more than €13 because they are also required to contribute any additional assessable means that they have, over and above the appropriate rate of supplementary welfare allowance, towards their accommodation costs.

The HSE has advised that the person concerned was in receipt of rent supplement but this payment was discontinued in 2007 as her income was sufficient to meet her housing costs. If she wishes to have her current entitlement to rent supplement assessed, she should make an application at her local health centre.

The person concerned incurred an overpayment of over €5,500 while in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment (OFP), as she failed to notify the Department that she had commenced employment. She has agreed to repay the overpayment by direct debit deductions of €10 per week. She has been advised that if her earnings reduce below the current OFP income limit of €425 per week, it is open to her to reapply for OFP.

Pension Provisions.

256. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if she has read the policy document recently published by the National Women's Council of Ireland entitled *Pensions: What Women Want*, a model of pensions that guarantees independence; if her attention has been drawn to the needs and challenges facing women here; if she will take steps to ensure that the issues highlighted in the document receive due attention and that these issues become a more important element of the debate on forming a new Government policy on pensions; the steps she will introduce; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [27919/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The Green Paper on Pensions, published on 17 October 2007, sets out a comprehensive discussion on the issues relating to both social welfare and occupational pensions. The purpose of the Green Paper is not to recommend any particular approach, but rather to facilitate a debate on the issues and possible approaches to future policy.

With regard to private and occupational pensions, the Green Paper discusses approaches for the development of the pension system, largely based on the conclusions of the Pensions Board

in its two reports published in 2006, the National Pensions Review and Special Savings for Retirement. These discussions are in the context of criteria ranging from coverage and adequacy to competitiveness. The approaches discussed include maintaining the status quo, the use of SSIA type tax incentives in a pensions context, soft mandatory approaches and mandatory provision. A more prominent role for the social welfare pension in improving retirement income is also considered.

The Government is anxious to ensure that as many people as possible can be accommodated within the social welfare pensions system, with due regard being paid to the contributory principle underlying entitlement to contributory payments and, in the case of non-contributory payments, the need to ensure that resources are directed to those who are most in need. Over the last 10 years, means tests have been improved and qualifying conditions for contributory payments made easier. The Green Paper includes a full discussion on the social welfare pension position of women and sets out, a range of reforms for discussion, including the use of universal entitlements and back-dating the homemakers scheme.

A consultation process commenced following its publication and submissions were invited on all aspects of the pensions system. Issues in relation to women's pensions were very prominent among the large number of submissions received, both from individuals and organisations. The policy document "Pensions: What Women Want" published by the National Women's Council of Ireland was also received and is included among the submissions on the website www.pensionsgreenpaper.ie dedicated to the Green Paper. I have read the document in question and, indeed, I met the National Women's Council of Ireland recently and assured them of the Government's commitment to developing a framework for future pension policy.

The consultation period has concluded and work has recently commenced on deciding on a framework. It is expected that the policy framework will be finalised by the end of the year.

Official Travel.

257. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the number of representatives of her Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27956/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): There will not be anyone visiting Beijing in an official capacity from this Department during the Olympic Games.

Departmental Publications.

258. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of her Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27976/08]

Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Deputy Mary Hanafin): The information requested is currently being compiled and a reply will issue to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Marine Accidents.

259. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 340 of 13 May 2008, the position in relation to same; if the meetings referred to have taken place; the outcome of same; if the recommendation referred to has been implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27836/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I wish to advise the Deputy that Waterways Ireland met with the Marine Safety Directorate on 2 July 2008 to discuss the Marine Casualty Investigation Board Report No. MCIB/127 into the circumstances surrounding the grounding and flooding of a hire cruiser on Lough Derg on 1 July 2006 and, in particular, Recommendation 6.3 of the Report.

Waterways Ireland in consultation with the Marine Safety Directorate has agreed to carry out a detailed review of its buoyage system on the Shannon Navigation in respect of Recommendation 6.3.

Waterways Ireland will revert to the Marine Safety Directorate with its proposals and, following agreement with them, will commence implementation of the necessary changes within an agreed timetable.

National Drugs Strategy.

260. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs when the new National Drugs Strategy is expected to be launched; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27864/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy John Curran): Work on developing the new National Drugs Strategy is ongoing. A key element of the work to date is the extensive consultation process that is being undertaken by the Steering Group, chaired by my Department, which has been established to develop proposals for the new Strategy.

This has included 15 public consultation meetings and meetings with (i) a number of relevant Departments and agencies, (ii) key sectoral groups, (iii) organisations working in the drugs area and (iv) a number of focus groups aimed at particularly hard to reach individuals. In addition, over 120 written submissions have been received to date.

The consultation process, which I expect will be completed by mid July, is central to the work of formulating a new Strategy. The opinions and views expressed will help to inform the shape and direction of the new Strategy which will cover the period 2009-2016.

The work of the Steering Group will continue into the autumn and I hope to be in a position to make recommendations on the new Strategy to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion before the end of 2008, and to launch it shortly thereafter.

Official Travel.

261. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of representatives of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27947/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): No such representatives of my Department will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games.

Departmental Publications.

262. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27967/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): I assume that the Deputy's Question relates to publications and brochures produced for general information by or on behalf of my Department. The details sought by the Deputy in relation to such publications for the period January 2007-June 2008 are set out in the table below.

The Deputy may wish to note that details in relation to other reports (such as VFM or policy reviews, etc) commissioned by my Department in the period 2002-2008 (to date) were provided in response to Question No. 574 of 8 Iúil 2008.

Publication	Published	Total Cost
		€
Departmental Annual Report 2005	2007	14,184
Departmental Annual Report 2006	2007	12,471
Many Communities — A Common Focus	2007	4,620
Report of the Working Group on Drugs Rehabilitation	2007	17,479
Updated information leaflet on the National Drugs Strategy Team	2007	1,209
Reprint of LEADER Programme brochure	2007	2,250
Scheme of Community Support for Older People	2007	3,962
Report of the Linguistic Study on the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht	2007	17,039
The Walks Scheme Booklet	2008	8,705
CLÁR Annual Report 2006	2007	7,895
A Guide to the Rural Social Scheme — Your Questions Answered	2007	3,850
Ráiteas Polasaí an Rialtais i leith na Gaeilge	2007	51,338
The Smallholder Initiative Leaflet	2007	1,195
Making a difference in Rural Ireland (Case Studies)	2007	25,769
Educational inequalities in a rural setting	2007	15,664
RAPID in Action — Community Safety and Physical Environment	2007	8,716
Equality Code of Practice	2007	1,061
Inclusion Through Local Development	2007	2,161
Performance Indicator Report 2006/2007	2007	7,866
Local Development Social Inclusion Programme: Annual Monitoring Report	2007	5,295
RAPID in Action — Leverage fund case studies	2007	37,845
Empowering Communities By Tackling Disadvantage	2007	26,914
Social Inclusion of Ex-Prisoners and their Families: the Role of Partnerships	2008	9,023
Meeting the Needs of One Parent Families — Brochure	2008	797

Post Office Network.

263. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his views on the fears that many communities have with respect to the closure of their local post offices, shops and convenience stores and the future for such people living in communities like this; the action he will take to enhance regional development and stem rural isolation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27990/08]

Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív): My Department's range of rural development and community development programmes reflects the Government's commitment to ensuring the economic and social well-being of rural communities.

In addition, the National Development Plan 2007-2013 contains a range of other programmes and schemes implemented by my Department, which contribute to the Government's objective

[Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív.]

of balanced regional development. Most notably, the LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, which was launched recently, will provide significant support for the social and economic development of rural areas and promote the diversification of the rural economy.

However, I have no direct function for postal services or the maintenance of post offices.

Official Travel.

264. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the number of representatives of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27944/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): No representatives of my Department will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity to coincide with the 2008 Olympics.

Departmental Publications.

265. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27964/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Tree Felling Licences.

266. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide a commitment that seven acres of forestry spruce trees for commercial use at the Demesne Castlereau, County Roscommon will be felled. [28109/08]

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Deputy Brendan Smith): Section 37 of the Forestry Act 1946 requires, with certain exceptions, the owners of land on which the trees stand to give notice of intention, by way of a Felling Notice, when uprooting trees over ten years of age or cutting down trees of any age. No Felling Notice has been received to date by the Forest Service of my Department for lands at Knockroe, Castlereau.

Should a Felling Notice be received by my Department, the Forest Service will give due consideration to the granting of a felling licence for the site in question in accordance with the Code of Best Forest Practice.

It should be noted, however, that the owner of the land in which the trees are situated is entitled to remove trees that are located within 100 feet of any building other than a wall or temporary structure in accordance with the exemption provided for under Section 37(4)(d) of the Forestry Act 1946.

Special Educational Needs.

267. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science if it is his policy to introduce cutbacks in the area of special education needs in view of the large amount of cutbacks in County Donegal (details supplied); his views on whether it is good practice to target the most vulnerable people in society when introducing cutbacks; the action he plans to take

to help persons who have been left in limbo over their children's educational future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27855/08]

272. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a person (details supplied) in County Donegal, who has Asperger's syndrome, has had their resource hours reduced and has to share their special needs assistant with two other students, who are not in the same class as them; if the special educational needs organisers are qualified to undermine recommendations from experts in the field of special education needs; if not, the reason they are allowed to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27853/08]

273. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a person (details supplied) in County Donegal has had their resource hours reduced and has been told that they will no longer have a special needs assistant next term; if it is his policy to introduce cutbacks to special education needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27854/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 267, 272 and 273 together.

As the Deputy may be aware, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special needs.

Applications for SNAs may be considered by the NCSE where a pupil has a significant medical need for such assistance, a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils.

For some pupils, as they mature, their care needs may diminish over time. In such circumstances, the NCSE will review and adjust the overall level of SNA support in the school concerned. This may mean that some pupils who had previously been supported by a full time SNA may have their needs met through the shared support of an SNA or perhaps they may have no need for SNA support. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie. I have arranged for the details supplied by the Deputy to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

The NCSE will undertake to review a decision taken by a SENO on foot of a request from a school or parents/guardians, when accompanied by relevant additional information, which may not have been to hand at the time of the decision. The NCSE has outlined this process in its Circular 01/05.

I wish to advise the Deputy that there have been no cutbacks in relation to special education needs provision. In fact, there are now 19,000 staff in our schools working solely with children with special needs. This includes almost 10,000 SNAs — compared with just 300 in 1997.

School Accommodation.

268. **Deputy Charles Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Science when an additional prefab will be provided to a school (details supplied) in County Laois; if he will provide an assurance that the prefab will be in place in advance of the beginning of the academic year 2008/2009; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27813/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): An application for the provision of temporary accommodation has been received from the school referred to by the Deputy. The application is under consideration at present and it is anticipated that a decision will be made in the matter and conveyed to the school very shortly.

Decentralisation Programme.

269. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 347 of 29 April 2008, when he expects the transfer of decentralised posts to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27818/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The transfer of decentralising posts to Athlone is well underway. Seventy five (75) posts have been relocated to Athlone and I expect another 10 posts to be relocated to Athlone during the remainder of July.

School Transport.

270. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science if school transport will be extended to a pupil (details supplied) in County Galway for an additional year; the reason this was initially refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27830/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): My Department is liaising with the relevant authorities and examining the background to the enrolment of the person named in the details supplied. When this examination is completed and the information received, the School Transport Section of my Department will liaise directly with the family concerned.

Schools Refurbishment.

271. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Education and Science when he expects a school (details supplied) in County Westmeath will be advised of the outcome of its application for an emergency works grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27831/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): My Department received an application for funding under the emergency works scheme from the school in question. A decision on the application will be made as soon as possible and the school will be advised of the outcome.

Questions Nos. 272 and 273 answered with Question No. 267.

School Accommodation.

274. **Deputy Mary Upton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the way schools can avail of assistance from his Department to increase energy efficiency; when the research project underway with Sustainable Energy Ireland aimed at helping schools to meet the certification requirements of the energy performance building directive will be rolled out to every school here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27866/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): My Department has a strong record in developing low energy educational buildings. For the past nine years it has been using a process called the DART approach to develop sustainable and energy efficiency in educational buildings. This acronym focuses on four key areas, namely design, awareness, research and technology. Rather than develop a unique focus on energy design the Department of Education and Science has taken a more holistic approach and has developed technical guid-

ance on energy efficiency in school designs as an integral part of the Department's suite of technical guidance documents. These guidelines encourage the design team to take a complete design team approach from project conception.

There is particular emphasis on elimination of over design, improved thermal envelope design and improved passive solar design, natural ventilation and day lighting along with advanced heating and lighting controls. It has been demonstrated that all Primary Schools designed and built in line with the above policy and the technical guidance documents can have an energy performance that is 2.3 times more efficient than International best practice. The performance of the Department in the area of low energy design has been recognised at both National and International level with sustainable energy awards for excellence in Design and Specification and just recently by the Taoiseach's Public Service Excellence Awards held in Dublin Castle Conference Centre on Friday 18 April 2008.

One of the research projects currently underway is developing a project, in conjunction with Sustainable Energy Ireland, aimed at helping existing schools to meet the certification requirements of the Energy Performance Building Directive. This process will allow all schools to conduct an energy audit of their school and energy usage and to input specific information to the Department's energy website. The school will then not only receive information on their actual energy use and environmental emissions but will also be able to compare the school's energy performance relative to that of other school buildings in the form of an energy rating. They will also be able to receive energy saving advice from the website relative to their school buildings and to view case studies of similar schools and how they achieve better energy savings. The data gathering, energy auditing and benchmarking and website development aspects of the project are complete and validation of the system will be completed this year.

School Enrolments.

275. Deputy Terence Flanagan asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will process the application of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27879/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): The compulsory school starting age in a National School is 6 years of age. Enrolment in individual schools is the responsibility of the managerial authority of those schools and my Department does not seek to intervene in decisions made by schools in such matters. My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking places. This may result, however, in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of schools that are not in a position to admit all pupils seeking entry to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act. In this regard a board of management may find it necessary to restrict enrolment to children from a particular area or a particular age group or, occasionally, on the basis of some other criterion. In formulating an admissions policy a school must, however, ensure it is lawful. In particular, it must act in accordance with section 7 of the Equal Status Act 2000.

Where a Board of Management refuses to enrol a student in a school, the parent of the student or, where the student has reached 18 years of age, the student himself or herself, following the conclusion of any appeal procedures at school level, has a statutory entitlement under section 29 of the Education Act to appeal that decision to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science. A committee is established to hear the appeal with hearings conducted with a minimum of formality. In most cases appeals must be dealt with within 30 days. Where appropriate, the Secretary General may give whatever directions to the

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

Board of Management that are considered necessary to remedy the matter complained of. The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The NEWB can be contacted at National Educational Welfare Board, National Headquarters, 16-22 Green Street, Dublin 7 or by telephone at 01-8738700.

Special Educational Needs.

276. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will confirm that the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 will be implemented in full across all ages in order to avoid children being without services or education. [27895/08]

278. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Education and Science the timeframe for the completion of negotiations between his Department and the Department of Health and Children with the Health Service Executive for the implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004. [27897/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 276 and 278 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, a number of sections of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 has been commenced, principally those establishing the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and those promoting an inclusive approach to the education of children with special needs.

The National Council for Special Education was required under the Act to make a report on the implementation of the Act. Based on consideration of this report and discussions held with the Education Partners, my Department has been drawing together proposals to facilitate implementation of the remaining sections, including the provisions in respect of assessment and individual education plans (IEP). The time taken to finalise proposals reflects the complexities involved, the need for consultation across the wide range of people and sectors involved, the need to align with the requirements of the Disability Act 2005 and define how the Health Service Executive (HSE) and NCSE will work together under both acts. These proposals will now be considered in the context of the Estimates 2009 process.

A Cross-Sectoral Team, comprising representatives from my Department, the Department of Health and Children, the NCSE and the HSE, is currently developing operational protocols to outline how the two sectors will interact. In parallel with these processes, my Department has also advanced a number of areas relevant to the implementation of EPSEN:

- Proposals for pre-school assessment services developed;
- Collaboration with the Department of Health and Children in relation to the establishment of the Standards Body;
- Recruitment of additional staff for the Council and staffing review of the NCSE;
- Appointment of Chairperson and members to the Special Education Appeals Board;
- Recruitment of educational psychologists;
- Review of the scheme for commissioning private assessments;
- Publication of agreed standards for assessment;

- Contributing to assessments under the Disability Act.

As the EPSEN Act does not provide for phased commencement by age cohort the education sector must be in a position to provide the required services to all children before the relevant provisions are commenced. My Department's priority, therefore, is to ensure that the necessary training, guidance and supports are in place to facilitate the commencement of the remaining sections of the Act.

I would also point out that, during this necessary period of preparation and planning for the roll-out of the EPSEN Act, my Department continues to expand capacity and services for students with special educational needs across the schools network through the work of the National Council for Special Education.

277. Deputy Emmet Stagg asked the Minister for Education and Science if, in view of the statistical growth of children with special needs at both primary and secondary level, within both inclusive class environments and special class or unit settings, the Health Service Executive has kept pace with the provision of service to students of special needs and autism units in primary and secondary schools. [27896/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): As the Deputy will be aware, the provision of health services is a matter for the Health Services Executive (HSE) and funding is provided to the HSE for such purposes. The Deputy may wish to raise the matter with my colleague the Minister for Health and Children or directly with the Health Service Executive.

Question No. 278 answered with Question No. 276.

Schools Refurbishment.

279. Deputy Denis Naughten asked the Minister for Education and Science the funding available for primary and post primary schools respectively for the emergency works scheme; when he will make an announcement on successful applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27906/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): Emergency works grants are made available to primary and post-primary schools most in need of resources as a result of unforeseen emergencies of a capital nature that may arise during the school year. It is incumbent on the school to provide as much detail as possible to the Department on the nature of the emergency and the need for an emergency works grant to be paid to address the emergency.

All applications are assessed by my Department and schools advised of the outcome as soon as possible. In light of the number of projects seeking funding from my Department for works from the budget allocated, it is not possible to provide funding under the Scheme for all applications at this time. 175 applications, 55 of which relate to post-primary schools, have been approved so far in 2008.

Schools Building Projects.

280. Deputy Ruairí Quinn asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of fast track schools under construction in June 2008; the number of these fast track schools that have had or will have storage heating installed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27930/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): I am glad to inform the Deputy that my Department currently has 26 school projects due for completion for the 2008 school

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

year. None of these schools will be heated by storage heating. All new schools are built to the specifications set out in the Departments technical Guidelines. These guidelines encourage the design team to take a complete design team approach from project conception. There is particular emphasis on elimination of over design, improved thermal envelope design and improved passive solar design, natural ventilation and day lighting along with advanced heating and lighting controls.

It has been demonstrated that all Primary Schools designed and built in line with the above policy and the technical guidance documents can have an energy performance that is 2.3 times more efficient than International best practice. The performance of my Department in the area of low energy design has been recognised at both National and International level with sustainable energy awards for excellence in Design and Specification and just recently by the Taoiseach’s Public Service Excellence Awards held in Dublin Castle Conference Centre on Friday 18 April 2008.

School Enrolments.

281. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Education and Science if, further to Parliamentary Question No. 118 of 26 June 2008, it is open to the board of management of a school, primary or second level, to define its own catchment area; his views on situations where a school refuses admission to a student clearly resident within its traditional catchment area on the grounds of enrolment capacity, while simultaneously enrolling brothers and sisters of current students resident outside the catchment area; if it is appropriate for boards of management to prioritise the enrolment of siblings outside of the catchment area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27931/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): Catchment boundaries have their origins in the establishment of free post primary education in the late 1960’s. For school planning purposes, the country was divided into geographic districts, each with several primary schools feeding into a post primary education centre with one or more post primary schools. The intention was, and continues to be, that these defined districts would facilitate the orderly planning of school provision and accommodation needs. A catchment boundary can only be changed by my Department.

With regard to school admissions, the position remains as set out in my previous response of 26th June 2008 i.e. it is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of schools that are not in a position to admit all pupils seeking entry to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act. In this regard a board of management may find it necessary to restrict enrolment to children from a particular area or a particular age group or, occasionally, on the basis of some other criterion. In formulating an admissions policy a school must, however, ensure it is lawful. In particular, it must act in accordance with section 7 of the Equal Status Act 2000.

Where a Board of Management refuses to enrol a student in a school, the parent of the student or, where the student has reached 18 years of age, the student himself or herself, following the conclusion of any appeal procedures at school level, has a statutory entitlement under section 29 of the Education Act to appeal that decision to the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science. A committee is established to hear the appeal with hearings conducted with a minimum of formality. In most cases appeals must be dealt with within 30 days. Where appropriate, the Secretary General may give whatever directions to the Board of Management that are considered necessary to remedy the matter complained of.

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The NEWB can be contacted at National Educational Welfare Board, National Headquarters, 16-22 Green Street, Dublin 7 or by telephone at 01-8738700.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio.

282. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of schools that will lose a teacher as a result of the new staffing schedule in 2007/2008; and the number that will lose a teacher if no improvements are made to the class sizes in 2008/2009. [27932/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): Mainstream staffing in primary schools is determined by reference to school enrolments on 30th September of the previous school year. The actual number of mainstream posts sanctioned is determined by reference to a staffing schedule which is issued to all primary schools each year. This is a transparent and clear way of ensuring that all schools are treated consistently and fairly and know where they stand. The schedule allocates teachers within enrolment bands and the current bands introduced for the 2007/08 school year are based on an average of 27 pupils.

Under a system that allocates additional teachers at different step points under a common schedule it is a fact of life that changes in enrolment can effect the mainstream staffing of a school. In any year, and not just this year, when enrolments are falling in a school this can result in the loss of a teacher. Equally when enrolments increase a school can gain a teacher under the operation of the staffing schedule. While some 120 schools will lose a teacher in the next school year compared to this year there will still be a net increase of some 500 teachers due to increase in enrolments. The impact of these additional teachers on class size in the 2008/2009 school year will be dependant on how they are deployed by the school authorities. Schools have flexibility in the way in which they assign pupils and teachers to classes and the Department does not allocate teachers to specific classes or age groups. Posts allocated on the basis of this staffing schedule are specifically for mainstream classes and should be deployed accordingly. School authorities are requested to ensure that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible, taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment). In particular, school authorities should ensure that there is an equitable distribution of pupils in mainstream classes and that the differential between the largest and smallest classes is kept to a minimum.

The Programme for Government sets out the overarching policy position in relation to the provision of additional teachers and on reductions in class size over the life of the Government. The Programme contains a commitment to increase the number of primary teachers by at least 4000 and on that basis to make further progress on reducing class sizes. Budget 2008 provided my Department with €4.6 billion or €380 million extra for teacher pay and pensions. This was a very substantial level of additional investment in the terms of the economic environment on which the budget was based. That allocation provides for paying for over 2000 extra primary teachers more than the number in schools when the Government took office last Summer. It covers the additional teachers that went into schools last September for the previously announced reduction to a 27 to 1 based staffing schedule along with additional teachers this school year and in the coming school year to meet increasing enrolments, to provide for special needs and the language requirements of newcomer children. This means that in terms of the overall commitment to provide at least 4000 additional teachers the Government in its first two years in office will be well ahead of target.

All Programme for Government commitments to improve public services including those relating to class size are contingent on the economic and budgetary environment and the need

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

for prudent expenditure and fiscal management. Even since the presentation of Budget 2008 last December there have been significant alterations in the external and domestic environment. In that context any reasonable observer would regard the fact that the Government has already taken measures that will see the allocation of over 2000 additional teachers to primary schools as a considerable investment all things considered.

Special Educational Needs.

283. **Deputy John O’Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Science his plans to ensure that a child (details supplied) in County Galway will be provided with a secondary education in a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27941/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): An application for funding under the emergency works scheme has been received from the school referred to by the Deputy to carry out special needs access works. The application is under examination at present and this is expected to be completed shortly. The school will be advised of the outcome as soon as possible.

Official Travel.

284. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number of representatives of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27949/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): There are no plans by Ministers, advisers or officials of my Department to visit Beijing on official departmental business during the period of the 2008 Olympic Games.

Departmental Publications.

285. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so forth. [27969/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The information sought would involve an inordinate amount of administrative time to compile. However, if the Deputy has any particular publications in mind I would be happy to have my officials obtain the relevant details and communicate them to the Deputy.

Special Educational Needs.

286. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Education and Science further to Parliamentary Question No. 762 of 17 June 2008, if a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27979/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): As the Deputy may be aware, the National Council for Special Education is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special needs. Applications for SNAs may be considered by the NCSE where a pupil has a significant medical need for such assistance, a

significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on *www.ncse.ie*. My officials have been in contact with the NCSE and I understand that a direct reply will issue regarding this matter in the coming weeks.

287. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason a full and comprehensive reply has not issued to date to a parliamentary question (details supplied). [27993/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keefe): As the Deputy may be aware, the National Council for Special Education is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special needs. Applications for SNAs may be considered by the NCSE where a pupil has a significant medical need for such assistance, a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils. A pupil's level of care may diminish over time as the child matures. Pupils may move to a different school or on to post-primary school. In such situations, the NCSE will review and adjust the SNA support required in the school. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on *www.ncse.ie*.

My officials have been in contact with the NCSE and I understand that the pupils in question did not meet my Department's criteria for allocating SNA support. The NCSE has advised that the SENO clarified the position to the principal and class teachers. The NCSE has also advised that a direct response will issue from the NCSE shortly.

Schools Building Projects.

288. **Deputy Joe Costello** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will respond to correspondence (details supplied). [28002/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keefe): It is the intention of my Department to provide a new building for the school to which the Deputy refers. This is being co-funded by another agency.

The project is in the early stages of architectural planning. In this regard, a Stage 1 submission has been submitted by the school authority. This is being assessed by the Department's Technical and Professional staff. When this assessment has been completed, the Department will be in direct contact with the Board of Management to outline its findings and by way of response to correspondence received. I have also asked my Department to ensure that the correspondence he refers to is responded to promptly.

Institutes of Technology.

289. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Science the situation regarding an estate (details supplied) in County Tipperary; if his Department is closer to having functions of Tipperary Institute of Technology based there; and if he will make a statement on this development for Clonmel and surrounding areas. [28043/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): In March 2005, my Department gave TRBDI approval to proceed with seeking expressions of interest from private sector property developers to determine what could be provided at the estate referred to by the Deputy in exchange for the Institute’s current property in Clonmel. I understand that negotiations with a preferred bidder are continuing.

Child Abuse.

290. **Deputy James Reilly** asked the Minister for Education and Science when the report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse is expected to be completed; when he expects to publish the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28086/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse was established in 1999 and was subsequently put on a statutory basis under the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Act 2000. The terms of reference of the Commission are set out in the 2000 Act as amended by the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Amendment) Act 2005. The purpose of the Commission is to investigate child abuse in institutions in the State, to enable persons who have suffered such abuse to give evidence to committees of the Commission, to provide for the preparation and publication of a report containing the results of the Commission’s investigation and any recommendations it considers appropriate for the prevention of child abuse.

The Commission is entirely independent in the performance of its functions. In accordance with the legislation, the report will be published to the general public by the Commission in such manner and at such time during the specified period as the Commission may determine. Consequently, it is not the function of the Minister for Education and Science to publish the report nor is there any requirement for the Commission to present the report to my Department prior to its publication.

I can advise the Deputy that both Houses recently approved an extension to the Commission’s specified period which will now expire at the end of January 2009. It is anticipated that the report will be finalised and published before that date.

Schools Building Projects.

291. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Education and Science the reason the planned extension to a school (details supplied) in Dublin 6W has been stopped; when work is expected to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28095/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of architectural planning.

The commencement and progression of all large scale building projects from initial design stage through to construction phase, including this project, will be considered on an on-going basis in the context of my Department’s Multi-Annual School Building and Modernisation Programme. I am currently reviewing with my officials the Department’s spending plans for this year, I am in the middle of this process and it will not be complete for some time. I will not be making decision on any further capital expenditure until that process is completed. When this is done the school management will be informed of the position without delay.

Special Educational Needs.

292. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Education and Science if he will investi-

gate the cutback in special needs assistance for a student (details supplied); and if he report on the circumstances and request that service be re-instated. [28107/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): As the Deputy may be aware, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for allocating resource teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) to schools to support children with special needs. Applications for SNAs may be considered by the NCSE where a pupil has a significant medical need for such assistance, a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or to other pupils.

The NCSE operates within my Department’s criteria in allocating such support. An SNA may be allocated to meet the care needs of a younger pupil. For some pupils, as they mature, their care needs may diminish over time. For example, an incontinence difficulty in a 4 year old pupil may be fully addressed by the time the pupil is a teenager. In such situations, the NCSE will review and adjust the overall level of SNA support in the school concerned. This may mean that some pupils who had previously been supported by a full time SNA may have their needs met through the shared support of an SNA or perhaps they may have no need for SNA support.

All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child’s special educational needs, using the contact details available on *www.ncse.ie*. I have arranged for the details supplied by the Deputy to be forwarded to the NCSE for their attention and direct reply.

Adult Education.

293. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science if his attention has been drawn to the fact that adult literacy tutors receive no sick pay, holiday pay, pension scheme or increments in respect of experience or extra qualifications; and his plans to introduce a scheme that would recognise that it is an integral part of the qualifications framework here and that tutors should be afforded equivalent terms and conditions from vocational educational committees as apply to other tutors on the FETAC ladder. [28117/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science (Deputy Seán Haughey): The Adult Literacy services are funded by my Department through annual grants to the Vocational Education Committees (VECs), which deliver the services locally. VECs employ Adult Literacy tutors on a full-time and part-time basis and it is the VECs which are responsible for their terms and conditions.

The annual grant provided by my Department to VECs may be used to cover the cost of tutor training. Adult Literacy tutors undergo in-service training before they start work as paid tutors or volunteers. Staff development programmes are provided on a modular in-service basis for tutors and literacy organisers in co-operation with National Adult Literacy Association (NALA) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The programmes lead to national certification at degree, diploma and certificate level by HETAC. My Department provides an annual grant to WIT to provide these courses.

Tutors provide tuition in groups and on a one-to-one basis, normally for two hours per week. Volunteer tutors normally provide tuition on a one-to-one basis. Under the Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) programme, introduced in 2006, up to six hours of tuition per week may be provided.

[Deputy Seán Haughey.]

In 2007, there were 44 paid full-time adult literacy tutors, 1,448 paid part-time tutors and 3,600 volunteer tutors working within the VEC sector. In 2006, the corresponding figures were 43 paid full-time adult literacy tutors, 1,381 part-time tutors and 3,622 volunteer tutors.

Teachers' Remuneration.

294. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the entitlement of classroom assistants to sick pay, holiday pay and pension cover. [28119/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O'Keeffe): I assume the Deputy is referring to Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) employed by individual school authorities, but paid through my Department's centralised payroll.

Included here for the Deputy's information are a copy of the sick leave and pension provisions and also a copy of a recent circular on holiday pay for Special Needs Assistants.

All school employees paid via my Department's centralised payroll system receive their full holiday pay entitlements in accordance with the provisions of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997.

SICK LEAVE PROVISIONS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS

1. No sick pay will be allowed during the first three months' service. Subsequently full pay may be allowed during sick absence up to the following limits:
 - a) After three months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to six weeks in any period of twelve months' service;
 - b) after six months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to nine weeks in any period of twelve months' service;
 - c) after twelve months' continuous service, sick pay at full rate for up to thirteen weeks in any period of twelve months' service.
2. Medical certificates must be furnished to the Board of Management in all cases of continuous absence by the third day of absence at the latest. As a general rule, sick leave will not be allowed for a longer period than one week on any one certificate. Where sick absence extends from Friday to Monday inclusive, a medical certificate must be furnished.
3. Special Needs Assistants on probation are reminded that when they are being considered for confirmation of appointment, full account will be taken of their health and of the extent and pattern of their sick absence. If any of these aspects is unsatisfactory, the Special Needs Assistant concerned cannot be accepted as suitable.
4. The grant of sick leave will be subject to the following conditions in particular:
 - a) that the absence is properly certified;
 - b) that there is no evidence of permanent disability for service.
5. Once sick pay has ceased owing to the expiration of the maximum limit, it cannot be resumed during the same absence.
6. Unpaid sick leave does not count as service qualifying for further paid sick leave.

7. **Uncertified Sick Leave:** Sick leave for single or two-day absences, not exceeding seven days in total in any period of twelve months, may be granted without medical certificate. However, should the number of days' absence without medical certificate in any period of twelve months, reckoning backwards from the date of the latest absence, exceed seven in the aggregate, any subsequent absence must be certified until the balance is restored.

Payment during sick leave will be **full salary provided that the following procedure is adhered to:**

If a Special Needs Assistant is absent on sick leave for more than three consecutive days, s/he must immediately complete a form for Disability Benefit (available from their general practitioner (GP)). This should be forwarded to SNA Payroll Section, Department of Education and Science, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, who then forward it to the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA). **The claim must be submitted by SNA Payroll Section to reach the DSFA within seven days of the start of the illness hence there is an urgency to submit the claim form to ensure continued payment of full salary.**

To : THE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITIES OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

CIRCULAR LETTER PEN 2/04

**(including amendments made to paragraphs 7.1.2 and 9.3
in accordance with Circular Pen 01/05)**

Pension Scheme for Special Needs Assistants

1. INTRODUCTION.

- 1.1 Following discussions with the education partners it has been agreed to admit Special Needs Assistants employed in Primary Schools to membership of the Superannuation (Education) Scheme. The Scheme will provide that whole-time service and certain part-time service as a Special Needs Assistant will, with effect from **1st September 2001**, become pensionable on an ongoing basis. (The categories of part-time Special Needs Assistants covered by pensionability will fall to be reviewed on the conclusion of the ongoing discussions referred to at 1.3 below).
- 1.2 The Superannuation (Education) Scheme is a defined benefit scheme and provides standard public service pension benefits. A brief outline of the Superannuation Scheme is given at **Appendix 1**.
- 1.3 Two recent pieces of legislation, the **Protection of Employees (Part-time Work) Act 2001** and the **Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act 2003** provide for the pensionability on an ongoing basis of further categories of workers. The pay and pensions provisions of the **Protection of Employees (Part-time Work) Act 2001** are effective from 20 December 2001. What this means in regard to pensionability is that, with effect from that date, an employer may not exclude a worker, solely because the worker is part-time, from membership of a pension scheme to which a comparable wholetime worker would be admitted. In order to benefit from the provisions of the Act, the part-time worker in question must be employed for at least 20% of the hours of the comparable wholetime worker. Taking the provisions of the Act into consideration, and in order to commence from the beginning of a school year, it has been agreed that Special Needs Assistants will become pensionable on an ongoing basis with effect from **1 September 2001**.

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

It is emphasised that pensionability from 1 September 2001 does not confer, and will not confer, entitlement to pro rata pay from that date: the pay provisions of the Protection of Employees (Part-time Work) Act will not in any circumstances apply to periods of employment before 20 December 2001. In line with the provisions of the Act, most categories of part-time staff will now be pensionable on an ongoing basis. The **Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act 2003** is effective from 14 July 2003. Discussions with the education partners are taking place regarding implementation of the Acts and it is expected that in due course circulars clarifying further how the Acts will be implemented will be issued. Any Special Needs Assistant to whom the pension provision apply and not already in the Scheme will then be admitted to the Scheme.

2. ELIGIBILITY FOR MEMBERSHIP.

2.1 Membership of the Scheme will be compulsory with effect from **1 September 2001** for all **Special Needs Assistants** in posts in Primary Schools who are:—

(a) of satisfactory health,

AND,

(b) (i) employed in **whole-time posts** in such schools,

OR,

(ii) employed under a **Pro-rata contract** where employed for 20% or more of the hours of a wholetime Special Needs Assistant,

[A Pro Rata Contract will normally run from 1st September to the 31st August. However a Pro Rata Contract may commence during the period 1st September to 31st October inclusive (or the first school day immediately after mid term break if mid term break terminates after 31st October)].

OR,

(iii) employed on a **Non-casual basis** i.e. under a contract that requires him/her to work for a period not less than 20% of the hours of a wholetime person during the school year but for less than a full year (e.g. replacing a Special Needs Assistant on maternity leave),

3. SATISFACTORY HEALTH

Special Needs Assistants who have already passed a medical examination for purposes of appointment will not have to undergo a medical examination for purposes of the Superannuation Scheme. Otherwise, before membership of the Scheme can be approved, the prospective member must undergo a medical examination by a doctor nominated for that purpose by the school authorities. (A sample form for certification by the nominated doctor is attached as **Appendix II** to this Circular.) In the case of a Special Needs Assistant who undergoes a medical examination on foot of this circular and who is deemed unfit by the nominated doctor, the school authorities must notify the Department immediately.

Where the medical report deems the Special Needs Assistant unfit, the Special Needs Assistant will not be formally admitted to the pension scheme but will be eligible to have his/her existing contract, provided that there are no changes except in regard to the number

of hours involved, renewed on the usual conditions. Any contributions provisionally deducted will be returned through the payroll.

A Special Needs Assistant who fails to attend for a medical examination without good cause may be regarded as having failed the examination.

4. MEMBERSHIP.

Membership of the scheme will be compulsory for all eligible Special Needs Assistants. It **will not be necessary** for a Special Needs Assistant to apply for membership of the Scheme. It will be a condition for appointment to a post that a Special Needs Assistant passes a medical examination by a doctor nominated by the school authorities.

Special Needs Assistants who are otherwise eligible, who have not already undergone a medical examination for purposes of appointment and who are in service on or after **6 April 2004** will be referred for a medical examination by the school authorities as soon as possible after that date.

- 4.3 **Ongoing deductions** from salary for superannuation purposes will be made with effect **from 6 April 2004** (or as soon as possible thereafter) in the case of pensionable Special Needs Assistants who are employed in primary schools and are on the Department's payroll. The deductions will be made provisionally in the case of a Special Needs Assistant who has been referred for a medical examination. In the event of a person failing the medical examination a refund of the superannuation contributions paid provisionally will be made.

Transitional arrangements in regard to contributions due in respect of certain Special Needs Assistants employed in primary schools will apply as set out in paragraph 6 below.

5. COMMENCEMENT DATE OF MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCHEME.

- 5.1 Special Needs Assistants will be **formally admitted** to the Scheme from **6 April 2004** (or as soon thereafter as ongoing deductions from pay, other than provisional deductions, commence).

Membership will be backdated where the member had reckonable service as a Special Needs Assistant prior to the date of formal admission. The **effective date of admission** to the Scheme in the case of such a member will be **1 September 2001** or date of appointment as a Special Needs Assistant, if later.

- 5.2 **Arrears** of contributions will be due in respect of the period between the effective date of admission to the Scheme and the commencement of ongoing deductions, other than provisional deductions. Membership of the Scheme requires that arrears must be paid.

The arrears will be recovered by increasing the ongoing contribution by instalments over an agreed period, not exceeding the length of the service to which the arrears relate, until all arrears have been collected. This will be done as soon as practicable after the commencement of ongoing deduction. In this regard, deduction of arrears for Special Needs Assistants in Primary Schools, who are paid through the Department's payroll, will commence in September 2004.

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

6. Transitional arrangements in regard to Contributions.

6.1 Primary Schools: Special Needs Assistants in **Primary Schools** are in the main paid salary through a payroll operated by the Department of Education and Science. Pension contributions in respect of pensionable Special Needs Assistants on payroll will be paid by deduction from salary. Deductions will commence with effect from 6 April 2004 and therefore the first deduction will appear in the payment that issues on 22nd April 2004.

Contributions will be deducted on a **provisional basis** from salary in the case of Special Needs Assistants paid through the payroll operated by the Department where the hours being worked are less than 20% of the hours of a wholetime Special Needs Assistant. Where at the end of the school-year the number of hours worked amount in aggregate to 20% of the hours of a wholetime Special Needs Assistant all the service will be pensionable. If however the threshold of 20% is not reached at the end of the school-year, then the monies provisionally deducted will be refunded to the Special Needs Assistant or alternatively the Special Needs Assistant may opt to have the contributions paid to her/his Personal Retirement Savings Account (PRSA). This arrangement will be reviewed in the light of the outcome of discussions on the implementation of the Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001.

The question of the contributions due in respect of Special Needs Assistants employed and paid directly by Boards of Management of Primary Schools will be considered further following the outcome of discussions on the terms of the Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001 and the Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act 2003. In the meantime no pension contributions need be deducted by school authorities. On the outcome of these discussions, arrears of contributions will, as appropriate, be payable.

7. SUPERANNUATION CONTRIBUTIONS AND PRSI CONTRIBUTIONS.

7.1 Ongoing liability for the Class A rate of PRSI, *(as amended by Circular Pen 01/05)*.

7.1.1 Special Needs Assistants pay PRSI at Class A rate and will have ongoing liability for the Class A rate of PRSI throughout their service.

7.1.2 A person who has ongoing liability for the Class A rate of PRSI throughout his/her service will be liable, from effective date of admission to ongoing pensionable service, for a superannuation contribution at the **Ongoing Co-ordinated Rate**. The Ongoing Co-ordinated Rate is made up of 1.5% of Current Pay and 5% of **Current Co-ordinated Pay** (including 1.5% of Current Co-ordinated Pay towards the Spouses’ Scheme).

Note that **Current Co-ordinated Pay** means Current Pay less twice the maximum personal rate of Social Welfare Old Age Contributory Pension.

8. SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS, IF ANY, WHO HAVE RETIRED OR DIED SINCE 1 SEPTEMBER 2001.

Eligible service given by a Special Needs Assistant who has retired prior to the commencement of ongoing deductions will be regarded as pensionable. Eligible service given by a Special Needs Assistant who has died prior to the commencement of ongoing deductions

will be regarded as pensionable provided the person has already passed a medical examination as a condition of appointment. Such service will also be regarded as pensionable where the person has not undergone a medical examination but death is due to a cause which would not have been likely to result in the person's failing a medical examination if one had been carried out on or about 1 September 2001 or at the time of appointment, if later.

Appropriate contributions will be offset against superannuation benefits. The contributions will consist of arrears in respect of the period from 1 September 2001 (or date of appointment, if later) to date of retirement or death-in-service and a buyback contribution in respect of any reckonable service given prior to 1 September 2001. The buyback of service contribution will be a co-ordinated contribution and will be based on pay at retirement or death-in-service. A Spouses' and Children's Scheme contribution in respect of **potential service** will also be charged, where appropriate.

9. BUYBACK OF SERVICE GIVEN BEFORE 1 SEPTEMBER 2001.

9.1 The scheme will provide for the buyback for pension purposes of all past reckonable service, i.e. wholtime service and certain part-time service, as a Special Needs Assistant given before 1 September 2001.

9.2 Reckonable service which may be bought back.

- (a) **Wholtime service** given prior to 1 September 2001, and,
- (b) **Part-time service** given in any week before 1 September 2001 provided the part-time service in the week comes to at least 18 hours.

9.3 Rate of Buy-back Contribution (*as amended by Circular Pen 01/05*)

The buyback contribution for past reckonable service will be payable by Special Needs Assistants who have been appointed to wholtime posts. The contribution will, subject to paragraph 9.4 following, be based on pay at the time the payment is being made. The position regarding the buyback of service by Special Needs Assistants who are serving in Part-Time posts will be clarified at a later date as outlined at paragraph 9.5 below.

The rate of the buyback contribution for **reckonable past service**, whether wholtime or part-time, payable **by a Special Needs Assistant** will be:—

Main Scheme

- 1.5% of Current Pay AND
- 3.5% of Current Co-ordinated Pay

plus

Spouses and Children's Scheme

- 1.5% of Current Co-ordinated Pay.

Special Needs Assistants will however have the option of paying this **Spouses and Children's** contribution either at the rate of 1.5% of current Co-ordinated pay (as outlined

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

above) or deferring payment to retirement and paying 1% of Co-ordinated pay current at retirement by deduction from retirement lump sum.

9.4 **Arrangements for the Buyback of reckonable service by Special Needs Assistants in wholetime posts.**

Any Special Needs Assistant in a **wholetime** post who wishes to buy back reckonable service given prior to 1 September 2001 must make a formal application to do so to the Department. An application form for this purpose is at **Appendix III** of this Circular.

A Special Needs Assistant who is currently in a wholetime post and who applies for buy-back not later than 31 March 2005 will pay the buyback contribution based on pay on 20 December 2001 or where the Special Needs Assistant was in part-time service on or after that date, s/he will pay the buyback contribution based on the wholetime equivalent of pay on 20 December 2001. Where the Special Needs Assistant’s employment commenced after 20 December 2001 the contribution will be based on pay or the wholetime equivalent of pay, as appropriate, on the date employment commenced.

Where the application to buyback reckonable service is made outside the above timeframe, by a Special Needs Assistant in a wholetime post at the date of issue of this Circular, the contributions will be based on pay at the date of the application.

Separate copies of the form at Appendix III to this Circular should be completed by the Special Needs Assistant and the school authority of each school in which the Special Needs Assistant worked prior to 1 September 2001.

9.5 **Special Needs Assistants serving in Part-time Posts.**

The question of the buy back of service by Special Needs Assistants who are serving in part-time posts is under consideration in the context of implementing the **Protection of Employees (Part-time Work) Act 2001** and the **Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act 2003**. A further circular in this regard will be issued on the outcome of these considerations.

9.6 **Payment of the Buy-back Contributions.**

Once the Department has established the overall amount of service to be bought-back it will advise the Special Needs Assistant by letter of the details and request payment of the appropriate contribution.

The Special Needs Assistant will have 2 months from the date of the letter to:

- (i) Make payment in one lump sum, or
- (ii) Opt to pay by instalments over **the shorter of** a period of 5 years or a period corresponding to the duration of the period to which the buyback relates. Instalment payments will commence immediately this option is chosen.

Where the Special Needs Assistant receives details by letter and decides against making payment or does not respond within the two-month timeframe, the quotation will lapse. The Special Needs Assistant may however make a further application at any date up to

the date of retirement in which case the buyback contribution will then be calculated by reference the rate of pay applicable at that later date.

9.7 Arrangements for the crediting of whole-time and part-time service which has been bought back.

Each year of wholetime service given prior to 1 September 2001 will be counted as a year of pensionable service.

Part-time service (of 18 hours or more) given in any week prior to 1 September 2001 will be reckoned in the proportion which the total reckonable hours bear to comparable wholetime service.

For example, part-time service given in 25 reckonable weeks in 1998 and amounting to a total of 500 hours in those weeks would, where wholetime service comes to 41 hours per week, be reckoned as $500/2139 = 0.2338$ of a year of pensionable service or 85 days, (where $2139 = 41 \text{ hours} \times 52.18 \text{ weeks}$).

10. ARREARS

Scheme members who owe **arrears** of contributions in respect of ongoing pensionable service given since 1 September 2001 will pay the arrears due, when they have been appointed to relevant posts, (i.e. wholetime or pro-rata), **and** have commenced payment of ongoing contributions. Collection of the arrears will, in the case of Special Needs Assistants who are already in relevant service and are being paid through the Department's payroll, commence on 1 September 2004, (or as soon as possible thereafter). Where the Special Needs Assistant has opted to buy back earlier service by instalments, the collection of the arrears may be deferred until the contributions for the bought back service have been paid.

11. TRANSFERABILITY OF RECKONABLE SERVICE.

Reckonable Service under this scheme, (whether wholetime or part-time) which is given by a Special Needs Assistant who later transfers to pensionable service in an organisation which is a member of one of the public sector transfer networks may be transferred to that organisation for pensions purposes.

The amount of reckonable service to be credited and the contribution payable for the service in question, where contributions have not already been paid in full to the Department, will be calculated by the Department. Any outstanding contributions due will be payable to the public sector organisation to which the person has transferred.

Similarly, prior pensionable service in an organisation which is a member of one of the public sector transfer networks may be transferred to this Scheme where a Special Needs Assistant is in pensionable service under this Scheme.

12. SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS WHO WERE MEMBERS OF THE NOMINATED HEALTH AGENCIES SUPERANNUATION SCHEME AT 30 MARCH 2001.

A small number of Special Needs Assistants, who were employed in special primary schools which were part-funded by the Department of Health and Children, were members of the Nominated Health Agencies Superannuation Scheme up to 30 March

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

2001 when this Department began making direct payment of salary to Special Needs Assistants. In these exceptional circumstances membership of the Superannuation (Education) Scheme may commence with effect from 31 March 2001.

Any Special Needs Assistant who was contributing to the Nominated Health Agencies Superannuation Scheme up to 30 March 2001 should write to the address given at the end of this Circular giving the school roll number, details of when the employment commenced, when s/he became a member of that pension scheme, and the rate of pension contribution (if known) that s/he was paying. The Department will then arrange to follow up on the matter and communicate directly with the particular Special Needs Assistant.

13. INCOME TAX RELIEF.

Full tax relief is **automatically granted at source** on superannuation contributions which are deducted from salary payments made.

14. ENQUIRIES.

Enquiries regarding the provisions of this Circular may be made by:

- E-Mail to sna_pensions@education.gov.ie.
- by letter addressed to the Department at the address given below.

PENSION SECTION (SNA),
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE,
CORNAMADDY,
ATHLONE.

- by phone to 090-648 4005 or 090-648 4006; OR,
090 -6474621 or 01-8734700: extensions 4005 or 4006.

An information booklet on the Scheme, in a question and answer format, is in course of preparation and will be issued to Special Needs Assistants in the very near future.

15. CIRCULATION.

The contents of this circular should be brought to the attention of all Special Needs Assistants including those on career break or other approved leave of absence.

This circular should be retained for future reference in the school. It may also be accessed on the Department of Education and Science website at www.education.ie under Education Personnel/Special Needs Assistants.

John Feeney
Principal Officer
Pensions Unit

15 April 2004.

Appendix 1 of Circular Pen 2/04**BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE SUPERANNUATION SCHEME**

1. The Superannuation Provisions consist of two Schemes (i) the main Scheme — which provides essentially for pension and lump sum at retirement or for the payment of a Death Gratuity where a member dies in service and (ii) the associated Spouses' and Childrens' Pension Scheme which provides for Widow's/Widower's pension and/or Children's Pension.
2. The value of the superannuation benefits is related to pensionable service, subject to a maximum of 40 years, and to pensionable remuneration at retirement or, where death in service occurs, at death.

Added years of pensionable service, subject to a maximum in most circumstances of 6 and 2/3 years, may be credited to a member who retires on health grounds having completed at least 5 years pensionable service.

In the event of death in service, a Death Gratuity of not less than one year's salary at the rate applicable at the date of death and not more than 1.5 times that rate of salary will be payable. If there is a surviving spouse and/or dependent children, the deceased member will be credited with added years of pensionable service which will bring total pensionable service, for purposes of calculating the Spouses' and Children's Pension, up to 40 years or up to the amount which the member would have had by compulsory retirement age, whichever is less.

3. A Special Needs Assistant, other than a New Entrant, (see paragraph 6 below), must retire at the end of the school year in which he/she reaches age 65 but may retire voluntarily any time after reaching age 60.
4. The main Superannuation Scheme provides for ongoing deductions from salary from the date of admission to the Scheme until retirement or death in service.

The Spouses' and Children's Scheme provides for ongoing deductions from salary and also provides, where a member retires on health grounds or dies in service, for the deduction of contributions from the Disability Retirement Gratuity or Death Gratuity in respect of any added years which may be credited to the deceased member for the purposes of a Spouses' and/or Children's pension. The Scheme makes provision for pensions to be payable to spouses and children even where the marriage/births take place after retirement but there is no provision for a refund of contributions where the member retires unmarried or dies unmarried.

5. Arrangements are being made to provide Special Needs Assistants with documentation explaining the details of the Superannuation Scheme.
6. New provisions, announced by the Minister for Finance in his Budget statement in December 2003, increase the minimum age for pension to age 65 for new entrants on or after 1 April 2004 and abolish the compulsory retirement age for those new entrants. Legislation giving effect to these new provisions has recently been enacted and further details will issue in due course.

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

Appendix II of Circular Pen 2/04

Certificate of medical fitness as a Special Needs Assistant

TO BE COMPLETED BY A MEDICAL PRACTITIONER NOMINATED BY THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT.

Surname: _____

Forename(s): _____

I certify that I have examined the above named and found that s/he is fit to undertake duties as a Special Needs Assistant.

Medical Examiner’s Name: _____ Signature: _____

Block Letters.

Date: _____

Address: _____

Medical Examiner’s Official Stamp

Appendix III of Circular Pen 2/04 (Page 1of 2)

Buy-back of Past Service as a Special Needs Assistant for Superannuation purposes.

CERTIFICATE OF PAID SERVICE AS A SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANT

GIVEN PRIOR TO 1 SEPTEMBER 2001.

Notes on completion of form:

Part 1: The Special Needs Assistant should complete this part of the form BEFORE submitting it to the school authority.

Part 2: The school authority should note the following when completing this part. The completed form should be returned to the Special Needs Assistant.

Periods of Service: Only periods of paid service need be listed i.e. where the Special Needs Assistant was paid directly by the school. Service should be shown in periods of unbroken service. The minimum period reckonable is a week in which at least 18 hours was assigned to the Special Needs Assistant.

Employment Status: Show status as (i) Wholetime (WHT) or (ii) Part-time (P/T)

Approved Hours per Week: List only those periods of employment where the Special Needs Assistant was assigned at least 18 hours per week.

Signatory: This certificate MUST be signed by the Chairperson of the Board of Management or the Principal of the school in which the service was given.

Part 1. — to be completed by the Special Needs Assistant.

In accordance with paragraph 9 of Circular Pen 2/04 I wish to buy-back for superannuation purposes reckonable service given as a Special Needs Assistant prior to 1 September 2001

Special Needs Assistant's Name	
Date of Birth	
Payroll Number	
PPS No.	

To the Authority of

School Name	
School Address	

To the best of my recollection, I worked in your school in the following period(s)

From	To

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

Appendix III of Circular Pen 2/04 (Page 2 of 2)

I would be grateful if you would check your records regarding this service and complete Part 2 of this form.

On completion, please return this form to me at the following address:

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Special Needs Assistant

Part 2 — to be completed by the certifying School Authority.

Details of Service:

Period of Service	Employment Status (WHT or P/T)	Approved hoursworked per week
Start Date	End Date	

Roll Number:	
--------------	--

I certify that the details of employment listed above are in accordance with the records of paid employment for this school and that these details are true and correct in all respects to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name (capitals) _____

Chairperson of Board of Management / Principal

Official School Stamp

N.B. When parts 1 and 2 have been completed the Special Needs Assistant should return the form to:

Pensions Section (SNA), Department of Education & Science, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

Circular 0111/2007

To the Management Authorities of Primary, Secondary,

Community and Comprehensive Schools

Special Needs Assistants Payment Arrangements for

July and August Annually

1. Introduction

1.1 The Minister for Education and Science wishes to advise management authorities and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) of the payment arrangements for SNAs for July and August 2008 *and subsequent years*.

1.2 This Circular replaces Circular Pay 0011/2007 which issued in February, 2007.

2. Arrangements which will apply in July and August 2008

2.1 SNAs who are appointed on or before 07 January 2008, will be paid for the full duration of the 2008 summer holidays.

SNAs who commence employment on or after 08 January 2008, will be paid up to and including 12 July 2008 irrespective of the date the school closes.

They will only be retained on the Department's payroll for the full duration of the 2008 summer holidays if the school management authorities provide the Department's Non Teaching Staff (NTS) Payroll with the following:

- a) Documentary evidence from the SENO for the relevant post for the 2008/09 school year, and
- b) confirmation that the SNA in question is returning to the post in September 2008.

3. Entitlement to Benefit from the Department of Social and Family Affairs

3.1 SNAs who are not in receipt of salary for the duration of the summer holidays, **may** have an entitlement to claim benefit from the Department of Social and Family Affairs for this period. SNAs should be advised to contact their local DSFA office for further advice in this regard.

4. Entitlement to Summer Pay from the 2008/09 school year onwards

4.1 SNAs appointed on or before the first school day following the Christmas break will be paid up to and including 31 August.

[Deputy Batt O’Keeffe.]

4.2 SNAs appointed on or after the second school day following the Christmas break will be paid up to and including 12 July.

4.3 The conditions which apply to the payment of salary from 13 July 2008, outlined in Paragraph 2.2 of this Circular, will also apply from the 2008/09 school year onwards.

5. Non Resumption in September

5.1 Management authorities are reminded to inform the NTS Payroll of any SNAs, **either full-time or part-time**, who are not returning to their posts in September.

5.2 The form ‘*Notification of Special Needs Assistant Leaving*’ should be completed and sent to NTS Payroll **before 01 August each year**. This form can be down-loaded from the Department’s website www.education.ie — follow the links to Education Personnel/Special Needs Assistants.

6. Dissemination of Information

6.1 Management authorities are requested to bring the contents of this Circular to the attention of all SNAs in their schools, including those on maternity leave, sick leave etc. and also to the attention of the members of the Boards of Management.

6.2 This Circular should be retained for reference in the school and may also be accessed on this Department’s website at www.education.ie — follow the links to Education Personnel/Special Needs Assistants.

7. Queries on this Circular

7.1 If you have any query in relation to this circular please contact the NTS Payroll at 090 648 4136 or e-mail your query to sna_pay@education.gov.ie

P. Maloney,
Principal Officer.
December 2007.

295. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Education and Science the number and categories of part-time teachers who are employed by agencies under his Department; the categories who do not receive full equivalent rights as are enjoyed by full-time teachers; and if he is reviewing the position of these categories in view of the recent Equality Authority ruling that part-time teachers were suffering discrimination. [28121/08]

Minister for Education and Science (Deputy Batt O’Keeffe): I would like to assure the Deputy that my Department has been very aware of the issues raised in relation to the adjustments to pay due to certain part-time teachers under the Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2001 and has worked closely with the school management bodies and teacher unions to ensure that the legislation is implemented and applied to teachers in a fair and consistent manner.

My Department has already made the pay adjustments and paid arrears for the majority of part-time teachers, including substitute teachers, that are on the payrolls that it directly administers, and has funded VECs to do likewise for part-time teachers on their payrolls.

The group of part-time teachers that have still to receive adjusted pay and arrears are those employed on a part-time basis by individual Boards of Management of primary schools. Currently, a grant system operates which allows the Boards to claim from my Department, the funding required to pay these teachers. The Boards of Management pay the part-time teachers directly.

These part-time teachers are mainly employed by schools as resource teachers for special needs pupils, to provide language support for newcomer pupils and modern languages primary schools initiative.

Under the terms of the Protection of Employees (Part-time Work) Act 2001, qualified eligible part-time teachers are entitled to be paid salary appropriate to their qualifications and to receive incremental credit in respect of relevant teaching service.

In order to ensure that the terms of this Act could be applied to any part-time teachers paid directly by school boards, my Department took the view that the best approach was to extend the single payroll process which is in place for all other teachers in primary, secondary and community and comprehensive schools rather than persist with the practice of having boards pay them directly. This approach would ensure that the teachers concerned could get full credit for their overall service where they served part-time in more than one school. Software development is now well advanced on the required extension to the payroll system.

It is not possible to assess the amounts due to the individual teachers or in aggregate. This is because my Department currently holds no records on the teachers concerned and in order to calculate the correct salary details it will be necessary to obtain a complete service history for the teachers in question from each of the schools involved. This information will be used to populate the payroll database with the necessary information to make any salary adjustments that are necessary when the entitlements under the legislation are matched to the service history of the teachers. Under the implementation schedule the collection of this service history data will begin when primary schools re-open in the Autumn.

All part-time teachers will ultimately be paid directly on the teachers' payroll in 2009 and the system will also have the capacity to pay arrears due based on past service.

Official Travel.

296. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Defence the number of representatives of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27948/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): There will be no representatives from my Department visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games.

Departmental Publications.

297. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Defence the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so forth. [27968/08]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Willie O'Dea): The information sought by the Deputy is detailed in the accompanying table:

[Deputy Willie O’Dea.]

Name of Publication/Booklet	Details of Publication	Breakdown of Costs
		€
Cadetship Competitions	30,000 Booklets, 10,600 Application forms	15,500
Apprenticeship Competitions	15,000 Booklets, 10,000 Application forms	7,000
General Service Recruitment	10,000 Leaflets	1,100
Naval Service Questions and Answers Booklet	10,000 copies	4,000
Defence Forces Reviews 2007, 2008	10,000 copies	35,800
Overseas Family Guidance Booklet	10,000 copies	6,700
Comd and Staff Cse Prospectus	500 copies	475
International Military Police Course Prospectus	500 copies	475
Human Rights Course Prospectus	500 copies	475
History of Collins Bks, Cork		380

Mutual Assistance.

298. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the assistance he has given to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28265/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Central Authority for Mutual Assistance, within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, has been in contact, on an ongoing basis, with the relevant foreign authorities in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy.

Residency Permits.

299. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason for the delay in granting long-term residency to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27803/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am advised by officials in the Long Term Residency Section of my Department that an application for Long Term Residency from the person referred to by the Deputy was received in November 2006.

I understand that applications received in October 2006 are currently being dealt with. As soon as a decision is made on the case, the person concerned will be notified.

Citizenship Applications.

300. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason for the delay in granting citizenship to a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27804/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy’s Question was first received in the Citizenship Section of my Department in January 2008. However, due to an error on the statutory declaration, the form was returned to the person in question on 12 February 2008 so that it could be amended.

An amended statutory declaration was returned to Citizenship Section on 19 February 2008. Officials in that Section are currently processing applications received in January 2006 and have approximately 16,100 applications on hand to be dealt with before that of the person concerned. These are generally dealt with in chronological order as this is deemed to be the fairest to all applicants. It is likely, therefore, that the processing of the application will commence in mid 2010.

Residency Permits.

301. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position of an application for a long term residency application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27826/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by officials in the Long Term Residency Section of my Department that they have not traced any application for Long Term Residency from the person referred to by the Deputy.

Citizenship Applications.

302. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason a certification of naturalisation was not approved for a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27827/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): An application for a certificate of naturalisation for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's Question was received in the Citizenship Section of my Department in February 2004.

The file was forwarded to my predecessor for a decision in February 2007 and he decided to refuse the application. The reason for refusal was disclosed to the person concerned in a letter dated 1 April 2008. It is open to the person in question to lodge a new application at any time, however, he should have due regard for the previous reason for refusal.

303. **Deputy Lucinda Creighton** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason for the delay in processing the application for naturalisation of a person (details supplied) who currently has long-term residency status; the estimated time for same to be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27844/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's Question was received in the Citizenship Section of my Department in August 2006.

Officials in that section are currently processing applications received in January 2006 and have approximately 4,000 applications on hand to be dealt with before that of the person concerned. These are generally dealt with in chronological order as this is deemed to be the fairest to all applicants. It is likely, therefore, that further processing of the application will commence in the coming months.

Garda Deployment.

304. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the reason the rationalisation of boundaries of Garda districts is taking place; the expected expenditure for such a change; if this expenditure has had a cost-benefit analysis completed; if these bound-

[Deputy Tom Hayes.]

ary changes will impact on south Tipperary; and if they do impact on south Tipperary, the way in which they do. [27880/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Garda Síochána's 2008 Policing Plan, which was laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas, contains the Commissioner's proposals to realign Garda Divisional boundaries to make them coterminous with local authority boundaries. The planned changes will bring about greater efficiencies and effectiveness in facilitating the establishment and functioning of Joint Policing Committees. As part of this work, the geographical areas of district and sub-district stations arising from the Divisional boundary realignments are also being examined to ensure that service delivery to the community is maintained to a high standard. Any expected costs arising from changes at Garda districts level are factored into the Divisional boundary changes and into existing budgetary allocations.

Project boards have been established in each Garda division, including one in Tipperary, to develop implementation plans and to rollout the planned changes. The project board in Tipperary is currently analysing the impact of the boundary changes on the Tipperary Garda Division and will make recommendations to the Commissioner regarding any proposed changes in relation to the realignment of Garda sub-districts/districts.

Drugs Related Crime.

305. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the measures planned for tackling drugs criminality in Clonmel, Cashel, Carrick-on-Suir, Tipperary, and Cahir in view of the considerable increases in drug related crime in these areas; the additional staff that have been drafted in to deal with this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27881/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have raised this matter with the Garda Authorities and will be in touch with the Deputy once their response is to hand.

Youth Services.

306. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if a youth cafe or drop-in centre has been planned for Clonmel as part of the Garda Youth Diversion Programme in view of the fact that there are few facilities for young people in the area. [27882/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme operates in accordance with Part 4 of the Children Act 2001, as amended, and under the general superintendence and control of the Garda Commissioner. The Programme has proven to be highly successful in diverting young persons away from crime by offering guidance and support to juveniles and their families. It also enables referral to the Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) which operate in parallel but separate to the Programme. GYDPs are community-based, multi-agency crime prevention initiatives which seek to divert young people from becoming involved, or further involved, in criminal or anti-social behaviour. There are currently 100 of these type of projects operating throughout the country.

The Garda Youth Diversion Project in Clonmel, which is called the CYD Project, received €98,328 in funding from my Department last year. It employs one full-time and one part-time worker. With regard to the linkage of a youth café to the CYD Project, I should point out that

the issue of youth cafés in general is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The availability of youth cafés or drop-in centres is linked to the provision of general youth services throughout the country and is not solely concerned with young persons referred to Garda Projects. I am informed that the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs is currently in the process of identifying the most appropriate mechanism for the development of youth cafés. This work will guide Government in ensuring that funding is targeted and coordinated most effectively on a model or models of youth cafés which meet the needs identified by young people themselves.

Passport Applications.

307. **Deputy Tony Gregory** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if it is permissible for a person (details supplied) to apply for a passport in respect of their son. [27883/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Deputy did not indicate whether the son of the person in question is an Irish citizen or a Romanian citizen. If the son of the person in question is a Romanian citizen, he would have no entitlement to an Irish passport but may make an application for his national passport to the Romanian Embassy, 26 Waterloo Road, Dublin 4. If the son of the person in question is an Irish citizen an application for an Irish passport may be made to the Passport Office, Molesworth St, Dublin 2.

Human Rights Issues.

308. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the steps he is taking to ensure that the Irish Human Rights Commission is not in danger of going broke as its chairperson reported to the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement on 15 May 2008;; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27942/08]

309. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his views on whether the level of funding for the Irish Human Rights Commission is adequate in view of its remit, the growing population here and the fact that its equivalent, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has near matching funding despite having to deal with only one third of the population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27943/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 308 and 309 together.

In 2008 the Irish Human Rights Commission has been allocated Grant-in Aid of €2,092,000, which is a 3% increase on the Grant-in-Aid provided in 2007. As is the case of all such Government agencies, there are no proposals for additional funding in 2008. My departmental officials who have responsibility for budgetary matters across the Justice Sector are also in communication with the Commission with a view to ensuring that all efficiencies are maximised so as to enable it to remain within its allocated budget.

Official Travel.

310. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of representatives of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27955/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I can inform the Deputy that neither I nor any officials from my Department have any plans at this time to travel to Beijing in an official capacity in connection with the 2008 Olympic Games.

Departmental Publications.

311. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27975/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I wish to refer the Deputy to the information requested in the tabular format below:

Name of publication/booklet	Cost of production e.g. printing costs	Cost of distribution	Associated costs e.g. Graphic Design / Launch	Overall Costs
Balance in the Criminal Law Review Group	€3,803.00	Nil	Nil	€3,803.00
Criminal Law Codification Advisory Committee First Programme of Work 2008-2009	Document published in electronic format only. No associated costs.	Nil	Nil	None
Criminal Law Codification Advisory Committee Annual Report 2007	€1,996.00	Not available	€3,343.36	€5,339.36
Government Alcohol Advisory Group	€3,807.00	Nil	€1,870.00	€5,677.00
Report of the Study Group on Pre-nuptial Agreements	€8,052.55	Nil	Nil	€8,052.55
Report of the Legal Costs Implementation Advisory Group	€4,780.00	Not available	Not available	€4,780
An Evaluation of the Civil Service Traveller Internship Programme — “Not like usual...”	€18,404.00	Not available	€4,963	€23,367
2006 Annual Report of the Garda Síochána Superannuation Schemes	€116	Nil	Nil	€116
Financial Shared Services Annual Report 2006	€3,650	Nil	Nil	€3,650
Financial Shared Services Annual Report 2007	€3,650	Nil	Nil	€3,650
Audit Committee Annual Report 2007	€190	Nil	Nil	€190
Equality for Women Measure 2008-2013	€2,123.55	Nil	€6,023.67	€8,147.22
Strand 1 — Access to Employment Information notes and guidelines for applicants.	€22,007.68	Nil	€20,962.76	€42,970.44
National Women’s Strategy 2007-2016	€8,910	Not available	€17,430	€26,340
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform Annual Report 2006	Nil to date. Electronic version available; printed version in preparation.	Not available	€3,211.70	€3,211.70
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform Annual Report 2007	€4,580	Not available	Nil	€4,580
Report on the Youth Justice Review	€10,211.60	Not available	€126.84	€10,338.44
A New Response to Anti-Social Behaviour	€4,598	Nil	Nil	€4,598
Expert Group on Children Detention School — Final Report	€10,000	Not available	€10,951.43	€20,951.43
National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010	€1,085.06	Not available	€48.40	€1,133.46
Irish Youth Justice Service (IJYS) News	€130.00	Nil	Nil	€130.00
UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities — Braille Version	€188.00	Nil	Nil	€188.00
Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 — Braille Version	€14,248.96	€9,543.00	Nil	€23,791.96
National Information Day on Disability 2007 Primary Schools Competition Calendar 2008	€3,326.29	Nil	Nil	€3,326.29
Report of the Advisory Group on Garda Management and Leadership Development	—	—	—	€1,170 (breakdown of costs not available)
Inquiry Pursuant to the Dublin Police Act 1924 as amended by the Police Forces Amalgamation Act 1925 — Summary of the Report of Mr. Hugh Hartnett SC. Prepared by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. March 2008 Information and Good Practise Seminars (in respect of service provision in Reception and Integration Agency accommodation centres) Report of the Issues, Actions and Recommendations (for service providers in this area)	Report: €5,109.00	N/A	N/A	€5,109.00

Firearms Licences.

312. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of handgun licences issued in each Garda division for each of the past five years. [27991/08]

313. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of overall fire arm licences issued in each Garda division in each of the past five years; and the particular type of fire arms licences issued. [27992/08]

319. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of handgun licences issued in each Garda district for each of the past five years. [28139/08]

320. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of overall fire arms licences issued in each Garda district in each of the past five years; and the type of fire arms licences issued. [28140/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I propose to take Questions Nos. 312, 313, 319 and 320 together.

I have requested this information from the Garda Commissioner and I will be in touch with the Deputy on the matter as soon as it comes to hand.

Citizenship Applications.

314. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform his views on the waiting times for naturalisation applications; the efforts being made or resources deployed to reduce the waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27995/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The existing processing time for applications for certificates of naturalisation is approximately thirty months and this is primarily due to the significant increase in the volume of applications received in the last number of years.

Upon receipt, an initial examination of each application is carried out to determine if the statutory application is completed fully. Incomplete application forms are returned to the applicant for amendment. Valid applications are then examined to determine if the applicant meets the statutory residency criteria set out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act. Passports and other documentation are examined in detail and enquiries with the Garda National Immigration Bureau may also be necessary. Since this procedure was introduced on 1 April 2005, over 3,500 applicants who applied since that date have been found to be ineligible. All such applicants are informed of any shortfall in their residency, within a matter of weeks from the date the application is received, and will be able to reapply when they have the required residency.

Further processing takes place at a later stage and involves assessing an applicant's financial status in respect of their ability to support themselves in the State. Enquiries with the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social and Family Affairs may be necessary in this regard. At the same time enquiries are also made with the Garda Síochána to clarify if the applicant can be deemed to be of good character. Depending on the complexity of any given case, these processes can take a lengthy time to complete. Once all enquiries are completed, the file is referred to me for a decision.

The procedures involved in the processing of applications have been developed and refined over a number of years and are necessary to maintain the integrity of the naturalisation process. Consequently, there is a limit to the reduction in the processing time that can be achieved.

The recent decentralisation of the Citizenship Section to Tipperary Town has resulted in a substantial redeployment in the staffing resources available to the section. This is expected to have a positive impact on the number of naturalisation applications on hand and will in time see a significant reduction in processing time scales.

315. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform when an application for citizenship by a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath will be processed; if he will confirm having received correspondence from them dated 23 May 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28001/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): An application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's Question was received in the Citizenship Section of my Department earlier this year.

Officials in that Section are currently processing applications received in early 2006 and have approximately 16,700 applications on hand to be dealt with before that of the person concerned. These are generally dealt with in chronological order as this is deemed to be the fairest to all applicants.

I am advised that officials in Citizenship Section received the correspondence of 23 May 2008 referred to by the Deputy. A response to same has issued to the individual.

Garda Complaints Procedures.

316. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, in relation to his announcement of 11 March 2008 regarding the appointment of a confidential recipient under Garda Whistleblower Regulations, the promised charter under the 2007 regulations has been finalised by the Garda Commissioner; if the charter has been published; if the confidential recipient has taken up their duties; the location of the Office of the Confidential Recipient; the staff and resources made available to the Confidential Recipient; the steps taken to promote awareness of the functions of the Confidential Recipient within the force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28042/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The Garda Síochána (Corruption or Malpractice) Regulations 2007 (S.I. No. 168 of 2007) were made in April 2007. They allow for civilian employees as well as sworn members of An Garda Síochána to make confidential reports on any corruption or malpractice of which they become aware.

Before confidential reports can be made, the regulations require the Garda Commissioner to establish a Charter. The Commissioner has submitted a Charter to me which I have approved. The Commissioner has circulated the Charter to all Garda members and civilian employees who may make confidential reports in accordance with it.

Mr. Brian McCarthy was appointed as a Confidential Recipient by my predecessor in March 2008. He will provide a point outside the Garda Síochána to which confidential reports may be made. Mr. McCarthy has the assistance of 4 staff working with him on a part-time basis from within the existing Civil Service staffing complement. Since his appointment Mr. McCarthy has been working on preparing his office to commence taking reports.

The Garda Commissioner has also appointed nine internal Confidential Recipients at Chief Superintendent and senior civilian manager level. As the Confidential Reporting Charter is

[Deputy Dermot Ahern.]

intended for the use of Garda members and civilian employees only, it is not proposed to publish it. The contact details of the Confidential Recipients are contained in the Charter. For operational reasons I do not propose to make public these details or the locations of the offices of the Confidential Recipients. It should be noted that any member of the public or other person who wishes to report on corruption or malpractice in An Garda Síochána may do so to the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission.

Visa Applications.

317. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will consider an application for a short-stay holiday visa in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28093/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): The visa application referred to was forwarded from the Embassy of Ireland, Kuala Lumpur to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, Dublin on 19 June 2008 for consideration. The guideline timeframe for the processing of visa applications is 6 to 8 weeks. At present, however, applications are being processed within a shorter timeframe.

Garda Transport.

318. **Deputy Pat Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if there are serving members of An Garda Síochána, detailed to drive Garda cars who are doing so without a full driving licence; if so, the number and the locations of same; the number of serving members of An Garda Síochána detailed to drive Garda cars who are doing so without a full driving licence and have completed an advanced driving course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28096/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that Members of An Garda Síochána are required to hold a full driving licence when driving Garda vehicles. Garda personnel are authorised to drive official vehicles if they have (a) successfully completed a standard driving course, or (b) in the absence of a standard driving course, by way of authorisation of a Chief Superintendent.

To apply for (a) or (b) a member of An Garda Síochána must first be the holder of a valid local authority class B driving licence.

Questions Nos. 319 and 320 answered with Question No. 312.

Citizenship Applications.

321. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the position in relation to an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28261/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): Officials in the Citizenship Section of my Department inform me that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to in the Deputy's Question. The person referred to by the Deputy cannot be identified as the reference number provided does not exist and there are numerous applications from individuals with similar names. If the Deputy wishes to furnish further details, officials in the Citizenship Section of my Department will advise him of the position.

Garda Strength.

322. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform the Garda numbers for Garda operational areas (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28264/08]

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy Dermot Ahern): I have been informed by the Garda Commissioner that the personnel strength of Wicklow, Carlow/Kildare, Waterford/Kilkenny and Longford/Westmeath Garda Divisions on 31 May 2008, the latest date for which figures are readily available was as set out in the table hereunder:

Wicklow

Station	Strength
Bray	104
Enniskerry	7
Greystones	41
Newtownmountkennedy	1
Baltinglass	32
Blessington	14
Dunlavin	1
Hollywood	1
Donard	1
Shillelagh	1
Tinahely	2
Carnew	2
Arklow	31
Wicklow	49
Ashford	7
Rathdrum	3
Avoca	3
Roundwood	5
Aughrim	2

Carlow/Kildare

Station	Strength
Naas	100
Celbridge	23
Clane	7
Kill	3
Maynooth	17
Ballymore Eustace	1
Kildare	29
Robertstown	4
Kilcullen	4
Monasterevin	5
Newbridge	35
Rathangan	4

[Deputy Dermot Ahern.]

Station	Strength
Carbury	4
Ballytore	1
Carlow	71
Leighlinbridge	1
Ballon	1
Myshall	1
Muinebheag	10
Athy	19
Castledermot	2
Hacketstown	1
Rathyvilly	1
Tullow	11

Waterford/Kilkenny

Station	Strength
Waterford	160
Dunmore East	4
Ferrybank	4
Passage East	1
Mooncoin	2
Glenmore	1
Kilmacow	1
Dungarvan	46
Cappoquin	2
Tallow	3
Ballymacarberry	2
Aglish	1
Ring	1
Lismore	5
Tramore	36
Kill	1
Kilmacthomas	4
Kilmeaden	2
Portlaw	3
Rathgormack	1
Leamybrien	1
Kilkenny	89
Freshford	1
Callan	5
Castlecomer	7
Ballyragget	1
Goresbridge	1
Thomastown	31
Bennetsbridge	1
Graiguenamanagh	6

Station	Strength
Stonyford	1
Ballyhale	1
Inistioge	1
Mullinavat	1
Borris	2

Longford/Westmeath

Station	Strength
Mullingar	97
Killucan	3
Kinnegad	7
Rochfortbridge	5
Castletown Geoghegan	1
Delvin	4
Athlone	63
Ballinahown	1
Ballymore	1
Glasson	1
Kilbeggan	3
Moate	12
Ballymahon	5
Longford	63
Drumlish	1
Kenagh	1
Newtowncashel	1
Ardagh	1
Lanesboro	7
Tarmonbarry	1
Granard	31
Ballinalee	1
Edgeworthstown	5
Smear	1
Ballynacargy	2
Castlepollard	3
Multyfarnham	1
Rathowen	1

The Deputy will appreciate that, as with any large organisation, on any given day that the personnel strength may fluctuate due, for example, to retirements etc. It is the responsibility of the Garda Commissioner to allocate personnel throughout the Force taking all relevant factors into account.

The Garda Síochána's 2008 Policing Plan, which was laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas, contains the Commissioner's proposals to realign Garda boundaries in a number of areas around the country to make them coterminous with local authority boundaries. This includes the establishment of new Divisions of Wicklow (established on 2 June 2008), Carlow/Kilkenny and Longford/Westmeath. The planned changes will bring about greater

[Deputy Dermot Ahern.]

efficiencies and effectiveness in facilitating the establishment and functioning of Joint Policing Committees.

Project boards have been established in each Garda Division to develop implementation plans to create and rollout the new Divisional changes. I am advised by the Garda authorities that for logistical reasons, the Divisional changes specified in the 2008 Policing Plan involving Carlow, Kilkenny, Longford and Westmeath are expected to take place simultaneously with a starting date of 1 January next.

Private Rented Accommodation.

323. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when he expects to publish revised regulations for standards in private rented accommodation used by persons who receive a rent supplement; the reason for the delay to date; if his attention has been drawn to the wide scale low standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27788/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The revision of the minimum standards regulations for private rented accommodation is an important element of An Action Programme to Promote Improvement in Standards, which was launched on foot of the Towards 2016 social partnership agreement, and is also a core component of the Government's housing policy statement, Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities. A general review of the regulations has been carried out, in consultation with relevant interests, and account has been taken of relevant recommendations in two reports published in November 2007 by the Centre for Housing Research on measures to promote improvement in private rented accommodation standards.

On foot of that work, a small working group comprising local authority and sectoral representatives was convened by my Department to input into the final drafting of the revised regulations. That group has met a number of times and consultations have also taken place with the Community and Voluntary Pillar under Towards 2016.

A significant number of very useful proposals emerged from these consultations and I intend to address these to the greatest extent possible in the revised regulations or, where necessary, in primary legislation. While the issues raised were of considerable scope and complexity, I expect to be in a position to submit proposals to Government in September, with the associated regulations being made shortly thereafter. Any issues requiring primary legislation will be addressed in the context of the passage through the House of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which I expect will be published shortly.

The revised regulations will cover all private rented accommodation, not just properties which are the subject of rent supplement payments. My Department has ongoing discussions with the Department of Social and Family Affairs, which has lead responsibility for the operation of the rent supplement scheme through the Community Welfare Service, regarding the need to match rent supplement payments to accommodation of an adequate standard. In addition, my Department has recently written to all housing authorities to emphasise the importance of ensuring regular liaison with, and appropriate action between, housing authorities and Community Welfare Officers in order to ensure that rent supplement-supported private rented accommodation meets the requirements of the minimum standards regulations.

Grant Payments.

324. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local

Government if he will expedite the processing of an application for a thatching grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick. [27802/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Following an inspection of the property on 11 June 2008, my Department issued a Certificate of Provisional Approval for the renewal of thatch on 13 June.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

325. **Deputy Enda Kenny** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the average cost of processing each application received by local authorities for the scheme of housing aid for older people; the average cost of processing each application received by local authorities for the housing adaptation grant for people with a disability; the average cost of processing each application received by local authorities for the mobility aids housing grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27837/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Details of the costs incurred by local authorities in processing individual applications under the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability, the Mobility Aids Grant Scheme and the Housing Aid for Older People scheme are not held by my Department.

Local Authority Housing.

326. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the reason local authorities cannot house people who have left the marital home as a result of a separation, while court proceedings are ongoing in relation to assets, in view of the backlog of family law cases; his views on whether it is acceptable that women who have suffered from domestic abuse are being denied the chance to be housed because their case is awaiting a court hearing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27849/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): There are no specific constraints placed on housing authorities providing appropriate housing support to households in need of housing in the circumstances outlined. There is a broad range of supports available for members of households who have suffered a marital separation, subject to the terms of the relevant scheme of letting priorities and taking account of each household's individual circumstances.

National Spatial Strategy.

327. **Deputy Pádraic McCormack** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the situation regarding the allocation of funds under the gateway innovation fund where the closing date for submission was November 2007 with a Cabinet decision expected on same before January 2008 and to date no decision has been made; if he will clarify the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter indicating when a decision is expected to be made on the application by Galway City Council under the gateway innovation fund. [27875/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Following the Call for Proposals under the competitive €300 million Gateway Innovation Fund (GIF) which issued in June 2007, proposals from all nine National Spatial Strategy gateways, including Galway, were received by the closing date of 15 November 2007.

[Deputy John Gormley.]

These proposals, seeking some €720 million in total funding under the GIF, were evaluated against the criteria set down in the Call for Proposals by the GIF Management Committee which consists of representatives of my Department and the Department of Finance (with appropriate input from other Departments and agencies as required). Goodbody Economic Consultants were commissioned to assist in the evaluation process.

Decisions on the projects to be approved under the GIF, and the timing of such approvals, will be taken by the Government on foot of proposals jointly made by the Minister for Finance and me. Such proposals will have regard to the overall capital funding position for 2008 and subsequent years.

Environmental Policy.

328. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if, in the context of the recent disclosures regarding Haulbowline, his attention has been drawn to other sites here which contain high levels of contamination; the active steps he is taking to discover such areas in view of the environmental and public health concerns involved; when such areas were brought to his attention; the steps he has taken to address the implications of such contamination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27884/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):

The position in relation to Haulbowline is an exceptional one in that my Department, on foot of a Government decision in this regard, has responsibility for the care and maintenance of this specific site. This is the only such site currently under the remit of my Department. In regard to the question of any other site in the country, my Department does not compile or maintain a list of such sites which could relate to any contaminated land.

With regard to landfill remediation under the Waste Management Acts the statutory responsibility for landfill remediation lies with the local authorities and statutory responsibility for national hazardous waste management planning rests with the EPA which has prepared a National Hazardous Waste Management Plan. Section 60(3) of the Act precludes me as Minister from exercising power or control over a matter for which the Agency or local authorities have statutory responsibility.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

329. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if all newly built houses are required to have meters installed to measure water consumption; the reason for such a requirement; if such a requirement will be imposed on existing dwelling houses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27885/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):

There is no requirement by my Department for all new homes to have water meters installed.

Local Authority Funding.

330. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he is examining the possible funding options for local government in the context of a programme of local government reform; the measures and initiatives he envisages will be introduced to give local authorities greater funding resources; his views on an increased level of local charges for services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27886/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I published the Green Paper, Stronger Local Democracy — Options for Change on 22 April 2008. Stronger Local Democracy presents a set of options which share a common theme of strengthening local democratic leadership.

Stronger Local Democracy describes the current funding mechanisms, summarises those reviews of the resourcing of local government which have been completed in recent decades, and sets out the key principles and issues for debate. These considerations will feed into the work on the Commission on Taxation, established in February 2008 in line with the Programme for Government; the Commission has been specifically tasked with consideration of options for the future financing of local government.

331. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has made a submission to the Commission on Taxation on funding local government; the recommendations made in any such submission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27887/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department has made a submission to the Commission on Taxation. It will be a matter for the Commission to make recommendations to the Minister for Finance on options for the future financing of local government.

Environmental Policy.

332. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the environmental consequences arising from the increased use of diesel by private motor cars; the measures he is taking to reduce the harmful consequences of increased diesel use in terms of additional emissions; if this includes the mandatory fitting of particulate filters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27888/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The rebalancing of VRT and motor tax on cars registered from 1 July 2008 is designed to lower the levels of CO₂ emissions from the use of private cars.

It is generally accepted that a diesel-powered car has a lower level of CO₂ emissions than its petrol equivalent. While historically diesel cars have had higher emissions of NO_x and particulate matter than their petrol equivalents, the European Union has progressively introduced robust emissions standards for vehicles since 1993, known as Euro standards. These standards have substantially reduced NO_x and particulate matter from passenger cars and heavy goods vehicles, particularly those with diesel engines. Euro 5 will enter into force in September 2009 and makes it obligatory to have a particle filter for all diesel cars of new models, and also specifies the same particulate matter standards for both petrol and diesel engines. More stringent Euro 6 standards will come into effect in 2014.

I am satisfied, therefore, that the rebalancing of VRT and motor tax will not have adverse environmental or public health consequences.

Departmental Staff.

333. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if free car parking is available to officials working in his Department; the number of parking spaces available for employees at his Department's offices and relevant agencies; his views on whether the availability of free parking is consistent with the need to establish sustainable travel patterns; the measures he proposes to encourage more sustainable travel

[Deputy Phil Hogan.]

patterns for people working within his Department and in the wider public service generally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27889/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Department's accommodation is provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and any costs arising from the provision of car parking are met by that Office.

The Department currently has 184 car parking spaces available for staff in its Dublin offices, 95 spaces in Wexford shared between 4 bodies including my Department, 94 spaces in Ballina shared between 5 bodies including my Department and 57 spaces nationwide for Met Éireann staff. My Department also has some 40 regional offices, mainly housing National Parks and Wildlife Service staff, who have access to some car parking. Parking is also available in the National Parks and Nature Reserves but this is largely for visitors.

Arrangements regarding accommodation and car parking for the bodies and agencies under the aegis of the Department are a day-to-day operational matter for the bodies concerned.

In terms of encouraging sustainable travel patterns, the Department actively encourages staff to use means of transport, other than cars, wherever possible. To this end, the Department is a partner in the One Small Step campaign by the Dublin Transportation Office. The campaign aims to motivate car users in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) to try alternative modes of transport for at least some of their journeys. In September 2007, the travel patterns of Departmental employees in the GDA were surveyed. The results showed that 78% of the Department's staff living and working in the area either avail of public transport, walk or cycle, as their preferred method of travel to work. The number of staff driving to work is remarkably low (18%), especially compared to the GDA regional peak period average of approximately 60% (DTO).

Initiatives to encourage the use of sustainable transport options in the Department have included:

- the provision of new cycling facilities for staff in the Custom House in November 2007,
- encouraging take up of the Civil Service Travel Pass Scheme which allows the Department to incur the expense of providing staff with an annual bus/rail pass, without the staff member being liable for benefit-in-kind taxation. This Scheme has been availed of by 259 staff in 2008,
- encouraging staff to use public transport wherever possible for official travel,
- making available, to the greatest possible extent, different working initiatives such as flexible working, e-working, work-sharing and term-time. These all support reduced travel and affect travel choice,
- active promotion of sustainable travel through staff newsletters and notice boards.

While measures to encourage more sustainable travel patterns in the wider public service are largely a matter for the Department of Transport, I have recently made provision for the introduction of a carbon offsetting scheme for all ministerial and official air travel.

My Department also acts as national co-ordinator for European Mobility Week, which will run from 16-22 September 2008. In order to maximise participation by the public and relevant local authorities in the week, the Department recently met with national stakeholders such as the Department of Transport, Sustainable Energy Ireland, An Garda Síochána and representatives from the larger urban local authorities. All Government Departments and local authorities

have been requested to participate actively in the week and a programme of activities will be supported by a limited awareness campaign at local and national level.

Consultancy Contracts.

334. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount spent by him and his Department on public relations, media and advertising services since May 2007 to date in 2008; the external parties who have provided such services to him or his Department; the cost of such services by company or individual; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27891/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):
The information sought in the question is set out in the following table:

Campaign	Company	Expenditure (to nearest €100)
Climate Change Awareness Campaign	Consortium comprises: Cawley NEA\TBWA, RPS Group, Mary Murphy Associates, OMD Ireland	3,337,100
Race Against Waste	Consortium Led By Lyle Bailie International (Formerly Known As McCann Erickson) PR element provided by Mary Murphy and Associates	84,700
Advertising of designation of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protected Areas	Brindley Advertising	61,600
National Tidy Towns Competition	Heritage Council	3,000
Species Protection Advertisements	Brindley Advertising	30,000
Notice Nature (Public Awareness Campaign on Biodiversity)	RPS	204,500
Register of Electors Awareness Campaign	Brindley Advertising	167,900
Information on Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability	Irish Times, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, The Star and Foinse	5,000
Advertising Call for Submissions on “Increasing Affordable Housing Supply” Report	Brindley Advertising	5,100
Fire Safety Awareness	Lyle Bailie International	303,900
Fire Safety Awareness	ICAN	32,700
Fire Safety Awareness	Clear Channel Outdoor	25,400
Fire Safety Awareness	Cork Media Enterprises Ltd.	500
Fire Safety Awareness	WKW FM Ltd	900
Fire Safety Awareness	Dublin’s Q102	900
Fire Safety Awareness	Limerick’s Live 95FM	800
Fire Safety Awareness	I.R.S. (Ireland) Ltd.	2,700
Fire Safety Awareness	Galway Bay FM	900
Fire Safety Awareness	Titan Outdoor Ireland Ltd	24,000
Fire Safety Awareness	LMFM	700
Fire Safety Awareness	Earth Horizon Productions	18,100
Fire Safety Awareness	Shop n Save	4,800
Fire Safety Awareness	RD Publishing (Athlone)	800
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	Bennis Design — design of poster	1,000
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	Brunswick Press, printing of poster	7,500
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	Design of ad for Heritage Week	400
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	Heritage Week advert	300
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	History Ireland advertisements	5,700

[Deputy John Gormley.]

Campaign	Company	Expenditure (to nearest €100)
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	Irish Arts Review advertisements	5,000
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	Irish Landmark Trust prize, RTE Architect's Eye	800
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	Landmark Trust — Architect's Eye prize	300
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	Limerick Civic Trust sponsorship	300
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	Limerick Leader — poster insert	2,900
National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Awareness Campaign	RTE — sponsorship of Architect's Eye radio series	3,600
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	Sherkin Comment	1,100
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	Lynn Publications	1,600
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	Nestron	1,100
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	The Dubliner Magazine	1,200
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	Lynn Publications	1,600
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	Sherkin Island	1,100
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	City Ads	400
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	Gaelic Times	2,400
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	Nestron	700
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	Sunday World	6,000
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	98FM	5,000
Advertising and Publicity Expenditure on Anti-Litter Initiatives	Greenhouse	800

EU Directives.

335. **Deputy Phil Hogan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of EU Directives that require to be transposed by his Department; when they are due to be transposed; the dates by which they are required to be transposed; the method of transposition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27892/08]

352. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if EU Directives 2004/35/CE of 21 April 2004 and 2006/21/EC of 1 May 2006 have been implemented in full; if not, when they will be fully implemented here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28124/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 335 and 352 together.

Eight Directives require transposition by my Department, including Directives, 2004/35/CE and 2006/21/EC. Details of these Directives are set out in the table below.

My Department is working to ensure the comprehensive transposition of these Directives.

Directive Number/Subject	Deadline for Transposition into Irish Law	Expected Transposition Date	Likely Method of Transposition
2003/35/EC Directive on public participation in plans and programmes relating to the environment and amending Directives 85/337/EEC and 96/61/EC	25/06/2005	At the earliest possible date	Statutory Instrument
2004/107/EC Relating to arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in ambient air	15/02/2007	By 3rd Quarter 2008	Statutory Instrument
2004/35/CE On environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage	30/04/2007	At the earliest possible date	Primary Legislation
2006/21/EC On the management of waste from extractive industries and amending Directive 2004/35/EC	01/05/2008	By 3rd Quarter 2008	Statutory Instrument
2006/66/EC On batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators and repealing Directive 91/157/EEC	26/09/2008	By the Transposition Date	Statutory Instrument
2006/118/EC On the protection of groundwater against pollution and deterioration	16/01/2009	By the Transposition Date	Statutory Instrument
2007/2/EC On the establishing of an Infrastructure for Spatial In-formation in the European Community (INSPIRE)	15/05/2009	By the Transposition Date	Statutory Instrument
2008/50/EC On ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe	11/06/2010	By the Transposition Date	Statutory Instrument

Local Authority Funding.

336. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the level of funding provided to each local authority for housing grants to individual households in 2008; the corresponding figure for 2007; the additional funding sought from each local authority to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27907/08]

363. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of funding that has been or is being allocated to a county council (details supplied) for the housing aid for older people scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28144/08]

364. **Deputy Olwyn Enright** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the amount of funding that has been or is being allocated to a county council (details supplied) for the housing aid for older people scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28145/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 336, 363 and 364 together.

Details of the combined capital allocations made to each local authority in 2008, in respect of the operation of the Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability, together with the amounts recouped to each authority in 2007, are set out in the table below.

The combined capital allocations made by my Department to local authorities for the operation of the Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability represent not capital grants, but the total amount which authorities are authorised to spend on the schemes, including from the resources of individual authorities, in the year in which the allocation is made. It is a matter for local authorities to decide on the specific level of funding to be directed towards each of the schemes, from within the combined allocation notified to them by my Department, and to manage the operation of the schemes in their area from within this allocation.

Local Authority	Total amount Recouped 2007	Overall Allocation 2008
	€	€
Carlow County Council	1,174,211	1,191,450
Cavan County Council	1,130,966	1,150,890
Clare County Council	1,286,340	1,308,060
Cork County Council (North)	1,932,606	1,962,090
Cork County Council (South)	2,509,769	2,545,140
Cork County Council (West)	991,409	1,008,930
Donegal County Council	4,186,047	4,248,660
DL/Rathdown County Council	1,867,940	1,896,180
Fingal County Council	1,554,110	1,576,770
Galway County Council	1,795,118	1,820,130
Kerry County Council	2,551,761	2,590,770
Kildare County Council	1,619,225	1,642,680
Kilkenny County Council	801,467	816,270
Laois County Council	2,601,255	1,678,000
Leitrim County Council	1,545,126	1,571,700

Local Authority	Total amount Recouped 2007	Overall Allocation 2008
	€	€
Limerick County Council	1,528,970	1,551,420
Longford County Council	628,049	638,820
Louth County Council	1,789,877	1,815,060
Mayo County Council	2,446,257	2,484,300
Meath County Council	2,380,019	2,418,390
Monaghan County Council	1,880,169	1,911,390
North Tipperary County Council	1,547,594	1,571,700
Offaly County Council	1,292,903	1,292,910
Roscommon County Council	1,652,933	1,678,170
Sligo County Council	484,371	491,790
South Dublin County Council	3,933,500	3,990,090
South Tipperary County Council	1,323,593	1,343,550
Waterford County Council	1,497,584	1,500,000
Westmeath County Council	1,437,482	1,460,160
Wexford County Council	2,010,858	2,043,210
Wicklow County Council	1,063,649	1,079,910
Cork City Council	1,827,539	1,855,620
Dublin City Council	12,464,277	12,639,510
Galway City Council	1,031,777	1,049,490
Limerick City Council	702,602	714,870
Waterford City Council	440,937	451,230
Sligo Borough Council	408,444	415,740
TOTAL	71,320,734	71,405,050

Turbary Rights.

337. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon will receive approval for the sale of bog to his Department; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27909/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley):

The monies and the executed contracts were sent to the Chief State Solicitor's Office on May 19th 2008. The deposit cheque was sent to the vendor on June 3rd 2008. The CSSO have been awaiting closing documents since that time from the vendors solicitor.

Waste Management.

338. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has held meetings, discussions or briefings in respect of proposals to locate an incinerator on the west side of Dublin at Rathcoole, Baldonnell or any other areas; the date on which such meetings took place; the people who attended such meetings, including the companies or organisations they represented; his views on the location of such a facility on the west side of Dublin in view of the prevailing westerly winds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27916/08]

344. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he met with a company (details supplied) or any company or agents on their behalf to discuss a proposal for an incinerator at Rathcoole, County Dublin; when this meeting occurred; the purpose of the meeting; the outcome of same; if his attention has been drawn to the widespread public concern that an incinerator on the west side of Dublin with prevailing westerly winds could have serious pollution consequences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28091/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 338 and 344 together.

Under the Waste Management Acts statutory responsibility for the making of regional waste management plans, which includes determinations in regard to the waste management infrastructure appropriate to each region, rests with the local authority (or local authorities) concerned and my Department has no function in this regard.

The proposed development in question is by a private company and my Department has no function in relation to this facility which it is understood will be the subject of an application to An Bord Pleanála for planning permission under the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006. Under the Planning and Development Acts the Minister is specifically precluded from involvement in a matter for which the Board has statutory responsibility.

My Department and I hold regular consultations with stakeholders in the context of the ongoing implementation of Government policy on waste management. Consulting widely, with a range of stakeholders, is designed to ensure that my Department and I have as full as possible an understanding of the issues and concerns of stakeholders and are therefore in a position to address them, where it is possible and appropriate to do so. Such consultations are also useful to assist me and my Department in keeping up to date on alternative technologies to landfill and to traditional incineration. In July 2007 I met with an environmental consultant acting on behalf of the proposers of the project in question. The purpose of this meeting, and of a separate meeting with my Department on 10 December 2007, was to outline a form of thermal treatment of waste which, it is suggested, differs from conventional municipal waste incineration. There was, of course, no question of these discussions comprehending matters proper to the physical planning or environmental licensing processes from which I, and my Department, are precluded from involvement. The proposed project has been subject to a small number of representations by the local communities.

The Programme for Government clearly sets out the approach to waste management that will be reflected in national policy in the years ahead. It is firmly grounded in a continuing commitment to the waste hierarchy with a renewed drive towards the achievement of international best practice in the reduction, re-use and recycling of our waste. This, coupled with an increasing emphasis on technologies for the mechanical and biological treatment of waste, will significantly reduce potential reliance on landfill and incineration.

Official Travel.

339. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of representatives of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits. [27951/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department will not be represented in an official capacity at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

Social and Affordable Housing.

340. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the formula by which the clawback percentage is calculated in the case of affordable housing schemes; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that, in the context of falling house prices, there are occasions where the market value quoted by the Affordable Homes Partnership is significantly in excess of the actual value of the property as certified by an independent valuer and that this has the effect of increasing the clawback percentage imposed on the purchaser; if he will take steps to ensure that this anomaly is rectified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27961/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The legal provisions relating to affordable housing under the 1999 Affordable Housing Scheme and Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2006 provide that the clawback must be based on the market value of the property at the time of sale to the person purchasing the property, and in the case of the Shared Ownership Scheme it is based on the date of grant of the shared ownership lease.

In the case of the direct procurement exercise operated by the Affordable Homes Partnership, or where the Partnership is selling affordable units on behalf of a local authority, it is the Partnership, or in some cases the local authority, that values the property. Where the purchaser does not accept this valuation they may have the property independently valued and submit this to the Partnership or local authority who will then re-examine its original valuation and determine the valuation to be applied to the property.

The clawback provision attached to a house purchased under the affordable housing schemes at a discount from market value is activated where the house is resold before the expiration of 20 years from the date of purchase whereby the person selling the property must pay to the housing authority a percentage of the proceeds of the sale. This clawback is expressed as the percentage discount received when the house was originally purchased and is applied to the subsequent resale price. It is an essential part of the scheme to prevent short-term profit taking. After ten years, the amount repayable is reduced by 10% in respect of each complete year thereafter during which the purchaser has been in occupation of the home as his or her normal place of residence.

Waste Management.

341. **Deputy Kathleen Lynch** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his views on extending his proposed baseline health study of the residents of Cork Harbour to former workers of ISPAT and the Naval base; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27963/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department has now engaged consultants, White Young Green, to carry out an independent and rigorous assessment of site conditions following the extensive unauthorised works by sub-contractors on the site. This assessment, which has already begun, is divided into three distinct modules and the consultants have had the full benefit of the advice of the EPA, the Marine Institute and the Health and Safety Authority:

1. Assessing quality of surface water, marine sediment and mussel bivalves in vicinity of Haulbowline,
2. Assessing any health or environmental risks which may be posed by the recent works on the East Tip,

[Deputy John Gormley.]

3. Ambient Air Monitoring.

I have given a commitment to local residents and the House that the results of the ongoing assessment will be published. I will then advise Government for purposes of decision-making on whatever actions are shown to be necessary, including the question of any studies in regard to human health. In bringing proposals to Cabinet, I will take appropriate advice, including scientific advice, on the scope of any such study.

Departmental Publications.

342. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27971/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Local Authority Housing.

343. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when the pilot project involving purchase of Cluaid and Respond housing will be rolled out; his views on the geographical area that would be suitable for the pilot scheme; if he will give consideration to areas of south Tipperary which are RAPID and LEADER areas and would find such a pilot scheme needful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28044/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): There is no provision at present in the voluntary housing schemes for the purchase of individual houses by tenants. However, the Government's housing policy statement, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, indicated that consideration would be given, in consultation with the voluntary and co-operative sector, to piloting a tenant purchase scheme for some new voluntary homes based on the incremental purchase model.

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which is expected to be published shortly, will include provisions to give effect to the incremental purchase scheme. In parallel with this, arrangements for the introduction of a pilot scheme for the voluntary housing sector are being considered in consultation with the Irish Council for Social Housing. Decisions in relation to the selection of an approved housing body or specific location for the purposes of implementing the pilot project would be premature, at this stage.

Question No. 344 answered with Question No. 338.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

345. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 228 on the 18 October 2007, the progress that has been made in developing improvement works to the sewage and water schemes for the Baltimore and Skibbereen area of County Cork; the works involved; the timescale for completion for these works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28099/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I understand that construction work has started on the collection system in Skibbereen and that the Council is preparing contract documents for the collection systems for Baltimore, Dunmanway and Schull. Under devolved procedures, the Council may advance these works to construction without further reference to my Department, provided the tender prices are within approved construction stage budgets and that the most economically advantageous tenders are accepted. I also understand that the Council is preparing contract documents for the Baltimore/Leap Water Supply Scheme. My Department awaits the submission of the Council's Preliminary Report for Stage 4 of the Skibbereen Water Supply Scheme. Additional information is awaited from Cork County Council to enable my Department to complete its examination of the Council's contract documents for the waste water treatment plants for Baltimore, Skibbereen, Dunmanway and Schull which will be procured under a single contract.

Housing Aid for the Elderly.

346. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the criteria used when he set the means test applying to the housing adaptation grant scheme and housing aid for older people grant scheme; the rationale for setting the lower threshold of the means test at such a low income; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the means test threshold is so low that it can mean that many couples who are exempt from income tax will not qualify for the full grant; his plans, to review and change the criteria to bring it into line with other Government schemes and allowances. [28100/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability, the Mobility Aids Scheme, and the Housing Aid for Older People schemes were introduced following my Department's review of the Disabled Persons, Essential Repairs and Special Housing Aid for the Elderly Grant Schemes. One of the primary aims of the review was to ensure that the available resources are targeted to those in most need of assistance. Under the previous schemes, some local authorities applied a means test, while others did not. The standardised means test introduced under the new schemes, including the income thresholds and bands provided for, were designed to ensure that a fair and uniform approach applies across all local authority areas, and that those households in greatest need benefit from the available funding. As part of the means-testing provisions, local authorities have been instructed to apply various income disregards in the calculation of household means, including disregards for children and students, and in respect of a range of welfare payments such as Carer's Benefit/Allowance. In addition, the income thresholds and bands will be adjusted annually in line with inflation. A review of the operation of the new schemes will be undertaken following their first year of full implementation.

Local Authority Housing.

347. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the position regarding the construction industry resulting from the failure of his Department and the local authorities to implement and invigilate the building regulations before September 2007 and in view of the estimates of up to 60,000 homes which are affected by the defective pyrite infill situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28102/08]

348. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will establish and lead a taskforce with the Fingal County and Dublin city managers to investigate all aspects of the pyrite infill problem in the construction industry

[Deputy Thomas P. Broughan.]

and to set in place a full remediation repair and compensation process for all the affected purchasers of defective homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28103/08]

349. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has contacted an organisation (details supplied), Fingal County and Dublin City Council managers regarding the failure of a construction company (details supplied) in Dublin north east to agree a protocol and plan of action for the repair of up to 300 new homes which may have been seriously damaged by defective pyrite infill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28104/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 347 to 349, inclusive, together.

The position on this matter was most recently set out in reply to the Dáil Adjournment item on 5 June 2009 and in reply to Question Number 92 of 27 May 2008. As indicated in reply to previous questions on this issue, the resolution of problems arising between building owners and builders are matters between the parties concerned, namely, the building owner, the relevant developer and the builder's insurer. Where the construction of a building is the subject of a contract between the client and the builder, enforcement is a civil matter.

The NSAI has now published a new amended Standard Recommendation on the use of aggregates as infill for civil engineering and road construction work. The new Standard Recommendation came into effect on 7 December 2007 and the intention is that it will address the quality standards of new homes and buildings insofar as problems relating to pyrite are concerned. The NSAI notified the European Commission of this intention in accordance with statutory requirements and no objection has been raised to the proposal. My Department has now incorporated this NSAI Standard Recommendation into the relevant Technical Guidance Document (TGD-C) associated with the Building Regulations. A copy of the relevant amendment to TGD-C is available on my Department's Website at www.environ.ie. My Department will this week be writing to local authorities, the Construction Industry Federation, the Irish Home Builders' Association and other key stakeholders drawing their attention to the provisions of the amended TGD-C. I am also aware that HomeBond has included the amended NSAI Standard Recommendation in their recently-published 6th edition of the House Building Manual. I have no proposals to establish a Task Force on this matter.

Social and Affordable Housing.

350. **Deputy Michael Kennedy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will request all local authorities to carry out a detailed audit of their social and affordable housing stock, with a breakdown of occupied and unoccupied units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28113/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Under the Government's housing policy statement, Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities, my Department has committed to undertaking a detailed audit of local authority social housing stock every ten years. The National Building Agency has recently undertaken a scoping study in preparation for this extensive audit, the results of which are informing the next steps to be taken by my Department. Under the current affordable housing schemes, affordable housing units, once purchased, become the privately-owned property of the purchaser, and as such are not considered part of the local authority stock. An audit of these properties would, therefore, not be appropriate.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

351. **Deputy P. J. Sheehan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government when approval will be issued by his Department to Cork County Council for the Courtmacsherry-Timoleague sewage scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28114/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): The Courtmacsherry/Timoleague Sewerage Scheme is included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009 as a scheme to begin construction in 2009, at an estimated cost of €2.47 million. Cork County Council's revised Preliminary Report for the scheme is being examined in my Department and is being dealt with as quickly as possible.

Question No. 352 answered with Question No. 335.

International Agreements.

353. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he will report on Ireland's position on the Aarhus convention; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28125/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): 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 and, in that context, 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).

Regulations transposing the European Communities (Access to Information on the Environment) Directive 2003/4/EC were signed and came into effect on 1 May 2007. The process to transpose Directive 2003/35/EC is already well advanced, with legislation completed to amend the majority of the relevant consent systems. The work to amend the remaining outstanding consent systems will be finalised by the Departments concerned as soon as possible. When this work has been completed I, along with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, will ensure that the instrument of ratification of the Aarhus Convention is submitted to Government and laid before the Dáil as soon as possible.

Local Authority Housing.

354. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of local authority homes that were in their respective housing stock for each of the local authorities here for each of the years, 1992, 1997, 2002, and 2007. [28126/08]

357. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of local authority homes built by each of the local authorities here for each of the past 20 years; the number purchased on the open market; and the number purchased under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000. [28129/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 354 and 357 together.

[Deputy Michael Finneran.]

Data in relation to local authority housing stock and social housing starts and completions, including acquisitions on foot of Part V agreements, are published in my Department's Annual and Quarterly Housing Statistics Bulletins, copies of which are available in the Oireachtas library. Bulletins from 2000 onwards are also available on my Department's website, www.environ.ie.

355. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of voluntary housing units here, their location, the organisation involved and the type for each of the years, 1992, 1997, 2002, and 2007. [28127/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Details of the accommodation provided under my Department's Capital Funding Schemes by approved voluntary and co-operative housing bodies for each of the years 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007 are published in my Department's Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin, copies of which are available in the Oireachtas Library. Copies of the Annual Bulletins for the years 2000 to 2006 and the relevant quarterly bulletins for 2007 are also available on my Department's website at www.environ.ie. The detailed information requested with regard to the individual housing bodies involved and the type of accommodation provided is not readily available and its compilation would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work.

356. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of local authority homes being built by local authorities or voluntary housing groups in 2008. [28128/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Work was in progress on over 10,600 social housing units under the local authority and the voluntary and co-operative housing programmes at the start of this year. However, due to the nature of social housing construction projects, where the project life cycle may extend beyond a single year, information is not available on the number of houses expected to be completed this year. Data in relation to social housing starts and completions are published throughout the year in my Department's Quarterly Housing Statistics Bulletins, copies of which are available in the Oireachtas library and on my Department's website, www.environ.ie. The Bulletin for the first quarter of 2008 is to be published shortly.

Question No. 357 answered with Question No. 354.

358. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the local authority housing list in terms of applicants for each of the local authorities and in terms of persons on the application. [28131/08]

373. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his proposals to address the local authority housing crisis having particular regard to the numbers on waiting lists at present and the likelihood of further increases in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28257/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 358 and 373 together.

A statutory assessment of housing need is carried out every three years by all housing authorities. The last assessment took place in 2005 and indicated that there were 43,684 households

on local authority housing waiting lists. Detailed information on this assessment is available on my Department's website. Local authorities are currently carrying out the 2008 statutory housing needs assessment, the results of which will be published in due course. This year alone, my Department has allocated a record amount of over €1 billion to support construction and acquisitions projects by local authorities across the country, with a further €200m for regeneration and renewal projects. In addition, close to €300m in capital grants and loan funding is being provided to support a significant programme of activity by the voluntary and co-operative housing sector.

The Government's housing policy statement *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* and the National Development Plan 2007-2013 reflect the strong commitment to expand social housing provision contained in the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. Under the agreement, 27,000 social housing starts are to be delivered over the period 2007-2009. Good progress is being made in meeting this target with some 9,000 new social housing starts achieved in 2007.

359. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of local authority homes planned in each of the regeneration projects here currently underway or in the planning stage which have been authorised by his Department; the number of local authority homes originally on the site being redeveloped; and the number occupied when the regeneration order was agreed. [28132/08]

360. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of private and affordable homes that were or are planned for each of the regeneration projects here; and the timeframe for development of each scheme currently started or planned. [28133/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 359 and 360 together.

My Department currently supports an ambitious National Regeneration Programme and a record €121 million in exchequer funding has been made available for projects under this programme in 2008. Works are under way in number of these projects, namely Ballymun in Dublin City, Laurel Avenue in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and Knocknaheeny and the Glen in Cork City. This funding also includes long-standing agreements to support redevelopment works within inner city flat complexes in Dublin City and a number of estates in Waterford City.

Other regeneration schemes are proposed in Limerick City, Sligo Town, Tralee and Dundalk and the authorities in question are in the process of developing their master plans. Under the procedures for the regeneration of local authority estates, a fully costed and detailed master plan outlining the required actions for the social, economic, and physical regeneration of the area is submitted to my Department for approval. It is difficult to ascertain the exact level of activity or timeframes involved in advance of an agreed master plan. In addition to regeneration schemes that are funded in the main by the exchequer, there are a number of PPP regeneration projects at various stages of procurement and development which have not been approved by the Department to commence development and for which only indicative numbers are available. In other instances, housing PPP projects that have been approved do not involve the regeneration of existing local authority estates.

For the regeneration schemes, including PPP regeneration, where work is ongoing, the following information is available:

[Deputy Michael Finneran.]

- **Ballymun:** at the beginning of the regeneration process in 1998, the Ballymun estate comprised 2,814 flats and 1,987 local authority houses, of which 985 had been purchased under tenant purchase arrangements. The regeneration process involved the demolition of the flats and some 80 houses, of which approximately 2,300 were occupied in 1998, and replacing them with high quality housing. Under current plans, the regeneration programme will deliver 2,288 new social houses, 436 new voluntary and co-operative houses, and 2,617 new private dwellings in addition to the 1,907 houses previously built. The scheduled completion date for the regeneration is 2012. It is anticipated that there will be some remaining sites that could be used to deliver further private and affordable housing.
- **Laurel Avenue:** Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council continues to support the regeneration of Laurel Avenue which saw the original estate of 61 social units (19 occupied) demolished to make way for 77 new social houses and apartments. This project is expected to be completed by Autumn this year.
- **Knocknaheeny:** The Knocknaheeny regeneration involves some 874 houses of which 860 were occupied at the publication of the master plan. The plan proposed 1,124 social, and 20 affordable houses. The scheduled completion date for this project is 2010.
- **The Glen:** The master plan for this regeneration identified 652 units (including 234 flats) for regeneration. Of these some 526 were occupied. Phases one and two of the project will deliver 642 regenerated social units. Phase two of the project is expected to be delivered by 2011. Phase three is still at the planning stage and the distribution of the housing units as social, affordable, and private has yet to be determined.
- **Fatima Mansions:** This has involved the complete regeneration of 364 inner city flats with a socially disadvantaged community, into a vibrant new development at the centre of the city. The completed regeneration of Fatima Mansions will see 615 new dwellings, 150 of which are social housing, some 400 are private houses with the remainder being affordable housing. In addition substantial community and commercial facilities are being provided on the site. Phase 1 of the scheme has been completed, with the second and final phase due for completion by the end of 2009.
- **O'Devaney Gardens:** The regeneration of O'Devaney Gardens will involve the regeneration of 272 social dwellings, of which 186 are occupied. At completion the project will deliver 281 social housing units, 250 affordable and 292 private units as well as community and commercial facilities. The timing of this regeneration is subject to the resolution of issues which have arisen during the procurement process.

361. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if progress has been made in authorising Dublin City Council's new scheme of lettings submitted to him earlier in 2008. [28137/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): The revised scheme of letting priorities submitted by Dublin City Council is currently under consideration in my Department. I expect to make a decision on it in the near future.

362. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if progress has been made in the past few months on the sale of flats scheme; when a decision on this scheme is expected; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28138/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): Proposals for a tenant purchase scheme for apartments were included in the General Scheme of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which was prepared by my Department and approved by Government for drafting in December 2006. These proposals take account of the difficulties that affected previous attempts to introduce such a scheme in areas such as the management of apartment complexes, insurance, the cost of maintenance and the transfer of legal title. Our proposals are based on the long-standing arrangements in the private sector for the ownership and management of multi-unit residential developments. The transition from a rented social housing apartment complex to a mixed tenure of privately-owned and social-rented accommodation adds an extra dimension to the legal and practical problems that can arise in private apartment complexes.

Working with the Attorney General's Office, we have made progress in identifying and dealing with the complex issues involved, so that the necessary statutory framework can be developed. My Department has also engaged external advisers to assist in developing the appropriate model and we are working with relevant local authorities through a working group specifically established on the tenant purchase of apartments.

I expect that the draft Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill will be submitted to Government shortly for approval for publication. While, at this stage, all of the legal issues involved in the tenant purchase of apartments have not been fully addressed, I anticipate that the proposals on the matter will have been fully developed in time for consideration during the Bill's passage through the Oireachtas in the next session. In overall terms, I believe that the Bill will be recognised as a major contribution to reform of the social housing sector.

Questions Nos. 363 and 364 answered with Question No. 336.

365. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the extent to which he proposes to fund the capital housing programme proposed by Kildare County Council in 2008 excluding provisions for voluntary or private housing agencies; the number of houses expected to be provided under this heading; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28247/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): A total of €45,450,000 has been allocated to Kildare County Council for the supply of social housing in 2008, which is broken down as follows:

Local Authority	Main Allocation	Traveller Accommodation	Total
Kildare County Council	€45,000,000	€450,000	€45,450,000

In addition, a further €13m has been allocated under the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme to support activity by the Voluntary and Co-operative Housing sector in County Kildare in 2008.

This allocation took into account the housing need figures for Kildare County Council and the discussions between the authority and my Department in the context of the latest round of Housing Action Plan meetings with housing authorities.

[Deputy Michael Finneran.]

In 2008 it is anticipated that Kildare County Council will achieve 78 starts and 318 completions under its construction and acquisitions programme.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

366. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the extent to which he will offer capital assistance to Kildare County Council or otherwise towards the provision of further domestic drinking water supply having particular regard to the urgent and growing need in the area; if he has received proposals from the local authority seeking funding in this regard; his response or intention in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28248/08]

367. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the full extent of sewage treatment facilities currently required throughout County Kildare; the number of contracts involved, approved, under review or pending; if these entail small, group or major capital schemes; the extent to which final costs are expected to be in line with original projections; if provision is expected to take place as required or in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28249/08]

368. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government his proposals to financially support or otherwise assist toward the provision of extra domestic water supply here; the extent of such works in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28250/08]

369. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the steps he has taken or will take to address areas sensitive to pollution here; if adequate procedures are in place or are expected to be put in place to address such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28251/08]

370. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government if he has sought or received a report indicating an expected pollution threat to ground water arising from the inadequacy of sewage treatment facilities at various locations here; his proposals to address these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28254/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): I propose to take Questions Nos. 366 to 370, inclusive, together.

The Government's commitment to improving water services infrastructure is reflected in the very substantially increased funding of some €4.7 billion provided for my Department's Water Services Investment and Rural Water Programmes in the National Development Plan 2007-13, an increase of 27% on the previous NDP.

Particulars of major water services schemes approved for Co Kildare and other local authority areas are set out in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2007-2009, which is available in the Oireachtas Library. More detailed information in relation to individual contracts under this Programme, and in relation to activity generally under the small public schemes and group water schemes measures of the devolved Rural Water Programme, may be obtained from relevant local authorities. The procedures for approving, procuring and advancing water services schemes are based on securing optimum results in terms of infrastructure provision and best value for money.

The schemes included in the current Water Services Investment Programme are derived mainly from the assessments of needs undertaken by all local authorities, at my Department's request, as an input to the overall strategy for meeting water services infrastructural requirements. In these assessments authorities are required to quantify the needs for capital works in their areas and to list their proposals on the basis of the priorities adopted by the elected members. Annual block grant allocations by my Department to local authorities under the devolved Rural Water Programme are informed by prioritised work programmes submitted by county councils.

Among the criteria local authorities are required to take into account in preparing assessments of needs and rural water work programmes are compliance with national and EU drinking water and wastewater treatment standards, and relevant reports produced by the EPA in relation to water quality, drinking water standards and municipal waste water treatment.

In conjunction with the publication of its report "The Provision and Quality of Drinking Water in Ireland: A Report of the Years 2006-2007", the EPA has listed 339 public water supplies where detailed profiling is required from source to tap to ensure consumers have a reliable supply that is consistently of a satisfactory standard. My Department and the EPA are working in conjunction with local authorities to identify, agree and implement appropriate solutions in these cases.

I have also provided contingency funding of €10m in 2008 for smaller scale upgrading works to schemes included in the EPA list and my Department is currently finalising its examination of applications from local authorities for funding from this provision. Any major upgrading schemes required have been approved for funding under the Water Services Investment Programme and my Department is also considering proposals invited from local authorities for advance works on these schemes that would expedite compliance with security and safety of supply requirements.

Local Authority Housing.

371. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of local authority houses expected to be built from foundation to completion in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28255/08]

374. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the extent to which he provided funding to the public housing programme through the local authorities and excluding voluntary charitable or private housing organisations in 2007; his expectations for expenditure in this regard in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28258/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael Finneran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 371 and 374 together.

My Department's expenditure on the local authority construction and acquisition programme in 2007 was €941,272,980. This year my Department has allocated a record €1 billion to support construction and acquisitions projects across the country.

Because of the nature of local authority housing construction projects, where the project lifecycle may extend beyond a single year, information is not available on the number of houses expected to be built from foundation to completion in 2008.

However, data in relation to social housing starts and completions are published in my Department's Quarterly Housing Statistics Bulletins, copies of which are available in the Oireachtas library and on my Department's website, www.environ.ie.

Question No. 372 answered with Question No. 77.

Question No. 373 answered with Question No. 358.

Question No. 374 answered with Question No. 371.

Water and Sewerage Schemes.

375. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the extent to which he will fund group water schemes through the various local authorities in 2008; the extent to which this is in line with previous commitments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28259/08]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy Michael P. Kitt): Block grant allocations totalling €101.85 million have been notified to local authorities in respect of group water scheme measures from the €135 million provided for the 2008 Rural Water Programme. This is generally in line with profiled expenditure for the overall €750 million provision for the Programme in the National Development Plan 2007-2013. Details of the individual block grant allocations are available in the Oireachtas Library.

Departmental Programmes.

376. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the number of capital projects for which he has financial responsibility; the extent to which such projects have been advanced to date; the degree to which he expects them to proceed in 2008; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28260/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): My Department's capital programmes include responsibility for Housing, Water Services, Environmental Protection, Fire Services, Libraries and other capital projects implemented primarily by local authorities but also by my Department. The scale of these projects range across social and affordable housing projects, water supply and waste water treatment systems, construction and upgrading of fire stations and libraries, and improvement works at six National Parks.

Capital programmes involve many hundreds of live projects with widely varying values at various stages of implementation. I am satisfied that good progress is being made in advancing these projects.

The compilation of the information sought on all projects would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work by my Department including contact with local authorities.

Waste Management.

377. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government the details of correspondence between his Department and a company (details supplied) in Dublin 24; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28263/08]

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Deputy John Gormley): Rentokil, as holder of a hazardous waste material, has the statutory responsibility to deal safely with this material under the Waste Management Act 1996, the Safety Health and Welfare at Work Acts 1989 and 2005, the Dangerous Substances Act 1972, Protection of the Environment Act 2003 and accompanying regulations and licensing regimes. My Department's involvement has been to facilitate the local authority concerned and the company in achieving a satisfactory outcome.

On behalf of Rentokil, Arthur Cox Solicitors made my Department aware of the existence of seven cylinders of hydrogen cyanide in April 2007 at the Rentokil premises at Ballymount. This followed a series of meetings held by Rentokil with South Dublin County Council, the Defence Forces, the Fire Services and An Garda Síochána to develop a solution for the disposal of the cylinders. My Department replied to the solicitors on May 2007 notifying them that South Dublin County Council was the lead agency in respect of this matter and that the Department did not have a direct role in relation to the operational issues involved.

On 18 June 2007, the company wrote to the Minister for Defence requesting assistance in the procurement of a suitable Defence Forces site for the disposal of the cylinders. This letter was copied to my Department and its receipt was acknowledged on 19 June 2007. A further letter issued by Rentokil on 25 June 2007 to the Minister for Defence in relation to the procurement of a suitable Defence forces site was copied to my Department.

In November 2007, the company addressed a letter to the Minister for Defence and to myself outlining difficulties it had encountered in finding a suitable disposal site. An e-mail copy of the same Rentokil letter was acknowledged by my Department on 3 December 2007. On 10 December 2007, I wrote to the company stressing my concern that the matter had not been resolved and emphasising that the company had the statutory responsibility to achieve a satisfactory resolution. In January 2008, the company contacted my Department by telephone to determine the nature conservation requirements that might apply for proposed disposal sites and a reply issued on 21 February 2008 setting out conservation recommendations.

On 29 February 2008, the company wrote to my Department inviting representatives to attend a meeting on 5 March 2008 facilitated by South Dublin County Council to advise on the environmental/permissions process in relation to the disposal of the cylinders at the Defence Forces site at Kilbride. Officials of my Department were invited by the company on 12 March 2008 to a further meeting on 13 March 2008, which was facilitated by South Dublin County Council. Subsequent to the latter meeting, on 13 March 2008 my Department issued an e-mail to the company advising on statutory waste management and planning issues. A report prepared by Rentokil of the meeting held on 13 March 2008 was circulated by the company via e-mail and received in my Department.

Alternative Energy Projects.

378. **Deputy Michael Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the resources are available for farms and enterprises interested in utilising wind and wave energy; the number of farms availing of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27871/08]

384. **Deputy Michael Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the resources available for farms and enterprises interested in utilising wind and wave energy; the number of farms availing of same; the capacity at which they are operating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27870/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 378 and 384 together.

My Department administers the Renewable Energy Feed-in Tariff (REFIT) programme, which supports the construction of new renewable energy powered electricity generating plants including wind-powered and wave-powered plants. Wind energy technologies are well developed and the dominant technology in the REFIT support programme and its predecessor AER. Wave powered technology is still in the research and development phase. Sustainable

[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

Energy Ireland (SEI) also offers a variety of technical advisory services to enterprises and individuals interested in developing renewable energy projects:

- The Renewable Energy Information Office;
- The Wind Atlas;
- The SEI Renewable Energy R,D&D programme;
- The SEI guides on connecting renewable and CHP electricity generators to the electricity network; and
- Local Energy Agencies.

There are approximately 190 wind-farms in Ireland with a combined installed capacity in excess of 2,000 megawatts which have secured support and built under the previous AER support programme or have received a support commitment under the current REFIT support programme.

Decentralisation Programme.

379. **Deputy Richard Bruton** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of staff at each grade within the Ordnance Survey Office who have opted for decentralisation; the number at each grade who have been assigned to a decentralising post in the Ordnance Survey; the number of each grade who have moved to date; and the number of staff at each grade who have opted to remain in Dublin who have been assigned to other posts remaining in Dublin. [28118/08]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Seán Power): The Government's Decentralisation Programme provides for the relocation of the headquarters of Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi) from Dublin to Dungarvan.

The organisation has in place a grade-level structure and does not differentiate between the occupational categories of staff. The total staff of OSi numbers 325, of whom 105 are already in regional offices. Some 84 have either applied, been recruited or have accepted promotion for decentralisation. All of these have been assigned to posts that are due to relocate to Dungarvan. No staff have yet taken up duty in Dungarvan. 12 field staff will continue to be Dublin-based. Other staff who wish to remain in Dublin have not yet been reassigned.

380. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the status of the decentralisation of the Central Fisheries Board to Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim; the number of staff decentralised; the number to be decentralised; the timetable for same; the status of property acquisition and the cost involved; when the property will be ready for occupation; the number it will cater for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27820/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The decentralisation of the Central Fisheries Board (CFB) under the Government's Decentralisation Programme involves the relocation 62 posts to Carrick-on-Shannon. To date, none of these posts has been decentralised but I can advise the Deputy that 35 staff have been assigned to posts that are relocating.

Property solutions are being pursued in respect of my Department and its agencies as part of the overall Decentralisation Programme to be funded from the Office of Public Works

(OPW) Vote. Firm scale costs will emerge on foot of actual cost proposals being received from the market. It would not be possible to give definitive costings in advance of final agreement on specific proposals.

OPW has recently identified a possible permanent HQ for the CFB in Carrick-on-Shannon and matters on that front are being progressed with the Board. In that regard no firm timelines have as yet been established and no costs have been incurred.

Telecommunications Services.

381. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the status of the National Broadband Project; if the project will suffer due to Exchequer cutbacks; if there is provision for utilising INTERREG funding to try to improve broadband access, with areas such as Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal working with their northern counterparts to resolve the issue on a more local basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27858/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The provision of telecommunications services including broadband is, in the first instance, a matter for the private sector. Broadband service providers operate in a fully liberalised market, regulated, where appropriate, by the independent Commission for Communications Regulation, ComReg.

The widespread provision of broadband services continues to be a priority for the Government. In that regard my Department has undertaken initiatives to address the gaps in broadband coverage. These included providing grant-aid under the Group Broadband Scheme (GBS) and ongoing investment in Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs).

Although broadband is now widely available in Ireland there are still some parts of the country where the private sector will be unable to justify the commercial provision of broadband services. These areas are being addressed by the National Broadband Scheme (NBS), which will provide broadband services to areas that are currently unserved and will ensure that all requests for broadband are met. The funding earmarked under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 for broadband initiatives will be used to implement the NBS. While INTERREG funding has been used to fund broadband projects in the past, it is not intended that INTERREG funding will be used for the NBS.

The first phase of the NBS procurement process (Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ)) is now complete. The remaining candidates have been engaged in “Competitive Dialogue” with my Department and are developing their proposed solutions to meet my Department’s requirements.

Judicial Review proceedings regarding certain elements of the NBS mapping process took place on 10 and 11 June 2008 in the High Court and a judgement is awaited. While the outcome of the Judicial Review cannot be anticipated, it is currently expected that a preferred bidder for the NBS will be selected in September 2008, with rollout to commence as soon as possible thereafter.

Alternative Energy Projects.

382. **Deputy Michael Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of farms using wind energy; the locations of same; the length of time they have been using wind energy; the capacity at which they are operating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27868/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The details of windfarms currently connected and those that have received connection offers are shown in the table on a county by county basis. The amount of electricity generated in Ireland from renewable energy sources has increased significantly in recent years as follows:

- 5.2% in 2004;
- 6.8% in 2005;
- 8.6% in 2006;
- circa 9.3% in 2007.

The actual output from any individual wind farm is not available.

County	Number of Plants	Capacity (MW)
Carlow	1	5.21
Cavan	13	268.04
Clare	5	88.60
Cork	38	425.93
Dublin	0	0.00
Donegal	44	434.25
Galway	10	213.95
Kerry	34	583.29
Kildare	1	0.04
Kilkenny	3	18.75
Laois	1	21.00
Leitrim	6	63.19
Limerick	30	405.06
Longford	2	0.44
Louth	2	4.70
Mayo	14	98.84
Meath	2	12.00
Monaghan	1	7.50
Offaly	5	30.10
Roscommon	7	58.78
Sligo	12	99.87
Tipperary	28	189.92
Waterford	3	5.00
Westmeath	2	4.61
Wexford	27	178.30
Wicklow	4	13.85

383. **Deputy Michael Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of farms here using wave energy; the locations of same; the length of time they have been using wave energy; the capacity at which they are operating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27869/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): There are no wave-to-electricity projects commercially operating in Irish waters at this time. The harnessing of ocean energy remains in the research and development phase. The Ocean Energy

Strategy which is being advanced by the Ocean Energy Unit located in Sustainable Energy Ireland, is designed to ensure that Ireland's wave energy potential is realised in full.

Question No. 384 answered with Question No. 378.

Official Travel.

385. **Deputy Ciarán Lynch** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the number of representatives of his Department, particularly Ministers, Ministers of State, advisers and Departmental officials, who will be visiting Beijing in an official capacity, to coincide with the 2008 Olympic Games; and projected cost of such visits; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27946/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): No representatives from my Department will be visiting Beijing, in an official capacity, during the 2008 Olympic Games.

Departmental Publications.

386. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the details of all the publications and booklets published on behalf of his Department from 1 January 2007 to June 2008, including the cost of producing the booklets, the cost of distribution, overall costs and associated costs such as graphic design, launching and so on. [27966/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): In the time available, it has not been possible to identify and assemble the information requested.

My Department is in the process of identifying and assembling the information and I will revert to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Telecommunications Services.

387. **Deputy Frank Feighan** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources when the roll out of MANs broadband in Boyle and Castlerea, County Roscommon will be implemented and funding for same put in place as had been agreed. [28108/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): The provision of telecommunications services, including broadband, is, in the first instance, a matter for the private sector. Broadband service providers operate in a fully liberalised market, regulated, where appropriate, by the independent Commission for Communications Regulation, ComReg.

The primary role of the Government is to formulate regulatory and infrastructure policies to facilitate the provision of high quality telecommunications services by competing private sector service providers. Previously, where the market has failed to meet the demand for telecommunications and broadband services, the Government has intervened to address the market failure. Previous intervention initiatives include the construction of the open-access Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs). The MANs Programme involves the construction of high-speed, open-access Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) in towns and cities nationwide in partnership with local and regional authorities.

Phase 1 of the Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) programme provided open access, high-speed broadband networks to 27 towns and cities throughout the country. Phase 2 of the MANs programme is underway. However, MANs Projects in 28 towns were suspended, pend-

[Deputy Eamon Ryan.]

ing consideration of the findings of a Value for Money and Policy Review and a Next Generation Broadband Policy Paper both of which were published last week.

Future investment in broadband, including any investment in additional MANs, will be guided by: the outcome of the consultation on Next Generation Broadband; the recommendations of the Value for Money and Policy Review; and other analyses as appropriate.

Alternative Energy Projects.

388. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the financial assistance or resources he has provided in pursuit of the development of hybrid cars; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28111/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI) has recently published reports on Hybrid Electrical Vehicles and Battery Electric Vehicles. These reports address potential measures that might be used to stimulate uptake in Ireland and make a series of recommendations with regard to how this might be best achieved. These provide a useful template for the way forward and I have asked my Department to work with SEI and with the Department of Transport to progress matters in the context of the Sustainable Transport and Travel Action Plan currently being finalised by my colleague, the Minister for Transport.

389. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his policy on the promotion of biofuels; if this policy takes account of the impact of biofuels on the environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [27567/08]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Eamon Ryan): My policy objective in relation to biofuels is to ensure the necessary conditions and framework for sustainable biofuel production and use which enhances security of energy supply, contributes to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and contributes to our overall ambitions for renewable energy in transport.

Emerging concerns about the environmental sustainability of current biofuel production and the potential interaction with food supplies underline the complexities of biofuels. I am working with my European colleagues and the Commission to ensure that comprehensive mandatory sustainability criteria are developed and implemented for biofuels production and use. It is only in that context and taking account of all factors that the development of a genuinely sustainable biofuels industry can be assured.