

## **Written Answers.**

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**The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].**

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 13, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Pyrite Remediation Programme Implementation**

14. **Deputy Seán Ó Feargháil** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans for long-term supports for home owners affected by pyrite; if any financial support is earmarked beyond next year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44851/13]

29. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the fact that the €50 million initially promised for remedial works to houses damaged by heave due to pyrite has not been delivered and these home owners have been abandoned by the structural guarantee company, HomeBond, if he will request that HomeBond now contribute its €25 million surplus to help remediate these damaged houses. [44770/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 14 and 29 together.

Following from Government consideration of the funding of a pyrite remediation scheme through the imposition of mandatory levies on the quarrying and insurance sectors, work commenced on the development of a Pyrite Remediation Bill. However, legal difficulties arose during the drafting process and it was not possible to proceed on the intended basis. My Department and I have worked over the past number of months to resolve these difficulties and put in place an alternative means of funding a pyrite remediation scheme. In this context, I am very pleased to have secured Exchequer funding to support the implementation of a pyrite remediation scheme under the auspices of the Pyrite Resolution Board. In addition, a revised general scheme of a Bill to provide for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board has been approved for drafting as a matter of priority. My Department will be working with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel to ensure that the Bill is published at the earliest possible date and I hope to bring the legislation to the Oireachtas in this term.

The Pyrite Resolution Board, which I set up on an administrative basis earlier this year, has already made significant progress on developing appropriate systems and procedures. They will now quickly advance work on the proposed online application and processing system and also finalise work on developing other complementary systems, with appropriate checks and balances, to ensure that effective and efficient programmes of remediation are delivered to affected homeowners.

The initial phase of the remediation programme will deal with approximately 1,000 dwell-

ings which, it is estimated, are in need of repair. Initially, €10 million is being made available to my Department. Additional funding will be provided over the next two years, in the context of the further capital stimulus programme to be announced in early 2014, to deal with all dwellings deemed by the Pyrite Resolution Board to be in need of remediation. The post-2015 funding position will be dealt with having regard to the position at that time. While it is not possible, at this point in time, to estimate the number of dwellings that may require remediation post-2015, the considered view is that the numbers will not be as large as previously thought. There are a number of positive indicators that support this view. The number of persons who have registered an interest with the Pyrite Resolution Board to receive an application form for the proposed scheme is 700 approximately.

As I have indicated previously, HomeBond is a private limited company providing a structural guarantee scheme to purchasers of new homes which, since November 2008, has become an insurance scheme underwritten by Allianz Insurance. As a private company my Department has no role or function in its operations. However, the Pyrite Resolution Board is in discussions with HomeBond in relation to how best they can make a positive contribution to the implementation of a pyrite remediation process.

While it was not possible to proceed with the imposition of levies on the quarrying and insurance sectors as a means of funding a remediation scheme, it would be indefensible to leave affected homeowners without redress. Despite budgetary constraints, I am glad to have secured Exchequer funding for a pyrite remediation scheme. I would like to assure affected homeowners that there will be no undue delay on my part or on that of my Department and the Pyrite Resolution Board to ensure that the pyrite remediation scheme is delivered in the shortest possible timeframe.

### **Energy Schemes Issues**

15. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a timeframe for the retrofitting of 14,100 social housing units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44855/13]

39. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the way in which funding for the €25 million investment in housing energy efficiency in the recent budget announcements has been sourced; how it will be allocated; the criteria for persons seeking funding from this initiative; and if there are any short, medium and longer-term deadlines for implementation. [44839/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 15 and 39 together.

The €25 million investment in energy efficiency forms part of a €50 million three-year energy efficiency investment programme for local authority homes, under my Department’s Social Housing Investment Programme. It is a key part of the Government’s €150 million capital investment in the economy over 2013-14. This three-year programme will target the 25,000 least energy efficient local authority homes. Some €25 million will be provided in 2014 and it is expected that 12,500 homes will be retrofitted in the course of the year. This will result in warmer homes and lower energy bills for the families concerned and will also create around 1,000 jobs in the sector. A further €5 million is being provided where a more substantial suite of energy efficiency works are needed, such as the replacement of windows and doors or the installation of high-efficiency central heating boilers. Taking both measures together, it is estimated that some 14,110 households will benefit from this €30 million investment in 2014.

It will be a matter for the local authorities to determine the individual houses and estates that will be retrofitted under this programme. My Department will be requesting local authorities to submit details of their energy retrofitting work programmes for 2014 in due course. Capital allocations in 2014 will reflect the level of contractual commitments of works under way at end 2013, the scope and extent of the programmes submitted and the capacity to deliver these programmes in terms of frameworks in place for the taking on of contractors.

I expect these works will be undertaken by small, locally-based contractors for the most part and will provide job opportunities for the long-term unemployed. I have asked local authorities to ensure that the potential to employ local labour is exploited to the fullest extent possible, having regard to public procurement rules.

### **National Spatial Strategy**

16. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he intends to publish an updated national spatial strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44871/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The 2002 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was Ireland's first national strategic spatial planning framework. It provides the spatial vision and principles to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development and population growth between regions through the co-ordinated development of nine gateway cities and towns, and nine hub towns, together with complementary policies to activate the potential for lasting economic development in their hinterlands and wider regions. The NSS serves as a strategic context for spatial planning in Ireland by regional authorities, in their regional planning guidelines role, and for planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála in their statutory planning functions. It also seeks to influence investment priorities particularly in transport, housing, water services, communications, energy, health and education infrastructure.

While the existing NSS remains in place, together with Minister Hogan, I have recently established a successor National Spatial Strategy Scoping Group comprising three experts with extensive experience of spatial planning and economic and social development, to prepare a short scoping report on a successor to the current NSS. I expect to receive their report in the coming months following which I will bring proposals to Government on the roadmap to develop a successor NSS that will take account, inter alia, of our significantly changed economic circumstances and to contribute to sustainable national recovery. The new strategy is expected to be in place in 2015.

### **Septic Tank Registration Scheme**

17. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown by county of the number of septic tank improvement grants distributed to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44860/13]

43. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown by county of the number of septic tank inspections conducted to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44858/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 17 and 43 together.

On 25 June 2013, I signed the Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (Financial Assistance) Regulations 2013, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library. The Regulations brought into operation a grants scheme to assist with the cost of remediation of septic tanks and domestic waste water treatment systems which are deemed, following inspection under the EPA's National Inspection Plan and the subsequent issue of an Advisory Notice by the local authority, to require repair or upgrading.

The Regulations provide that, subject to the applicant meeting all qualification criteria, a local authority may pay a grant to a person who is required, following an inspection, to have repairs or upgrades to, or replacement of, a septic tank or other domestic waste water treatment system. Applications for grant aid are administered by the local authorities in whose functional area the particular domestic waste water treatment system requiring remediation is situated. Where a local authority pays a grant under the scheme, my Department will recoup 100% of the amount paid by the local authority. To date, no applications for recoupment have been submitted by the local authorities to my Department.

The Water Services (Amendment) Act 2012 assigns responsibility to the EPA to make a National Inspection Plan for domestic wastewater treatment systems. The National Inspection Plan 2013: Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems was adopted and published by the EPA in February 2013. The Plan provides for a minimum of 1,000 inspections to be carried out by the water services authorities (which are the 34 county and city councils) in the 12 month period up to July 2014. Details of the minimum number of inspections to be carried out in each county are included in the Plan.

An IT system, developed by the EPA for use by the water services authorities, underpins implementation of the National Inspection Plan. The system facilitates the selection of treatment systems for inspection based on the risk to human health or the environment and captures all information relating to inspections. This will ensure a consistent approach to inspections nationally. Implementation of the Plan is a matter for the individual water services authorities, under the supervision of the EPA. The IT system in use enables individual water services authorities to track the progress in completing inspections against the Plan's requirements and enables the EPA to monitor the progress by all authorities. The EPA has committed to review the implementation of the National Inspection Plan in 2014. As neither I nor my Department have any direct role in monitoring the implementation of the Plan, I have no information on the number of inspections carried out to date.

### **Homelessness Strategy**

18. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he remains committed to ending long-term homelessness by 2015; and the steps he is taking to achieve this target. [44847/13]

152. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a progress report on the Government's commitment to ending long-term homelessness by 2016; the framework and funding in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44925/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 18 and 152 together.

Earlier in 2013 I published the Government's Homelessness Policy Statement in which I outlined the Government's aim to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. The state-

ment emphasises a housing-led approach which is about accessing permanent housing as the primary response to all forms of homelessness. The availability and supply of secure, affordable and adequate housing is essential in ensuring sustainable tenancies and ending long-term homelessness. When I published the statement I announced a set of indicators which will be used to demonstrate the dynamics of homelessness as it is addressed. These indicators will give a clearer picture of homelessness in Ireland and, in quantifying its on-going extent, will support the bringing forward of realistic and practical solutions. I also established a high-level three-person oversight group for the purpose of reviewing the progress of the approach being advocated in the statement, identifying obstacles and proposing solutions. The group expects to provide me with their first report shortly.

Arrangements have been put in place to provide for the delegation of homelessness funding to the lead housing authority in each of the 9 regions. I consider the regional approach more appropriate as it helps to bring a more strategic perspective to bear on action to address homelessness, including avoidance of over-concentration of homelessness services in certain centres and promoting appropriate regional availability of services, consistent with need. These arrangements place an emphasis on increased decision making at local level, in lieu of the existing individual project based arrangements, to improve overall efficiency and value for money, and allow greater local decision making in homeless services. These arrangements seek to ensure that the measures being pursued by housing authorities reflect the housing-led approach advocated in the policy statement, that actions are in place towards achieving the target of ending long-term homelessness by the end of 2016 and that evidence to support progress will be presented through the reports on the indicators.

My Department is currently engaging with a number of lead housing authorities and is considering the appropriate allocation of the 2014 homelessness budget so as to ensure that Section 10 homelessness funding meets the needs in the various regions.

### **Traveller Accommodation**

19. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government where he sees the €1 million cut in social inclusion funding taking place; and the criteria that will be applied. [44815/13]

23. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government how the contents of budget 2014 will affect the accommodation and housing of members of the Traveller community in view of the many cuts to that provision over many previous budgets. [44841/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 19 and 23 together.

The Abridged Estimate for my Department for 2014 includes a capital provision of €3 million for Traveller-specific accommodation in 2014. While this represents a decrease of €1 million compared to 2013, I do not expect that this will have a major impact on activity in 2014 as the current round of Traveller Accommodation Programmes come to an end this year. This capital funding stream is used to provide 100% funding to housing authorities for the provision and maintenance of Traveller-specific accommodation and, in doing so, is designed to meet the specific and distinct accommodation needs of the Traveller community, such as halting sites and group housing schemes.

In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, new multi-annual

Traveller Accommodation Programmes, which will run for the 5-year period to the end of 2018, will be introduced in 2014. As a result, 2014 will be a transition year with a strong emphasis on the planning of programmes for the period up to end 2018. Based on the current status of approved Traveller-specific projects and considering that the new programme must be adopted by April 2014, this is considered sufficient to meet current requirements. If it transpires that the 2014 Estimates provision is insufficient, I will review the position with a view to augmenting the capital provision.

It should be recognised that the vast majority of Traveller families have opted for, and are accommodated in, standard housing provided by local authorities and financed from my Department's capital allocations for social housing, or in private rented accommodation with Rent Supplement support. It is open to Travellers to opt for any form of accommodation and local authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes are intended to reflect these preferences.

There are high vacancy levels at present in Traveller-specific group housing schemes in some local authorities. With a view to ascertaining the reasons for this, an independent research study is currently being carried out by the Housing Agency to examine the reasons why Traveller families vacate Traveller-specific accommodation and to make recommendations to inform future policy and practice. The National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC), which is a statutory body to advise me in relation to general matters concerning Traveller accommodation, has expressed concerns in relation to the level of vacant Traveller-specific accommodation nationally. It is expected that this study will be completed early in 2014 and its findings will be presented to the NTACC, who will consider the policy implications. I look forward to working with the committee on this issue and other concerns in relation to Traveller accommodation.

The Government remains committed to meeting the accommodation needs of Travellers. Since the adoption of the third round of programmes in 2009, it is estimated that over 450 units of Traveller-specific accommodation had been provided to end 2012, supported by the provision of approximately €50 million in capital funding from my Department. This is in addition to expenditure on standard local authority housing and other housing supports. The results of this substantial financial commitment are reflected in the significant reduction in the numbers of Traveller families on unauthorised sites, notwithstanding the steady increase in the numbers of Traveller families nationally over recent years.

### **Housing Finance Agency Issues**

20. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the specific criteria and rationale used to determine the advancement of loans by the Housing Finance Agency which can adequately account for the extremely wide variance in total amounts advanced across local authorities; if he will account for the large increase in total loans advanced to County Mayo in 2012 compared with other parts of the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44805/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The elected members of a local authority have direct responsibility in law for all reserved functions of the authority, including authorising borrowing, and are democratically accountable for all expenditure by the local authority.

Local authority borrowing is subject to the provisions of the Local Government Act 2001; borrowing is a reserved function under Section 106 and requires the sanction of the appropriate Minister. Borrowing proposals, including overdrafts, must be submitted to the relevant Minis-

ter together with a resolution of the local authority members approving the proposed borrowing. All borrowing by local authorities is subject to the overall limits which are set by the Government from time to time in the context of the General Government Balance.

The HFA has two basic criteria when assessing a loan application from a local authority - a valid resolution of the Council of the applicant authority and sanction from my Department or such other sanctioning Department as may be involved.

Mayo Co. Co. received €32.8m in 2012 compared to €10.8m in 2011. In the case of the Mayo loans, as with all loans, the above criteria were satisfied. The HFA had total lending of €4.4 billion at 31 December 2012 with Mayo having a total of €109m borrowed, representing 2.45% of the HFA's lending.

### **Local Government Reform**

21. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the steps his Department has taken to prepare for a referendum on the establishment of a directly elected mayor for Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44866/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** The Local Government Bill 2013, published on 17 October, provides, in Part 10, for a plebiscite to be held in the administrative areas of the four Dublin local authorities in respect of a directly elected mayor for the Dublin metropolitan area on the same day as the local elections 2014, should the four local authorities concerned pass a resolution in that regard by 31 March 2014.

In anticipation of the Bill's provisions, I wrote to the Lord Mayor of Dublin inviting the Forum or Colloquium being established to assess options for local governance in the Dublin metropolitan area under the leadership of a directly elected mayor and identifying a number of elements which would need to be addressed when developing proposals to be put before the electorate in the plebiscite. A copy of this letter is in the Oireachtas Library. I have asked for the response of the Forum by the end of the year.

### **Irish Water Funding**

22. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide full details of public funding from the Exchequer, the National Pensions Reserve Fund or any other sources that have been transferred to Uisce Éireann to date; and the projected figures for 2014 onwards. [44818/13]

45. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the fact that the installation of domestic water meters has commenced, the amount the full project will cost; and if he will provide a breakdown of current and capital spend for Irish Water. [44811/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 22 and 45 together.

The Water Sector Reform Implementation Strategy, which is published on my Department's website, is focused on ensuring that appropriate policy and legal frameworks are put in place for Irish Water and the water sector. A key objective of the reform programme is to rationalise

the cost of the current service delivery and ensure more efficient operation of water services by moving from 34 water services authorities to a single body; following enactment of comprehensive legislation later this year, these functions will transfer to Irish Water.

Bord Gáis has put in place appropriate programme management arrangements to establish Irish Water, prepare for the transfer of assets, liabilities and functions from local authorities from 1 January 2014, provide for customer service and billing and implement the domestic water metering programme. Expenditure on this programme is a matter for Bord Gáis/Irish Water and these costs are not being funded from the Exchequer. The National Pensions Reserve Fund has provided a bridging loan facility to Irish Water to meet the costs arising to the end of 2013. This includes the initial stages of the domestic water metering programme, the full cost of which is €539m excluding VAT.

Following the transfer of water services functions to Irish Water from 1 January 2014, a new funding model will be in place to meet both capital and operational costs of the new entity. Irish Water's costs in the coming years will be funded through a mix of revenue from the domestic and non-domestic sector, third party finance (such as the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, EIB, bank lending and capital markets facilities) and State support which may be in the form of both equity and subvention.

The Exchequer proposes a direct equity investment of €240m towards the capital funding of Irish Water in 2014. This will support projects to be included in Irish Water's Capital Investment Plan and will ensure that the entity is in a position to take on the water services investment programmes of the 34 water services authorities, including some 80 projects currently in progress. Irish Water will also finance some of its costs and the liabilities transferred from local authorities through borrowings in 2014.

The establishment of Irish Water and its financial relationship with the local government sector will have a considerable impact on local authority financing from 2014. Work is also underway on the funding model for Irish Water's operational costs, to ensure that Irish Water can fund the Service Level Agreements being put in place with local authorities for the delivery of water services in 2014.

*Question No. 23 answered with Question No. 19.*

### **Local Authority Housing Issues**

24. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the reports that two senior executive officers in Louth County Council used their influence to have properties in their ownership purchased by the council for social housing despite serious questions of conflict of interest and the unsuitability of at least one of the properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44837/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** New social housing supply is delivered through a range of measures under my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme (SHIP), including the construction and acquisition of social housing units directly by local authorities and by approved housing bodies, the Social Housing Leasing Initiative, the Capital Advance Leasing Facility and the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

Louth County Council acquired 18 housing units within its administrative area during 2010 as part of the work programme financed under my Department's SHIP programme. My Department now understands that two of these were in the ownership of Council employees. There

are robust legislative procedures in place under the Local Government Act of 2001 and the Ethics in Public Office Act, 1995 which set out the requirements in relation to declarable interests and the conduct of public servants in exercising their functions. There are no exceptions to these requirements.

In 2010, when the units in question were acquired, local authorities had delegated sanction to acquire housing units. This delegated sanction applied where both the numbers of units and level of funding available for the acquisition programme had been agreed with my Department. When identifying properties for acquisition, housing authorities are required to ensure that all the relevant issues are considered, including tenure mix and estate composition, specific local needs and that the acquisitions are fit for purpose and appropriate for social renting. Housing authorities are also required to achieve best value for money in the acquisition of properties. It is an absolute requirement that the local authority obtains an independent valuation of each property by a suitable qualified person. I understand this requirement was adhered to in both these cases. My Department does not have a role in the selection of particular properties for acquisition by a local authority and would not, at any time, be aware of the identification of the vendor.

The matter of the alleged conflict of interest was brought to the attention of my Department in September. Following this, my Department was in touch with senior management in Louth County Council and requested a report on the matter. The County Manager subsequently commissioned an outside independent firm of auditors and risk assessment managers to undertake a comprehensive review of the Council's social housing investment programme in 2010, including the acquisition of 18 properties and, in particular, the procedures which applied in the case of the purchase of the two houses owned by local authority employees. I understand that the review process has just completed and that the independent consultants have presented their report to the County Manager. It is absolutely essential that the public has full confidence in the exercise of public service functions and that there is strict compliance with the legislative requirements in this regard.

In fairness to all concerned, I do not propose to comment further on the issue until such time as I have considered the findings of the report and the views of the County Manager.

### **Housing Assistance Payments Administration**

25. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the way the housing assistance payment scheme will work; the persons who will be eligible for same; its role in the housing system; the areas that will pilot the scheme; and if there is a timeline for roll out across the State. [44845/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** In March 2012, the Government approved in principle the transfer of responsibility for recipients of rent supplement with an established housing need from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to local authorities using a new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). On 18 July 2013, the Government approved the introduction of HAP including the provision of funding to the local authorities to cover the costs of accommodating HAP claimants. It was also agreed that the DSP would provide for the implementation of the mandatory direct deduction of rental contributions from the welfare payments of HAP recipients and local authority tenants. My Department and the Department of Social Protection continue to work closely on the legal, policy and operational issues involved in developing and introducing HAP.

My Department is also working closely with the County and City Managers Association (CCMA) in overseeing plans for the implementation of HAP, but more specifically at this stage in relation to the test phase, which is planned for 2014 (subject to the enactment of the relevant legislation). A Project Implementation Team is in place and will be responsible for detailed planning and implementation during the testing and roll-out phases.

The CCMA has identified Limerick as the lead authority to drive implementation in the local government sector. The other authorities currently nominated for the test phase are:

- South Dublin County Council
- Louth County Council
- Kilkenny County Council
- Waterford City Council
- Cork County Council
- Monaghan County Council

A detailed business process design exercise for HAP involving input from all the relevant key stakeholders has recently been completed. The Implementation Team will now, in conjunction with my Department, develop a plan for testing the scheme in the selected authorities in 2014 (subject to the required legislation being in place), with full roll out of the scheme to follow once the test phase is complete. Consideration, where possible, will be given to what aspects of the scheme can be progressed under existing mechanisms prior to enactment of the required legislation.

HAP is being designed so as to bring all of the social housing services provided by the State together under the local authority system, with local authorities being responsible for all households with an established housing need and ensuring significant efficiencies in the provision of rental assistance. HAP will provide a new framework for the provision of rental assistance, and will, in as much as it can, facilitate the removal of existing barriers to employment in the rent supplement scheme by allowing HAP recipients to remain in the scheme if they gain full-time employment.

Under the new scheme applicants will source their own accommodation within the private rented market (as currently happens with rent supplement) and the tenancy agreement will be between the HAP recipient and the private landlord. The local authority will pay the new assistance payment on the tenant's behalf directly to the landlord. The tenant will pay a rental contribution to the local authority based on the differential rent scheme for the relevant local authority.

During the test phase, it is envisaged that the authorities will initially focus on new applicants before moving on a progressive basis to those already in receipt of Rent Supplement. It is also intended that the test phase will prioritise, as much as possible, the transfer of long-term unemployed rent supplement recipients to HAP. This is a reasonable approach to implementation, which will allow any issues that arise to be dealt with in a graduated way and give local authorities sufficient time to scale up the operation of HAP within their housing directorates.

## **Rural Recreation Policy**

26. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local

Government his plans for the development of rural recreation in 2014; the increase or decrease in funding available from his Department for this purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44881/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** Within the community and rural development funding available to my Department for 2014, I will be allocating some €3.68m to rural recreation services, an indicative increase of 5.2% on 2013 allocation. My Department continues to engage with the Local Development Companies, where Service Level Agreements are in place in relation to the delivery of a range of recreation services including the continued implementation of the Walks Scheme and other appropriate schemes and actions to implement relevant objectives of the National Countryside Recreation Strategy.

The Walks Scheme was launched in March 2008 on the recommendation of Comhairle na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council) and represented an innovative response to facilitating the development and maintenance of many of Ireland's key walking trails. This Scheme brings the landholders in as key participants in the provision of high quality walking trails, by contracting them to undertake maintenance work on the trails in line with agreed work plans. The Walks Scheme is currently operating on 40 trails supported by 1,811 landowners, and is being managed by 16 Local Development Companies around the country.

My Department is continuing negotiations with other State Agencies to agree a National Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters in Ireland. My Department also continues to be a main funding partner of Leave No Trace Ireland which promotes responsible recreational use in the outdoors. It encourages all outdoor enthusiasts to act responsibly outdoors and to protect lands used by the public for the benefit of the environment and for future generations. My Department chairs regular meetings of Comhairle Na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council) where matters are discussed relating to rural recreation/activity tourism and furthering the implementation of the priorities of the National Countryside Recreation Strategy (NCRS).

It is intended to facilitate access to the uplands for hill walking and similar activities and a Pilot Mountain Access scheme is under way at Mount Gable in Connemara. Discussions are continuing regarding the expansion of the initial proposed Carrantuohill Pilot to the entire McGillicuddy Reeks in Co Kerry. A report on the Kerry Mountain Access scheme is currently being prepared and should be available towards the end of 2013.

My Department is currently negotiating the implementation of a National Indemnity Scheme which would indemnify private landowners against claims from recreational users for injury or damage to property. The Occupiers Liability Act of 1995 already provides significant protection to landowners, but the upfront costs of successfully defending a claim can be significant. The development of the indemnity scheme is not expected to lead to any major increased demand for funding.

### **Housing Adaptation Grants Funding**

27. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to deal with the serious shortfall in funding for the housing adaptation scheme for older persons and persons with disabilities in view of the severe need for support due to a social housing shortage. [44840/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I am aware of the challenges we face in delivering housing

supports to a range of vulnerable households and groups. The requirement to reduce public expenditure to sustainable levels is impacting on capital programmes all across the public service, including my Department's housing capital programme. The level of capital funding available has declined significantly in recent years along the lines highlighted in the Medium Term Exchequer Framework for Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2012-2016. As a result capital spending on housing programmes is subject to constraint over the short-term.

Substantial grant funding was provided for improving and adapting private houses in recent years - in the past two years almost 22,000 householders benefitted under the schemes. On 22 February 2013 I announced Exchequer allocations to local authorities under the suite of Grants for Older People and People with a Disability amounting to €34.2 million. Through active management of the overall housing budget for 2013, I allocated further funding across all local authorities on 19 July bringing the overall funding for these grants to €36.5 million. My Department is closely monitoring expenditure across all the measures under the housing programme. I will consider allocating further funds to the grants measure in the event of any saving arising elsewhere.

The Abridged Estimate for my Department, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Expenditure Report 2014, provides some €28.6 million in respect of the grants measure. This will be supplemented by the recently announced €10 million in additional funding for the measure, giving an overall provision in 2014 of €38.6 million, some €4.3 million more than the initial allocation in 2013.

I am currently reviewing the operation of the suite of Grants for Older People and People with a Disability with the objective of targeting those in most need and ensuring that the maximum numbers of households can benefit from these schemes. I intend to announce revised terms and conditions for the grant schemes before the end of the year.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

28. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government where funding for the proposed €30 million social housing boost in the recent budget will be sourced from; how it will be allocated; and if there are any short, medium and longer-term deadlines for implementation of this scheme. [44834/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I expect the recently announced €30 million additional Exchequer investment in social housing to deliver up to 500 local authority homes for families on the housing waiting list. Approximately half of this investment will facilitate the construction of new infill housing developments in areas with a high demand for social housing. It is intended that €15 million will be invested in bringing vacant and boarded-up local authority houses back into productive use.

The detailed arrangements for the implementation of the two measures are being developed by my Department at present. I intend to announce these arrangements as soon as possible with a view to having the investment programme up and running as early as possible in 2014. My Department will be requesting local authorities to submit proposals for inclusion under both measures in due course.

*Question No. 29 answered with Question No. 14.*

## **Local Authority Housing Provision**

30. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which an assessment has been done of the local authority housing need in the greater Dublin area with a view to urgent utilisation of the recently announced budgetary provisions in this regard, with particular reference to the need to ensure the immediate provision of directly built local authority houses is facilitated throughout County Kildare - and north Kildare specifically, where the housing crisis is worsening; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44786/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** In accordance with Section 21 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, I directed all housing authorities to prepare a summary of social housing assessments carried out in their areas on 7 May 2013. The data submitted by housing authorities are currently being analysed and, once verified, a report on the findings will be published by the Housing Agency. The report findings will detail the number of households on waiting lists in each local authority, broken down by basis of need, employment status, age of applicant, length of time on waiting list and other categories. This information will provide an important insight into the level and type of need for social housing support across the country.

I expect the recently announced €30 million additional investment in social housing to deliver up to 500 local authority homes for families on the housing waiting list. Approximately half of this investment will facilitate the construction of new infill housing developments in areas with a high demand for social housing. It is intended that €15 million will be invested in bringing vacant and boarded-up local authority houses back into productive use.

The detailed arrangements for the implementation of the measures are being developed by my Department at present. I intend to announce these arrangements as soon as possible with a view to having the investment programme up and running as early as possible in 2014.

## **Homelessness Strategy**

31. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will confirm that funding cuts to Dublin City Council have resulted in a €4.5 million cut to homelessness services in the city; and the rationale for this in the context of the Government's commitment to ending long-term homelessness. [44836/13]

69. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the manner in which the local authorities in the Dublin area will be required to absorb cuts to their budgets at this year end in a manner that will not adversely impact on the provision of homeless services by the local authorities. [44776/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I propose to take Question Nos. 31 and 69 together.

I refer to the reply to Question No. 366 of 22 October 2013, which sets out the position in regard to homelessness funding and services in the Dublin area.

## **Wind Energy Generation**

32. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Lo-

cal Government when revised regulations on the construction of wind farms will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44767/13]

37. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the regulations that will be implemented for wind turbines erected near residential properties and main roads; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35674/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 32 and 37 together.

My Department is currently undertaking a targeted review of the Wind Energy Guidelines 2006 focusing on noise, proximity and shadow flicker. The indicative timetable for the publication of the draft guidelines is Quarter 4 of 2013. The draft guidelines will – like all other new or revised guidelines – go out for extensive public consultation for a period of 6 weeks to 2 months, to allow for publication of the final guidelines in 2014. All interested parties are welcome to make written submissions during this consultation period. Once the consultation period is closed, the submissions received on the draft guidelines will be considered and taken into account in the final form of the guidelines.

### **Rural Development Policy**

33. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the services that will be impacted by the 49% reduction in funding to community and rural development. [44809/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I refer to the reply to Priority Question No. 1 on today’s order paper which sets out the position in this matter.

### **Water Quality**

34. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when he will allocate the €2.2 million funding required by Donegal County Council to rectify the long-standing issues with drinking water in Rathmullan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44833/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** The West Donegal Regional Water Supply Scheme is included in my Department’s Water Services Investment Programme 2010 – 2013 as a scheme to advance through planning during the lifetime of the Programme.

Donegal County Council has submitted proposals to my Department for a large number of “Advance Work Contracts” on the scheme, including works to improve the water supply in Rathmullen, in advance of submitting the full Preliminary Report for the scheme for approval. These proposals are under examination in my Department.

### **Community Development Initiatives**

35. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on whether there should be a process of adequate consultation

with representatives of the community sector and the communities they serve before there is any further progress on the establishment or work of local and community development committees and socioeconomic committees. [44810/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** Local Community Development Committees, which are to be established as part of the reforms set out in Putting People First – Action Programme for Effective Local Government, will be based on a consultative and participative approach to the delivery of the new enhanced role for local government in community development. The Local Government Bill 2013 will provide that these committees will include representatives of local community interests, as well as members of the local authority, and representatives of other public authorities and of publicly funded or supported local development bodies. Representatives of local community interests will, in the main, be drawn from local Community and Voluntary Fora, which are a collective representative structure for the community and voluntary sector in each local area and play an important role in facilitating local communities in making an input into various consultative processes.

The participative approach underpinning Local Community Development Committees, with the involvement of Community and Voluntary Fora and other local stakeholders, will build on the consultation with stakeholders that has already taken place in relation to the reforms covering the enhanced alignment of local government and local development. The Alignment Steering Group, which I established to examine this area, undertook consultation with key stakeholders, including local development companies, local authorities (both city/county managers and elected representatives), the Community and Voluntary Fora, Volunteer Centres, representative bodies for community and voluntary organisations, and service users.

A partnership approach is also being followed in progressing the implementation of the Steering Group's recommendations, via an Alignment Working Group which comprises representatives of the City/County Managers Association, the Irish Local Development Network and Pobal. The Working Group has engaged with the Community and Voluntary sector, as well as with other important stakeholders, in considering how best to progress the alignment recommendations. More recently, I established a working group on citizen engagement to make recommendations on more extensive and diverse input by citizens into the decision-making process and to allow for facilitation of input by citizens into decision making at the local government level.

The reforms in Putting People First are based on greater local empowerment. The work now underway on citizen engagement and the development of new participative arrangements, such as Local Community Development Committees, reflect the strong level of consultation already underway, which will continue as the reforms are implemented.

### **Waste Management Expenditure**

36. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the increase in funding in budget 2014 of 19% for the environment and waste management, how this funding will be used; and the reason for the cut in the landfill levy by 21%. [44813/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** Overall Exchequer capital and current funding for environmental and waste management programmes is being increased by 19% from €29.25m in 2013 to €34.67m in 2014. In terms of how this funding will be used, a full breakdown of the multi-annual capital investment

framework provided for under Budget 2014, by ministerial Group, is set out in the Expenditure Report for 2014. This Report, which provides a breakdown of the capital allocations by programme heading, including environmental and waste management programmes, on page 184, was published on 16 October by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and can be accessed at: <http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2014/Documents/Expenditure%20Report%202014.pdf>. In particular, additional capital provision is being made in respect to landfill remediation.

There has been no cut to the landfill levy. Proceeds from the levy are paid into the Environment Fund and the total estimated revenue to be received from the levy in 2014 is €39.9 million; this represents a decrease of 21% on the estimated income for 2013. However, it is important to note that the landfill levy is chargeable on waste presented for disposal at landfill facilities. It is intended, primarily, to act as an economic instrument to encourage more sustainable management of our waste by diverting it away from landfill. The decrease in income from the levy indicates that the instrument continues to be effective in decreasing the amount of residual waste consigned to landfill.

*Question No. 37 answered with Question No. 32.*

### **Climate Change Policy**

38. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he plans to change the climate change policy in view of the recent International Panel on Climate Change report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44873/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I refer to the reply to Question No. 384 of 8 October 2013. As stated in that reply, the report of the Inter governmental Panel on Climate Change has been developed and published in an international context and has no specific implications that are unique to Ireland. Through the EU, Ireland is contributing constructively to the on-going negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, aimed at finding agreement on a new global climate treaty in 2015. Our contribution is strengthened by the steps we are taking to develop progressive national policy and legislation.

In this regard, I published a Programme for the Development of National Climate Policy and Legislation in January 2012. The Programme sets out specific milestones over a two-year period planned to culminate in Government adopting a national policy position on transition to a low-carbon future and finalising the introduction of climate legislation early in 2014.

*Question No. 39 answered with Question No. 15.*

### **Social and Affordable Housing Provision**

40. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his response to the ongoing housing crisis, particularly in Dublin; and if he will be undertaking to recommence investment in building new housing units across the country to address the crisis. [39146/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The Government's housing policy statement, published in June 2011, clearly identifies that the priority for Government will be to meet the most acute needs of households applying for social housing support. I am determined to ensure that the

social housing programme optimises the delivery of social housing and the return for the resources invested. To achieve this, it is essential that we continue to tailor the use of available Exchequer supports to prevailing conditions and explore the full range of solutions to address housing needs. The financial parameters within which we continue to operate rule out a return to large capital funded construction programmes. The Government is committed to responding more quickly and on a larger scale to social housing support needs through a variety of mechanisms, including through increased provision of social housing.

In July 2012 I announced details of a three-year funding programme of €100 million to deliver some 800 new units of voluntary and local authority owned social housing. I am monitoring expenditure under my Department's housing programme for 2013, together with the level of contractual commitments extending into 2014, with a view to a decision later this year on approving some limited new construction and house purchases over the period to end 2014. In addition to the €525.8m in housing programme expenditure provided for in my Department's Estimate for 2014, Budget 2014 provides a further €50 million to fund infrastructural investment primarily in the housing area, including €30 million to recommence a State house building programme; €10 million for an unfinished housing estate resolution project; and €10 million for housing adaptation grants. When this is taken into account, funding for housing for next year is effectively maintained at 2013 levels.

Delivery of social housing is significantly facilitated through more flexible funding models such as the Rental Accommodation Scheme and leasing, but the Government continues to be committed to other funding mechanisms that will increase the supply of permanent new social housing. Such mechanisms include options to purchase, build to lease and the sourcing of loan finance by approved housing bodies for construction and acquisition. In addition, my Department and the Housing Agency are also engaged with NAMA to ensure continued delivery of housing units for social purposes. Approved Housing Bodies will also play a key role in 2014 in the delivery of social housing and in particular in its capacity to attract external financial investment.

In spite of the current challenging circumstances, I expect the final output across all social housing programmes for 2013 to be in the region of 5,000 new housing units, and it is provisionally estimated that in the region of 5,000 units will be provided for social housing in 2014.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with the housing authorities. Work continues between central and local government and the voluntary sector to ensure that the considerable monies spent on services for the homeless are effectively and appropriately targeted.

### **Motor Tax Collection**

41. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will consider allowing persons additional time to tax their machinery and pay any necessary arrears under the new road tax regime, given that many persons will need to get a vehicle registration certificate issued for their machinery, which will take considerable time, and in view of concerns that farmers are suffering distress in getting their paperwork processed on time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40805/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** The primary purpose of the Non-Use of Motor Vehicles Act 2013 is to replace the system whereby vehicles were declared off the road retrospectively when next being taxed with a procedure under which vehicles must now be declared off the road in advance. The Act provided

for a three month transition period from its commencement to allow vehicle owners to bring their motor tax status up to date. The relevant provisions of the Act commenced on 1 July 2013 and, accordingly, are fully in force since 1 October 2013; extensive public notice of the Act's coming into force was given over the period since 1 July.

As precision is needed in taxation measures to provide certainty to those liable to pay the tax, the Act does not allow discretion to extend the deadline.

### **Leader Programmes Funding**

42. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when Local Development Companies will be in a position to accept new applications for Leader funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44832/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** My Department is carefully monitoring expenditure and approvals under the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. I will assess unallocated funding in early November with a view to reallocating available funding to other qualifying projects, so that all funding will be allocated to qualifying projects before the end of 2013. My Department is currently preparing for the next Programming period 2014-20 which is expected to be operational in 2015.

*Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 17.*

### **Regeneration Projects Funding**

44. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the way 2014 funding for regeneration projects will be allocated; and the progress in the major regeneration schemes across the State. [44846/13]

64. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the way in which the €79 million allocated for housing regeneration will be divided between those specific areas of regeneration in Dublin and Limerick; and the way the remainder of the fund will be allocated. [44807/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 44 and 64 together.

My Department currently supports an ambitious programme of regeneration which seeks to address the causes of disadvantage in communities and large social housing estates and flat complexes through holistic programmes of physical, social and economic regeneration. Some €70m is being provided in 2014 to support the completion or continuation of regeneration projects at a number of locations around the country including large scale projects in Ballymun, Dublin City, Limerick and Cork and smaller scale projects at Tralee, Sligo and Dundalk. A further €9 million is being allocated for a remedial works programme, focussed largely on the deep retrofitting of social housing units at a number of estates and flat complexes, including Liberty House in Dublin city.

The funding available for regeneration in 2014 will be allocated on the basis of the level of contractual commitments on regeneration projects currently underway and the regeneration

work programmes to be submitted for 2014. I intend to announce details of these allocations early in the New Year.

Good progress is being made in the delivery of regeneration projects across the country. In relation to Dublin, construction works at Ballymun and St. Michael's Estate, Inchicore will be substantially completed in 2014. Plans for the refurbishment of 63 units and the construction of 37 new units at Dolphin House are well advanced, with demolition and construction works due to commence late 2014 or early 2015.

In the case of the redevelopment of St. Teresa's Gardens, the retrofitting of apartments to facilitate the de-tenanting of apartments due for demolition has commenced and it is anticipated that 16 units will be completed by the end of the year. This will facilitate the demolition of vacant units and the start of preparatory work for the construction of 50 new units on the cleared site.

In relation to Limerick, the regeneration programme over the past five years has facilitated a substantial acquisition and re-housing programme with over 1,000 households relocated to date. I recently launched a comprehensive Framework Implementation Plan which has the capacity to transform the four regeneration areas within Limerick. The implementation of this plan will see construction and refurbishment accelerate in all regeneration areas in 2014.

The proposed works for Cork City North West Regeneration are being carried out on a phased basis and in accordance with available funding. All the tenants from Phase 1 have now been relocated and the houses have been demolished. Work is due to commence shortly on the construction of 23 new social houses.

The Mitchel's Area regeneration programme in Tralee is in its final phase, having made significant progress in the delivery of key elements including the delivery of Phases 1 and 2 of the Tobar Naofa housing development.

The regeneration of the Cranmore estate in Sligo and Cox's Demesne in Dundalk are at an early stage of development. However, some important initial works have been completed including, in the case of the Cranmore Estate, a windows and doors replacement programme and the completion of the initial phases of the Cleveragh Regional Park. In the case of Cox's Demesne, the retrofitting of a number of houses has been completed with the next phase focusing on the strategic demolition of a number of dwellings and the construction of some new dwellings.

*Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 22.*

### **Departmental Expenditure**

46. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the rationale for the cut of €58 million from the housing budget, including €15.3 million from local authorities and €14.4 million from approved housing bodies, respectively, in the context of almost 112,000 applicants on the housing waiting lists and increasing difficulty for rent supplement and RAS recipients, given higher rents and increased minimum contributions. [44843/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** In terms of the delivery of social housing, the Government's housing policy statement, published in June 2011, clearly identifies that the priority for Government will be to meet the most acute needs of households applying for social housing

support. The process of framing Budget 2014 involved making difficult choices given the overriding need to make the fiscal adjustments required to support exit from the EU-IMF Programme. The Abridged Estimate for my Department, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Expenditure Report 2014, provides €525.8 million in respect of the Housing Programme. These resources have been supplemented by a further €50 million announced in the Budget to fund infrastructural investment primarily in the housing area, including €30 million to recommence a State house building programme; €10 million for an unfinished housing estate resolution project; and €10 million for housing adaptation grants. When taken together funding for housing for next year is effectively maintained at 2013 levels.

### **Local Development Companies Expenditure**

47. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he plans to provide the local development companies at present operating the Leader programme with interim funding once their current contracts are concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44879/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** Under the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 local development companies (LDCs) are permitted to spend up to 20% of their allocation on administration; this is approximately €74 million of the revised Programme value of €370m. In addition operational funding is also provided for animation activities. This is a substantial percentage of the fund and I have no plans to make additional interim funding available in addition to this.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Expenditure**

48. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the way in which funding for the €100 million investment in housing for the elderly in the recent budget announcements has been sourced; the way it will be allocated; the criteria for persons seeking to be housed with this initiative; and if there are any short, medium and longer term deadlines for implementation. [44835/13]

70. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on whether the reduction in spending on social housing by €700 million from 2010 to €80.9 million for 2014 is regrettable and regressive. [44808/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 48 and 70 together.

The level of capital funding available to my Department has decreased significantly in recent years along the lines highlighted in the Medium Term Exchequer Framework for Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2012-2016. The Abridged Estimate for my Department, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Expenditure Report 2014, provides €525.8 million in respect of the Housing Programme. These resources have been supplemented by a further €50 million announced in the Budget to fund infrastructural investment primarily in the housing area which includes €30 million to recommence a State house building programme; €10 million for an unfinished housing estate resolution pilot project; and €10 million for housing adaptation grants. When taken in conjunction, funding for Housing is effectively maintained at 2013 levels.

I am determined to ensure that the social housing programme optimises the delivery of social housing and the return for the resources invested. To achieve this, it is essential that we tailor the use of available Exchequer supports to prevailing conditions and explore the full range of solutions to address housing need. The 2014 Estimates will provide capital funding which will allow progress to continue to be made across a range of programmes under my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme (SHIP). These measures will include the provision of over €40 million to continue the local authority housing construction and acquisitions programme. I am confident that the additional €30 million being invested in local authority housing will facilitate the construction of new infill developments in areas with the highest demand for social housing and will bring long-term vacant units back into social use resulting in up to 500 new homes becoming available for families in 2014. I envisage that some 4,500 additional housing units will be provided next year through leasing and existing capital programmes.

Significant funding is also being provided to support the national regeneration programme with over €79 million available in 2014 to target the country's most socially disadvantaged communities and to support a range of remedial works schemes. 2014 will also see €25 million provided which will improve the energy efficiency of 12,500 local authority houses, resulting in warmer homes and lower energy bills for thousands of families.

In 2014, I will continue to focus the available resources towards the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sectors of the community. The capital provision will include over €40 million for the provision of accommodation by Approved Housing Bodies (AHB's) to be funded under the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). Under CAS, funding of up to 100% of the approved cost is available for the provision of accommodation to meet the needs of persons with specific categories of housing need including older people. The additional €10 million provision under the suite of Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, as announced last week, will facilitate the payment of more than 7,800 grants to assist older people and people with disabilities to remain at home for longer.

### **Unfinished Housing Developments**

49. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide details of the mechanism for the use of a new unfinished estate fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44862/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I intend to develop a fund for the resolution of certain unfinished housing developments that have not been possible to resolve up to this point. The precise criteria under which the fund will be disbursed are currently being developed and will be finalised shortly. However, I envisage that the fund will operate in a carefully targeted and evidence led fashion to aid the resolution of occupied developments and in a way that will stimulate more significant investment by the owners of these developments, including generating additional employment through the resolution works.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

50. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the outcome of the wind energy guidelines focused review, the deadline for which closed in February; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44803/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Gov-**

**ernment (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** My Department is currently undertaking a targeted review of the Wind Energy Guidelines 2006 focusing on noise, proximity and shadow flicker. The indicative timetable for the publication of the draft revised guidelines is Quarter 4 2013. The draft guidelines will – like all other new or revised guidelines – go out for extensive public consultation for a period of 6 weeks to 2 months, to allow for publication of the final guidelines in 2014. The public will be notified about the consultation period through media notices and a copy of the draft guidelines will be made available on my Department’s website. All interested parties are welcome to make written submissions during this consultation period. Once the consultation period is closed, the submissions received on the draft guidelines will be considered and taken into account in the final form of the guidelines.

My Department previously invited submissions from the public as part of a pre-consultation process in January 2013 which marked the initial stage in this review process. This was essentially a pre-draft consultation intended to inform the preparation of revised draft guidelines. This previous consultation has allowed for the public and other stakeholders to input into the process at an early stage.

### **Community Development Initiatives**

51. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the projected reduction in funding for the RAPID and LCDP programmes in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44877/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** The Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) is one of my Department’s main social inclusion programmes. The objective of the LCDP is to tackle poverty and social exclusion through partnership and constructive engagement between Government, and its agencies, and people in disadvantaged communities. It is a key tool of Government in providing supports for the ‘harder to reach’ in the most disadvantaged areas and communities. €47.707 million is being provided in the 2014 indicative allocation for the Local and Community Development Programme, a reduction of €1million or 2% on the 2013 allocation, the smallest reduction to the Programme since 2010.

In allocating resources in the prevailing stringent budgetary situation, I am particularly conscious of the need to support funding levels for the LCDP, to ensure that resources are allocated in the fairest way possible and to make the maximum contribution to job creation and economic recovery. In our current economic circumstances and with high levels of unemployment, the LCDP is more relevant than ever as it creates employment opportunities and gives those most distant from the labour market the skills to access training and jobs. The Programme provides employment supports, training, personal development/capacity building and other supports for the harder to reach in the most disadvantaged areas in society. The funding provided in 2014 will be used to increase access to formal and informal educational activities and resources, and to increase people’s work readiness and employment prospects. For example, some 14,000 people who are distanced from the labour market will receive direct one-to one labour market training and supports through the Programme in 2014.

I provided €2 million in capital funding for RAPID in 2013, which is being used to meet my Department’s existing contractual commitments on RAPID projects, mainly Sports Capital top-ups and CCTV systems, jointly funded with the Departments of Transport, Tourism and Sport and Justice and Equality respectively. The capital allocation for RAPID for 2014 is €1.9million, a reduction of 5%.

The LCDP and RAPID programmes will in future be overseen by new Local Community Development Committees which are to be established in each Local Authority area as part of the reforms set out in Putting People First – Action Plan for Effective Local Government with the objective of bringing greater co-ordination on an area basis to publicly-funded programmes.

### **Dormant Accounts Fund Deposits**

52. **Deputy John Browne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of moneys accumulated to date in the dormant account fund since its inception; the amount available at present; his plans to allocate such funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44895/13]

55. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the allocation in next year's Estimate for expenditure under dormant accounts measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44882/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 and 55 together.

Under the Dormant Accounts legislation, balances on dormant accounts with banks, building societies and An Post and the net encashment value of certain life assurance policies are paid into the Dormant Accounts Fund, which is managed by the National Treasury Management Agency. The primary purpose of the legislation is to re-unite the original account holders with their moneys, including all interest due. In addition, the legislation also provides that disbursements from the fund may be made for charitable purposes or for purposes of community benefit. Since its establishment in April 2003 to the end of September 2013, the transfers to the Dormant Accounts Fund have totalled some €724.6m, which includes interest earned of approximately €39.8m. Funds reclaimed in that period by account holders amounted to around €267.6m. €278m of disbursements have been approved, with €251m already spent on projects designed to benefit the community over the same period. The current balance of uncommitted funds is €120.6m.

The Disbursement Plan of 2009, put in place by the Dormant Accounts Board, will be replaced shortly by a new disbursement scheme in accordance with the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act 2012. The 2012 Act also provides for the preparation of an action plan, to give effect to the disbursement scheme. The plan will indicate the programmes or types of projects that may apply for disbursement and the maximum funds available. Different amounts may be specified in the plan in relation to a particular class or classes of programme or project.

This year, I have allocated €6.385m for Dormant Accounts Measures, which includes €2.835m to be used to support labour force activation measures in local authorities. The budget provision for 2014 is €5.456m, made up of €3.45 current and €2.006 capital. This will allow for the continuation of funding to support the labour force activation measures and the implementation of a modest action plan. Further data in relation to Dormant Accounts Funding is available on my Department's website at [www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie).

### **Shared Ownership Scheme**

53. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in respect of the Housing and Sustainable Communities Agency's review of the shared ownership housing scheme if he will indicate the main recommendations; the spe-

cific difficulties that have been identified; the potential financial exposures to local authorities that have been identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44806/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Government’s 2011 housing policy statement announced the standing down of all affordable housing schemes, including the shared ownership scheme, in the context of a full review of Part V of the Planning and Development Act. The review is available on my Department’s website [www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie).

Earlier in 2013, I asked the Housing & Sustainable Communities Agency to conduct a stand-alone review of the shared ownership scheme, including identification of the main difficulties and recommendations for mitigating measures. I have received an interim draft of the review from the Agency and I intend to issue a circular letter to local authorities this month with preliminary recommendations arising from the review.

A number of issues have been identified that need further detailed financial analysis in order to fully assess the impact on local authority finances of possible mitigating measures. This additional work is underway and I expect to make further determinations in the coming months. At that time consideration will be given to the publication of relevant inputs to the review process.

### **Wastewater Treatment Issues**

54. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if planned upgrades for waste water treatment are likely to be delayed due to the establishment of Irish Water. [44820/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** Wastewater schemes and contracts included in my Department’s Water Services Investment Programme 2010–2013 (WSIP) have been progressed as expeditiously as possible over the period of the programme. From 1 January 2014 Irish Water will be responsible for the delivery of water services capital infrastructure and is currently preparing a Capital Investment Plan for 2014 - 2015. I expect that this Plan will provide for the transition of relevant projects currently included in the WSIP.

*Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 52.*

### **Leader Programmes Expenditure**

56. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total allocation of funding available under the Leader programme 2007-2013; the amount spent to date; the amount remaining to be spent until the end of the programme; the latest date for the spending of this money; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44875/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** The total spend under Axes 3 & 4 of the Programme to date is €213 million, leaving an estimated balance of €157 million to be spent on projects and operating costs. The Local Development Companies (LDC) contracted to deliver the Programme on behalf of my Department also administer a food measure under Axis 1 of the Programme and to date almost €2 million has been committed under this measure with expenditure of €230,147. The EU regulations al-

low for expenditure under the Programme to continue up to the end of 2015.

### **Environmental Impact Statements**

57. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the court rejection of the Corrib gas terminal licence application if he will consider a system where environmental impact assessments for planning applications are undertaken independently by local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44804/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) of 3 March 2011 in case C50/09 found that Irish legislation was not fully in conformity with the EIA Directive (2011/92/EU). Specifically, the Court found that in a case where a project requiring EIA required both planning permission and an Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) licence, the fact that Irish legislation did not prevent the Environment Protection Agency from making a licensing decision before the planning permission application was decided, and therefore before the EIA was completed, meant that part of the overall consent for the project (i.e. the licence) was being decided without an EIA being first carried out, contrary to Articles 2 and 4 of the EIA Directive.

In order to comply with the Court ruling it was necessary to make amendments to the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1992 and the Planning and Development Act, 2000 in relation to the assessment of projects which require both a consent under the Planning and Development Act 2000 and an IPPC licence. These amendments were made in the European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control) Regulations 2012, which came into effect on 30 September 2012 (new application for IPPC licences) and the European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control) (No.2) Regulations 2012, which came into effect on 15 November 2012 (IPPC licence applications on hands).

I consider that the legislation in relation to the environmental impact assessment of the projects referred to above is now fully compliant with the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive and I have no plans further to amend the legislation in this regard.

### **Local Authority Housing Mortgages**

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 68 of 16 October 2013, in respect of which a generic reply was received in respect of a specific question, if it is accepted that the role of the local authorities in the context of the determination of eligibility for local authority housing loans differs from that of commercial lending or banking institutions in so far as the local authority is a statutory housing authority with responsibility to meet the housing needs of those eligible under two headings, namely directly built local authority houses and by way of local authority loans; if it is recognised that the activities of the Irish Credit Bureau are effectively frustrating the latter function; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44785/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The reply to Parliamentary Question No. 68 of the 16 of October 2013 sets out the intrinsic role of the Irish Credit Bureau in the local authority loan process, as was requested. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual loan

applications.

Local authorities have for many years provided housing loan finance to people of limited means and who could not access such finance in the commercial market. One of the qualifying conditions for such local authority loans was the provision of evidence of refusal from two commercial lenders. In extending housing loans, local authorities are as flexible as possible when dealing with borrowers experiencing difficulties servicing those loans.

Housing loans extended by local authorities are based on obtaining matching finance from the Housing Finance Agency which must in turn be serviced by local authorities. Any default on a housing loan exposes the local authority to a drain on its finances in continuing to service loans. In extending loans, it is also critical to ensure that borrowers are capable of servicing the loan sought, thus avoiding the distress which might ensue should the home be repossessed as a result of unsustainability.

The credit guidelines for housing loans, introduced in 2009, were intended to standardise best practice throughout the sector, and apply a transparent and coherent process to the assessment of loans. Central to this was the requirement to have the application subjected to examination by the Irish Credit Bureau, to ensure that each loan was similarly treated and assessed. Anecdotally, loans extended under the guidelines are performing more satisfactorily than those not subjected to these guidelines.

I am satisfied that the guidelines in place, and the checking of applications by the Irish Credit Bureau, represent prudent practice and work in the best interests of borrower and lender alike.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

59. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in view of the fact that the European Court of Justice has several cases against Ireland over non-implementation of environmental legislation, the way these will be addressed if the implementation of the capital programme is delayed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44819/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** There are currently two cases in which the Court of Justice of the European Union has delivered judgment in areas for which my Department has responsibility and which involve capital works. These cases relate to implementation of Directives on urban wastewater treatment and waste management.

Water and wastewater schemes and contracts included in my Department's Water Services Investment Programme 2010–2013, which are being promoted to ensure compliance with EU requirements, have been progressed as expeditiously as possible and continue to be progressed in that manner. From 1 January 2014, Irish Water will take over responsibility for the delivery of water services capital infrastructure and is currently preparing a Capital Investment Plan for 2014-2015. I expect that this Plan will include relevant projects from the current Water Services Investment Programme.

Capital expenditure and related efforts to address issues cited in the waste management case will continue in 2014 and no delay is envisaged. At its meeting of 24 April 2012, the Government approved a proposed programme of measures agreed with the European Commission to deal with outstanding issues and agreed to the provision of funds from voted expenditure, as it becomes necessary, to support the work of local authorities and the Environmental Protection Agency in bringing the case and associated matters to conclusion. Voted expenditure will

supplement the funding that will continue to be provided from the Environment Fund.

I have prioritised the resolution of issues arising from environmental infringement cases and my Department is working hard to resolve these and other cases as soon as possible.

### **EU Funding**

60. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if the proposed socioeconomic committee will be the channel for EU funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44812/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** Neither the regulations in respect of, nor the value of, any EU funded local development programmes are agreed at this stage for the next programming round 2014-2020. Consideration of these matters is ongoing and is expected to be finalised in the coming months.

Similarly, implementation arrangements for local development programmes under the new local governance arrangements set out under Putting People First - Action Programme for Effective Local Government, remain under consideration by the Alignment Working Group established to advise and assist my Department in the implementation of the alignment recommendations. The Working Group's considerations are now advanced regarding the optimum programme implementation arrangements under Local Community Development Committees which will be established in each local authority area to have responsibility for planning and oversight of local and community development programmes. It is my intention that Local Community Development Committees will have primary responsibility for co-ordination, oversight and governance of the EU-supported LEADER programme.

### **Foreshore Licences Applications**

61. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government with regard to forthcoming amendments to the Foreshore Act if a company (details supplied) will be able to reactivate its previous application for oil exploration in the foreshore or if it will need to commence the process again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44773/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** There is no provision in the Foreshore Act to allow reactivation of an application. If a licensee surrenders a foreshore licence and subsequently proposes to pursue the same development, a new application is necessary. It is not proposed to alter this position in the Maritime Area and Foreshore (Amendment) Bill, the general scheme of which was approved by Government in July 2013.

### **Budget Measures**

62. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his Department carried out any impact assessments in the run up to budget 2014 to ascertain the possible social consequences of spending changes proposed, factoring in the overall economic cost in dealing with such consequences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44838/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** The Abridged Estimate for my Department, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Expenditure Report 2014, provides €766 million in respect of the programmes and services for which my Department is responsible. These resources are supplemented by €240 million in Exchequer equity investment in Irish Water to fund the water and wastewater capital programme, a further €50 million announced in the Budget to fund infrastructural investment primarily in the housing area, and other resources available from the Local Government and Environment Funds.

The process of framing Budget 2014 involved making difficult choices given the overriding need to make the fiscal adjustments required to support exit from the EU-IMF Programme. The resource allocation assessment and decision-making processes in my Department aimed to ensure that the available resources were allocated in the fairest way possible, while at the same time making the maximum contribution to job creation and economic recovery. Key programmes with significant social impact have been protected to the greatest extent possible. For example, in 2014 there is funding of €79m for Housing Regeneration; €48m for the Local and Community Development Programme; €45m for homeless accommodation; and €2m for employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed.

### **Homeless Persons Supports**

63. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that homelessness charities are not currently funded adequately even to operate at current capacity and that many are experiencing major problems, with volunteers and workers unable to continue working due to increased stress resulting from increased demand and decreased funding. [44844/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** My Department’s role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation for homeless persons rests with the housing authorities. The purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988.

My Department does not fund any service directly but provides funding to housing authorities towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services under Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. The bulk of Section 10 funding from my Department goes towards the costs incurred in the provision of accommodation services by the voluntary sector providers who have built up the services over the years. In addition, Section 10 funding is used to support day services such as drop-in centres and food services, as well as outreach services, settlement and tenancy sustainment services and the cost of local authority and voluntary sector staff.

The Section 10 funding provided in 2012 by my Department and through local authorities towards the costs incurred by voluntary sector providers in providing homeless accommodation and related services is set out in the table below. Housing authorities provide additional funding from their own resources to these providers. Definitive data relating to 2013 funding will not be available until the end of the year.

### **Section 10 Funding to Voluntary Sector Providers in 2012**

Charities	Funding
Simon Communities Ireland	€5,009,583
Focus Ireland	€3,929,768
Crosscare	€2,629,787
St. Vincent de Paul	€2,489,158
DePaul Trust	€2,202,599
Salvation Army	€1,820,893
Peter McVerry Trust	€1,531,796
Novas	€1,919,081
Sophia	€939,554
Cope	€829,356
Sonas	€677,294
Cuan Mhuire - Teach Mhuire	€747,401
Sisters of Charity	€252,979
Threshold	€334,382
Merchants Quay Dublin	€800,470
TOTAL	€26,114,101

In addition, details of the funding provided by my Department to organisations tackling the issue of homelessness, under the Scheme to Support National Organisations in 2012, are set out in the following table.

Organisation	2012 - €
Simon Communities of Ireland	90,000

I have no function in relation to the financial viability of homelessness charities.

*Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 44.*

### Departmental Budgets

65. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government where the €2 million announced as part of budget 2014 on employment opportunities for long-term unemployed appears in his Department's budget; and the way in which this money will be administered. [44817/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** €2m will be allocated from the Dormant Accounts Fund in 2014 for payments to local authorities to assist them meet once-off costs such as health and safety training, personal protective clothing, equipment and a contribution to materials for the works to be undertaken by participants in the Gateway initiative, the local authority contribution to labour market activation. Gateway will provide short-term quality and suitable work opportunities for unemployed people who are economically, educationally or socially disadvantaged while at the same time assist in their personal, educational and social development by carrying out beneficial work within communities. This initiative will be funded from the €74.259m provided in respect of

Community and Rural Development Programme Expenditure in the Abridged Estimates for my Department.

### **Leader Programmes Funding**

66. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to front-load the 2012 and 2013 Leader rural development programme underspend into 2014; if he will extend the Leader funding for the EDI centre for the unemployed in Longford; his views on the future of the Leader programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44816/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** LEADER is a multi-annual programme which has regularly underspent its annual allocations since it began in 2009. My Department has therefore relied on carrying over significant amounts of unspent funding into the following year to meet upcoming commitments. This will also be the case this year. I anticipate that in the order of €50 million will become available to carry forward into 2014 to fund LEADER projects. Final decisions will be made in the wider context of the Department's overall capital allocation and will be published in the Revised Estimates later in the year.

In line with the 'bottom-up' approach to rural development the Local Development Companies (LDCs), contracted on my Department's behalf, are the principal decision makers in relation to which projects are funded under the Programme. I understand that the LDC for Longford has not received an application from the organisation referred to in the Question.

### **NAMA Social Housing Provision**

67. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the delivery of the National Asset Management Agency social leasing initiatives, including, in tabular form, a breakdown under the headings of occupied, in the process of being occupied, vacant and in need of works, detailing the local authority area in which they are situated and the expected cost on a monthly basis of these leases as well as any money which has been spent to date in making them suitable for occupation. [44842/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** To the end of September this year 4,319 units have been identified by NAMA as being potentially suitable for social housing.

Of these some 1,900 have been confirmed as being suitable and 443 have been completed or contracted. Of these, 288 are being delivered through the Social Housing Leasing Initiative (SHLI) and are currently occupied or in the process of being occupied. Under SHLI there is no cost for works in completing the units as agreements are not signed until the units are available for tenanting. My Department has also issued approval for some €4m in repayable capital advances to Approved Housing Bodies to facilitate the financing of the units being provided by them.

The expected average monthly cost for these units is just under €597.

A full breakdown by county of the units identified, deemed suitable and completed or contracted, is shown in the table. Further information, including quarterly updates, in relation to

the delivery of NAMA sourced units is available at the Housing Agency's website, [www.housing.ie/NAMA](http://www.housing.ie/NAMA).

County	Identified	Suitable	Complete/Contracted
Carlow	137	82	55
Cavan	47		
Clare	169	19	7
Cork	471	271	36
Cork City	419	202	53
Donegal	95	59	
Dublin City	628	252	55
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	328	122	58
Fingal	203	45	20
Galway	84	44	
Galway City	117	117	45
Kerry	90	52	15
Kildare	243	97	57
Kilkenny	167	96	
Laois	98	10	
Leitrim	35		
Limerick	112	9	9
Longford	31	11	
Louth	27	27	27
Mayo	66	58	
Meath	203	38	
Monaghan	35	30	
North Tipperary	13		
Offaly	79	64	
Roscommon	91	1	
Sligo	46	15	
South Dublin	60	42	
South Tipperary	24		
Waterford	65	27	
Westmeath	42	29	4
Wexford	90	74	2
Wicklow	36	7	
Total	4,351	1,900	443

### Seniors Alert Scheme Issues

68. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the funding provided this year for the provision of security and warning equipment to the elderly; the proposed allocation for next year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44878/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Ho-**

**gan):** The Seniors Alert Scheme aims to encourage community support for vulnerable older people in our communities by providing grant assistance towards the purchase and installation of personal monitored alarms to enable older persons, of limited means, to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. The Scheme is administered by local community and voluntary groups with the support of my Department.

The maximum grants for equipment are as follows:

- Monitored personal alarms (with pendant) - €250
- Additional pendant/Re-installation - €50

The funding allocated to the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2013 is €2.35m and this provision has been maintained in the Budget for 2014.

*Question No. 69 answered with Question No. 31.*

*Question No. 70 answered with Question No. 48.*

### **Housing Adaptation Grants Expenditure**

71. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown by county of the 5,700 housing adaptation grants as announced in budget 2014 to assist older persons and persons with disabilities. [44854/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The Abridged Estimate for my Department, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Expenditure Report 2014, includes some €28.6 million in respect of the suite of Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. It is estimated that this will provide grant assistance to some 5,700 households in 2014. The Estimates provision will be supplemented by the recently announced €10 million in additional funding for this measure, giving an overall provision in 2014 of €38.6 million, some €4.3 million more than the initial Exchequer allocation in 2013. The increased allocation will facilitate the payment of more than 7,800 grants to assist older people and people with disabilities to remain at home for longer.

I intend to announce details of the capital allocations to local authorities early in 2014. Allocations will be based on the level of activity within local authorities, the level of contractual commitments in respect of approved grants where work is on-going at present or about to commence and the level of applications on hand and anticipated in the course of 2014.

### **Middle East Issues**

72. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent World Bank report in relation to the costs to the Palestinian economy of €3.4 billion a year due to Israeli restrictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45005/13]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore):** I am aware of the recent report issued by the World Bank which found that Israel’s continued control of Area C deprives the Palestinian economy of an estimated \$3.4 billion a year. The report was also raised in recent discussions which my colleague, the Minister of State for Trade and Development, Joe Costello, had with Palestinian representatives, including Foreign Minister Malki,

during his recent visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The World Bank estimate that if Israeli restrictions on Palestinian access to, and activity and production in, Area C were lifted, the total potential value could amount to some \$3.4 billion or some 35% of Palestinian GDP, at 2011 levels. The resulting increase in revenues for the Palestinian Authority could amount to \$800 million which would notionally cut its fiscal deficit by half, thereby significantly reducing the need for recurrent donor support.

At a time when the Palestinian economy is facing significant pressures, with declining aid levels and GDP growth having fallen to 1.9 per cent in the first half of 2013, compared to an average 9% over the period 2008-2011, the economic benefits of greater Palestinian control of Area C and its resources are obvious. Ireland has for decades been clear on the need for an urgent end to Israel's occupation. This report merely underlines the unacceptable costs to Palestinians of continuing failure to end the occupation and realise the undoubted economic dividend and benefits which will flow from a negotiated peace deal and realisation of the two State solution.

### **Undocumented Irish in the USA**

73. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update in relation to the Immigration Reform Bill in the United States; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45006/13]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore):** This is an issue to which I accord very high priority. During my visit to the US last month, I spoke with several key contacts in the US Congress including leading members of the House Judiciary Committee, Minority House Leader Nancy Pelosi, and Chair of the Congressional Friends of Ireland, Pete King. I also met with representatives of Irish community groups as well as some community members who are undocumented. I am acutely aware of the difficulties they face as a result of their undocumented status.

I am more determined than ever to continue to work to find a solution to their plight. A resolution of the situation facing the undocumented Irish in the United States remains a priority for the Government. The Government also attaches great importance to seeking provision for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the United States through the extension of the "E-3" visa scheme to include Irish citizens. In this context, we very much welcomed the US Senate's approval of the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Bill by a 68-32 margin on 27 June last.

The comprehensive draft legislation, which was drafted over several months by a bipartisan group of eight US Senators, provides for extensive reform of the US immigration system. It includes provisions that would legalise the status of undocumented Irish people and provide a path to permanent residency. It also provides for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US via the proposed E-3 visa.

The Bill is a very positive development. Its provisions, if adopted, would help to end the great hardship and uncertainty faced by undocumented Irish in the US and their families here in Ireland. The inclusion of a new provision to allow several thousand Irish citizens to legally avail of employment opportunities in the US every year is also particularly welcome. The focus has now shifted to the House of Representatives for its consideration of the issues. It remains to be seen whether a consolidated Bill can be agreed between the Senate and the House of Representatives. It is generally accepted that securing overall agreement will remain a complex and challenging process, particularly at a time when Congress has been preoccupied by budgetary

and debt issues. This was clear from my discussions last month and I believe the challenge to secure agreement has become even greater in recent times. I am determined to continue to deploy all necessary resources at political, diplomatic and Irish community level to make progress on this vital issue. In support of this ongoing effort, a delegation of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade is in Washington DC this week for a programme arranged by our Embassy during which they will meet with key members of Congress and with Irish-American community representatives.

In addition to my contacts last month in New York, I visited Washington DC on 11-12 July and held a series of meetings on Capitol Hill, including with key members of the House of Representatives and Senate, with the US Administration and with Irish-American community representatives. I reiterated throughout all these contacts the Government's interest in all aspects of immigration reform and in particular our interest in seeing an overall agreement reached which provides relief for currently undocumented Irish migrants and a facility for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US.

I wish to acknowledge the critically important role being played by a number of Irish community organisations, including the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Chicago Celts for Immigration Reform and the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform.

### **Overseas Trade Promotion**

74. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the plans that exist for trade growth with China, including any initiatives to support Irish businesses considering expanding into the Chinese market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45172/13]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore):** Developing Ireland's trade and investment relationship with China is a key priority for the Government. This is reflected in the large number of high level visits that have taken place between Ireland and China in recent years, and the strong growth seen in many sectors. The implementation of Ireland's Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy is overseen by the Export Trade Council, which I chair, and which includes relevant Ministers, heads of State Agencies involved in the promotion of Trade, Tourism and Investment and representatives of the private sector.

The Strategy includes numerical targets and associated action points for implementation and outlines 27 priority markets, of which China is one. Each market has a Local Market Team, which comprises the Embassy/Consulate and the relevant state agencies, under the direction of our Ambassador. China is a priority growth market for Irish companies. Export growth of 19% was recorded in 2012 to bring the total value of goods and services exported by Irish owned companies to China to €346m. Enterprise Ireland, in their recently revised strategy for China, have outlined a path to achieving total exports of €600m by 2016 – an ambitious 73% growth rate over the next 4 year period.

During my visit to China in July/August, I visited Beijing and Shanghai and met with many companies across practically all sectors of the economy – from tourism and food to education – and SMEs active in sectors as diverse as telecommunications and agricultural machinery. While the scale of opportunity in the Chinese market is enormous, it is nevertheless a market that takes somewhat longer to generate returns, compared to our more established export markets in Europe and the US. I am conscious of the need to provide the necessary support to Irish businesses seeking to exploit those opportunities.

The priority target sectors for export development over the next 3 year period are: Financial Services; Clean Technologies (including Energy Efficiency and Green Buildings); Pharmaceuticals; Information Technologies; Medical Devices; Education Services; Agri-Technologies; Equine Products and Services. In addition, and with the support of Bord Bia, Irish food & drink exports to China have more than doubled over the last three years, reaching €262m in 2012. The market is on track for a further increase in the region of 30% during 2013. The main focus of our food exports at present is on dairy, pork, and seafood. In line with the Government's plans for growth in the industry, China is expected to play an important role in the uptake of increased dairy production post CAP reform 2015. Securing access to mainland China for Irish beef will also play an important role in increasing our exports. Bord Bia has established a "Food Hub" in its office in Shanghai which provides a cost-effective way for Irish companies to achieve a presence within the market. At present nine companies are represented in the Bord Bia Food Hub.

My Department, in conjunction with all State Agencies present in China, will continue to work to maximise the benefits from the substantial goodwill and positive relations that exist between Ireland and China.

### **Alternative Energy Projects**

75. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason there was a change in commitment regarding a bio-fuels cap as given in a previous parliamentary question, where he committed to supporting a 5% cap but is now supporting a 7% cap; when and how did he change his commitment to this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45302/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello):** My colleague, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, has the lead on Government policy in relation to bio-fuels and the negotiation of EU policy on bio-fuels. This includes the ongoing consideration of the European Commission's proposal to limit the use of foodcrop-based bio-fuels in transport to 5% by 2020. Ireland, during our EU Presidency, worked hard to facilitate consensus on this complex issue. The Council has yet to arrive at an agreed position. A significant number of Member States have argued for either no cap or a cap in excess of 5% on these first generation bio-fuels. My officials have been advised by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources that in the interests of facilitating negotiations with the European Parliament, with a view to reaching an agreement as quickly as possible on the proposal from the Commission, Ireland has given its support to a compromise proposal from the Lithuanian EU Presidency for a 7% cap. The European Parliament voted last month for a cap on first generation bio-fuels of 6%.

As I have stated in response to previous Questions on this subject, I share concerns that bio-fuel production, unless properly regulated, can have a negative impact on food production and food prices, especially in developing countries. I will continue to follow this matter closely.

### **IBRC Staff**

76. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will support the staff of Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, particularly by supporting the Labour Relations Commission resolutions proposals. [44905/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am not aware of any specific proposals put forward by the Labour Relations Commission in relation to IBRC. I have been advised

by the Special Liquidators that there is on-going communication between them and the staff of IBRC and their representative bodies to discuss their issues in relation to the liquidation. I acknowledge the significant efforts and commitment made by the staff in IBRC over the past few difficult years whilst the bank was in wind down and the difficulties that arise for staff as a result of the liquidation but it was necessary to take the decision to liquidate IBRC in the larger public interest.

I have been advised by the Special Liquidators that significant steps have already been taken to address staff concerns including the announcement the Special Liquidators that the majority of staff would be retained until March 2014 in order to provide for an orderly wind-down of the business. This should provide some reassurance to IBRC staff relative to the common position in liquidations where staff contracts are terminated on liquidation. Furthermore, it is likely that some staff will, in time, gain employment by NAMA or other purchasers or servicers of the assets of IBRC.

### **Tax Collection**

77. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if jobs will be destroyed and businesses placed under massive pressure when they are forced to file early tax returns under the new EU rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44906/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** Under the regulations known as the “Two-Pack” which were formally adopted on 30 May 2013, a common budgetary timeline is being introduced for all Euro Area member states. Specifically, the draft budget for central government and the main parameters of the draft budgets for all the other sub-sectors of the general government must be published by the 15 of October each year; draft budgetary plans in a common format must be submitted by all Euro area Member States not in a programme of assistance; and the budget for the central government must be adopted or fixed upon and published by the 31 of December each year.

In light of these requirements, the Government decided to bring Budget Day forward from the first week in December to on or before the 15 of October from now on. Accordingly, I presented Budget 2014 on Tuesday last, 15 October. The Government also decided that the Finance Bill should complete its passage through the Oireachtas by the 31 of December each year.

The Deputy will be aware that one of the most critical elements of the Budget process is the accuracy of systems for forecasting potential revenue yield in the year in question prior to the Budget actually taking place. In the context of a December Budget Day, the availability prior to the Budget of information on cumulative tax yields to the end of November gave a high degree of certainty to the estimation of potential outturn for the year. For example, cumulative tax yield to the end of November 2012 was €33.8bn, which represented 92% of the full year outturn of €36.6bn. On the other hand, cumulative yield to end September, at €26.1bn, represented only 71.3% of the eventual outturn.

The scope for unanticipated events which would lead to either a higher or lower than projected outturn is considerably increased in the context of an October Budget. In addition the ability to project future yield is compromised. Consequently, measures which would result in improvements in the availability of information or increases in the proportion of total yield already available prior to the Budget have to be considered. The main areas where scope exists to introduce such improvements relate to the income tax Pay & File arrangements and on 11 October I initiated a consultation process on a revision of the existing arrangements. I will consider the results of this consultation process when drafting, as a Committee Stage amendment to the forthcoming Finance Bill, the necessary measures.

I would reiterate to the Deputy that these changes are required as a result of the move to an earlier Budget Day, necessitated by the adoption of the Two-Pack and will provide increased certainty around the annual tax take. I would not accept the suggestion that such changes are a threat to jobs or businesses. On the contrary, the more information available at Budget time, the more accurate forecasting can be, thereby increasing levels of certainty for business and employment.

### Budget Measures

78. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Finance in relation to the statement on page C 14 of budget 2014, €600 million of the budgetary adjustment comes from additional resources and savings elsewhere, adding all of these to the €1.85 billion in new policy measures outlined gives a total adjustment package of €3.1 billion in 2014; if he will clarify what the total budgetary adjustment is for 2014 and if different from the statement quoted, if he will provide an explanation for that difference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44910/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As I outlined in my budget day speech, in order to achieve a deficit of 4.8% of GDP, a total adjustment package of the region €3.1 billion was necessary. This comprised €2.5 billion in expenditure cuts and tax increases complemented with additional resources - other savings of €0.6 billion. A summary table of the adjustment package is outlined below.

Adjustment Package	€bn
Expenditure measures	1.6
Current expenditure measures	1.4
Increase in savings from Prior Year Measures	0.1
Capital expenditure measures	0.1
Taxation measures	0.9
Net new measures	0.4
Revenue carryover	0.5
Other	0.6
Total Adjustment Package	3.1

Additional detail on what encompasses the other elements of the adjustment package may also be useful. Firstly, the NTMA Budget debt service estimate for 2014 is lower than the corresponding April SPU estimate, of the order €0.2bn, due to an improvement in the interest rate environment generally and lower than previously planned bond issuance. Turning to the Central Bank income, during the summer, the Central Bank provided an estimate of the 2013 surplus income to be paid to the Central Fund in 2014 based on results to that date and projections for the remainder of the year. The Central Bank revised this estimate upwards by €0.1bn in September, in light of actual results for the first nine months and the consequent revisions of projections for the remaining three months of 2013.

In terms of savings from the Live Register, the numbers in work rose by 33,800 in the year to the second quarter of 2013 and the Live Register at the end of quarter 3 2013 was down by just over 20,000 when compared to the same period last year. On foot of this recovering labour market, live register savings have exceeded those previously expected of the order of €0.15bn. Finally, the remaining €0.15bn arises from a number of other factors mainly connected with state asset transactions.

Complementing tax and expenditure measures with additional resources and other savings, some of which may be once off, is consistent with the composition of previous adjustments published in the National Recovery Plan - Budget 2011 and the contribution of additional dividends outlined in Budget 2013.

### **Tax Credits**

79. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Finance the numbers of persons currently in receipt of the one-parent family tax credit; if he proposes to make provision when introducing the new single-person child care tax credit from 1 January 2014 to apportion this tax credit proportionately and by agreement between both parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44937/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that for 2013, it is currently estimated that 76,800 individuals are in receipt of the One-Parent Family Tax Credit i.e. in a position to utilise some or all of tax credit. As the Deputy is aware, the One-Parent Family Tax Credit is being replaced with a new Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit from 1 January 2014. The Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit will be of the same value, i.e. €1,650, as the existing One-Parent Family Tax Credit and will also carry the same entitlement to the extended standard rate tax band of €36,800 per annum. The new credit will be targeted such that it is available only to the primary carer of the child. A maximum of one credit will be available per single carer/claimant, regardless of whether he or she cares for more than one child. This is the same condition that applies to the current One-Parent Family Tax Credit.

Allocation of child care responsibilities is primarily for parents to agree. Practical implementation issues are being considered as part of the Finance Bill process.

### **Budget Measures**

80. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the measures announced in budget 2014 or in any previous budgets pending EU approval under state aid regulations, and their value individually and in total. [45000/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I assume the Deputy is referring to measures where such approval has yet to be obtained. In my Budget 2013 speech I announced a scheme of accelerated capital allowances entitled “Incentives for certain aviation services facilities”. This was provided for in section 31 of Finance Act 2013. This scheme provides accelerated capital allowances for the construction and refurbishment of certain specialist buildings and structures for use in the maintenance, repair, overhaul or dismantling of commercial aircraft. This is subject to approval from the European Commission. When this approval is received, the section will be commenced. The estimated cost: is €26 million over 6 years. The extension of the Employment and Investment Incentive from 2013 to 2020 was also announced in Budget 2013, pending the receipt of the necessary approval from the European Commission. The estimated cost is €135 million over 7 years.

The living city initiative, announced in Finance Bill 2013, is a pilot project which provides certain tax incentives to make it more attractive for people live in historic and culturally significant city centre houses. The initiative also offers incentives for retailers and small businesses in those areas. Budget 2014 extended the living city initiative to include residential properties constructed up to the end of 1914 in designated areas, and extended it to other cities – Cork, Galway, Kilkenny and Dublin. This initiative is subject to EU State aid approval and a com-

ment commencement order. The estimated value is €20 million per year.

The Finance Act 2013 introduced new provisions to ensure that Film Relief tax reliefs will accrue to the producers rather than investors and result in tax savings for the Exchequer. Budget 2014 extended the definition of 'eligible individual' to include non-EU talent, in conjunction with the introduction of a withholding tax. It is intended to commence this provision once EU State Aid approval has been given. The estimated value is €15 million per year.

A CGT incentive is being introduced by Budget 2014 and Finance (No 2) Bill 2013 to encourage entrepreneurs (in particular "serial" entrepreneurs) to invest and re-invest in assets used in new productive trading activities. Commencement of this measure is subject to receipt of EU State Aid approval. The estimated cost is €20 million by 2018. The stamp duty exemption for transfers of shares in companies listed on the Enterprise Securities Market (ESM) of the Irish Stock Exchange, announced in Budget 2014, may require EU State Aid approval. The estimated cost of this measure is €5 million in a full year.

### **Living City Initiative**

81. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications that have been made under the Living City initiative in counties Limerick and Waterford since its introduction in budget 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45052/13]

83. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the European Commission has approved the Living City initiative announced in budget 2013 and extended in budget 2014. [45087/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 81 and 83 together.

The living city Initiative was announced as part of Finance Bill 2013. I stated at the time that the proposed scheme would be subject to a full ex-ante cost benefit analysis and would require State aid approval from the European Commission. The cost benefit analysis was recently presented to my Department and has been published on the Department's website. On foot of the recommendations contained in this independent report, I made an announcement in my 2014 Budget Statement that I was proposing to extend the Initiative to include designated areas of four other cities. Certain other technical amendments would also be proposed in the forthcoming Finance Bill.

Following the receipt of the report, an application for EU State Aid approval will be submitted shortly to the European Commission and the evidence presented in the cost benefit analysis will form part of this application. The Initiative can not be commenced until EU State Aid approval is received and so no applications have yet been received.

### **Tax Reliefs Eligibility**

82. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Minister for Finance if he will clarify the issue of entitlement to tax relief on dental and-or medical expenses on services fully carried out outside the State; if he will confirm this is so; the reason it is allowed, as, in the case of dental services available here, it is putting Irish dentists at risk in their employment; if he will consider changes to same and make a distinction between medical dental treatments available in the State and others only available abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45080/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** Relief in respect of health expenses is allowed in accordance with the provisions of section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. In order to qualify for relief an individual must show that he or she has incurred “health expenses” for the provision of “health care”. It is not the case that all expenses incurred on health care qualify for relief. For the purposes of section 469 “health care” is the prevention, diagnosis, alleviation or treatment of an ailment, injury, infirmity, defect or disability. Health expenses include the cost of treatment necessarily incurred in connection with the services of a medical practitioner.

Relief is allowed where a practitioner is either –

(a) registered in the register established under section 43 of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007,

(b) registered in the register established under section 26 of the Dentists Act 1985, or

(c) in relation to health care provided outside the State, entitled under the laws of the country in which the care is provided to practice medicine or dentistry there.

The treaties governing the European Union guarantee the free movement of goods, capital, services and citizens within the EU’s 28 member states and it is therefore not possible to place restrictions as to where individuals seek or avail of services. All claims for tax relief must be treated on a similar basis and relief granted regardless of where the services are provided. Relief for health expenses has been granted in respect of the services of a practitioner, entitled under the laws of the country in which the care is provided, to practise medicine or dentistry there, since the introduction of the tax relief in section 12 of the Finance Act 1967.

*Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 81.*

### **Banking Sector Issues**

84. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Finance the measures in place to ensure that Ireland will not be vulnerable to a repeat banking crisis and to prevent a repeat of the banking practices which led to the recent financial crisis; the further regulations that will be put in place to ensure that the banking industry plays a constructive role in the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45176/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The reports of Governor Patrick Honohan, Messrs. Regling and Watson and the Nyberg Commission pointed out the problems to be addressed in our system of financial regulation. Acting on the recommendations contained in those reports, this Government has undertaken a number of significant reforms towards building a strengthened regulatory framework for the financial services sector and to respond to the shortcomings identified in those reports. The Central Bank Reform Act 2010 created a single fully-integrated Central Bank of Ireland with a unitary board – the Central Bank Commission – chaired by the Governor of the Central Bank. The unitary Central Bank structure gives the Commission members a more complete remit over prudential regulation and financial stability issues. In 2011 the new Fitness and Probity regime was rolled out by the Central Bank in accordance with the provisions of the Central Bank Reform Act 2010. The regime provides for new powers to be exercised by the Central Bank to ensure the fitness and probity of nominees to key positions within financial service providers and of key office-holders within those providers.

The Central Bank and Credit Institutions (Resolution) Act was also introduced in 2011. It provides the necessary mechanisms to enable the Central Bank to intervene where a credit

institution gets into serious difficulty and is in danger of becoming destabilised or otherwise failing. The Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 was passed this year which enhances the Central Bank's regulatory powers, drawing on the lessons of the recent past. It strengthens the ability of the Central Bank to impose and supervise compliance with regulatory requirements and to undertake timely prudential interventions. The Act also provides the Central Bank with greater access to information and analysis and underpins the credible enforcement of Irish financial services legislation in line with international best practice.

The reforms introduced under the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 are complemented by a number of strategically important reforms at EU level in financial services. Under our presidency, agreement was reached on the single supervisory mechanism, one of the main cornerstones of Banking Union which will provide for the European Central Bank to act as supervisor for systemic important banks throughout the Union. Agreement was also reached on the Capital Requirements package which will ensure that European banks hold enough good quality capital to withstand future economic and financial shocks. Member States have also agreed in principle the Markets in Financial Instruments Regulation and Directive and agreement with the European Parliament was secured on the Market Abuse Regulation.

These legislative reforms have been supplemented by a significant increase in regulatory activity by the Central Bank with a corresponding increase in staff numbers and skill levels. The Central Bank of Ireland's Enforcement Priorities for 2013 highlight the importance of enforcement within its risk-based regulatory framework (PRISM). PRISM represents a challenging and proportionate risk-based system of supervision for all financial institutions operating in Ireland. The Central Bank's Strategic Plan 2013 – 2015 also sets out a strategy of assertive risk-based supervision underpinned by a credible threat of enforcement.

This Government has also implemented a series of measures which reflect the important role that the banking sector has to play in supplying credit and in doing so to support economic growth in the economy. As shareholders in the main banks, the Government's objective is twofold; to ensure that they are managed commercially so as to create and protect value for the taxpayer but also to ensure that they supply the credit lines necessary to sustain and grow the economy. In that respect the Government has imposed SME lending targets on AIB and Bank of Ireland for the three calendar years, 2011 to 2013. Each bank was required to sanction lending of at least €3 billion in 2011, €3.5 billion in 2012 and €4 billion in 2013 for new or increased credit facilities to SMEs. Both banks have reported that they achieved their 2011 and 2012 targets and the recent Credit Review Office quarterly report commented "both banks are on track to achieve their €4bn loan sanction targets, assuming the pattern of previous years of a strong Q4 performance is repeated".

The Credit Review Office is available to assist businesses which have been refused credit. The most recent CRO report shows that the CRO upheld the credit appeal in 150 cases or 55% of cases decided. The upheld appeals have resulted in €18.5M credit being made available to SMEs and farms, protecting 1,521 jobs. In Budget 2013 I recognised the important role played by the CRO in assisting borrowers who had been refused credit by the banks by increasing the number of reviewers in order to ensure that all appeals are dealt with in a timely and efficient manner. In Budget 2014 I announced an increase in the limit for loan applications that can be reviewed by the CRO from €500,000 to €3m. This increase will assist those borrowers currently banking with non-trading banks and banks which are strategically exiting the Irish SME lending market, whose refinancing requests are larger than €500,000.

We have also put in place a comprehensive suite of measures to assist personal borrowers including mortgage holders. The personal insolvency regime has been overhauled and the insolvency service is now up and running. The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears and new

statutory personal insolvency frameworks protect and assist people in genuine mortgage arrears difficulty and, more generally, to resolve unsustainable debt positions. Co-operating borrowers now have more protections available to them and more effective options to deal with their over indebtedness than was the case previously. These measures will also require creditors to deal with their customers who are experiencing genuine debt difficulty in a more holistic and customer friendly manner. Taken together, these factors should make a useful contribution to the future development and application of more responsible lending decisions and practices.

### **Insurance Industry Regulation**

85. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Finance in view of the financial implications for Irish citizens of the collapse of PMPA in 1983 and of Quinn Insurance, the measures he has put in place to ensure the Irish consumer will be protected in future with proper and appropriate regulation in the insurance industry. [45177/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** At the outset it should be noted that governance procedures within firms are of vital importance in managing insurance companies and protecting the Irish consumer. In this regard, the Acquisitions Directive (transposed into Irish law in June 2009); the Central Bank's Corporate Governance Code and the recently introduced Fitness and Probity regime act as important safeguards in that matter. To improve regulatory supervision and protect the Irish consumer, the Central Bank has, along with increased staffing levels, introduced a risk-based supervision framework, PRISM (Probability Risk and Impact System). The framework establishes a new approach for supervisory engagement with regulated firms. The first phase covering banks and insurers was rolled out in late 2011. The system categorises all regulated firms into four separate impact categories, which are based on the level of damage a firm could cause to the financial system, economy and consumers were it to fail. Firms are categorised as high impact, medium-high impact, medium-low impact or low impact, which determines the number of supervisors assigned and level of interaction with each firm.

As part of the framework the Central Bank of Ireland engages with firms at a level that corresponds to their impact category; the higher the impact, the higher the level of engagement. Engagement involves reviews, inspections and meetings, and the frequency and level of engagement is associated with the firms' impact rating. Additionally, the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013, enacted on 11th July, 2013, enhances the power of the Central Bank to regulate, supervise and take action against financial service providers. Some of the enhanced powers include: whistle blower protection and powers of inspection, investigation and information gathering for Central Bank authorised officers. Taken together this overall framework should ensure that the Irish consumer will be protected as far as possible.

Furthermore, the Deputy should note that at EU level a directive known as Solvency I places requirements on the amount of regulatory capital insurance companies must hold against unforeseen events. Following years of negotiations, on 1 January 2016 Solvency II will commence. The Solvency II EU Directive will set out new, stronger EU-wide requirements on capital adequacy and risk management for insurers with the key aim of increasing policyholder protection. This modern, risk-based system for the regulation and supervision of European insurance and reinsurance undertakings is necessary in order to ensure a safe and solid insurance sector that can provide sustainable insurance products and support the real economy through long-term investments and additional stability.

Negotiations on this directive are nearing the end in Brussels and preparations are already underway for this in Ireland.

## Tax Residency Issues

86. **Deputy Arthur Spring** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the taxation regime as it applies to tax exiles where it is obvious that their primary residences and their main centres of operation are here and due to current legislation such persons avoid paying a fair share of income tax as is expected of all citizens. [45178/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** The taxation of individuals in the State is broadly in line with that prevailing in most other OECD jurisdictions, that is to say —

(a) Individuals who are resident in the State for tax purposes (based on the number of days of presence in the State) are taxable here on their worldwide income; and

(b) Individuals who are not resident here for tax purposes pay tax here only on income arising in the State and on income derived from working here.

Residence status for tax purposes is determined by the number of days that an individual is present in Ireland in a tax year. An individual is tax resident in Ireland for a tax year if they are present in the State:

for 183 days or more in Ireland during a tax year or

for 280 days or more in Ireland between the current year and the previous year (although if an individual is present in the State for fewer than 30 days in either year, those days are not counted for the “280 day” test).

Individuals are treated as being present in the State on a day for tax residence purposes if they are present in the State at any time during that day.

The Programme for Government contains a specific commitment to ensure that “tax exiles” make a fair contribution to the Exchequer. A public consultation on tax residence rules was undertaken last year, to prepare for possible further changes in the area. In general, the submissions received considered the present residence rules are clear and workable, and the clarity, certainty and stability of our domestic tax regime enables us to compete effectively in the international economic context.

An Irish domiciled individual claiming to be non-resident for tax purposes and who is living abroad primarily for tax reasons may be subject to the Domicile Levy which is charged on an individual:

- who in any year is Irish domiciled,
- whose worldwide income in the year exceeds €1m,
- whose Irish located property in the year is greater than €5m, and
- whose liability to Irish income tax for the year is less than €200,000.

The amount of the levy is €200,000. Any Irish income tax paid is available as a credit against an individual’s liability to the levy.

In Budget 2012 I abolished the “citizenship” condition for payment of the Domicile Levy to ensure that it cannot be avoided by renouncing citizenship. The first year for which the changes applied was the tax year 2012; the levy payment for that year is due by 31 October 2013. Measures in recent budgets to increase the tax take from high earners will also have an impact on so called “tax exiles”.

## Home Renovation Incentive

87. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the target number of jobs and levels of investment generated by the home renovation incentive for each year up to and including 2016. [45290/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As the Deputy is aware, I announced the Home Renovation Incentive in the recent Budget. This scheme will run from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2015 and provides for tax relief for homeowners by way of a tax credit at 13.5% of qualifying expenditure incurred on repair, renovation or improvement work carried out on a principal private residence. Qualifying expenditure is expenditure subject to the 13.5% VAT rate. The work must cost a minimum of €5,000 (exclusive of VAT) which would attract a credit of €675. Where the cost of the work exceeds €30,000 (exclusive of VAT) a maximum credit of €4,050 will apply. The credit is payable over the two years following the year in which the work is carried out. The work must commence on or after 1 January 2014 and be carried out during 2014 or 2015.

Homeowners must be Local Property Tax compliant in order to qualify under the Incentive, while building contractors must be tax compliant in order to carry out works. The scheme will be administered through Revenue's online systems. Contractors will be required to inform Revenue in advance of details of works to be carried and will also be required to notify Revenue in relation to any payments received in respect of the works. Homeowners will be able to view the information provided to Revenue by the contractor through the Revenue electronic systems and will also claim the relief through those systems.

It is not possible to say how many jobs will be created as a result of this incentive, as numbers will depend on the level of take-up. It is estimated that this incentive will cost approximately €62 million in a full year. This cost equates to an overall spend in the construction sector of approximately €459.3 million.

## Departmental Meetings

88. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of meetings that he, his advisers or senior members of the Department have had with representatives of a company (details supplied). [45291/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** Since the formation of this Government, there have been no meetings between me or my advisors and the company referred to in the question. The Secretary General of my Department met with the Irish Managing Director of the company referred to on February 27th 2012 to discuss the broad technology sector and how best to use IT in running an organisation. As a result of that discussion, it was arranged that the Regional Sales Director for North Europe would have a follow-up meeting with the Secretary General on May 22nd 2012.

As part of the preparation for Budget 2014, which included the publication of the Ireland's International Tax Strategy, the Department of Finance consulted with a large number of the main multinational employers in Ireland to discuss international tax issues, in a process that was facilitated by the IDA. This included the company referred to in the question. In addition, as per the reply to PQ 25551 and PQ 25297 earlier this year, officials from the Department also had a phone conversation with the company in May 2013.

## **Tax Residency Issues**

89. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of Irish registered non-resident companies that have not declared any state of residence; the number resident in a recognised tax haven; the number that have been fined for failing to provide a country of residence; and the total number of Irish registered non-resident companies of which the Revenue Commissioners are aware. [45292/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that there is no requirement in Irish tax law for a company to claim or obtain authorisation of non-resident status from Revenue and that statistics on the number of Irish registered non-resident companies are not separately compiled. Accordingly, it is not possible to identify from Revenue records the number of Irish registered non-resident companies, how many of such companies have not declared any state of residence or how many companies are resident in a tax haven. A company that fails to deliver a statement of particulars under section 882 is liable to a penalty of €4,000, with provision for a further penalty of €60 for each day on which the failure continues after a court judgement has been obtained.

However, there is no specific fine applicable where a non-resident company fails, or is unable, to provide a country of residence in the statement of particulars to be provided under section 882 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The primary purpose of this provision is to ensure that newly incorporated companies coming within the charge to Irish corporation tax are registered with Revenue for tax purposes.

Non-resident companies that are liable to Irish corporation tax because they are carrying on a trade in the State through a branch or agency are not required to provide a country of residence in their annual corporation tax return.

## **Small and Medium Enterprises Supports**

90. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the trade finance initiative currently being discussed with the European Investment Bank. [45293/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** As was highlighted in the Action Plan for Jobs 2013, accessing working capital to avail of increased export opportunities through the provision of a broader suite of financial products is an issue for growing Irish enterprises. For this reason one of the SME State Bodies Group's policy commitments under this plan was to review the availability of appropriate finance for international trade. In July the Board of Directors of the European Investment Bank, (EIB) approved a proposal to develop trade facilitation initiatives across Europe premised on the phased roll out of trade finance activities for SMEs and mid-caps. The EIB are beginning with countries such as Greece, Portugal and Ireland where funds may not be available from other sources on reasonable terms. The EIB have already helped Greece in this area and are now turning their focus to Ireland.

The EIB can lend money to Irish SMEs and exporters, usually through an intermediary such as a bank, at a lower cost than is currently accessible without their help. These favourable lending conditions provide an essential support to offset price differences in credit across European countries. This is particularly important for our exporting companies who have to compete with other companies who have access to cheaper credit and lower operating costs.

Since the Budget day announcement, my officials along with officials in the Department of

Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and with Enterprise Ireland have already met with the EIB on this subject. Working papers on the proposal have also been exchanged and the EIB are examining the feasibility of its support for such an initiative in an Irish context. The engagement with the EIB builds on the strong relationship that my Department has sought to build with the bank in seeking to identify and develop sustainable mechanisms to facilitate the provision of financing to SMEs.

The overall goal of this work is to address the specific challenges of funding international trade through a broader suite of financial products and leverage EIB funding to provide much needed finance to exporters and ensure that they have sufficient working capital to grow their exports. This will ultimately restore confidence, support trade and foster growth and employment. Working with the EIB to develop a tailored and customised trade finance initiative would support the growth of the SME sector in Ireland.

I can assure the Deputy that this is being given the highest priority by the relevant officials and I can update the House as progress is being made at each step in the process.

### **Small and Medium Enterprises Supports**

91. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide details of the budget for the subsidised financial training programme for small business as announced in budget 2014; and the target number of small and medium enterprises to take up the programme. [45294/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am acutely aware of the importance of ensuring an adequate flow of credit to SMEs, both for working capital and investment purposes. One of the commitments contained in the Action Plan for Jobs 2013 was for the SME State Bodies Group to “examine the practical steps that can be taken in the short and medium term by the State to improve the financial literacy of our micro and small enterprises”. To this end, in Budget 2014 I announced a new initiative aimed at enhancing the skill sets of SMEs to improve their financial capabilities. In conjunction with Skillnets’ ManagementWorks programme, a subsidised financial training programme for SMEs is under development which will assist them in putting together robust credit applications to lenders. The programme, consisting of 2 days dedicated off-site training together with expert mentoring support, will launch on a pilot basis early next year. The costs of delivery for training, mentoring and facilities are all subject to the outcome of a public procurement process and therefore subject to some variation. However, the estimated cost of introducing the scheme in 2014 is in the order of €750,000. It is anticipated that Government support for the initiative will reduce the cost to participating SMEs considerably.

This programme will add to the existing frameworks of credit support available to SMEs, thereby ensuring that viable businesses are better equipped to access credit more freely as the economy continues to recover.

### **Budget 2014**

92. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the basis for the growth projections for employment as outlined in budget 2014. [45295/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** For 2013, employment growth of 1.6 per cent is projected. This takes into account outturn data for the first half of the year, which show average annual employment growth of 1.5 per cent. This growth is in both full-time and

part-time employment and was broad-based across the majority of sectors in the economy. In addition, high frequency data, such as the Liver Register and survey data, suggest a continued improvement in the labour market situation in the second half of the year.

For next year and over the forecast horizon, further employment growth is projected. This is based on the assumption of GDP growth averaging 2.4 per cent per annum. The GDP growth forecast incorporates a modest positive contribution from domestic demand growth, which is labour intensive.

Finally, I would point out that macroeconomic forecasts underpinning Budget 2014 for this year and next have been endorsed independently by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council as part of the European economic governance reforms.

### **Pensions Levy Yield**

93. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the expected receipts to be generated by the pensions levy in 2014 and 2015; the level of funds that relevant sections of the jobs initiative will receive; and the level of funding to be set aside to provide for State liabilities from pre-existing and future pension fund difficulties. [45296/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I announced in my Budget speech last week that the 0.6% Pension Fund Levy introduced to fund the Jobs Initiative in 2011 will be abolished from 31st December 2014. I will however, introduce an additional levy on pension funds at 0.15%. I am doing this to continue to help fund the Jobs Initiative, including the continuation of the reduced 9% VAT rate detailed below and to make provision for potential State liabilities which may emerge from pre-existing or future pension fund difficulties. The additional levy within the existing legal framework will apply to pension fund assets in 2014 and 2015. The yield from the pension fund levy in 2014 is estimated at €675 million. The yield from the pension fund levy at the reduced rate of 0.15% in 2015 is estimated at €135 million.

The revenues arising to the Exchequer from the levy are, in common with Exchequer revenues generally, not hypothecated to any particular item of expenditure or liability but have been used to help fund the various measures introduced by the Jobs Initiative. One of the very significant and successful measures introduced by the Jobs Initiative – the reduced VAT rate of 9% on tourism and certain other services – was due to end this year. In my Budget speech, I announced the continuation of the reduced 9% VAT rate. I also announced that the Air Travel Tax is being reduced to zero with effect from 1 April 2014. The combined cost of these initiatives is estimated at close to €400 million in a full year.

The Jobs Initiative also included a number of current and capital expenditure measures. While the details of the expenditure on these measures are a matter for my colleagues in Cabinet, I would ask the Deputy to note that the Jobs Initiative originally provided for 5,000 places under Jobbridge, the National Internship scheme and 5,900 places under the Springboard scheme. Numbers who have participated in Jobbridge have now exceeded 20,000 with an evaluation by Indecon Economic Consultants finding that 61.4% of survey respondents were in employment within 5 months of finishing their internships. The Springboard scheme, now in its third iteration, has expanded to over 16,500 places. The expansion of these schemes, reflective of their success, will require further funding from the Exchequer.

The extent of the potential State liabilities from the pre-existing or future pension fund difficulties is a matter currently under examination by my colleague the Minister for Social Protection. As I have already indicated, however, the proceeds from the levy that accrue to the Exchequer are not set aside in the manner suggested in the question and expenditure decisions on the use of those and other funds will be made as they arise in the normal way.

## Property Taxation Administration

94. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Finance if improvements will be made to the local property tax department in the Revenue Commissioners to ensure that any concerns regarding payment are responded to quickly and efficiently (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45300/13]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the introduction of Local Property Tax (LPT), which was the largest extension of the self-assessment system in its history, has been a major administrative challenge. On response times, Revenue strives to respond to all correspondence and contacts within its customer service standards, i.e., 30 days. However, as LPT is a new tax it was inevitable that there would be exceptional temporary pressures at stages of the initial implementation and it was always going to be difficult for Revenue to meet service demands. To put the scale of the task into perspective, since early March 2013 Revenue has processed approximately 1.59 million LPT Returns, lodged in excess of €200 million to the Exchequer, answered in excess of 500,000 phone calls and replied to approximately 200,000 letters/emails. In the circumstances, Revenue has done a very good job, in my view.

On the specific case mentioned by the Deputy, I am advised that the refund arose when a second payment arrangement was made by the owner of the property without cancelling the original arrangement. The situation was further complicated when the individual, who is a multiple property owner, sent other correspondence to Revenue on the revaluation upwards of another property. The letter for the second property was inadvertently associated with the refund request on the basis of a common property identification number which led to a delay in dealing with the refund request.

Once Revenue had fully clarified all the issues concerning the various properties linked to the property owner, a refund was approved and was issued on 1 October.

## School Textbooks Rental Scheme

95. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to the announcement in budget 2014 regarding additional funding for the book rental scheme in primary schools, if the grant paid to schools for this scheme will be paid in one instalment or spread over three years; when this grant will be paid to the schools in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44918/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** The additional funding referred to by the Deputy will involve an investment of €15 million to support the establishment of book rental schemes in primary schools that do not currently operate them. The Department will provide €5 million per annum over a three year period to such schools. This will allow schools to reduce the cost burden on parents with young children. These schemes can result in savings of up to 80% of the cost of school books for parents.

The Department will advise schools of the application process later this year. The funding will be allocated in time to allow schools to purchase a stock of textbooks for the commencement of the 2014/2015 school year.

## School Accommodation

96. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties pertaining to a school (details supplied) in County Limerick, which is attended by children of 169 families; the steps he intends to take to solve those difficul-

ties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44988/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** My Department has been in ongoing liaison with the school, referred to by the Deputy, in relation to its accommodation issues. In that regard, my Department recently met with the school authority concerned to consider further the proposal being developed by the school to meet its accommodation needs. Arising from this meeting, the school concerned agreed to supply the technical reports required by my Department. This information, when received, will enable my Department with the school authority to progress an accommodation solution for the school.

### **School Accommodation**

97. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide details of the intended catchment area for a new primary school for which his Department has recently applied to Dublin City Council for planning permission on Bannow Road, Cabra West, Dublin 7 (details supplied). [44997/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** I wish to advise the Deputy that demographic projections which are based on child benefit data for the Dublin 7 area indicates a requirement for up to 38 additional primary school classrooms in the general area in the coming years. While most of that demand will be catered for by using current capacity in the existing primary schools in the area and also through the proposed expansion of some of those schools, my Department forecasts indicate that a new school building may be required to meet future demand that is projected to arise in the coming years.

With the closure of the FÁS training centre in Cabra, FÁS approached my Department to establish whether there would be an educational use for that property. A planning application for a 16 classroom primary school was prepared and recently submitted by my Department in relation to part of the former training centre site. Assuming that planning for a school building is secured, my Department will have 16 primary school classrooms available at the former training centre site in anticipation of meeting future needs in the area.

### **Schools Building Projects Expenditure**

98. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when funding will be approved for a school building project (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45003/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2b - Detailed Design. This stage includes the applications for Planning Permission, Fire Safety Certificate, Disability Access Certificate and the preparation of tender documents. Due to competing demands on the Department's capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise the limited funding available for the provision of additional school accommodation to meet increasing demographic requirements it was not possible to include this project in the 5 year construction programme announced in March 2012.

School building projects, including the project referred to by the Deputy, which were previously initiated but not included in the current five year construction programme will continue to be progressed to final planning stages in anticipation of the possibility of further funds being available to the Department in the future.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

99. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a building project (details supplied) in County Cavan will progress to the next stage in view of the fact that there is an urgent need to provide additional permanent accommodation at this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45004/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning - Stage 2b - Detailed Design. A decision to grant planning permission for the project was made by the County Council on 23rd September 2013. The Design Team for the project has submitted an application for a fire certificate and disability access certificate to the County Council.

Due to competing demands on the Department's capital budget imposed by the need to prioritise the limited funding available for the provision of additional school accommodation to meet increasing demographic requirements it was not possible to include this project in the 5 year construction programme announced in March 2012. School building projects, including the project referred to by the Deputy, which were previously initiated but not included in the current five year construction programme will continue to be progressed to final planning stages in anticipation of the possibility of further funds being available to the Department in the future.

### **Special Educational Needs Services Provision**

100. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a list of the schools providing secondary level education for children with autism, serving the Dublin 15 and Dublin 7 areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45023/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** My Department's policy is focused on ensuring that all children, including those with autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

The policy is to provide for children with special educational needs, including autism, to be included in mainstream schools unless such a placement would not be in their best interests or the interests of the children with whom they are to be educated. Some children may be supported in a special class attached to a mainstream school. These students have the option, where appropriate, of full/partial integration and interaction with other pupils. Other children may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school. The establishment of a network of autism-specific special classes in schools across the country has been a key educational priority in recent years. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOS), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for special educational needs supports, including the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas as required. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

Details of the special classes for children with autism, including details of special classes for children with autism in the Dublin 7 & 15 areas, are available on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie). The contact information details for individual schools is available on the Department's website <http://www.education.ie/en/find-a-school>.

### **School Uniforms**

101. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason some post-primary schools are requesting students to purchase expensive school blazers as part of the uniform that are only to be worn to and from school (details supplied). [45058/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** I have already expressed my concern in relation to costs incurred by parents on school uniforms. This is a matter on which I believe schools must take account of the wishes of parents.

During the course of this school year I will be publishing my plans for a Parent Charter that will strengthen the position of parents generally within our school system. I believe that changes to the Education Act 1998 will be important in underpinning such a charter and will form part of my proposals.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if eligibility for a higher education grant will be reconsidered in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45075/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that due to a change of circumstances the student referred to by the Deputy applied to have his case reviewed. SUSI are currently awaiting documents from the student and the case will be fully reviewed on receipt of outstanding documentation.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

103. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a reply will issue to a query (details supplied) raised with his Department on 23 September 2013; the reason for the delay with the response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45079/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** The query to which the Deputy refers in being addressed in the Pension Unit of my Department. All email queries are acknowledged and directed to general information on the website as many queries relate to general pension information. When the query relates to a specific matter, the response is provided when the matter is investigated and this is the position in respect of the query to which the Deputy refers.

### **Institutes of Technology Issues**

104. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will outline the process of replacing a chairperson of an institute of technology (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45169/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** Chairpersons of the Governing Body of Institutes of Technology are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills in line with the provisions of the Institutes of Technology Acts 1992 to 2006. Section 2 (2) of the Second Schedule to the Act provides that the “chairman shall be appointed by the Minister and may be removed from office by the Minister”. Section 2 (4) provides that the chairman shall hold office on such terms and conditions as the Minister may, at the date of the appointment, decide.

Chairpersons of Governing Bodies of Institutes of Technology do not receive any fees but

are entitled to travel and subsistence expenses which are met by the Institute.

### **Overseas Students Data**

105. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of Chinese nationals coming here for study over the past four years; his plans to grow this number; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45174/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** With close on 5,000 Chinese students registered in Irish higher education institutions, China is the second source market for international students coming to Ireland. Figures provided by Enterprise Ireland on the number of Chinese students coming here since 2006 are as follows:- 2006/07 - 3,573; 2009/10 - 3,355; 2010/11 - 5,105; 2011/12 - 4,554. Figures are not available for 2008/09.

In March of this year, I visited Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai, accompanied by thirteen higher education institutions on an Enterprise Ireland education mission. The programme included educational promotion and alumni engagement events, the launch of strategic initiatives including UCD's Beijing-Dublin International College and the signature of 13 agreements between Irish and Chinese education institutions. Next month the Secretary General of my Department will lead a joint working group between both Education Ministries to further develop the framework for education co-operation.

Irish higher education institutions are actively investing in China and there are now 125 joint programmes between sixty five Chinese Universities and seventeen Irish HEIs. My Department and Enterprise Ireland have been working collaboratively with the sector on a strategic plan for 2014 which will include an emphasis on alumni engagement, social media, education agents and targeted trade missions and fairs. The Government remains committed to deepening and growing our relationship with China and will monitor progress closely.

### **School Curriculum**

106. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of Irish post-primary schools teaching Mandarin; if there is a strategy in place to grow this number; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45175/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** There are a range of foreign languages available on the curriculum in schools - French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Japanese and Arabic. Mandarin Chinese is not currently on the curriculum.

It is not possible in the current budgetary situation to expand the range of languages available in the post primary curriculum. However there is a Chinese module for transition year which has a language element. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment are currently developing a short course in Mandarin for the new Junior Cycle. This course should be available from September 2014.

### **School Accommodation**

107. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding an application for additional permanent accommodation at a school (details supplied) in County Cavan; if this application will be processed as soon as possible as the school has outlined in detail to his Department the need for this building project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45273/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** I can confirm to the Deputy that the school to which he refers submitted an application for additional accommodation to my Department last week. A decision on the application will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

### **School Transport Provision**

108. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on transport provision for a child (details supplied) in County Cork; when arrangements will be put in place to facilitate this child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45274/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** Bus Éireann, which operates the School Transport Scheme, on behalf of my Department, has advised that the school transport service to facilitate the child in question will commence after the mid-term break.

### **Student Grant Scheme Applications**

109. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a student grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal. [45276/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support that the student referred to by the Deputy initially applied in error as an independent mature student. The original application was cancelled at the request of the student and he then reapplied as a dependent student. The second application was received on 15th September and is currently awaiting assessment.

### **Site Acquisitions**

110. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the lack of progress in securing a new site for the provision of a new school building (details supplied) in County Cork; if his attention has been drawn to the serious overcrowding in this school and that funding was ring fenced for the purchase of a site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45284/13]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department is continuing to work closely with the relevant Local Authority in relation to identifying and acquiring a suitable site for the provision of permanent accommodation for the school, and I can advise that options are currently under consideration in that regard. However, given the sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally, I am not in a position to comment further at this point in time.

Once a suitable site has been identified and acquired, it is intended that the proposed building project will be progressed in accordance with the five year programme announced last year.

### **Flood Prevention Measures**

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

the extent to which any assessment continues to be done of requirements for drainage or flood prevention measures on a county basis; the progress in this regard in respect of previously identified sensitive areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45316/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes):** A comprehensive flood risk assessment and management programme for all national river catchments is being undertaken through the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme under the direction of the Office of Public Works. The CFRAM Programme is being delivered through six separate CFRAM Studies. Further details on this Programme is available at [www.cfram.ie](http://www.cfram.ie).

The CFRAM Programme is designed to assess and map the country's river systems to identify areas at risk of significant flooding. The purpose of the Programme is to:

- produce detailed flood mapping in order to identify and map the existing and potential future flood hazard and risk areas within the study areas.

- Build the strategic information base necessary for making informed decisions in relation to managing flood risk.

- Identify viable structural and non-structural measures and options for managing the flood risks for localised high-risk areas and within each river catchment as a whole.

There are three main stages in the Programme and a suite of documents will be produced for public consultation at each stage:

- Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment - complete

- Flood Hazard Mapping (2013 - early 2014)

- Catchment Flood Risk Management Plans (2015).

The country has been divided into 6 river basin districts (RBD), covering all counties of the State, and separate studies have been commissioned, in each RBD, to carry out a detailed mapping of Ireland's rivers. The Programme will meet the requirements of the EU Floods Directive (Directive 2007/60/EC) and the 2004 Flood Policy Review Report. The preliminary flood risk assessment completed in 2011 identified 300 locations or Areas for Further Assessment which will be the subject of detailed flood risk analysis and modelling under the CFRAM Studies.

The River Basin Districts are:

- Shannon

- East

- South-East

- South-West

- West

- North-West/Neagh-Bann.

Engineering consultants have been appointed to all six RBDs to carry out the work.

In parallel with the CFRAM Programme, assessment and identification of flood risk on a localised basis within each county is carried out by local authorities who can apply for fund-

ing under the OPW Minor Flood Mitigation Works & Coastal Protection Scheme, introduced in 2009. The Scheme provides funding for local authorities to undertake localised minor flood mitigation works and coastal protection measures or studies, based on assessment of need within their own administrative areas. The Scheme generally applies to relatively straightforward cases where a solution can be readily identified and achieved in a short time frame.

To date, OPW has approved funding of €29m through the Scheme to local authorities in respect of approximately 400 projects located in every county around the country. Details in relation to the Scheme are available on the OPW website [www.opw.ie](http://www.opw.ie) under Flood Risk Management.

Pending the completion of the CFRAM the OPW is continuing with its programme of major flood relief schemes. These schemes are focused on locations, throughout the country, where significant flood events have occurred in the past. Spending in this regard has been of the order of €120m in the past five years and further details are available on [www.opw.ie](http://www.opw.ie) under Flood Risk Management.

### **Child Care Services Provision**

112. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the provision of crèche facilities (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44919/13]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin):** In Budget 2001, the then Minister for Finance allocated €12.7m for the provision of 10-15 crèches for the children of civil servants. The allocation was part of a major initiative by the Government to improve childcare provisions and increase the number of childcare places available. The provision of childcare places was identified as an important mechanism for enabling women to participate in the labour force.

Seven crèches were delivered under the Civil Service Childcare Initiative (CSCI): two in Dublin (Mount Street and Marlborough Street) and one each in Backweston (Kildare), Athlone, Ennis, Sligo and Cork. My Department chairs the CSCI Board which is responsible for the oversight of the initiative and the licensing arrangements with the crèche operators. The Office of Public Works (OPW), the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Civil Service Unions are represented on the Board.

A Focused Policy Assessment (FPA) of the Civil Service Childcare Initiative was carried out by the Central Evaluation Expenditure Unit (CEEU) in my Department during 2012. The principal findings of the FPA were that there was no longer significant market failure in respect of the supply of childcare places by the private sector and that the removal of this State subsidy could result in savings to the Exchequer of over €600,000 per annum. On that basis, the assessment found that there was no longer any rationale for continued State support for the seven civil service crèches delivered under the CSCI and recommended that the State should end its involvement in civil service crèches in a structured and planned fashion.

The OPW was asked to examine the seven purpose-built crèche facilities, and, in consultation with the CSCI Board, they identified an interim arrangement to allow for a phased transition approach to June 2016 to facilitate a public procurement process for the provision of commercially based crèche services at these locations which would no longer benefit from the significant subsidy being provided under the CSCI.

In December, 2012, the crèche operators were informed by the Board of the findings of the

FPA, and, that on the expiry of their current licence towards the end of 2013, the State would no longer subsidise or have any management role in the Civil Service crèches. The operators were offered an option to continue operating the crèche under a new interim licence for the transition period to June, 2016. The terms of the interim licence arrangements were the subject of negotiations between OPW and the operators. These include rental cost for the property to be paid by the operator as well as other costs such as maintenance and utilities costs which heretofore had been borne by the State. The interim licence also removes the restriction on the crèche to only accept children of public servants. The crèche operators were invited at the same time to start a process of communication with the parents regarding the changes. Once agreement on the interim licence arrangement was reached with the existing operators during the summer of 2013, the CSCI Board and OPW have been active in ensuring that operators inform parents of the new arrangements.

In view of these circumstances and the decision to discontinue the CSCI and the significant subsidy provided under it, the fees charged for the crèche services are strictly a commercial matter for the relevant operators, in respect of which I, as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform have no role or responsibility. With regard to the specific matters raised in the Deputy's question, I understand that notification issued to the parents on 10 October, 2013 advising parents of the new fee structure which is proposed to take effect from 1 January, 2014.

### **Office of Public Works Staff**

113. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will be employing any more engineering staff or any other staff in the near future in the Office of Public Works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45271/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes):** All recruitment undertaken by the Office of Public Works is governed by the necessity to remain within the staffing limits directed by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform through the Employment Control Framework (ECF), together with level of funding made available to meet payroll costs. Recruitment of additional permanent staff is subject to the sanction provided via that Department.

In relation to Established staff, the Office of Public Works (OPW), through the Public Appointments Service, is currently in the process of filling the post of Engineer Grade II (Fire & Security) and also recently advertised for the post of Director of the Botanic Gardens.

In relation to our State Industrial staff, there are no plans to recruit permanent staff in the near future. However, as occurs annually, it is intended to recruit the 2014 seasonal complement of staff in due course, principally to meet the demands of arterial drainage maintenance work and to augment guide staff at our heritage sites and/or visitor centres. These are advertised to the public.

The Office also has a training programme for the Graduate Engineers which assists them in attaining the skills and learning required to become Chartered Engineers. The programme involves taking in 10 graduates per year over a rolling 3-year cycle, up to a maximum of 30 graduates. A competition to place a further 10 Graduates is nearing completion and the successful candidates will be placed in January, 2014 which will bring the total placed to 30.

While not in a position to offer further employment opportunities, the Office is committed to partaking in the JobBridge programme and has recently offered 7 further placements on a 9 month work experience placement bringing the total such placements since 2011 to 54.

### **State Properties Data**

114. **Deputy Ann Phelan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount of land in public ownership in counties Carlow and Kilkenny; and if he will identify all lands owned by the public, including land owned by local authorities and semi-State bodies. [45286/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes):** The Office of Public Works (OPW) has a substantial portfolio of properties in its care. It has only one land bank, a 3.06 acre site in Thomastown, County Kilkenny that was acquired as part of the decentralisation programme for a new headquarters for the Health and Safety Authority. OPW has other properties in Carlow and Kilkenny. A list of these can be provided if required.

Any public lands in the ownership of the Local Authorities or Semi State Bodies is a matter for those organisations.

### **European Safety Standards**

115. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his plans for developing a safety strategy on the importation, procurement and use of Chinese lanterns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45186/13]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Chinese lanterns or sky lanterns are small balloons, generally made of paper and bamboo, with a burner inside to generate hot air that gives the lantern its lift. Permission is required from the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) before any launch of these products can take place. They are classified as 'free floating balloons' for which written launch permission is required. I am informed that there have been no recorded injuries in Ireland to people resulting from the use of sky lanterns.

The establishment of a European safety standard for these products is being considered by the European Committee for Standardisation. However, there is an acknowledgement that it is not a straightforward product for which to develop a standard. Under article 13 of the current General Product Safety Directive, an EU Commission decision to ban certain products can be made where there is agreement by member states that the risk is immediate and that current law does not protect the health and safety of consumers. This decision is valid for a year but can be renewed for terms not exceeding a year.

### **Enterprise Support Schemes**

116. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the measures available to sole traders to help them employ persons and to improve their business in general. [45277/13]

**Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Anyone interested in starting or expanding their own business should in the first instance contact their local County and City Enterprise Board (CEB). The CEBs support the indigenous micro-enterprise sector in the start-up and expansion phases and stimulate enterprise potential at local level. They are the first port of call in terms of advice, direction, training and, in certain circumstances, grant support for anyone who wishes to start or expand a business. Contact details for the CEBs are available on [www.enterpriseboards.ie](http://www.enterpriseboards.ie).

Work is well underway to transform the support infrastructure for small and micro businesses, which will see the CEBs as presently constituted dissolved and re-formed as Local

Enterprise Offices within Local Authorities working under the direction and guidance of the new Enterprise Ireland Centre of Excellence. This will ensure that Ireland has an enhanced, seamless and benchmarked support and progression pathway for small and micro business. I am confident that this reform will bring about a new level of engagement and interaction at both national and local level in relation to enterprise support and economic recovery and growth, and will result in an enhanced, more consistent and coherent set of enterprise supports with positive effects in terms of start-up numbers and increased employment.

I have also introduced two targeted schemes to support an additional flow of credit into the economy, namely the Microenterprise Loan Fund and the Credit Guarantee Scheme to positively impact on entrepreneurship and job creation. The Microenterprise Loan Fund improves access to credit for microenterprises and facilitates the growth and expansion of viable businesses with less than 10 employees from all industry sectors across the country, which have been refused access to credit from the banks. Support is in the form of loans for up to €25,000, available to start-up, newly established, or growing microenterprises, with viable business propositions, that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by banks after one full year in operation. As of 18 October 2013, MFI has approved 109 applications to the value of €1.674m supporting 107 microenterprises and 237 jobs.

The SME Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS) supports SMEs who, because of lack of collateral or because of the sector they operate in, face difficulties in accessing traditional bank credit. Commercially viable, well performing micro, small and medium enterprises that have a solid business plan and a defined market for their products or services, and can demonstrate their ability to repay the loan are the target of this scheme. The CGS is currently being independently reviewed to help improve the Scheme for all businesses. I intend taking appropriate action as a result of the review to ensure use of the Scheme is maximised and a report will be published shortly. As at 4 October 2013, there were 69 live CGS facilities resulting in €9.7m being sanctioned through the Scheme by the participating lenders resulting in 433 new jobs being created and 139 jobs maintained.

In addition, JobsPlus which was a disruptive reform in the 2013 Action Plan for Jobs is a new employer incentive, now run by the Department of Social Protection. This pays a cash grant towards employers who offer employment opportunities to the long term unemployed. Anyone interested in availing of the scheme should contact their Department of Social Protection local office.

### **Poverty Impact Assessment**

117. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider the implementation of a poverty impact assessment to assess the impact of the revised rent supplement limits announced in June 2013; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44934/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The purpose of the rent supplement scheme is to provide short-term 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. There are currently over 82,000 rent supplement recipients for which the Government has provided over €403 million for 2013. New revised rent limits came into force on Monday 17 June 2013 and will be in place until 31 December 2014.

The new rent limits were determined following an extensive review of the private rental market which showed rising rents for urban centres, particularly Dublin and Galway and reduction in rents for the majority of counties. The new limits continue to ensure that value for money is achieved while, at the same time, people on rent supplement are not priced out of the

market for private rented accommodation. The purpose of rent limits is to provide adequate access to accommodation for rent supplement tenants, while paying a minimum contribution. Where rent limits have fallen, this is due to the local rental market's supply and demand conditions which set the local pricing levels of rental property in the respective area.

Officials in the Department continue to examine the impact of the rent limits on those who claim rent supplement and ensure that their accommodation needs are met. Accordingly it is not proposed to conduct a poverty impact assessment.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility**

118. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the issue regarding levels of rent that those availing of rental assistance are supposed to negotiate in County Donegal, in view of the fact that these levels are not realistic for the local rental market and persons are being forced to move out of a house they are happy living in as landlords are refusing to negotiate rent. [44908/13]

134. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the hardship many families in County Donegal are enduring due to the reduction in rent levels; and if she will consider a new level to reflect the local market. [45326/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 118 and 134 together.

The purpose of rent supplement is to provide short-term 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. The overall aim is to provide short-term assistance, and not to act as an alternative to the other social housing schemes operated by the Exchequer.

The Department has completed a review of the maximum rent limits for rent supplement. The revised rent limits came into effect on 17 June 2013 and will remain in place until 31 December 2014. The emphasis of the June 2013 review was to ensure that value for money was achieved whilst, at the same time, ensuring that people on rent supplement are not priced out of the market for private rented accommodation. It is essential that State supports for rents are kept under review and reflect current market conditions.

During the rent limit review the Department used information from rental tenancies registered with the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) to analyse actual rental costs in each county across the country. The Department also used publicly available data sources including the Central Statistics Office rental indices, the Daft.ie Rental Report and websites, advertising rental properties to ascertain both the market trends and the current asking prices for one, two and three bedroom properties. The new maximum rent limits will not change the "after accommodation costs" income of persons receiving rent supplement.

The Department is satisfied that the new rent limits provide access to accommodation for persons claiming rent supplement. While the central aim is to ensure availability, the limits do not provide rent supplement tenants with access to all housing in all areas. Officials in the Departmental will continue to monitor the impact of the revised rates and those administering the scheme will continue to ensure that the accommodation needs of rent supplement recipients are met.

## Youth Unemployment Measures

119. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons aged 25 or under in receipt of jobseeker's benefit; the number of persons aged 25 or under in receipt of jobseeker's allowance; the number of dedicated training placements she is making exclusively available to those aged 25 or under; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44913/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The number of persons aged 25 or under in receipt of jobseeker's benefit or in receipt of jobseeker's allowance are 3,153 and 51,076, respectively.

Provision of the information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of dedicated training placements she is making exclusively available to those aged 25 or under is the responsibility of my colleague Ruairí Quinn T.D., Minister for Education and Skills.

## Social Welfare Code

120. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on the forthcoming abolition of the transition State pension; the ramifications it will have for those who reach the age of 65 years during 2014 and who will consequently be forced to apply for jobseeker's benefit or allowance and the attendant fall in outcome which will come about as a result of same; if she has considered the potential impact in terms of poverty among the elderly; and her plans to reconsider this change in policy or otherwise to avoid a fall in income for the elderly. [44926/13]

121. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to any implications of the forthcoming abolition of the transition State pension on the Equal Status Act, or any other equality legislation, in view of the fact that those who turn 65 during 2014 will be forced to apply for jobseeker's benefit or allowance, in spite of the fact that most contracts of employment state that the normal retirement age shall be 65, and that they are often unlikely to be in a position to affect this position. [44927/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 120 and 121 together.

Increasing State pension age and the abolition of the State pension (transition) are steps that have been taken to ensure the sustainability of pensions into the future. The decision to reform State pension was taken in the context of changing demographics and the fact that people are living longer and healthier lives. The Social Welfare and Pensions Act, 2011 provides that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This will begin in 2014 with the standardising of State pension age for all at 66 years and the cessation of State pension (transition). The State pension age will then increase to 67 years in 2021 and to 68 years in 2028.

It should be noted that until the 1970s, the standard age for receipt of State pension was 70 years of age. This applied at a time when longevity was much lower and working patterns were more likely to be physically demanding. State pension (transition) was introduced in 1970 when it was known as the retirement pension and was designed to bridge the gap between the standard social welfare pension age, which at that time was 70 years of age, and retirement age. Over time, the age for State pension (contributory) was reduced to 66 years.

However, the Deputy may wish to note that a significant number of people coming on to State pension (transition) in 2012 did not come from work as many were already on other social

welfare schemes. In December 2012 there were approximately 14,400 State pension (transition) claims in payment and of those, 12.5 per cent came from work with over 50 per cent coming from other social welfare schemes such as illness benefit, jobseekers benefit and assistance, invalidity and carers, indicating that significant numbers of people are leaving the workforce for a variety of reasons well in advance of State pension age.

In terms of social welfare supports available to those at age 65, all short term social welfare schemes are payable to age 66. The main social welfare payment available to those who leave employment before pension age is jobseeker's benefit. Persons who qualify for a jobseeker's benefit who are aged between 65 and 66 years are generally entitled to receive payment up to the date on which they reach pensionable age (66 years). Each application for any social welfare scheme is assessed on its own merit in terms of qualifying criteria and contribution history. Where a person fails to meet the qualifying conditions of an insurance based scheme, a means tested assistance payment may be available provided they satisfy the qualifying conditions including a means test. Further consideration is being given to the social welfare position of those exiting the workforce before pension age.

It should be noted there is no statutory compulsory retirement age for employees in Ireland. Responsibility for setting retirement age is a matter for the employer/employee relationship and the contract of employment. However, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has made rulings in a series of age-discrimination cases concerning Directive 2000/78/EC, which prohibit work-related discrimination on various grounds, including age. The CJEU has clarified that mandatory retirement ages may be set down by employers within the context of national law, whether by contract, custom and practice or other means, which must be objectively and reasonably justified by a legitimate social policy aim, with the means of achieving that aim being both appropriate and necessary. Consideration of these issues as they relate to enterprise and equality policy come within the respective remit of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Minister for Justice and Equality.

An interdepartmental Working and Retirement Group was initiated to consider the cross departmental policy issues that will support longer working and thereby improve the sustainability and adequacy of pensions systems. The interdepartmental group, chaired by the Department of Social Protection, includes representatives from the Departments of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation; Justice and Equality; Public Expenditure and Reform; and the Pensions Board. Further engagement has also been undertaken with the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health and Children and work in this regard is ongoing.

### **Social Welfare Appeals Status**

122. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will confirm that a formal appeal has been received in connection with an entitlement to widower's pension and an alleged overpayment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44938/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that there is no record of any appeal by the person concerned having been received by that office.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

## Social Welfare Benefits Applications

123. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason the mother of a young boy (details supplied) suffering from autism spectrum disorder in County Leitrim has been refused carer's benefit and domiciliary care allowance despite extensive medical evidence from a number of experts regarding the 24 hour care that this child requires; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44989/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** An application for domiciliary care allowance was received from the person concerned on 12th August 2013. This application was referred to one of the Department's Medical Assessors who considered that the child was not medically eligible for the allowance. A letter issued on 13th September 2013 advising her of the decision. She subsequently requested a review of this decision and supplied additional information on her child's condition. Her application along with the additional information provided, was reviewed by a second Medical Assessor who found the child to be medically eligible for the allowance. The person concerned was notified of the revised decision to award the allowance on 18th October 2013 and payment will issue to her shortly.

An application for carer's benefit was received from the person concerned on 22 August 2013. This application was refused on the grounds that the care recipient was not so disabled as to require full time care and attention as prescribed in regulations. The person concerned was notified of this decision on 11 September 2013. The person concerned subsequently submitted further medical evidence for review. Her application along with the additional information provided, was reviewed by a second Medical Assessor who found the care recipient to be medically eligible for the benefit. Confirmation of carers leave dates was requested from the person concerned on 15 October 2013. On receipt of this information a decision will be made on the application.

## Household Benefits Scheme

124. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will clarify the position in respect of the withdrawal of the telephone allowance and the extreme implications it will have for old age pensioners and persons living alone in rural isolated areas, whose alarm and security systems are connected to the land line; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44996/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** My overall concern in this Budget has been to protect the primary social welfare rates. To allow us to protect these core payments, we have had to look very carefully at other additional payments such as the household benefits package, including the telephone allowance. While we have cut the telephone allowance, there have been no cuts to the electricity/gas allowance, free travel, the free television licence, the fuel allowance or the living alone increase.

The cost of the telephone allowance scheme has risen each year and the number of eligible customers has increased very significantly. In 2007 there were some 316,000 people receiving the telephone allowance, today there are almost 400,000, an increase of 24%. Each year almost 10,000 extra customers become eligible for the allowance because of the increased number of pension recipients. The telephone allowance was introduced at a time when telephone services were more expensive and fewer people had telephones. In recent years the nature of the telephone market has been transformed with deregulation, mobile services and bundled services including television, broadband and telephone. There is a wide variety of deals and great competition now available.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government has responsibility for the Seniors Alert Scheme which provides grant support for the supply of equipment such as personal alarms, smoke detectors and security lighting to enable older people without sufficient means to continue to live securely in their homes. The grant assistance is made available through community and voluntary groups registered with the Department and the equipment supplied under the scheme remains the property of the community group. The budget allocation for 2013 was €2.35 million. While the equipment currently provided requires the use of a landline, there are other companies in the market providing similar services based on mobile technology.

Finally, if any person is in particular difficulty, an application may be made for an exceptional needs payments (ENP) under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, to help meet an essential, once-off cost which an applicant is unable to meet out of his or her own resources. There is no automatic entitlement to this payment. Each application is determined based on the particular circumstances of the case.

### **Invalidity Pension Appeals**

125. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection when invalidity pension will be granted in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45002/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 5 July 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department of Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 21 October 2013 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Appeals**

126. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a jobseeker's assistance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wicklow; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45011/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an Appeals Officer, having considered all of the evidence presented, has decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

### **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in determination of an appeal in respect of an application for carer's allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45012/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The application for carer's allowance by the person in question was disallowed on 23 January 2013. The person in question appealed this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of the application. The decision was reviewed by a deciding officer in the light of the additional evidence supplied but there was no change in the decision and the customer was notified of this on 7 June 2013. All the necessary papers have recently been submitted by the Department to the Social Welfare Appeals Office for determination. The Social Welfare Appeals Office will be in touch with the person directly regarding the progress of the appeal.

*Question No. 128 withdrawn.*

### **Social Welfare Appeals Status**

129. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a social welfare appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45015/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

### **Guardian's Payment Appeals**

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress of an appeal in respect of an application for guardian's payment in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; if an oral hearing will be arranged in this instance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45020/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 15th October 2013, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing. Your request for an oral hearing in this case has been forwarded to the Appeals Officer.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Payments**

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the correct amount of rent allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45021/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The client's entitlement has been examined and full entitlement to rent supplement is being paid.

### **Community Employment Schemes Funding**

132. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the threat to the vital services provided under the community employment and job initiative schemes in a centre (details supplied) due to the cutback in materials and overheads money under the CE scheme this year; the action she will take to preserve these vital services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45078/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** The Community Employment (CE) scheme is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long term unemployed people and other disadvantaged persons with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis.

St. Nicholas of Myra CE scheme has approval for 47 participants and two supervisors in a variety of work experience roles. The project currently receives a material and training grant together with funding for participant allowances and supervisor wages bringing the total grant aid to approximately €723,000. The budget was the same for 2012. Of the 37 current participants, 23 are based in Carman Hall which is under the control of the St. Nicholas of Myra parish. A recent Health and Safety audit found that the building is unsafe for use. Officials from the Department of Social Protection met with the sponsors on Thursday 17th October to discuss the implications of the Health & Safety report and to ensure in so far as possible that CE participants will be not displaced.

The Department understands that discussions are ongoing with Dublin City Council regarding the future of the building but as yet no plans or funding have been agreed. The Department will work with the sponsor and Dublin City Council to seek a solution to the current challenges.

### **Social Welfare Benefits**

133. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Social Protection whether it is possible for a person in receipt of a social welfare payment that will remain in payment for six weeks after their death to specify in advance a payee, such as an undertaker, to receive the six weeks of payments following their death, to ensure their wishes are adhered to; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [45183/13]

**Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton):** My Department provides a range of supports to people as contingencies arise during a person's lifecycle. A number of payments allow for an additional six weeks payment, when a death occurs, to the person's spouse, civil partner or cohabitant. The purpose of this continuation of payment is to support the surviving spouse in those early weeks of bereavement. I have no plans to provide for changes to this practice.

### **Deer Hunting**

135. **Deputy Eric Byrne** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the shooting licences available to persons to stalk deer in the Dublin-Wicklow mountains. [45323/13]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan):** Annual licences to hunt deer are issued by my Department to individuals under the Wildlife Acts. The hunting season for deer is regulated by the Open Seasons Order, which prescribes the periods for the hunting of various deer species. These periods vary depending on the gender and age of the deer. My Department has issued some 4,200 deer hunting licences to date to individuals for the current hunting season, which commenced on 1 September 2013. On average, about 20% of deer hunting licences are granted to individuals in the counties of Dublin and Wicklow.

I should point out that individuals who have a deer hunting licence also require a Firearms Certificate issued by An Garda Síochána for the weapon used to hunt deer.

### **Rural Recreation Promotion**

136. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will provide an update on the round Lough Lein trail, County Kerry; the anticipated timeline for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44912/13]

**Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan):** In July 2012, I convened a Steering Group comprising of representatives from the key stakeholders in the Lough Leane trail project and charged the Group with the planning and development of the trail. To date, the Group has met on seven occasions and a further meeting is scheduled next month. Most of this trail will be inside the boundary of Killarney National Park and, because of the associated ecological issues, the task of delivering this project will require careful consideration and planning.

To ensure that the project is delivered as efficiently and quickly as possible, it has been broken down into various modules, which will allow the advancement of some sections of the trail while the necessary consultations, assessments and planning and any land acquisitions as may be required for the more complicated aspects of the plan are moved along in parallel. Final completion of the trail will depend on the progress made on advancing all of these issues and a final deadline has not been set at this stage. I am satisfied that significant progress is being made and, insofar as possible within the constraints of the public finances, I will seek to ensure that there are no avoidable delays in bringing the project to completion.

### **Bord na Móna Operations**

137. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will prevent the downgrading of Bord na Móna at Boora works, Leabeg, Tullamore, County Offaly (details supplied). [44991/13]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):** This is a matter for Bórd na Mona and one in which I, as Minister, have no function.

### **Internet Access**

138. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the percentage of the Irish population that have access to the Internet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44904/13]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):** Considerable progress has been made in recent years in both the coverage and speeds of national broadband infrastructure, with a multiplicity of commercial operators providing services over a diverse range of technology platforms. The Government has also undertaken a number of initiatives to bring broadband to those parts of the country where commercial operators have been unable to offer services. The combination of private investment and State interventions such as the National Broadband Scheme means that Ireland has met the EU Commission's Digital Agenda for Europe target of having a basic broadband services available to all areas by 2013. Accordingly, every citizen should have access to at least a basic broadband service.

The Government's National Broadband Plan, which I published in August 2012, aims to radically change the broadband landscape in Ireland by ensuring that high speed broadband is available to all citizens and businesses. This will be achieved by providing:

- a policy and regulatory framework that assists in accelerating and incentivising commercial investment, and
- a State-led investment for areas where it is not commercial for the market to invest.

In order to progress the State-led investment for areas where it is not commercial for the market to invest, a full procurement process must be designed and EU State Aids approval must be obtained. My Department is engaged in a comprehensive mapping exercise of the current and anticipated investment by the commercial sector to identify where the market is expected to deliver high speed broadband services over the coming years. The results of this mapping exercise will inform the precise areas that need to be targeted in the State-led investment as envisaged in the National Broadband Plan. Intensive technical, financial and legal preparations, including stakeholder engagement, are on-going. The procurement process for the approved intervention will be carried out in accordance with EU and Irish procurement rules and it is expected that it will be launched in 2014.

Through the implementation of the National Broadband Plan, I am committed to ensuring that all parts of Ireland have access to high speed broadband, with a view to ensuring that all citizens and businesses can participate fully in, and maximise the benefits of a digitally enabled economy and society. While all citizens should now have access to at least a basic broadband service, statistics show that some 65% of households have a broadband subscription. This highlights the need for the range of demand-led measures contained in the recently-published National Digital Strategy.

### **Renewable Energy Projects**

139. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will outline the details of the environmental assessment in respect of a wind turbine project in the midlands; the way this assessment will differ from an environmental impact assessment; and if he will consider seeking an environmental assessment of other energy projects, including the EirGrid Grid West project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45054/13]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):**

A Renewable Energy Export Policy and Development Framework (with a spatial dimension) is currently being prepared by my Department and will facilitate An Bord Pleanála in making planning decisions on individual proposed renewable energy developments, regardless of location, of significant scale for export. It will be underpinned by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which is a formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to adopt the plan or programme. The SEA will be carried out by my Department based on the findings of an Environmental Report. This is in accordance with the provisions of the relevant EU legislation, including Directive 2001/42/EC and the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations, 2004, as amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations, 2011.

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) differs from an SEA in that it is an environmental assessment examining the impact a particular development project, such as a wind farm, will have on the receiving and surrounding environment. The EIA is carried out by the appropriate competent planning authority on a project specific basis. Typically, an individual wind farm project is subject to an EIA where the wind farm has greater than 5 turbines or a generating capacity greater than 5MW. Therefore, any party wishing to submit a planning application for a proposed project of significant scale for renewable energy export will be required to compile an Environmental Impact Statement to support the application. In considering such applications, An Bord Pleanála will take account of the Renewable Energy Export Policy and Development Framework underpinned by the SEA completed by my Department, as well as the project level EIA, before making its decision on whether or not to grant planning permission.

EirGrid, as with any public or private sector organisation, is required to comply with all EU Directives on environmental and appropriate assessment in progressing transmission projects, including Grid West, through the planning process.

### **Electromagnetic Fields Studies**

140. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources with regard to the data and report of the expert monitoring panel on electromagnetic field, EMF, emissions in respect of the east-west interconnector, if he considers that a similar report on potential EMF emissions from the Grid West project is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45055/13]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):**

My Department has no function in respect of any aspect of the matter of potential health effects of EMF. Responsibilities previously held by the then Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources in relation to such effects of EMF became the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government from 1 May 2007, with a view to non-ionising radiation becoming part of the remit of the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII).

I am, however, aware that Ireland has taken a precautionary approach on this issue and adopted international guidelines for exposure to electromagnetic radiation developed by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection. These guidelines are set at levels which are many times less than the experimental levels at which no adverse effects have been established. Ireland has also participated in the work of the International Committee on Electromagnetic Safety, which sets standards in this area. I have full confidence in the State

energy companies' commitment to complete the Gridwest project and other projects under the Grid25 programme to the highest safety standards and without risk to the health and safety of local communities.

### **Pension Provisions**

141. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the discussions he has had with ESB regarding concerns associated with its occupational pension scheme; the reason it was changed to a defined contribution scheme and the implications for staff who do not generally have an entitlement to a State pension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45179/13]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):** In late 2008, the Trustees of the ESB Superannuation Scheme brought forward the Tri-Annual Valuation of the Scheme by one year to assess the financial health of the Scheme. The Actuarial Valuation to 31 December 2008 showed an ongoing valuation deficit of €1.9 billion and a Minimum Funding Standard deficit of €1.8 billion. As required by the Scheme rules, ESB and the ESB Group of Unions formed a working group to assess how best to address the reported deficit and to protect as far as feasible the interest of ESB and the current members of the Scheme. ESB reached an agreement with staff in 2010 to resolve the pension deficit. The measures adopted under that agreement have, I understand, had a positive effect, resulting in the Scheme Actuary recently reporting that the Scheme is now in balance on an on-going actuarial basis.

Aside from the on-going actuarial position, the Pensions Board also requires the ESB Scheme to assess whether it could meet a certain prescribed standard, known as the Minimum Funding Standard (MFS). This effectively tests whether the Scheme could meet all its current obligations if it were wound up immediately. Neither the Government nor the ESB envisages the winding up of the Scheme but regardless, the Scheme is currently still required to meet the requirements of the MFS. I understand that the Scheme Actuary reported at the end of 2011 that the ESB scheme, like many others, did not, at that time, satisfy the MFS requirements.

I am advised that the Pensions Board does not require the MFS deficit to be addressed immediately but does require that a plan be developed to address it over a reasonable time. I am informed that the Trustees of the ESB scheme, with the agreement of ESB, submitted a funding plan to the Pensions Board, which was approved in October 2012. In light of the fact that the funding plan was submitted in 2011, the then existing rules relating to the Minimum Funding Standard applied - the Pensions Board published revised MFS rules in June 2012 for addressing pension fund deficits. I am also informed that the ESB plan aims to eliminate the deficit by 2018 and that this plan remains on track.

Finally, with regard to the manner in which ESB accounts for the Scheme in its financial statements, my Department has been assured by the ESB that having taken expert legal and financial advice, the Company is satisfied that the current accounting treatment for the Scheme is correct and in accordance with applicable laws and international accounting standards. I understand that the ESB Scheme remains registered with the Pensions Board as a defined benefit scheme, based on the relevant definitions as set out by the Pensions Act.

### **Wind Energy Guidelines**

142. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the position regarding the review of the national policy on wind energy and wind farms. [45272/13]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):**

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, in conjunction with my Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, is undertaking a review of the Wind Energy Guidelines which will address the key issues of noise (including separation distance) and shadow flicker. Draft guidelines will be published for public consultation by end-November 2013 with a view to finalising guidelines by mid-2014. The revised guidelines will apply to all wind farm development in Ireland.

In terms of the potential export of renewable energy, one of the key requirements for proposals of a significant scale for wind energy export will be the achievement of the necessary planning consents in Ireland. Planning permission for such projects, which will be determined by An Bord Pleanála, must await the putting in place of a clear national planning policy framework and I have asked my Department to prepare such a framework. The policy framework will provide the opportunity to integrate relevant EU Directive requirements (including Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment), trans-boundary dimensions and stakeholder participation within the context of a national framework.

The outcome will be a high level development framework taking its lead from the Inter-Governmental Agreement, EU Directive requirements and relevant national, regional and local planning policy considerations in conjunction with wider policies, objectives and requirements. It will incorporate a vision and strategy coupled with technical parameters and a spatial element. The development of the framework will be progressed by my Department over the next year or so and will provide confidence and certainty for all stakeholders through an open, fair, balanced and consultative process.

The initial phase of public consultation has now commenced and all interested parties and members of the public have been formally invited to make written submissions on the export project which will be taken into consideration in preparing the framework. Details can be found on a new dedicated section on my Department's website, exclusive to the project, and which will be updated as the project progresses.

### **Bioenergy Strategy Publication**

143. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the timeframe for the publication of the bioenergy strategy; the other measures he plans to put in place to incentivise the Irish market for renewable energy products; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45304/13]

**Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Pat Rabbitte):**

The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. In order to meet this target, Ireland is committed to meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heating and 10% of transport power from renewable sources, with the transport target also being legally binding.

There are already a number of policies in place to incentivise the increased use of renewable energy. In the electricity sector, the REFIT schemes are the principal policy supports and offer guaranteed tariffs for electricity from wind, hydropower and a number of categories of biomass. The REFIT3 scheme also supports biomass-fuelled high efficiency cogeneration which, in addition to renewable electricity, supports renewable heat. This builds on the increases in renewable heat which were achieved by the Greener Homes Scheme, the Renewable Heat Deployment Programme (ReHeat) and the CHP Deployment Programme. In the transport sector, the penetration of renewable energy will grow mainly with the increased use of sustainable biofuels

which is supported by way of the Biofuel Obligation Scheme. There is also a grant scheme in place to support the deployment of electric vehicles.

My Department is currently finalising a bioenergy strategy which will set out the actions, including any additional policies, required to optimise Ireland's bioenergy sector's contribution to the 2020 renewable energy targets.

### **Farm Improvement Scheme Expenditure**

144. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if a subsidy is still in existence for the installation of electricity in farm out offices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44942/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** The Farm Electrification Grant Scheme (FEGS) was administered and funded through the former Department of Community Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCEGA) followed by my Department from January 2005 to 31 December 2011. In that time some €511,000 was paid to farmers under the scheme, to subsidise the installation of electricity supply to farms located in disadvantaged areas which were without supply or where supply was inadequate to facilitate their development and modernisation. The maximum grant payable was €508 for single-phase supply and €1,016 for 3-phase supply.

The scheme was closed to new applications from 1 December, 2010.

### **Animal Welfare Bodies**

145. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to help relocate the Ballymun Dogs Trust, which will be without a premises soon due to the regeneration of its current location in Balbutcher Lane, Dublin 9. [45082/13]

146. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the impending closure of Assisi Animal Clinic due to the regeneration of Ballymun and the demolition of the flat block from which it operated; and his plans to help this organisation to relocate considering the important work it does in the community. [45083/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 145 and 146 together.

My Department understands that the premises used by the Assisi Animal Clinic and the Ballymun Dogs Trust are located in one of the flat blocks which are scheduled for demolition by Dublin City Council. It is a matter for the Council to make the necessary arrangements to ensure all units are vacated prior to commencing demolition. I have no function with regard to the sourcing of alternative accommodation for these organisations.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which this country's carbon reduction targets continue to be

met in line with international agreements; the extent if any to which adjustment is needed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45558/13]

173. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which carbon reduction targets have been achieved in each of the past six years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45318/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 147 and 173 together.

The Environmental Protection Agency report, Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions in 2012, which was published on 9 October 2013 and is available on the Agency's website ([www.epa.ie](http://www.epa.ie)), sets out national greenhouse gas emissions for the period 1990 to 2012 and includes details on compliance for the purposes of the Kyoto Protocol over its first commitment period covering 2008-2012. Compliance with Ireland's Kyoto Protocol limit is achieved by ensuring that Ireland's total greenhouse gas emissions at the end of the five-year period are below our Kyoto limit, set as 314.18 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>eq. The data provided in the EPA report indicate that Ireland will achieve its Kyoto Protocol target.

*Question No. 148 answered with Question No. 9.*

### **Fire Safety Regulations**

149. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the specific fire safety building regulations which were not complied with in the case of Priory Hall; and if he will confirm that such breaches of fire safety building regulations do not exist in other housing estates constructed during the building boom, in particular in the nearby Belmayne estate. [44771/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** In late 2008, following a complaint to Dublin Fire Brigade, Dublin City Council became concerned about fire safety issues more generally at Priory Hall and came to regard the buildings as potentially dangerous. Several attempts to have the developer address fire safety concerns were unsuccessful and on 3 December 2009 Dublin City Council delivered a letter by hand to each occupied apartment advising them that Fire Safety Notices had been served on the developer which prohibited the use of the buildings until such time as works specified in the Fire Safety Notices had been completed.

The Housing Department of Dublin City Council subsequently engaged consultant engineers to carry out a detailed investigation of the buildings which identified further and more serious concerns than had been uncovered by any previous inspection. Since that time the local authority has used the statutory powers available to it to pursue compliance with planning permission conditions and with fire safety and building standards requirements, all of which are at issue in relation to Priory Hall. Failure by the developer to honour court undertakings to remedy fire safety defects led to the High Court orders to evacuate the development in October 2011.

With a view to preparing for remediation of the development Dublin City Council last year commissioned a full-scale technical survey of the apartment units at Priory Hall in its ownership in order to identify all necessary remediation works required in order to bring the units into compliance with the current requirements of the building regulations. It is understood

that, while the superstructure of the development is sound, significant remediation works are required and will include: replacement or securing of the entire brick façade, stabilisation of certain floors and walls, addressing widespread fire stopping and compartmentalisation defects, correction of stairs, removal of a small number of inner rooms, securing railings and stair rails, adding insulation, and removal of pyritic hardcore in one block. A full-scale technical survey of the remaining units will be necessary before arrangements for re-design and remediation works can be put in place.

In relation to Belmayne my Department understands that Dublin City Council, through Dublin Fire Brigade, was previously notified by the developer of a construction defect affecting 232 properties at the Belmayne Housing Complex. The developer, acting responsibly in consultation with his Fire Engineer, contacted the Local Authority immediately and undertook to carry out remedial works to all of the properties affected. Dublin City Council and the Fire Consultants for the developer agreed on the works necessary to rectify the problem units. The Fire Officer is satisfied that when these remedial works are completed this defect will have been addressed.

My Department understands that remediation work on 225 units has now been completed while 7 units remain to be remediated but the developer has to date been unable to gain access to these properties. The onus in this instance is on the developer to ensure compliance with the requirements of Part B of the Building Regulations and my Department understands that the developer has retained the services of Fire Safety Consultants to carry out inspections of the works during the remediation process.

In relation to the more general issue of building control and fire safety concerns in other developments it is important to note that implementation and enforcement of the building control system is a matter for the local building control authority. My Department has no function in assessing, checking or testing compliance, or otherwise, of specific works or developments. My Department continues, however, to liaise with local authorities in relation to significant building control issues that have arisen in a number of multi-unit developments across the country. I have urged local authorities to continue to use all of the powers currently available to them to address issues of building standards compliance, including in relation to fire safety.

### **Constitutional Amendments**

150. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will report on the timeframe for the proposed referendum to reduce the voting age to 16 years. [35073/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I provided to the Oireachtas, in this House, the Government response to the first report of the Convention on the Constitution. The Government welcomed that report and accepted the main recommendations of the convention in the report. These included a recommendation that the Constitution should be changed to provide for a voting age of 16 years. The Government committed therefore to holding a referendum before the end of 2015 on a proposal to amend the Constitution to provide for a voting age of 16.

We are now proceeding with preparations for bringing forward the relevant legislation and, as I said last July this will include careful examination of the consequences of such a change across the policy spectrum including for the age of majority.

## Recycling Policy

151. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will consider the introduction of a deposit retention tax for certain metal cans and plastic bottles with the specific focus of reducing littering and environmental pollution; if not, the reason for same; if he has conducted a feasibility study in relation to same; if he will share the findings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44900/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** In June 2012, as part of a commitment in the Programme for Government to examine the introduction of a levy on packaging in conjunction with a waste reduction programme, I initiated a root and branch review of all aspects of the Producer Responsibility Initiative model in Ireland. The aim of the review was to assess the nature and level of the challenges which are currently facing the existing Producer Responsibility Agreements as well as the forthcoming challenges that are expected to arise in the management of various waste streams. My Department also completed a consultation process with stakeholders on this issue.

Following completion of the consultation process and the receipt of the consultant's report, I decided, after careful consideration, not to proceed with the introduction of a packaging levy at this time. The primary reason for my decision is that the introduction of a packaging levy is likely to generate a number of regulatory costs to business and the public sector with few identifiable benefits, given our very successful packaging recovery and recycling performance to date in Ireland. In addition, the consultant's report does not recommend the introduction of a Deposit and Refund scheme as to establish such a scheme is inappropriate, in view of the operation of the existing packaging scheme [Repak] and policies concerning household waste collection, plus the high administrative costs of introducing such a system.

The consultant's report is available on my Department's website and can be accessed at: <http://www.environ.ie/en/PublicationsDocuments/FileDownload,34038,en.pdf>.

*Question No. 152 answered with Question No. 18.*

## Homelessness Strategy

153. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the preventive measures currently being used to ensure that those who move on from homelessness are able to maintain long-term stable housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44929/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The importance of homeless preventative measures, such as housing advice, advocacy and tenancy support are acknowledged in the homeless strategy, *The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008-2013*. Early and effective interventions are essential to prevent the occurrence or reoccurrence of homelessness. Wider Government policy initiatives to tackle early school leaving, unemployment, addiction and mental ill-health and supports for vulnerable families will ultimately contribute to a reduction in the number of people becoming homeless. An effective role is also necessary at local level in identifying and addressing the needs of at risk households and groups and encouraging the development of preventative measures on a regional basis.

Earlier in 2013, I published the Government's Homelessness Policy Statement in which I outlined the Government's aim to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. The state-

ment emphasises a housing-led approach which is about accessing permanent housing as the primary response to all forms of homelessness, and includes provision for homelessness preventative measures and supports for homeless people with special needs. The availability and supply of secure, affordable and adequate housing is essential in ensuring sustainable tenancies and ending long-term homelessness.

Arrangements have been put in place to provide for the delegation of homelessness funding to the lead housing authority in each of the 9 regions. These arrangements seek to ensure that the measures being pursued by housing authorities reflect the housing-led approach advocated in the policy statement, that actions are in place towards achieving the target of ending long-term homelessness by the end of 2016, and that evidence to support progress will be presented through the reports on the relevant service indicators.

### **Homelessness Strategy**

154. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to reverse the April 2013 30% increase in the number of persons sleeping rough on the streets of Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44930/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** Traditionally it has been difficult to quantify the number of homeless persons on an on-going basis; this is in part a consequence of the volatility within this cohort of housing need. However, during the course of 2013 the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), which commenced operation in Dublin in 2011, is being extended nationally. When PASS is fully implemented nationally it will provide good quality, timely data which will allow housing authorities to report in relation to the on-going extent and the dynamics of homelessness as it is addressed.

In advance of the full implementation of PASS the most complete set of data available in relation to homelessness nationally is the Central Statistics Office’s special Census report, Homeless Persons in Ireland, which was published on 6 September 2012. This report indicated that a total of 65 individuals were sleeping rough on Census night, 10 April 2011, while identifying a further 3,743 people as housed in accommodation defined as emergency, transitional or long-term. Of the total of 3,808 individuals included in the report, almost 60% were in long-term or transitional housing arrangements.

A count of rough sleepers conducted in April 2013, organised by the Dublin Region Homeless Consultative Forum, found that there was 94 persons confirmed as sleeping rough on the night in question. These rough sleeper figures indicate the significant challenge in dealing with the complexity of the homelessness issue and the difficulties in finding answers to it. Rough sleeping is monitored closely countrywide but particularly in Dublin. The problem of rough sleeping is very limited outside of Dublin, with Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Galway City Councils reporting sufficient bed capacity on a nightly basis and that there is no one sleeping rough due to a lack of a bed. The Dublin Region’s Outreach Team works on an on-going basis to engage with all individuals sleeping rough with the specific goal of moving people into accommodation through Dublin City Council’s Central Placement Service. Indeed, Dublin City Council recently commenced a public awareness campaign to encourage members of the public to contact the Outreach team about persons sleeping rough with a view to moving people into temporary accommodation and on to independent living.

The priority of this Government is to ensure that homeless people have access to secure, stable, appropriate accommodation. It is not acceptable that people should sleep on the streets

of our cities and towns. While the immediate hardship of sleeping rough may be solved through emergency accommodation, this is not a viable long term solution. The recently published Homelessness Policy Statement outlined the Government's aim to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. The statement emphasises a housing-led approach which is about accessing permanent housing as the primary response to all forms of homelessness. While it is clear that a proportion of funding must be used to provide sufficient bed capacity to accommodate those in need of emergency accommodation, it is equally important that resources are channelled to deliver more permanent responses in a more focused and strategic way. In the Dublin region in 2012, 879 people moved from homelessness to independent living.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with the housing authorities. Work continues between central and local government and the voluntary sector to ensure that the considerable monies spent on services for the homeless are effectively and appropriately targeted.

### **Rent Supplement Scheme Administration**

155. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will consider the replacement of rent supplement with the proposed housing assistance payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44931/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** In March 2012, the Government approved in principle the transfer of responsibility for recipients of rent supplement with an established housing need from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to local authorities using a new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). On 18 July 2013, the Government approved the introduction of HAP including the provision of funding to the local authorities to cover the costs of accommodating HAP claimants. My Department and the DSP continue to work closely on the legal, policy and operational issues involved in developing and introducing HAP.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

156. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on whether there is a need to ring-fence a proportion of the €100 million housing stimulus package towards housing for persons moving out of homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44932/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I refer to the reply to Priority Question 4 on today's order paper which sets out the position in this matter.

### **NAMA Social Housing Provision**

157. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will ensure that an adequate proportion of National Asset Management Agency units is ring-fenced for persons moving out of homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44933/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** My Department, the Housing Agency and NAMA continue

to work together with housing authorities and approved housing bodies towards identifying and bringing units into social housing use. Units identified through this process are considered by housing authorities for the full range of possible social housing uses, including homeless appropriate accommodation. I am satisfied that when units appropriate to addressing homelessness are identified this process allows housing authorities to bring them into use for those purposes.

Earlier in 2013 I published the Government's Homelessness Policy Statement in which I outlined the Government's aim to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. The statement emphasises a housing-led approach which is about accessing permanent housing as the primary response to all forms of homelessness. I am pleased to confirm that my Department's 2014 national homelessness budget will be maintained at the same level as 2013 - €45 million – to ensure continued progress towards the achievement of the 2016 target of ending long-term homelessness. It continues to be my Department's objective to maximise the delivery of social housing using all resources available.

### **Local Authority Housing Maintenance**

158. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will ensure funding is made available to Fingal County Council with respect to the scheme for alterations to council-rented dwellings to assist disabled and older persons in urgent need of home alteration works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44985/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** Under my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme, local authorities are allocated funding each year in respect of a range of measures to improve the standard and overall quality of their social housing stock, including the regeneration of large social housing estates and flat complexes, estate-wide remedial works schemes, funding for extensions and adaptations to meet the needs of tenants with a disability etc. Funding is also provided by my Department for a programme of works aimed at improving the overall standard and energy efficiency of the housing stock.

Earlier in 2013, I allocated just over €1.29 million to Fingal County Council for spending on a range of retrofitting and remedial works. This includes some €159,000 for the provision of adaptations and extensions to meet the needs of particular tenants.

### **Emergency Accommodation Provision**

159. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form the amount of money spent on emergency accommodation in the years 2008 to 2012, inclusive, and to date in 2013; the long-term accommodation provisions that are being delivered to reduce the cost of emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45051/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** The extensive information requested is not readily available in my Department. This information is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Earlier this year I published a Homelessness Policy Statement in which I outlined the Government's aim to end long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. The statement emphasises a housing-led approach which is about accessing permanent housing, rather than emergency accommodation, as the primary response to all forms of homelessness. While it is clear that a proportion of funding must be used to provide sufficient bed capacity to accommodate those in need of emergency accommodation, it is equally important that resources are channelled to

deliver more permanent responses in a more focused and strategic way. The arrangements that I have put in place during 2013 for delegating homelessness funding to the lead housing authority in each of the 9 regions seek to ensure that the measures being pursued by housing authorities reflect the housing-led approach and that actions are in place towards achieving the target of ending long-term homelessness by the end of 2016.

### **Local Authority Charges Yield**

160. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of companies here that are paying €500,000 and over in rates per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45085/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** The information requested is not available in my Department. Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Act 2001. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority.

### **Local Authority Services**

161. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress made to tackle the issue of overgrown hedges and trees in privately-owned gardens; if he will consider enacting legislation similar to the High Hedges Act 2011 in Northern Ireland; his views in terms of a legal remedy to the problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45287/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** There is no legislation in this jurisdiction regulating the height of trees and hedges in privately owned gardens and I do not currently propose to introduce legislation on this matter. My Department understands that there is a civil remedy of nuisance available in respect of the branches or roots of a neighbour's trees encroaching on one's property. I have recently been in correspondence with the Joint sub-Committee on Public Petitions and will give consideration to their recommendations on this matter.

### **Seniors Alert Scheme Issues**

162. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide in tabular form a breakdown by county of the numbers of recipients of the senior alert scheme in 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; the number of groups used to distribute the programme in 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; the amount of money spent in 2011, 2012 and earmarked for 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45289/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** My Department manages the Seniors Alert Scheme which encourages and assists the community's support for older people by means of a community-based grant scheme to improve the security of people over 65 years of age. The Scheme is administered by local community and voluntary groups with the support of my Department.

The aim of the Seniors Alert Scheme is to support independent living for those over 65 who live alone or with a person who is also over 65 years of age and of limited means. A key element of the Scheme is the provision of funding for a socially monitored alarm which supports this independence.

The tabular information requested in regard to the number of groups used to distribute the programme in 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; the amount of money spent in 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013 on a county by county basis is available on my Department's website: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/Community/SeniorsAlert/FileDownload,26536,en.xls>.

The following table outlines the expenditure and the overall number of beneficiaries from 2011 to date:

Year	Expenditure	Beneficiaries
2011	€2.43 m	7,910
2012	€2.52 m	9,142
2013 to date	€1.9m	8,439

The funding allocated to the Seniors Alert Scheme in 2013 is €2.35m, and I expect the full allocation to be spent by year end. This provision has been maintained in the Budget 2014. The numbers of recipients of the senior alert scheme on a county basis is not readily available from my Department; the information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### Local Authority Charges Yield

163. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the amount of money that was given to the local authority in County Kerry form all property charges, from December 2011 to December 2012 and from December 2012 to 1 October 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45297/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I assume that the question refers to the Household Charge and the Local Property Tax. The Local Government Management Agency has administered the Household Charge system on a shared service/agency basis for all county and city councils. I am advised by the Agency that in excess of €5.3m has been raised in respect of the Household Charge in Kerry. The aggregate proceeds of the Charge have been re-distributed on an equalised basis to local authorities within the context of the annual allocations of general purpose grants.

In 2013, Local Property Tax revenue is accruing directly to the Exchequer. Under the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012, commencing in 2014, the Minister for Finance will pay into the Local Government Fund an amount equivalent to the Local Property Tax paid into the Central Fund during that year; this revenue will be allocated to local authorities from the Fund.

### Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total number of families currently recorded on the housing waiting list of each local authority; the extent to which a study has been carried out to determine the areas most seriously deficient in terms of ability to meet the housing needs as set out; his plans to deal with the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45308/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** My Department does not hold information on the number of households on local authority waiting lists. These figures fluctuate as households are allocated housing and new households apply for support.

In accordance with Section 21 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, I directed all housing authorities to prepare a summary of social housing assessments carried out in their areas at 7 May 2013. The data submitted by housing authorities are currently being analysed and once verified will be collated and a report published by the Housing Agency. The report findings will detail the number of households on waiting lists in each local authority, broken down by basis of need, employment status, age of applicant, length of time on waiting list and other categories. This information will provide an important insight into the level and type of need for social housing support across the country.

The current assessment is the first to be carried out since the commencement of the Social Housing Assessment Regulations on 1 April 2011, which introduced a standardised system for assessing applicants for social housing support, including revised basis of need criteria. The results, when available, will not therefore be directly comparable to the results of the last assessment carried out, as at 31 March 2011, the results of which are available on my Department’s website [www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie) and the Housing Agency’s website [www.housing.ie](http://www.housing.ie).

The Government’s housing policy statement, published in June 2011, clearly identifies that the priority for Government will be to meet the most acute needs of households applying for social housing support. I am determined to ensure that the social housing programme optimises the delivery of social housing and the return for the resources invested. To achieve this, it is essential that we tailor the use of available Exchequer supports to prevailing conditions and explore the full range of solutions to address housing needs.

Delivery of social housing is significantly facilitated through more flexible funding models such as the Rental Accommodation Scheme and leasing, but the Government continues to be committed to other funding mechanisms that will increase the supply of permanent new social housing. Such mechanisms include options to purchase, build to lease and the sourcing of loan finance by approved housing bodies for construction and acquisition. My Department and the Housing Agency are also engaged with NAMA to ensure continued delivery of housing units for social purposes.

In spite of the current challenging circumstances, almost 70% of the budget for the Department will go directly to support housing in 2014 with an investment of over half a billion on a range of programmes. Meeting social housing need within the available resources will necessitate smarter and more innovative approaches in order to maximise output. In 2014, I will continue to focus the available resources towards the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sectors of the community.

### **Shared Ownership Scheme**

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total number of shared ownership housing loans currently in arrears in respect of the rental part of their property; if cognisance has been taken of the fact that the regulations appertaining to such mortgages were penalised to the extent of an annual increase of 4.2%; if any review has been undertaken to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45309/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** The rental equity portion of shared equity loans is man-

aged by local authorities and serviced by them from the proceeds of rents received. While local authorities continue to meet loan payments to the Housing Finance Agency on their portion of shared equity properties, the shared areas of such properties may have individual arrears issues with local authorities, which are matters for resolution between the relevant local authority and their borrower. My Department does not hold specific information in that regard.

The Government's 2011 housing policy statement announced the standing down of all affordable housing schemes, including the shared ownership scheme, in the context of a full review of Part V of the Planning and Development Act. That review is available on my Department's website [www.envron.ie](http://www.envron.ie) and the period for public submissions closed on 27 September 2013. Earlier in 2013, I asked the Housing & Sustainable Communities Agency to conduct a standalone review of the shared ownership scheme, including identification of the main difficulties and recommendations for mitigating measures. I have received an interim draft of the review from the Agency and I intend to issue a circular letter to local authorities this month with preliminary recommendations arising from the review.

A number of issues have been identified that need further detailed financial analysis in order to fully assess the impact on local authority finances of possible mitigating measures. This additional work is underway and I expect to make further determinations in the coming months.

### **Local Authority Housing Provision**

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if in the context of funds provided for local authority house building in the recent budget are likely to be deployed to those local authorities most seriously affected by housing shortage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45310/13]

167. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which it is expected that the serious local authority housing crisis as evidenced by the unprecedented numbers on the Kildare County Council housing waiting list will be addressed within the context of the recent budgetary allocation for this purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45311/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 166 and 167 together.

The Abridged Estimate for my Department, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Expenditure Report 2014, provides €525.8 million in respect of the Housing Programme. These resources have been supplemented by a further €50 million announced in the Budget to fund infrastructural investment primarily in the housing area and, when taken in conjunction, funding for housing is effectively maintained at 2013 levels.

Meeting social housing need within the available resources will necessitate smarter and more innovative approaches in order to maximise output. In 2014, I will continue to focus the available resources towards the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sectors of the community. I expect the recently announced €30 million additional Exchequer investment in social housing to deliver up to 500 local authority homes for families on the housing waiting list. Approximately half of this investment will facilitate the construction of new infill housing developments in areas with a highest demand for social housing. It is intended that €15 million will be invested in bringing vacant and boarded-up local authority houses back into productive use.

The detailed arrangements for the implementation of the two measures are being developed by my Department at present. I intend to announce these arrangements as soon as possible with

a view to having the investment programme up and running as early as possible in 2014. My Department will be requesting local authorities to submit proposals for inclusion under both measures in due course.

### **Local Authority Housing Mortgages**

168. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the total number of local authority loans applied for in each local authority area in each of the past five years to date; the number approved, rejected or pending; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45312/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** My Department collates and publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics that inform the preparation and evaluation of policy. Data on the number of local authority housing loan applications are not included in this range. Data on the number of local authority housing purchase loan approvals and drawdowns are included in this range; however, they are not broken down by administrative area.

Quarterly data are available on my Department’s website [www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie).

### **Water Services Provision**

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which it is expected to provide for the enhanced storage, treatment and transmission of domestic drinking water in the short, medium and long term; the extent to which this meets identified targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45313/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** The overall strategy of investment in water services to date has been to ensure that the timing and scale of investment facilitates economic and other development, achieves compliance with statutory requirements and promotes environmental sustainability objectives. The main vehicle for achieving these objectives for public domestic water supplies is the multi-annual Water Services Investment Programme. The current Programme runs to the end of 2013 and includes contracts to address deficiencies in the quality of supply, to improve the overall capacity of the system and an accelerated programme of mains rehabilitation. The Programme also provides for the advancement of a further range of schemes through planning, for progression to construction in future investment cycles.

In order to create efficiencies, improve service delivery and achieve cost savings in the delivery of water services, the Programme for Government provides for the establishment of a new State-owned national water authority to take over responsibility for managing and supervising investment in water services infrastructure from 1 January 2014. Irish Water will be responsible for the delivery of water services capital infrastructure from 1 January 2014, and is currently preparing a Capital Investment Plan for 2014-15. This Plan will include taking account of the transition of projects that are included in the current Water Services Investment Plan.

### **Fire Service Issues**

170. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which part-time or whole-time fire services currently exist throughout the country; the extent to which it is expected to develop the service in the future

on a part-time or whole-time basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45314/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** The provision of a fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Act 2001. My Department supports fire authorities through the setting of general policy, provision of training support and issue of guidance on operational and other related matters and the provision of capital funding.

The provision of fire services by local authorities is based on a risk management approach which involves an analysis of the nature of the fire hazards and the incidence and extent of fires which occur as well as the fire protection measures in place. The fire services in the cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford are staffed on a full-time basis; Drogheda and Dundalk have a combined full-time and retained service, while fire services in all other communities are provided by the retained system, which operates on a call-out basis when required.

Earlier in 2013 I published as national policy the document Keeping Communities safe (KCS), which is intended to keep fire safety and fire services in Ireland in line with international best practice. KCS includes, inter alia, the rationalisation of structures to deliver effective fire services. This entails fire services remaining within local authorities, but service delivery is to be reshaped from the current 30 fire services to 21 – 14 single fire authorities and 7 shared services.

KCS is based on a risk management approach, which addresses the critical elements of fire prevention, protection and response. In that vein, each fire service is currently undertaking an initial risk categorisation process for its functional area. In order to provide a comprehensive and effective fire service to the community, section 26 of the Fire Services Act provides that it is a reserved function of local authorities to adopt fire and emergency operations plans indicating the provision made in respect of organisation, appliances, equipment, fire stations, training, operational procedure and any such matters as may be relevant. The risk categorisation process referred to above will help inform local decision making in this regard.

## **Water Pollution**

171. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which river or waterway pollution has been reported or detected in each of the past four years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45315/13]

172. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the degree to which monitoring continues to take place in respect of air and water pollution; if particular trends have become noticeable arising from same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45317/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 and 172 together.

In respect of monitoring of water quality, the EPA, local authorities, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Marine Institute all monitor rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal waters, and groundwater quality under the Water Framework Directive on a three-year cycle. This extensive monitoring programme provides a good overview of current water quality and trends as they develop.

Water quality trends emerging in recent years include a notable decline in the incidence of serious pollution events from 39 sites in the 2004-2006 period, to 20 sites in the 2007-2009 period and currently down to 11 sites. There has also been a stabilisation in the length of river channel regarded as unpolluted, at approximately 71% of the length surveyed. However, the period has also been marked by a steady decline in the number of river sites at high ecological status.

The 2013 surveys are currently under way and a new national update for 2010-2012 will be available by early 2014. In the meantime, this year the EPA has published regional reports covering the south east, Louth/Monaghan and Galway/Mayo/Sligo, including information from 2012 monitoring. The EPA and local authorities respond to water quality incidents and complaints on an ongoing basis. Details of recent incidents are available on the EPA website and can be accessed at: <http://www.epa.ie/news/incidents/recent>. Additional information is available at: [http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/indicators/00061\\_EPA\\_SoE\\_2012.pdf](http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/indicators/00061_EPA_SoE_2012.pdf). Comprehensive reports on water quality are published every three years by the EPA and are available for download at <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/water/waterqua>.

The ambient air quality monitoring programme in Ireland is carried out to meet the requirements of EU Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe, also known as the CAFÉ Directive. The Directive requires that certain minimum levels of monitoring are conducted for the purpose of assessment and management of air quality. The EPA has responsibility for the monitoring of air quality in Ireland, and monitors a range of atmospheric pollutants based on data obtained from the 29 monitoring stations that form the national ambient air quality network.

The EPA also publishes an annual report on air quality, based primarily on the monitoring requirements of the CAFÉ Directive. The most recent report, Air Quality in Ireland 2012 – Key Indicators of Ambient Air Quality, was published in September 2013 and provides an assessment of air quality in Ireland for 2012, compared to the CAFÉ Directive standards as well as, for the first time, assessments in relation to more stringent World Health Organisation (WHO) air quality guidelines for the protection of human health.

Downward trends have been identified for many pollutants and Ireland currently meets all EU standards for air quality but exceeds WHO air quality guidelines for particulate matter. Particulate matter levels in Ireland are of concern, particularly during the winter heating season, when people's choice of fuel can impact directly on the air quality in their locality and can thus impact on health. To maintain our good standard of air quality and ensure that in the future our air will be healthy and clean, Ireland must continue to implement and enforce the ban on bituminous coal. Households and businesses should use more efficient methods to burn fuel and shift from solid fuel to cleaner alternatives, while also striving to reduce the demand for energy consumption.

Levels of nitrogen oxides (NOX) at traffic-impacted city centre areas may also be a challenge in the future. Ireland must reduce traffic emissions through implementing policies to reduce travel demand, increase the use of alternatives to the private car such as cycling, walking, and public transport and improve the efficiencies of motorised transport.

*Question No. 173 answered with Question No. 147.*

### **Local Authority Leases**

**174. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community

and Local Government the total number of properties currently let or leased to tenants on local authority housing waiting lists and or other; the extent to which such numbers have fluctuated over the past six years to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45319/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan):** My Department does not hold any current information on the number of tenants on local authority waiting lists.

I directed all local authorities to prepare a summary of social housing assessments carried out in their areas as at 7 May 2013. The results of this assessment, when available, will detail the number of households on waiting lists in each local authority by a range of categories, including current tenure.

The last summary assessment carried out, as at 31 March, 2011, found that there were 69,937 households in private rented accommodation. The full results of this assessment are available on my Department’s website [www.envron.ie](http://www.envron.ie) and the Housing Agency’s website [www.housing.ie](http://www.housing.ie). The current assessment is the first to be carried out since the commencement of the Social Housing Assessment Regulations on 1 April 2011, which introduced a standardised system for assessing applicants for social housing support. The results will not therefore be directly comparable to the results of previous assessments.

My Department does not hold information on the allocation of social housing supports to households on the waiting list, whether to leased accommodation or other accommodation provided by the local authority.

The Social Housing Leasing Initiative (SHLI) is a form of social housing support that, along with the more traditional forms of support, is provided by local authorities to meet the housing needs of individual households. To the end of October 2013, 4,319 housing units have been provided under SHLI since it was introduced in 2009.

### **Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding**

175. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which his Department has adequate resources available to meet the requirements of the various local authorities under the small or group sewerage or water schemes; the degree to which he expects to be in a position to provide such funding in the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45320/13]

176. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which his Department has adequate resources available to meet the requirements of Kildare County Council under the small or group sewerage or water schemes; the degree to which he expects to be in a position to provide such funding in the coming year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45321/13]

**Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 175 and 176 together.

Funding is currently provided under my Department’s Rural Water Programme towards group water schemes, group sewerage schemes, small public water and wastewater scheme works and some miscellaneous grants. The allocation for the Programme in 2013 is €39.6 m.

The allocation for the Programme for 2014 will be €27.7 m. The amount being provided in 2014 reflects the fact that responsibility for the small public water and wastewater scheme

works element of the Programme will transfer to Irish Water in 2014. The primary focus of Irish water will be on the delivery of services to customers on the public water and wastewater networks. My Department will remain responsible for the overall policy, and funding where appropriate, of the non-public sector, including the group water sector. The funding that will be provided in 2014 under the Rural Water Programme will continue to fund group water schemes, group sewerage schemes, and some miscellaneous grants.

### Garda Investigations

177. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the total number of times a Garda investigation has taken place into death by suspected negligence in a hospital setting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44941/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** I am informed by the Garda authorities that the information requested is not available in the format requested by the Deputy and that it would require a disproportionate expenditure of Garda time and resources to compile it.

### Penalty Points System

178. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 447 of 30 April 2013, if he will provide, for each month of this year to date in 2013, the number of motorists appearing in court charged with offences under the Road Traffic Acts incurring penalty points who avoided convictions because they agreed to make a donation to the court poor box. [44986/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** The court poor box is a non-statutory system used mostly by the District Courts to impose a financial charge on a defendant to be used for a charitable purpose, usually instead of imposing a criminal conviction. Payments made to the court poor box are accounted for by the court office concerned and the accounting procedures are subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Generally, charities are the recipients of poor box contributions but the decision is solely at the discretion of the Judge who is independent in the matter of sentencing, as in other matters concerning the exercise of judicial functions, subject only to the Constitution and the law.

In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the table below shows the number of defendants recorded on the Courts Service Criminal Case Tracking System (CCTS) who were before the court for offences under the Road Traffic Act incurring penalty points for each month of this year up to the end of August 2013 and the outcome of whose cases involved payments to the Court Poor Box. None of these people were convicted of the offences.

Month	Number of Defendants
January	183
February	157
March	96
April	166
May	177
June	141
July	129
August	0

Month	Number of Defendants
TOTAL	1,049

### Penalty Points System

179. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 447 of 30 April 2013, if the proposed reform cited by him in his reply in relation to the replacement of the poor box in courts with a statutory reparation fund has yet been initiated. [44987/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** Work is at an advanced stage in my Department on the General Scheme of a Bill to replace the Probation of Offenders Act 1907 with modern provisions dealing with community sanctions, such as probation orders, and the role of the Probation Service in the criminal justice system. The Court Poor Box is also being examined in this context with a view to bringing forward proposals for a transparent statutory reparation scheme. I intend to bring proposals to Government on the matter as soon as possible, having regard to other legislative priorities.

### Garda Operations

180. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on Garda Operation Spire; the number of persons arrested and charged to date as part of the operation; and the number of successful convictions obtained to date. [44993/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** I am informed by the Garda authorities that Operation Spire began on 27 May 2013 and will remain in place until the end of 2013 when it will be reviewed and evaluated.

Operation Spire provides for a high visibility policing presence specifically on O'Connell Street at critical times to address anti-social behaviour, drug dealing and related crime. The area is patrolled by uniform patrols supplemented as required by Crime Prevention Unit and Divisional Crime Task Force personnel and additional resources are deployed on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

As Operation Spire is designed as a preventative measure with the goal of providing a high visibility presence on the main thoroughfare in the city, no specific crime statistics are maintained in relation to the operation. However, I am advised that Garda figures for the year to date indicate that Public Order Offences for the Store Street Garda Sub-District are down by 22%.

### Garda Deployment

181. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will instruct the Garda Commissioner to ensure that additional Garda patrols will be in place during Hallowe'en night in an area (details supplied) in Dublin 13. [44994/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** The Garda Commissioner is responsible for the detailed allocation of resources, including personnel, throughout the organisation and I have no function in the matter. This allocation of resources is constantly monitored in the context of demographics, crime trends, policing needs and other operational strategies in place on a District, Divisional and Regional level to ensure optimum use is made of Garda

resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the public.

A policing plan for the Halloween period is in place throughout the Dublin Metropolitan Region, including the Coolock sub-district. This plan is designed to address all aspects associated with the policing of the period concerned including the prevention and detection of sale of fireworks, and anti-social behaviour. Local Management are satisfied that sufficient resources will be deployed during Halloween night in the area referred to and current policing policy in the area is predicated on the prevention of public order offences, the prevention of crime including crimes of violence against persons and property and the maintenance of an environment conducive to the improvement of quality of life of the residents of the area.

### **Garda Operations**

182. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on whether any increased costs have been incurred from Garda resources as a result of additional policing required for the Arthur's Day promotion since it first began a number of years ago; and if the promoters have been billed for any of the potential increased costs associated with policing for the event. [44995/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** The Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote. In that context, I am informed by the Garda authorities that while some additional costs have been incurred in respect of events linked to Arthur's Day the Garda operations involved were relatively small in scale.

I also understand that arrangements have been made for the recoupment of relevant costs in 2013. At this stage the details are being finalised and the matter is being actively pursued by the Garda authorities.

### **Garda Recruitment**

183. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to waive the age limit of 35 years old for recruitment to An Garda Síochána for reserve members of An Garda Síochána who entered the reserve before the age of 35. [45013/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** The maximum recruitment age at which candidates may apply to join the Garda Síochána as a full time member is set by regulation at not more than 35 years and the question of appealing that upper age limit does not arise. The current maximum age applies without discrimination to everyone, including members of the Garda Reserve.

This upper age limit of 35 was set having regard to equality legislation and also took into account the following criteria:

- The cost of training.
- The need for recruits to serve for a sufficient period of time as full members of the service to recoup this cost.
- The operational requirements of the service in terms of having an age profile appropriate to the physical demands placed on full time members in the course of their duty.

### **Garda Vetting of Personnel**

184. **Deputy Shane Ross** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will clarify the

requirements for Garda vetting for Irish citizens who have travelled and worked overseas for a number of years; if it is true that if they wish to apply for job for which vetting is a requirement, if they have been abroad for more than two years then they must be back in permanent residence in Ireland for five years before they can even be considered to apply for vetting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45081/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** The Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) provides Garda Vetting Disclosures to organisations registered with it for that purpose. There are currently in the region of 20,000 such organisations. While it is part of current vetting procedures that any applicant must have an address in Ireland, the GCVU does not place any other restriction on the making of applications by registered organisations and accordingly, time limits of the kind referred to in the Deputy's question do not apply to such applications.

### **Visa Applications**

185. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality in view of the potential for growth for tourist visits from the Chinese market, the current processing times of tourist visas for Chinese visitors; the cost of such a typical tourist visa; if he will provide a cost comparison with a similar visa for Chinese visitors to the UK or the Schengen area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45171/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** Visa applications for Chinese nationals living in China are handled by the dedicated Irish Visa Office in Beijing, which is a sub-office of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department. This office handles all aspects of visa applications, including appeals, locally.

Over 50% of visit visas worldwide, which includes tourist visas and applications lodged in China, are processed within 4 days. The remainder are for the most part processed within one week with a small amount of more complex cases taking up to 15 days. This time frame is of course dependent on all the required documentation being provided with no queries remaining outstanding. The approval rate for applications for Irish visas lodged in China is in excess of 93% which compares very favourably internationally.

The current application fee for a single entry visa application lodged in the Visa Office in Beijing is €60. The fee for the equivalent visa for the UK is £80 or about €95. A Schengen single-entry visa also costs €60.

The Deputy may wish to note that China is one of the seventeen countries covered by the Visa Waiver Programme which allows most categories of visitor to the UK, including tourists, to travel on to Ireland without the additional need for an Irish visa. This Programme, which was introduced on 1 July 2011, has proved a significant success with the number of Chinese visitors increasing from 2010 (the last full year before the introduction of the Programme) to 2012 by 38% according to figures from the Central Statistics Office.

The Government has also taken other steps to make the visa process easier, including, with effect from 1 August, 2012, a more liberal multi-entry visa regime for Chinese business travellers and regular family visitors. This regime compares favourably with the approach taken by our nearest competitors. For example, it allows for a multi-entry visa for 3 years for €100 for qualifying travellers which compares with the \$180 charged by the USA for the same duration. In addition, agreed programmes aimed at short stays for the purpose of learning English in Irish colleges, with accelerated processing of applications and reduced formalities, have been introduced.

Whilst I am satisfied that Ireland compares favourably with international competitors regarding processing times and approval rates for visas from China, my Department continually examines ways in which the visa process can further facilitate the promotion of tourism and business links to the People's Republic of China, in conformity with the needs of an effective immigration regime. The success of the Visa Waiver Programme and the other initiatives is very welcome and this Government is not resting on its laurels and work is continuing, through regular meetings between the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service and the UK Home Office, on the development of reciprocal short-stay Common Travel Area visa arrangements which would allow tourists and business visitors, including those from China, to travel to the CTA and to travel freely between Ireland and the UK on a single visa. A timetable has been agreed which foresees rollout of such arrangements next year.

This exciting initiative reflects the long history of cooperation between Ireland and the United Kingdom in the protection of the Common Travel Area and now, its promotion as a tourist destination for emerging markets, including China.

### **Garda Deployment**

186. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 64 of 20 September 2011, the way the minimum establishment required for each Garda district is taken into account in the distribution of Garda personnel and resources as he explained when, in relation to Parliamentary Question No. 459 of 8 October 2013, it was explained that there is no minimum establishment required for each district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45298/13]

187. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the Parliamentary Question No.99 of 8 May 2012, the way response times are taken into account in the distribution of Garda personnel when, in relation to Parliamentary Question No. 460 of 8 October 2013, statistics in relation to response times are not available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45299/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 186 and 187 together.

As I have previously informed the Deputy, the distribution model for the deployment of Garda personnel takes all the relevant factors into account, including of course the capacity within each Garda Division and District to respond to demand, and there is no minimum establishment for a given Garda area.

As the Deputy will appreciate these are very much operational matters and I am assured by the Garda authorities that the specific policing arrangements for all areas are kept under ongoing review. The objective at all times is to ensure optimum use is made of Garda resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the public.

### **Charities Regulation**

188. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a charity (details supplied) based in Dublin 3 is a registered charity; if he will provide an update on the regulation of charity shops; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45305/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** The Charities Act 2009 provides for an integrated system of mandatory registration and proportionate regulation and supervision of charitable organisations operating in Ireland. An independent Charities Regulatory

Authority is to be established under the Act. One of the functions of this Authority will be to establish and maintain a public Register of Charities. When this Register is in place, interested parties will be able to consult it to establish whether any given organisation is a registered charity.

The Deputy will appreciate that the full implementation of the Charities Act, including the establishment of the Authority and Register of Charities, has resource implications that had to be examined in the context of the urgent need to reduce government expenditure. I delayed bringing this legislation into force in order to consider how best to achieve the objectives of the Act in this context. It remains an objective of the Government to strengthen the regulation of the charitable sector in effective and proportionate ways. To advance this, a public and stakeholder consultation on the implementation of the Charities Act 2009, and the establishment of a Register of Charities, was carried out by my Department earlier this year and published in July. At that time the Government also approved my plans to proceed with the establishment of an independent Charities Regulatory Authority under the terms of the 2009 Charities Act. It is envisaged that the new Authority will come into operation in 2014.

In the meantime, the Deputy may be interested to know that many Irish charities, approximately 8,000, have been deemed eligible by the Revenue Commissioners for charitable tax exemptions under the Taxes Consolidation Act(s). Information on this Scheme and a list of those charities that have been deemed eligible are available on the Revenue website: [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie).

### **Visa Applications**

189. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will expedite an application for a joint spouse visa in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45327/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa application referred to by the Deputy was lodged at the Irish Embassy in Ankara on 02 September 2013 and was forwarded to the INIS Visa Office in Dublin for processing. A decision on the application can be expected within 10-15 working days.

Queries in relation to general immigration matters may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Courts Service Issues**

190. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeline envisaged for the refurbishment of the courthouse in Mullingar, County Westmeath, which has been deemed not suitable for Circuit Court and higher court settings for the past number of years; when it is likely that such courts will be in a position to resume sitting in Mullingar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45334/13]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter):** In July 2012, the Government announced an infrastructure stimulus package which includes the provision of new or refurbished courthouses in Mullingar, Drogheda, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford and Letterkenny.

As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions. In order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that they are currently working with the National Development Finance Agency and the Office of Public Works with a view to bringing these projects to the market shortly. The projects are to be procured and delivered through a Public Private Partnership.

In relation to the proposed Mullingar Courthouse project, the Courts Service has stated that the plan is to refurbish and extend the existing courthouse at Mullingar to provide a three court-room venue, a new court office and associated facilities. I am informed that the refurbished courthouse will be suitable for sittings of the circuit and higher courts as required. It is anticipated that it will be completed in late 2016.

### **Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Eligibility**

191. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review the recent decision to reduce area aid payments from 34 ha to 30 ha in respect of lowland farmers in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44911/13]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The decision to reduce the maximum payable area under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was made in Budget 2013, with the changes being published in the Scheme Terms and Conditions, at which time my decision to increase funding for the 2013 Scheme to €195 million was also taken. This increase in funding reflects my commitment to the protection of farming in disadvantages areas, most particularly the smaller farmers whose livelihoods are most dependent on this Scheme. I decided to focus on the protection of the smaller and most disadvantaged, including mountain sheep holdings, whose payments have remained unchanged. Making some minor technical changes, in addition to reducing the maximum area payable from 34 to 30 hectares, allowed me to increase the overall provision in 2013 compared to 2012.

However, this reduction in the maximum payable area is not applicable to farmers in mountain areas and, indeed, the changes introduced to the 2013 Scheme mean that almost two-thirds of farmers have had no change in their income resulting from this change.

### **Forestry Sector**

192. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if farmers who are not allowed forestation on their lands because of the hen harrier will be compensated. [44914/13]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The implementation of the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive, under which Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are designated, is a matter in the first instance for the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is commencing the development of a Threat Response Plan (TRP) for the conservation of the hen harrier. The plan is expected to take approximately two years to complete and forestry will form a significant element of the Plan. The Forest Service will be liaising closely with the NPWS in the formulation of the TRP on aspects relating to afforestation, felling and

replanting. It is also understood that the NPWS will engage in a formal public consultation process in relation to the Plan, which it will announce at the appropriate time.

As development of the TRP progresses, and in advance of its completion, opportunities may arise – possibly in late 2014 - to pursue an interim arrangement to allow for the limited issuing of afforestation approvals in some hen harrier SPAs. Until then, the Forest Service will not be in a position to approve any afforestation projects within these SPAs. My Department does not provide compensation for the consequences of such designations.

### **Sea Lice Controls**

193. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine how he proposes to protect the livelihoods of the 130 people on 32 fishing boats in Galway Bay dependent on the high-value sustainable crab, lobster and shrimp fisheries from the impact of the use of pesticides required to kill infestations of sea lice, which are also crustaceans, by the operators of the proposed Galway Bay open-cage salmon farm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44920/13]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** An application by Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) for an aquaculture licence for the cultivation of finfish near Inis Oirr in Galway Bay was received by my Department last year. The application and its accompanying Environmental Impact Statement are being considered under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act and the 1933 Foreshore Act. All applications for aquaculture licences are referred to a wide range of consultees for comment. These include, inter alia, the Marine Institute, Inland Fisheries Ireland, the Department of Environment Community and Local Government, Fáilte Ireland, An Taisce and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. In addition the legislation provides for a period of general public consultation. My Department's Engineering Division also provides technical advice on each application.

In relation to sea lice, Ireland's sea lice control protocols are operated by the Marine Institute. These protocols are considered to be more advanced than those operated in other jurisdictions for the following reasons:

- The inspection regime is totally independent of the industry.
- Data obtained as a result of inspections is published and made widely available.
- Treatment trigger levels are set at a low level.

In 2008, the State introduced a new Pest Management Strategy, supplementing the control regime already in place. This has resulted in a steady decline in average sea lice numbers on farmed salmon since its inception.

### **Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals**

194. **Deputy Michael Creed** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a disadvantaged areas scheme appeals committee decision on a minimum stocking density in respect of a person (details provided) in County Cork; if he will confirm that the medical evidence submitted has been taken into account in determining this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44940/13]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The person named is one of a number of applicants under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme whose

cases were impacted by the requirement to have achieved a minimum stocking density of 0.3 livestock units per forage hectare in 2011, and who applied for and were refused derogation in this regard. The person named subsequently appealed unsuccessfully to the independently chaired DAS Appeals Committee who, having reviewed all documentation, including medical evidence, concluded that there were insufficient grounds to overturn the decision. In notifying the person named of the decision of the Committee, the person named was advised of their right to pursue the matter with the Office of the Ombudsman.

### **Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments**

195. **Deputy John O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a disadvantaged areas scheme payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44998/13]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Payment under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has not yet issued to the person named as the holding has not yet satisfied the Scheme minimum stocking density requirements. As soon as the holding concerned is confirmed as having met these requirements, the case will be further processed with a view to payment at the earliest possible date thereafter.

### **Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments**

196. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will receive payment in view of the fact that the inspection of the commonage in question has now taken place and a new decision has been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44999/13]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** A ground inspection of the commonage in question has recently been completed. The results are currently being examined and will be finalised as soon as possible. Once this process is completed the Single Payment-Disadvantaged Area Scheme applications of the person named will be processed with the intention of issuing any outstanding payments as soon as possible.

### **Agrifood Sector Issues**

197. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the plans or initiatives that are in operation or are planned to grow agri-business exports to the Chinese market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45173/13]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am pleased to advise the Deputy that exports of Irish agri-food and related exports to China have grown in value from €167m in 2010 to €323m in 2012, an increase of 93%, with dairy products increasing from €103m in 2010 to €182m in 2012, an increase of 77%. Pigmeat exports increased from €8m in 2010 to €44m in 2012, an increase of 450%, while our seafood exports have also grown from €5.7m in 2010 to €10m in 2012, a 75% increase. Exports of hides and skins are valued at €40m in 2012.

In the first eight months of 2013, when compared with the same period in 2012, there has again been a significant increase in exports to China, rising from €213 to €281m, an increase of 32% with dairy exports showing a substantial increase from €120m to €176m, an increase of

47% in this period.

During my Trade Mission to China in April 2012, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Agriculture and Fisheries cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture of the People's Republic of China and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine was signed. This provides a framework for the strengthening of the bilateral relationship between Ireland and China in the area of agriculture and fisheries. It also provides for the sharing of expertise and the exchange of officials, designed to provide assurances to the Chinese authorities of the integrity of our food production systems, our high veterinary and food safety procedures and our technologically advanced agri and seafood sectors, thereby enhancing trade and facilitating increasing exports.

This MOU builds on an original MOU agreed in September 2006 and on the Action Plan on Mutual Cooperation between both Ministries which I signed on 28 May, 2011, and which provided for Chinese officials to undertake work placements in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and in the Marine Institute. Since the signing of the renewed MOU in April, 2012, there has been a significant increase in the number of political and trade related visits from China to Ireland. My Department hosted seven inward delegations from China in 2012, including three Vice-Ministerial visits, one inspection visit and visits by senior Chinese officials, including a joint study visit by EU and Chinese officials, as part of their cooperation agreement. Two further Chinese Vice-Ministers visited Ireland in May and June of this year.

Ireland has also secured full market access to China for salmon exports, which represents a sizeable opportunity for Irish salmon exporters, with demand for high-end seafood in China growing substantially each year. This followed intensive negotiations with the Chinese authorities by the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) in conjunction with the Irish Embassy in Beijing. Both the Marine Institute and Teagasc have also developed Memoranda of Understanding with their counterparts in China, focused on developing research between both our countries.

Because of the importance I attach to this market, I have approved the posting of an agriculture attaché from my Department to China in the New Year. The official will have specific responsibility for assisting in addressing any market access issues with China. I am particularly pleased to see the very significant increase in our exports to China and that the relationships which we have developed with China in the Agri food and related sectors have provided a very solid basis for growth in our exports to this key export destination.

### **Departmental Offices**

198. **Deputy Paul J. Connaughton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the opposition in County Roscommon to the proposed reduction in staff numbers and consequent reduction in service to the farming community at his Department office in Roscommon town; if his further attention has been drawn to the importance of this office to livestock exporters who, on a regular basis, need quick, direct access to his Department's personnel; if he is aware that the Roscommon office is strategically located to provide such urgent services to vast areas of counties Galway, Mayo, Longford and Sligo; if he will consider the original decision in favour of a regional type service based in Roscommon town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45303/13]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The position is that, following on from the successful restructuring of my Department's local office network, which reduced the number of local offices from 58 to 16, my Department has decided to centralise the administrative support currently provided in the local offices into two centres.

The decision to centralise the administrative support is based on a review by the Department of the business processes and procedures and, in particular, the administrative support requirements, in its remaining Local Offices. This review concluded that, arising from the substantial reduction in disease levels and the changes introduced earlier this year in relation to the implementation of controls in the context of the TB eradication programme, the number of administrative staffing required in the local offices would be significantly reduced and that further significant efficiencies in terms of the number of administrative staff required would accrue from the centralisation of administrative support in one or more centralised office(s). I have accepted this recommendation and I have decided that the centralised offices should be based in Cavan and Portlaoise. The choice of these two centres is based on the fact that, arising from the Government's decision to centralise human resources and payroll services, the staff required to provide the administrative support to the local offices will be available in these two centres as the centralised human resources and payroll services is rolled out across all Departments.

I would like to emphasise that the centralisation of the administrative functions of the local offices should not negatively impact upon local access and services for local customers and experience to-date indicates that there has been no negative impact on the services provided by these offices. In the event that the administrative support currently available in the Roscommon office is centralised, the Department vets, inspectors, technical officers and limited administrative support will remain in place in the Roscommon office and will continue to provide an effective service our clients across all of the schemes that are provided from that office. In view of this, I am satisfied that frontline services will be fully maintained and public access for all of the Departments stakeholders will continue to be available at the Roscommon office, including to livestock exporters.

### **Speech and Language Therapy**

199. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the speech and language therapy services provided at St. Patrick's rehabilitation and community care in Waterford city and the staffing complement to deliver same; the number of patients that attended in 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; the number of unfilled posts at this time; his plan to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44899/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the Health Service Executive. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Procedures**

200. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 186 of 25 September 2013, if he will state specifically when a cataract operation will be arranged in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; if he will state clearly the process in this case and the timeframe involved; if he will insist that improved information be included in the answers relevant to the person on whose behalf the question is being asked. [44916/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** As the Deputy will be aware from my reply to him of 25th September last, the National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2013*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the

processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

I understand that the HSE wrote to the Deputy on 10th October last in relation to this matter and advised him that the relevant Consultant clinically prioritises each patient requiring a procedure with each patient's name added to the list. Patients are then scheduled for their procedure in strict chronological order. It will be a matter for the hospital to advise the patient of the arrangements for her treatment and it would be inappropriate for me to intervene in a clinical matter.

I have however again asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy if further details can be made available.

### **Medical Card Appeals**

201. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card application now under appeal will be expedited and approved in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kilkenny. [44917/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

### **Dental Services Waiting Lists**

202. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the measures being taken to deal with the backlog of patient appointments for orthodontic treatment at Millhouse, Ashtown Gate, Dublin; the timeframe involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44921/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The HSE has commissioned an independent review of orthodontic services. The outcome of this review, which is near completion, will give guidance as to what changes will be desirable to provide the best possible model of care delivery, given the current resources available and future demand for services.

### **Dental Services Waiting Lists**

203. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when orthodontic treatment will continue following repeated cancellations at Millhouse, Ashtown Gate, Dublin, in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 13; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44922/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The HSE provides orthodontic treatment to patients based on their level of clinical need. An individual's access to orthodontic treatment is determined against a set of clinical guidelines and priority is given to patients with greatest needs. The HSE has been asked to examine the specific query raised by the Deputy and to reply to him as soon as possible.

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

204. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will make the threshold announced in budget 2014 for over 70s medical card holders for married and cohabiting couples

compatible with the threshold of single applicants in view of the inequity for couples; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44923/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The Government recognises that the living costs of an individual living alone are more than half the living costs of a couple living together. This is acknowledged through the provision of the Living Alone Allowance and differential income limits for medical cards for persons aged under 70 years between individuals and couples. In that context, the over-70s income limit for a single person has been reduced proportionately less than the income limit for a couple.

### **National Lottery Funding Applications**

205. **Deputy Michael McCarthy** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a national lottery grant in respect of an organisation (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44928/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** My Department has received an application for funding from the 2013 National Lottery allocation from the organisation in question. This is one of a large number of applications currently being assessed. The Deputy will be informed of the outcome of the application as soon as a decision has been made.

### **Hospital Appointment Status**

206. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath will receive an appointment at St. James's Hospital for an urgent bypass operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44936/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** The National Waiting List Management Policy, A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2013, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to this particular query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the Health Service Executive to investigate the situation and respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

### **Accident and Emergency Departments Waiting Times**

207. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the current target waiting times for patients to be treated in the accident and emergency unit of Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9. [44990/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** The Special Delivery Unit was established to free up access to acute services by improving the flow of patients through the system. The national targets Emergency Department wait times are:

- 95% of all new Emergency Department patients to wait less than 6 hours. Patient Experience Time (PET) is measured from arrival to Emergency Department departure time.

- 100% of all new Emergency Department patients to wait less than 9 hours. Patient Experience Time (PET) is measured from arrival to Emergency Department departure time.

An intensive work programme is underway between the SDU's liaison officers, the Clinical Programmes and Beaumont Hospital teams. The SDU is satisfied that there is increased engagement at all levels in the hospital, focussing on working to achieve the national targets for unscheduled care so that emergency patients may be seen in a timely manner.

In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Health Services Staff Data**

208. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons employed in the Health Service Executive's mental health services in north Dublin in the years 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013; the number of employees who took up new posts with the Health Service Executive's mental health services in the area during that time; and the number of posts that are currently vacant within these services. [44992/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** As this is a service matter this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

209. **Deputy Patrick Nulty** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in detail the changes with respect to medical card eligibility arising out of budget 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45001/13]

211. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the date in 2014 from which the new medical card income limits for the over 70s will apply. [45009/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 and 211 together.

The measures outlined below are the changes to the eligibility criteria for medical cards under Budget 2014.

#### **Reducing income thresholds for medical cards for the over 70s**

This measure reduces the income thresholds for a single person aged 70 or over to €500 per week and for a couple aged over 70 to €900 a week. A single person aged 70 or over with income up to €700 per week will continue to have access to GP services without charges. A couple aged 70 years or over with income up to €1,400 per week will continue to have access to GP services without charges. It is planned to have that legislation in place by the end of the year/early 2014, with reassessments beginning after the legislation is in place.

#### **Return to work arrangements**

Currently, persons who return to work after a period of unemployment retain their medical card for 3 years, regardless of income. Under this measure, a person that has returned to work after a period of unemployment will retain a GP visit card for 3 years, irrespective of their level of income. The measure will not be retrospective in that the HSE will not be seeking refund of costs of any services provided to people who retained a medical card after returning to employment. However, the current circumstances of a person who has returned to work will determine whether they qualify for a medical card or a GP card.

The Department of Health will work further with other Departments with an implementation date early 2014.

### **Hospital Appointment Status**

210. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Laois will receive an appointment with their consultant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45007/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** Improving access to outpatient services is a key priority for the Government. Collaborating with individual hospitals, the SDU, together with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) and the HSE, has developed the outpatient waiting list minimum dataset. This allows data to be submitted to the NTPF from hospitals on a weekly basis and, for the first time, outpatient data is available on [www.ntpf.ie](http://www.ntpf.ie). For 2013, a maximum waiting time target has been set of 12 months for a first time consultant-led outpatient appointment and this is reflected in the HSE service plan. The SDU and the NTPF will work closely with hospitals towards achievement of the maximum waiting time.

Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she would be in the best position to take the matter up with the consultant and hospital involved. In relation to the specific hospital appointment query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

*Question No. 211 answered with Question No. 209.*

### **Proposed Legislation**

212. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on the consultation process in advance of the publication of a new dental Bill; the date on which this Bill will be published and the approach he intends to take to deal with the issue of illegally practising dental technicians; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45010/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** In June this year, my Department launched a seven week public consultation process on new legislation to replace the Dentists Act, 1985. This took place from 10th June 2013 to 26th July 2013, and the objective of the consultation was to obtain the views of the public and key stakeholders on the proposed new legislation.

The public consultation was advertised in national newspapers on 10th June 2013, and on my Department's website for the full duration of the consultation period. My Department also notified 49 key stakeholder of the public consultation.

A total of 125 submissions were received, and the initial analysis of these submissions has recently been completed. Work is now underway to prepare a comprehensive report of the consultation process in order to identify the primary issues which need to be addressed in a modernised Dental Bill, and this will be published on my Department's website upon completion. The outcome of the consultation will inform the policy position taken when drafting the Heads of Bill, which will be the next stage in the process. This will also inform the undertaking of a Regulatory Impact Analysis which will be carried out by my Department. It is anticipated that the bill will be published in 2014.

My Department and the Dental Council take the matter of illegal practice very seriously and will continue to work with the relevant authorities in addressing this issue.

### **Medical Card Reviews**

213. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical card review in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45018/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

### **Home Help Service Provision**

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if home help will be granted in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45022/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Primary Care Centres Provision**

215. **Deputy Paudie Coffey** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made to date in respect of the promised two primary care centres for County Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45053/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The Health Service Executive (HSE) is working with the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) to progress Primary Care Centre Public Private Partnership. The NDFA as a centre of expertise will be responsible for the delivery of the Primary Care PPP programme on behalf of the HSE, including the management of the procurement phase and the provision of financial advice including a Value for Money assessment. It has been reviewing the processes involved in procurement of PPP projects with a view to streamlining the process and delivering projects more quickly.

The HSE and NDFA have completed an indicative Public Sector Benchmark (PSB) for the overall project which was presented to the Project Board in early September. Considerable work on the project has been completed by the HSE and its appointed design teams and technical advisors. The HSE is in the process of lodging planning applications, details of which will be available on the Waterford County Council planning website.

*Question No. 216 lapsed.*

### **Medical Card Reviews**

217. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a decision to remove a medical card from a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45084/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The Health Service

Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

### **Audiology Services Provision**

218. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry who has been waiting for more than three years for a hearing aid may expect to receive same. [45180/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The Health Service Executive Community Audiology service administers and monitors hearing tests for adults who are at risk for hearing loss. Appointments for the audiology service are sent in a strict chronology according to clinical priorities and date of receipt of referral. The HSE has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Audiology Services Provision**

219. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will have a hearing test for a hearing aid. [45181/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The Health Service Executive Community Audiology service administers and monitors hearing tests for adults who are at risk for hearing loss. Appointments for the audiology service are sent in a strict chronology according to clinical priorities and date of receipt of referral. The HSE has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Patient Files**

220. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health if a person is ordinarily allowed access to their recently deceased partner's medical records, both general practitioner and hospital records (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45184/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** The Medical Council's "Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners" advises that confidentiality is a fundamental principle of medical ethics and is central to the trust between patients and doctors. Patients are entitled to expect that information about them will be held in confidence. Patient information remains confidential even after death. Therefore, there is no automatic entitlement to releasing medical records to a third party.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

221. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans regarding making defibrillators more accessible to the public (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45278/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** The Second Stage of the Public Access to Defibrillators Bill, which sets out the requirement to provide defibrillators in a range of settings and for events which have a regular attendance in excess of 100 persons per day, was passed in the Seanad in June 2013. Approval was granted for the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) to undertake a Health Technology Assessment (HTA) of a public access defibrillator programme for Ireland. This HTA, when completed, will determine the implementation of the defibrillator programme for Ireland.

### **Medical Card Reviews**

222. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical card review in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45280/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

### **General Medical Services Scheme Administration**

223. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the widespread practice by general medical practitioners of charging medical card holders a fee for taking blood for warfarin and other required tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45285/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** Under paragraph 11 of the General Medical Services (GMS) contract, a general practitioner (GP) shall provide for eligible persons, on behalf of the HSE, all proper and necessary treatment of a kind usually undertaken by a GP and not requiring special skill or experience of a degree or kind which GPs cannot reasonably be expected to possess. Under paragraph 27 of the GMS contract a GP shall not demand or accept any payment or consideration whatsoever from a GMS patient in reward for services provided by him/her under this contract, or for travelling or for other expenses incurred by him/her or for the use of any premises; equipment or instruments in making the services available.

The monitoring and appropriate care of patients receiving anti-coagulation therapy with Warfarin comes within the scope of competence of general practice. Warfarin testing is also available free of charge in hospitals. Warfarin testing is carried out by some GPs as a matter of course in their practices and I welcome this. This provides their patients with an option of receiving this service locally in a primary care setting rather than attending an acute hospital for the service. In relation to other blood tests, in circumstances where the taking of blood is necessary to either (a) assist in the process of diagnosing a patient or (b) monitor a diagnosed condition, the GP may not charge that patient if they are eligible for free GMS services under the Health Act, 1970, as amended.

The HSE has written to GP contract holders and clarified the position in relation to this matter and has also communicated its position to the Irish Medical Organisation. Any alleged instances of eligible patients being requested to pay for a routine service of this nature from their own limited resources is viewed as a serious matter by the HSE and the Department. I

have been advised by the HSE that its Local Health Offices will fully investigate any reported incidents of eligible patients being charged for phlebotomy services which form part of the investigation and necessary treatment of patients' symptoms or conditions. In such cases, where a medical card holder or a GP visit card holder has been inappropriately charged for the taking of blood, the HSE will make deductions from those GPs' routine GMS payments.

Officials in my Department are in consultation with the HSE with a view to drawing up a new GMS contract. The appropriate arrangements in relation to anti-coagulation therapy and phlebotomy services will be considered as part of the new contract.

### **Medical Card Reviews**

224. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a medical card review in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45288/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White):** The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has issued to Oireachtas members.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

225. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that a person (details supplied) in County Dublin receives a replacement wheelchair as a matter of urgency. [45301/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch):** As the Deputy's question relates to service matters I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Health Services Staff Issues**

226. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Health if the pension schemes of consultant hospital doctors employed by the Health Service Executive are varied where they transition from a type B contract to a type C contract or if terms and entitlements are varied under the new contractual arrangements. [45306/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** As the issue raised is a matter for the Health Service Executive, I have referred the question to the Executive for direct reply.

### **Health Services Staff Issues**

227. **Deputy Brian Walsh** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce changes to the contract arrangements pertaining to consultant doctors in order to facilitate practice in the private sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45307/13]

**Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly):** I have no plans to pursue changes to the consultant contract in order to facilitate practice in the private sector.

Consultant Contract 2008 introduced a series of measures designed to improve equity for public patients, including limits on private practice. This Contract included specified upper limits to private practice activity of 20% for newly-appointed consultants on a Type B or C contract and 30% for consultants who held a contract prior to 2008. Consultants holding a Type A contract are limited to public practice. Under the Public Service Agreement, following negotiations at the LRC in September 2012, health service employers and the two consultant representative bodies agreed a range of measures to support improved patient care, including consultant compliance with the limits on private practice activity.

### **Sports Capital Programme Administration**

228. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in view of the decision of the Government to include provision for a new round of sports capital funding in the 2014 Estimates, the likely timeframe for any new scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44909/13]

230. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected timeframe for the new sports capital grant scheme; the amount that will be involved; if there will be different criteria from the previous round; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45279/13]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 and 230 together.

I welcome the decision of the Government to provide funding for a new round of the Sports Capital Programme. I believe that it demonstrates this Government's understanding of the value of sport from both an economic and health perspective. My officials are presently working on the details of the new Programme and I hope to be in a position to make an announcement before end year.

My Department has developed a new portal on the Department's website which must be used by organisations to register their interest in the Sports Capital Programme, to apply for funding (when the Programme is open for applications) and to manage the drawdown of any new grants allocated after 2013. The portal also has a growing knowledge base of information on all aspects of the SCP. Registered users can also ask questions and get answers about the SCP. Any interested organisation should register on [www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie](http://www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie).

### **Tourism Promotion**

229. **Deputy John Lyons** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to increase the number of visits by Chinese nationals; if he has a dedicated Chinese tourism strategy; if strategies are employed to raise awareness of Ireland as a tourism destination in China; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45170/13]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** The matter raised is an operational one for Tourism Ireland Limited as the body responsible for promoting the island of Ireland as a visitor destination overseas. I have referred the Deputy's Question to Tourism Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

*Question No. 230 answered with Question No. 228.*

## Driving Licence Renewals

231. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the precise nature of new regulations which have been introduced regarding licensing requirements for persons who are driving vehicles which have trailers attached; the reason the position pertains whereby persons have to obtain a class B on their licence and that same is restricted to those who have secured a licence prior to 13 November 1989, as many persons, particularly farmers during the 1990s, have gained significant competency in driving vehicles with trailers attached and are now being forced under this new regulation to resit their test to achieve the required class on their driver's licence; if same will be reviewed in a reasonable way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [45330/13]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar):** Before 1989, there was one category of driving licence for driving a car or a car with a trailer. In the 1989 Regulations this was changed to provide for two separate categories, one for cars alone and one for cars with trailers. People who previously had a licence for cars could apply for both when renewing their licences. It would appear that some people did not realise this at the time of renewing their licences, and therefore unintentionally lost their trailer entitlement.

There have been several changes to Regulations since that time. The categories under which we operate at present are set in EU law. The Road Traffic (Licensing of Drivers) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 483 of 2011) represents the transposition of Directive 2006/126/EC into Irish law, and came into effect on 19 January 2013. Under these Regulations, Category B covers a car plus trailer up to 750kg, B with code 106 is a car plus trailer which can be over 750kg provided the combination of car plus trailer is not over 4250kg, and BE is car plus trailer not exceeding 3500kg.

Earlier this year, I received representations from farming organisations suggesting that many farmers who had a car licence before the 1989 Regulations came into effect, had unintentionally lost their trailer entitlement by not ticking the appropriate box on the form when applying for renewal. I agreed to make an exceptional allowance for people in this position - whether farmers or not - to reclaim the trailer entitlement, where they could prove that they had previously held it. The RSA has made arrangements to accommodate drivers in this position for a limited period.