

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Private Residential Tenancies Board

11. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the annual budget and total number of personnel employed by the Private Residential Tenancies Board in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3440/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) was established in September 2004 under the Residential Tenancies Act. For the first six years the PRTB was in receipt of Exchequer funding towards operational costs but has operated on a self-financing basis since 2010. The PRTB's funding is derived primarily from a proportion of the fee income accruing from tenancy registrations, as set down by Ministerial Order. The Board is currently entitled to retain 80% of the registration fee income to fund its activities, with 20% going to fund local authority inspections of rented accommodation under the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008. It also retains the fees charged for its' dispute resolution services.

The total number of personnel employed by the PRTB in whole time equivalents for the years in question is as follows:

- 2010 – 65.4
- 2011 – 50.4
- 2012 – 37.4
- 2013 – 34.8
- 2014 – 30.3

The reduction in staffing in recent years needs to be seen in the context of the introduction of online tenancy registration and online dispute application services. In 2012, the PRTB awarded a contract, outsourcing its call -centre activities and processing of paper registrations, allowing the Board to focus on its dispute resolution processes. There are currently 28 people employed on the PRTB account by the outsourced service provider.

Given the sustained increase in demand for PRTB services, approval has been provided for

an additional 4 permanent staff and 5 temporary staff and the Board is currently working with the Public Appointments Service to fill these posts. My Department continues to keep the resources available to the PRTB under close review and engages regularly with the Board on this and other matters.

Insurance Coverage

12. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the action he has taken with regard to convening a meeting of home insurers to tackle the issue of the owners of pyrite remediated homes being refused home insurance; his plans to pursue the establishment of a voluntary agreement between the Government and insurance providers, along the lines of the declined cases agreement which operates in the motor insurance industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3499/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): While I have no function in relation to the regulation or oversight of insurance providers or insurance based products, I am acutely aware of the upset and distress faced by many homeowners who have been affected by pyritic heave and am conscious that their difficulties have been exacerbated by the withdrawal of household insurance cover.

In this regard, I have recently written to Insurance Ireland, as the representative body for insurance providers operating in the Irish market, to encourage their members to re-consider their position on providing homeowners, whose homes have been remediated, with appropriate insurance cover where that is not already the case in the light of the range of measures that are now in place to mitigate against future risk of pyritic damage. I have also written to the Minister for Finance in this matter given his role for policy in respect of insurance.

All works under the pyrite remediation scheme will be completed to the requirements of the relevant standard, I.S. 398-2:2013 Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material - Part 2: Methodology for remediation works, and will be carried out by competent builders, overseen by construction professionals in accordance with the requirements of the Pyrite Resolution Board and the Housing Agency. There will also be oversight by construction professionals from within the Housing Agency itself to ensure that the works will be fully compliant with the relevant requirements of the Building Regulations, that proper materials are used in the works and that remediated dwellings will be restored to the quality expected by the homeowners. At the end of the works, each homeowner will be provided with certification to confirm that their home has been remediated to the requirements of the relevant standard.

My Department is available to meet with Insurance Ireland to address any concerns their members may have and I will support any proposals put forward that provide the basis for a satisfactory resolution for homeowners on this issue.

Homelessness Strategy

13. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the discussions he has held with the local authorities in Dublin and the counties adjacent thereto such as County Kildare to address the issue of homelessness; arising from such discussions, the degree to which his Department and the local authorities are in a position to address the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3623/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): 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 and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

A range of measures are being taken to secure a ring-fenced supply of accommodation to house homeless households and mobilise the necessary supports in order to deliver on the Government's target of ending involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. These measures have been identified in the Government's Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness and in the Action Plan to Address Homelessness. Progress in implementing these plans are reported through the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform. The plans and progress reports are available on my Department's website - the relevant link will be included in the Official Report. [[http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/.](http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/)]

Implementation of these plans necessitates close liaison with the lead housing authorities in each of the 9 homelessness regions so as to ensure that the appropriate actions are being taken and funding available to address the homelessness needs in these regions. My Department liaises with housing authorities for this purpose on an ongoing basis

Local Authority Housing Provision

14. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress of restoring and renewing the local authority housing stock to ensure maximum availability of accommodation, with particular reference to counties Galway and Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3627/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): In 2014 my Department provided funding of in excess of €26 million to support local authorities in their work to return over 2,300 vacant social housing units back to productive use. The three local authorities in Counties Galway and Mayo received funding of almost €1.9 million under this programme and returned 182 properties back to productive use. The funding provided by my Department to return these properties to use is capped at €30,000 per social housing unit.

The effective management of vacant and boarded up social housing units is a key aspect of achieving best practice and value for money in housing management, to assist local authorities in making best use of their existing stock. For 2015, I will provide support to local authorities to target a further 1,000 such units and the aim over the lifetime of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 is to return 2,300 units to productive use. I have also outlined in the Strategy that my Department will link future funding to the measured performance of local authorities on their ability to return vacant units to use and to put in place on-going maintenance programmes.

Water Quality

15. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he has received any assessment from Irish Water regarding the presence of asbestos pipes in the water infrastructure; and his views on whether asbestos water pipes pose a health threat to those being provided with water through them; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [3647/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Since 1 January 2014 Irish Water has statutory responsibility for all aspects of water services planning, delivery and operation at national, regional and local levels including the delivery of water services capital infrastructure. I have not received any assessment from Irish Water specifically in relation to the presence of asbestos pipes in the water infrastructure.

Asbestos cement piping formerly used in local authority water mains was required to meet certain specifications including bitumen lining and coating. The main health risk associated with asbestos products relates to inhalation of airborne asbestos particles. The potential exposure to such risk led to the decline in the use of asbestos materials generally. With the availability of more robust materials, asbestos cement piping is no longer used in Ireland for new public water mains or sewer pipes.

The World Health Organisation's position on asbestos in drinking water is that there is no consistent evidence that ingested asbestos is hazardous to health and that there is no need to establish a health-based guideline value for asbestos in drinking water.

Private Rented Accommodation Price Controls

16. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to reform the rental housing market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3653/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The private rented sector is an important element of the housing market, with the proportion of households in the sector almost doubling in the period 2006-2011. The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 regulates the landlord-tenant relationship in the sector and sets out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants including in relation to rent, security of tenure and the termination of tenancies. The Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) was established as an independent statutory body under the Act to operate a national tenancy registration system and to resolve disputes between landlords and tenants.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment)(No. 2) Bill 2012 is currently before the Oireachtas and will amend the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to provide, inter alia, for:

- the inclusion of the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector within the remit of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004;
- the introduction of a new fast-track procedure to deal with non-payment of rent;
- the introduction of a tenancy deposit protection scheme.

The Bill has passed all stages in the Dáil, together with Second Stage in the Seanad. Legislative provisions for the deposit protection scheme, together with other amendments, are currently being drafted and it is my intention to introduce these amendments at Committee Stage of the Bill in the Seanad in the first quarter of 2015.

The Government published the Social Housing Strategy 2020 in November 2014. The strategy provides the basis for a concerted and coordinated approach to social housing provision and contains an action plan with detailed objectives and timelines. It includes a commitment to developing a national policy on the private rented sector aimed at increasing investment in

and supporting the supply of, good quality, secure and affordable accommodation in the sector.

The PRTB published two major reports on the sector in 2014 and these reports, together with a forthcoming National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) report on the future development of the private rented sector, will be important inputs to the process of developing the national policy.

Water Quality

17. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the discussions he has had with Irish Water regarding the progress that is being made on lifting boil water notices and drinking water restriction notices from water supplies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3536/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Under the European Communities (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library, suppliers of drinking water are required to ensure that the water supplied complies with the chemical and microbiological parameters set out in the Regulations. The procedures to be followed and the roles of water suppliers, the EPA and the HSE where there is non-compliance with the parametric values set out in the Schedules to the Regulations, are clearly laid out in the Regulations. Neither I nor my Department have any role in monitoring or supervising the delivery of water services.

The EPA's Drinking Water Report 2013 highlights the current situation where 23,297 people are required to boil their water before drinking. Since 1 January 2014, Irish Water is responsible for the delivery of water services capital infrastructure. Irish Water has stated that it has prioritised the elimination of boil water notices and has accelerated investing to accomplish this. Irish Water has published its Proposed Capital Investment Plan for 2014 – 2016 and this is available on the Irish Water website ; the relevant weblink will be circulated with the official Report. (<http://www.water.ie/news/proposed-capital-investme/Proposed-Capital-Investment-Plan-2014-2016.pdf>)

The plan outlines a number of priorities to be delivered including improving water quality, tackling leakage, improving capacity and investing for economic development and it identifies where Irish Water considers investment in infrastructure is necessary for the effective performance of its functions. This includes compliance with Water Framework Directive requirements, improving sewage treatment and collection infrastructure in accordance with the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, responding to judgments of the European Court of Justice and achieving environmental and public health objectives arising from various regulations and EPA reports dealing with water quality.

In the case of County Roscommon specifically, I understand that in 2014 and 2015, Irish Water will spend almost €20 million on 6 new plants in the county, which will remove over 17,000 people from boil water notices by next April. In addition, I understand that a further major scheme for north-east Roscommon is at tender and scheduled to be completed by the end of 2016, providing a modern high quality supply for 6,000 people currently on boil water notices.

Planning Issues

18. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress of the planning review of the performance of planning func-

tions reopened by his Department in July 2013; when it is likely to report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3611/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): MacCabe Durney Barnes Consultants were appointed in February 2014 to carry out an independent planning review on the performance of planning functions in six selected planning authorities (Carlow, Cork, Galway and Meath County Councils and Cork and Dublin City Councils) in accordance with section 255 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. I expect to receive the final report from the consultants shortly and I subsequently intend to publish it having considered its contents.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

19. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will meet with the staff in Cherry Orchard equine centre and see the vital work they do in the Ballyfermot community (details supplied). [3438/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department's Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) superseded the Local Development Social Inclusion and the Community Development Programmes in 2010. LCDP is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The current Programme officially ended at the end of 2013 having operated for four years with funding of €281 million over that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis until March 2015, pending the roll out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in April 2015.

In accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients, SICAP is subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway. The closing date for receipt of tenders under stage two was noon on 19 December 2014. The tenders received are currently being evaluated and tenderers will be informed of the outcome by mid February. Contracts for SICAP will be determined following the outcome of the procurement process.

The procurement process for SICAP was open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that can provide the services to be tendered for to deliver the new Programme. In Stage one, joint applications were encouraged and organisations of varying sizes (for example smaller organisations working in consortia with larger organisations) were invited to submit joint applications.

Consistent with the transitional arrangements to extend the LCDP until the roll out of SICAP in April 2015 and to ensure business continuity, interim LCDP funding will be provided to the Cherry Orchard Equine, Education and Training Centre up to end March 2015, pending the outcome of the SICAP competitive process. As Stage two of the process (Invitation to Tender) is currently underway, I am not in a position to meet with the group concerned at this time.

My Department appreciates the importance of the work of the Cherry Orchard Equine, Education and Training Centre. The issues involved are broader than just those relating to SICAP. However, it is my Department's intention to examine the position with regard to a number of groups, including the Cherry Orchard Equine, Education and Training Centre, in the near future, and will be in contact with the group at that stage.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

20. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will report on the progress of the transfer of training and community programmes from local community development programmes to the social inclusion and community activation programme; the timeframe for communication with projects on whether or not they were successful in the new tendering process; and if he will report on any transitional funding that may be made available. [3431/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department's Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The current Programme officially ended at the end of 2013 having operated for four years with funding of €281m over that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis until March 2015, pending the roll out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in April 2015. All groups who received LCDP funding in 2014 are being funded through LCDP interim arrangements until 31 March 2015, pending the outcome of the SICAP competitive process.

In accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients, SICAP is subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway. Stage one (Expression of Interest) has been completed. Stage two (Invitation to Tender), commenced on 20 October 2014 and involved the successful applicants from stage one being invited to apply to one or more Local Community Development Committees, in local authority areas, to deliver the programme. The closing date for receipt of tenders under stage two was noon on 19 December 2014. The tenders received are currently being evaluated and it is intended that tenderers will be informed of the outcome by mid February.

Vacant Sites Levy

21. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the way the proposed vacant site levy will ensure that developers are not sitting on zoned land and to bring those sites into use for housing, commercial or social purposes. [3606/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The proposed vacant site levy will enable local authorities, should they wish to do so, to apply a levy on vacant sites in urban centres within their functional areas with a view to incentivising and stimulating the development of such sites. The proposals for the levy are as set out in the General Scheme for the Planning and Development No. 1 Bill which I published in November 2014.

Under this scheme it is envisaged that the levy will be applied at a rate not exceeding 3% of the market valuation of a site in the first year, increasing incrementally by 1% in subsequent years up to a maximum levy not exceeding 6% of the market valuation of the site in question in any individual year. It is further proposed that the individual local authorities who decide to introduce this measure will be responsible for collecting the levy within their functional areas.

To be entitled to apply the levy, local authorities will in the first instance be required to provide for the development of vacant sites in specific locations within urban areas as an objective in their local development plans – thereby being an integral part of the local development

planning process.

The measure should be supplemented by the application of reduced development contributions on such sites when granted planning permission having regard to the likelihood that the development of such sites will be able to avail of existing infrastructure rather than be reliant on further investment in new infrastructure.

In essence, the levy will entail a carrot and stick approach i.e. incentivising developers to develop vacant underutilised sites while also applying lower development contribution levies on the development of such sites, and only penalising those who opt not to bring forward proposals to develop such sites.

Housing Data

22. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of households currently occupying accommodation rented directly from Dublin City Council in Dublin Central; the number of households occupying accommodation rented from an approved housing body or housing association; the number of units of local authority housing known to be vacant or unoccupied because it is in disrepair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3534/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): My Department publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics on our website and the total number of local authority units occupied can be found at the following link, under the area titled ‘LA rented units by area 2003+’ within the Social Housing Supports contents: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/StatisticsandRegularPublications/HousingStatistics/FileDownload,15291,en.xls> .

However, this information does not cover households currently renting directly from an Approved Housing Body or Housing Association in particular parts of the Dublin City area as that data is not available in my Department.

General statistics on local authority housing stock, including units that may be empty, are published annually by the Local Government Management Agency. The most recent statistics are in respect of 2013 and are available at the following link: <http://www.lgma.ie/en/service-indicators-local-authorities-2013> . As part of a planned programme supported by my Department in 2014, Dublin City Council returned 467 vacant social housing units back to productive use and will be continuing to address this into 2015, through funding made available under Budget 2015.

Building Regulations

23. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the role and membership of the building regulations advisory body; the number of meetings held by this body since March 2011; and the number of these meetings which discussed the regulations which became the BC(A)R 2014. [3604/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Section 14 of the Building Control Act 1990 provides for the establishment of a Building Regulations Advisory Body to advise on matters relating to the Building Regulations and to provide advisory services for or on behalf of the Minister. The

Body has no executive function. Currently there is no Building Regulations Advisory Body in place. The last such Body was appointed in June 2007 for a period of 5 years. Prior to the completion of its term of service in June 2012 the then Minister extended its term of service until 1 October 2012. The membership comprised of nominated representatives of key Construction Industry stakeholders (both private and public sectors) and full membership details can be found on my Departments website at the following link <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/BuildingStandards/BRAB/> :-

The Body held eight plenary meetings (excluding working groups meetings) during the period between March 2011 and 1 October 2012. Three of those meetings included brief updates from the Department on progress relating to the drafting of new building control regulations which was being overseen by a High Level Group established to review the arrangements in place for the control of building activity. Building Control Regulations set down administrative procedures for the control of building activity and are distinct and complementary to the statutory performance standards set down in Building Regulations with which the Building Regulations Advisory Body is predominantly concerned. Detailed consideration of the new regulatory framework took place at three further meetings of the Body and members were also invited to an industry briefing on the draft Building Control Amendment Regulations released for public consultation in April 2012. The Body had also produced its own report on enforcement which was adopted at its meeting of 22 June 2011 and which was forwarded to the then Minister for consideration at that time in conjunction with the report of the High Level Group.

Housing Provision

24. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the private housing sector with particular reference to the ability of first-time buyers or those in need of a home excluding investors; if they will be facilitated in their efforts to acquire a family home at a reasonable cost; if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties this group of persons face in view of their inability to compete with the investment sector over the past 12 months; if he will propose any initiatives in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3624/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Government is acutely aware of the difficulties facing people in accessing housing and is undertaking a range of actions to address the matter.

My Department's Housing Land Availability Survey (HLAS) estimates that there is in excess of 25,000 hectares of undeveloped residentially zoned land nationally, which equates to a capacity for over 500,000 new homes (based on a national average of 20 units per hectare). This capacity is considered to be sufficient to meet the housing requirements nationally for in excess of the next ten years.

The challenge is to translate this potential supply line into actual construction on the ground to meet the demand of home seekers. Most of the difficulties currently being encountered can be addressed by increasing the supply of properties available to buy, to rent, and to be provided by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

The Government recognises that a whole of Government approach, working in close cooperation with key stakeholders, is the only way to tackle the challenge of increasing the supply of housing. The implementation of the Construction Strategy 2020 forms the basis for a properly functioning and sustainable construction sector. It provides for a strategic approach to the provision of housing based on real and measured demand and addresses the full range of relevant

issues including the planning process, financing, access to mortgage finance, and developing the construction workforce. Construction 2020, and two Planning Bills currently being drafted, aim to remove blockages from the system in order to support increased supply, reducing the pressure on house price growth and helping homebuyers to acquire a family home in their community of choice at reasonable cost.

Measures to increase supply will also impact positively on the private rental sector. Historically, the private rental sector has been characterised by small scale landlords. Attracting large scale investment in professionally managed residential property, for example using Real Estate Investment Trusts and other options for long-term investment, has an important role to play in helping to deliver a more professional and higher quality sector.

Social housing is also a key priority for Government, as evidenced by the additional €2.2 billion in funding announced for social housing in Budget 2015 and the publication of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 in November 2014. The Strategy builds on the provisions contained in Budget 2015 and sets out clear, measurable actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing, reform delivery arrangements and meet the housing needs of all households on the housing list.

The total targeted provision of over 110,000 social housing units, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme, will address the needs of the 90,000 households on the housing waiting list in full, with flexibility to meet potential future demand. This will help to ease pressure on the private sector.

In 2015, I expect that some 7,400 new social housing units will be provided-3,000 units through the leasing initiative; 1,000 vacant local authority units will be returned to use through a programme of refurbishment; a further 1,400 units to be built or acquired by local authorities and approved housing bodies through the Social Housing Investment Programme and the Capital Assistance Scheme; and a further 2,000 new Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) units will be delivered. In addition, 8,400 households will be assisted through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

I will be continuing to assign the highest priority to the implementation of both Construction 2020 and the Social Housing Strategy.

Homelessness Strategy

25. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the steps taken on the issue of homeless since his meetings in December 2014 following the death of a person (details supplied). [3649/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 4 on today's Order Paper which sets out the position in this matter.

An Bord Pleanála Review

26. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide the details of the review of An Bord Pleanála. [3435/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly):

ly): I will be announcing the commencement of the organisational review of An Bord Pleanála in the near future. The terms of reference for the review and the composition of the review group are currently being finalised.

Housing Data

27. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government further to the annual planning statistics produced by his Department, the reason the number of planning decisions taken nationally where the decision differs from the recommendation of the planner officer jumped from an average of just 400 per year between 2003 and 2007 to an average of 5,600 per year between 2010 and 2012 with particularly high differences recorded in counties Cork, Donegal, Kildare, Meath and Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3609/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The figures presented in the Annual Planning Statistics document are based on information submitted by all planning authorities to my Department. While my Department strives to ensure that the statistics presented are correct, the accuracy of the figures is dependent on the accuracy of the data submitted by each planning authority. Investigation of the situation regarding the data in respect of the counties concerned has revealed that there was a data entry error. The erroneous dataset will be removed from the web site and the amended data will be uploaded online as soon as possible.

Water Charges Exemptions

28. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his views on amending the Water Services Act 2014 to include exemptions for households affected by the presence of hard water; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3434/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013 provides that Irish Water can collect charges from each customer in receipt of water services provided by it. The Act also provides that responsibility for the independent economic regulation of the water sector is assigned to the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) and the CER has been given statutory responsibility for protecting the interests of customers.

Under the European Communities (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014, a copy of which is available in the Oireachtas library, suppliers of drinking water are required to ensure that the water supplied is wholesome and clean. Water which is wholesome and clean is defined as water which is free from any micro-organisms and parasites and from any substances which in numbers or concentrations constitute a potential danger to human health, and which meets the quality standards specified in the Schedule to the Regulations. Hard water is not included in the Schedule mentioned above as it does not pose as a threat to human health, nor indeed are the substances associated with hard water, such as lime, calcium and magnesium.

The Water Charges Policy Direction issued to the CER in July 2014 referred to a number of matters relating to domestic water charges including where the quality of water services provided by Irish Water to customers is impaired or where services are reduced or restricted. Where a customer is subject to a drinking water restriction notice, affected customers will receive a 100% discount to the water supply portion of their bill for the duration of the restriction. Ac-

cordingly, the current legislation allows for discounts on charges for impaired services and no amendments to the Water Services Act 2014 are necessary. However, as neither hard water nor the substances associated with it require the restriction of a supply, discounts would not apply in such cases .

Homelessness Strategy

29. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the objectives agreed at the homelessness conference which took place in his Department in December 2014; the progress on each of the agreed points to emerge from that conference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3612/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 4 on today's Order Paper which sets out the position in this matter.

Legislative Measures

30. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce new legislation to tackle domestic waste; and if that will include a levy on bottles, cans and plastic bottles. [3608/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): As part of the introduction of a radical and comprehensive new regulatory framework to reform the regulation of the collection of household waste in 2015, I intend to introduce measures to require collectors to have a customer charter in place and to meet certain minimum standards of customer service, such as specified frequencies of collection. I will be setting out in law what the minimum content of these customer charters will be, so that standards of service are raised and are consistent.

It will also become a statutory requirement for all collectors to operate the "pay-by-weight" system as a condition of their permit. The requirement for households, other than those already on a pay-by-weight system, to pay on a by-weight basis will not apply until 2016 so as to provide an appropriate lead-in time.

A levy on drinks containers will not be part of the new framework. In June 2012, as part of a commitment in the Programme for Government to examine the introduction of a levy on such packaging in conjunction with a waste reduction programme, my Department initiated a root and branch review of all aspects of the Producer Responsibility Initiative model in Ireland. My Department also completed a consultation process with stakeholders on this issue.

Following completion of the consultation process and the receipt of the review report, it was decided, after careful consideration, not to proceed with the introduction of a packaging levy. The primary reason for this decision was that the introduction of a packaging levy would be 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 review report does not recommend the introduction of a levy as to establish such a scheme would be inappropriate, in view of the successful operation of the existing pack-

aging scheme operated through Repak, as well as the high administrative costs of introducing such a system.

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

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

31. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the measures that the Government plans to take in order to achieve the 80% reduction in emissions on 1990 levels by 2050, in line with our EU commitments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3645/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The extent of the challenge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in line with our EU commitments, is well understood by Government, as reflected in the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development, published in April 2014, and in the Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development Bill 2015, published last week. The National Policy Position provides a high-level policy direction for the adoption and implementation by Government of plans to enable the State to move to a low-carbon economy by 2050. Proposed statutory authority for the plans is set out in the Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development Bill 2015.

In anticipation of enactment of the planned legislation, work is already underway on developing a low-carbon plan - the National Mitigation Plan - the primary objective of which will be to track implementation of measures already underway and identify additional measures over the longer term to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and progress the overall national low carbon transition agenda to 2050. I am satisfied that Ireland is on course to comply with the annual mitigation targets under the 2009 EU Effort-Sharing Decision (406/2009/EC) in the first half of the 2013-2020 compliance period. However, there will be a significant compliance challenge in the years 2017-2020 and therefore the first iteration of the National Mitigation Plan will place particular focus on putting the necessary measures in place to address the challenge arising in that period, but also in terms of planning ahead to ensure that appropriate policies and measures will be in place beyond that. It is also important to note that the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill will provide for long - term successive planning in this respect.

The general public and stakeholders have already had opportunities to submit views on the sectoral elements of the planned National Mitigation Plan in previous public participatory processes over the last year or so. In continuing my commitment to openness and inclusiveness, I will shortly be inviting the views of the public and stakeholders on the preparation of the National Mitigation Plan currently being developed. I look forward to receiving input from all interested parties on how we might address the specific challenges ahead and harness the opportunities as Ireland moves towards a low-carbon sustainable economic future.

Building Regulations Application

32. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will clarify article 9(2) of SI 9 of 2014; if he will provide details on the type of house extensions that will fall under the new rules regarding the 40 sq. m limit; if this provision is cumulative or if it could permit multiple and possibly concurrent extensions, each of less than 40 m; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3646/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The Building Control Regulations 1997 to 2014, incorporating S.I. No. 9 of 2014, must be construed together as one. Article 7 of the regulations addresses generally the application of Part II of the regulations which deals with commencement notices and certificates of compliance before construction. Article 7 includes a general exemption in respect of works which is exempted development under the Planning and Development Acts. Article 9(2)(b) applies the requirements relating to statutory certification to “an extension to a dwelling involving a total floor area greater than 40 square metres”. The requirements for building control purposes in relation to an extension to a dwelling therefore fall into three categories as follows:

(a) works which constitute exempted development for planning purposes are exempt from the requirements to supply a commencement notice and statutory certification;

(b) works which do not constitute exempted development for planning purposes and which remain under 40 square metres are subject to the requirement to submit a commencement notice only;

(c) works which do not constitute exempted development for planning purposes and which are greater than 40 square metres are subject to the requirements to submit a commencement notice and statutory certification.

The idea that multiple and possibly concurrent extensions, each of less than 40 metres, may be used as a way of avoiding the requirement for statutory certification is precluded by the wording of article 9(2)(b) above where “an extension” must be read as “extensions” where those circumstances apply and the word “total” becomes operable.

I have indicated that I am receptive to addressing concerns regarding the cost burden of the building control regulations in the case of one-off dwellings and extensions to dwellings. I have instructed my Department to review this aspect as a matter of priority and I expect to receive the outcome of this review next month.

Water Conservation Grant

33. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the discussions his Department was involved with in respect of the €100 water conservation grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47804/14]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): To promote sustainable use of water and to enhance water conservation in households, the Department of Social Protection will administer, on behalf of my Department, a €100 water conservation grant for households (principal private dwellings) that complete a valid response to Irish Water’s customer registration process.

While Irish Water, as part of the transition phase, will have a ‘first fix free’ scheme to fix customer leaks, it is recognised that some leakage may be internal to the house. The €100 annual water conservation grant can be used in this regard to address issues such as leaking cisterns, dripping taps etc. Equally, households can use the grant towards other conservation measures such as the costs of water butts or installing dual flush toilets or rain water systems, de-sludging septic tanks or maintaining wells to ensure operating efficiency.

The water conservation grant replaces the tax rebate and social protection measures previously announced, as it is a more straightforward means of addressing water issues for all

households on equal terms and will reduce households' outlay on water services both now and in the future.

The Department of Social Protection will administer the grant on behalf of my Department. There are on-going discussions with that Department and Irish Water to address the technical administrative issues and the necessary communications with households regarding the grant.

Property Tax Administration

34. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will provide an update on the Government's housing strategy; and if he will provide an indication when councils will receive notification on how to spend property tax ring-fenced for housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3629/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I refer to the reply to Question No. 8 on today's Order Paper.

My Department has advised local authorities of their provisional Local Property Tax allocations from the Local Government Fund for 2015. For certain local authorities, with stronger property bases, the amount of Local Property Tax receipts to be retained locally (80%) in 2015 will be greater than the level of funding those individual local authorities received from General Purpose Grants in 2014. Ten of these local authorities will use a portion of this surplus funding for their own discretionary purposes, with the remainder used to fund vital services in the Housing and Roads areas, to free up Central Government funding for other purposes.

The total Housing provision for 2015 will result in an investment of almost €800 million across a range of housing programmes, of which €119.36 million will be self-funded by the relevant authorities. Further details in relation to the specific obligations to be met from these self-funding levels will be provided as part of the overall Housing grant allocations process for 2015.

Homelessness Strategy

35. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to end long-term homelessness by 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3652/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): On 20 May 2014, the Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness was published in which the Government's approach to delivery on its objective of ending involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016 was outlined. A copy of this plan is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/SpecialNeeds/HomelessPeople/>.

This plan sets out a range of measures to secure a ring-fenced supply of accommodation to house homeless households within the next three years and mobilise the necessary supports. Progress in implementing the plan is reported quarterly through the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and a copy of the Quarter 3 2014 Progress Report is also available on my Department's website at the link provided above.

On 4 December 2014, I hosted a special Summit on Homelessness to reaffirm the Government's commitment to end involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. A number

of actions arising from the Summit were considered at the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform on 8 December and were then formalised into an Action Plan to Address Homelessness which was noted by the Government at its meeting on 9 December 2014. A copy of this action plan is available on my Department's website at the link provided above. Progress in implementing this plan is overseen by the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform and a copy of the most recent progress report is also available on my Department's website at the link provided above.

In addition to those actions which constitute an immediate response to the issue of rough sleeping in Dublin, actions have been identified which tackle the more systemic issues, classified under the three categories of the 'housing-led' approach. I am pleased that there is enough accommodation available for all those sleeping rough and that no one needs to sleep rough unless they choose to do so. The number and availability of emergency beds is being monitored closely by Dublin City Council and further beds will be brought on stream should the need arise. Where a homeless person does not want to be placed in emergency accommodation, the Housing First intake street team will refer the person to the recently established Nite Café which is now fully operational. The Nite Café links in with the new Transport with support services for those sleeping rough as an integral part of the Housing First service. This initiative transports homeless persons to emergency accommodation and provides them with the necessary health and care supports in conjunction with other State providers.

The long-term solution to homelessness is to increase the supply of homes. In November 2014, I launched the Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020. This six-year strategy sets out to provide 35,000 new social housing units at a cost of €3.8 billion and restores the State to a central role in the provision of social housing through, inter alia, a resumption of direct building on a significant scale by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

Additional funding for homeless services across the country in 2015 will ensure continued progress toward the achievement of the Government's target of ending involuntary long-term homelessness by the end of 2016. My Department is currently considering the appropriate allocation of the 2015 homelessness budget so as to ensure that Section 10 homelessness funding contributes to meeting the needs in the various regions.

Private Rented Accommodation Price Controls

36. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans for the future regulation of the private rented sector here; the timeframe for any legislative changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3439/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): I refer to the reply to Question No. 16 on today's Order Paper which sets out the position in this matter.

Local Government Reform

37. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will review the impact of local government reforms contained in the Local Government Reform Act 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3602/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Most of the provisions of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 only came into effect on

1 June 2014. Accordingly, 2015 will be the first full year of the operation of a number of significant changes in the local government system such as the unification of city/county councils in Limerick, Tipperary and Waterford, the establishment of municipal districts and a range of new governance arrangements. Moreover, implementation of various reform measures is ongoing ; for example the adoption of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies by Regional Assemblies, established under a recent ministerial order, the formulation of local Economic and Community Plans in accordance with guidelines issued by my Department last week, the approval of new local authority corporate plans, and the adoption of Schedules of Municipal District Works by municipal district members in accordance with recently issued guidelines. In addition, I am also willing to consider further reforms which may be warranted beyond those provided for in the 2014 Act. In this regard, I recently announced further important local government reform initiatives involving independent reviews of local government arrangements in Cork and Galway by statutory committees.

In the circumstances, I consider that it would be premature to undertake any detailed review of the impact of the provisions of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 at this stage. However, the implementation of the various reforms is kept under general review in consultation with the local authorities and the Association of Irish Local Government, which represents the elected councils of local authorities.

National Planning Framework

38. **Deputy Seán Kyne** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the progress on the new national planning framework which appears to be the proposed successor to the national spatial strategy; the way the new framework will achieve the principles of sustainable and regionally balanced development; and when it is likely the framework will be published. [3626/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): The 2002 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was Ireland's first national strategic spatial planning framework and outlined policies and objectives to secure 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 remains in place, but having regard to the significantly changed economic circumstances that the country now faces, the Government recently approved the commencement of the preparation of a new National Planning Framework as a successor to the NSS. Arrangements in this regard will now be put in place and this will be a significant area of activity during 2015.

I intend that the new National Planning Framework will be developed in an inclusive and participative manner with all relevant national, regional and local interests as the strategic context for:

(1) planning in Ireland at national level, in relation to relevant Government policies and investment concerning national and regional development with particular emphasis on economic development and investment in housing, water services, transport, communications, energy, health and education infrastructure;

(2) development, by the three new regional assemblies, of their new regional spatial and

economic strategies, and

(3) planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála in their statutory planning functions.

I intend to make a further statement in the near future on broader arrangements in relation to the preparation of the Framework. In light of that and the need to take account of the public participation and consultation input as to the content of the Framework, it would be premature, at this stage, to outline underlying principles or to commit to a publication date for the framework.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

39. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the issues raised with him regarding SICAP; his arrangements to meet community organisations in Dublin; and if the resource allocation model has been sent to said organisations. [3535/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): Within the constraints of the prevailing budgetary situation, I have been particularly conscious of the need to prioritise funding for the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP), until March next, and for its successor, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), from April next. My aim is to ensure that resources are allocated in the fairest way possible and to make the maximum contribution to tackling disadvantage, job creation and economic recovery. My Department’s intention is, over time, to use the available knowledge of population levels and disadvantage to ensure that available resources are targeted at areas of greatest need. As a tool to assist with this, a Resource Allocation Model, or RAM, has been developed which allows relative disadvantage to be measured across all census areas. In order to achieve the objective of moving towards allocating resources according to this model, my Department has in recent years worked to ensure that funding is protected for those areas which the RAM shows have greatest needs. This principle was used in deciding on funding allocations for SICAP and I am satisfied that the funding allocated to Dublin Inner City under SICAP is a fair allocation of resources for the area concerned. Details of the model are available at the following link: <http://trutzhaase.eu/wp/wp-content/uploads/Pobal-RAM-Briefing-Document-04.02.2013.pdf>

In accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of the services to clients, SICAP is subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway. The closing date for receipt of tenders under stage two was noon on 19 December 2014. The tenders received are currently being evaluated and tenderers will be informed of the outcome by mid February. Contracts for SICAP will be determined following the outcome of the procurement process.

In relation to the Deputy’s specific query, my Department has consulted with Dublin City Council and it is agreed that it would not be prudent to engage in a deliberative process, in respect of the service delivery mechanism for the inner city, until such time as the results of stage two of the SICAP procurement process are known. In the meantime, I can confirm that interim arrangements have been made to ensure that LCDP funding for the groups concerned will continue until 31 March 2015, pending the outcome of the SICAP competitive process. As the procurement process is still underway, I am not in a position to meet with the groups involved at this time.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

40. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the results of the tender competition for the SICAP will be announced; the reason for the delay in the announcement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3436/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department's Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The current Programme officially ended at the end of 2013 having operated for four years with funding of €281m over that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis until March 2015, pending the roll out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in April 2015. All groups who received LCDP funding in 2014 are being funded through LCDP interim arrangements until 31 March 2015, pending the outcome of the SICAP competitive process.

In accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients, SICAP is subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway. Stage one (Expression of Interest) has been completed. Stage two (Invitation to Tender), commenced on 20 October 2014 and involved the successful applicants from stage one being invited to apply to one or more Local Community Development Committees, in local authority areas, to deliver the programme. The closing date for receipt of tenders under stage two was noon on 19 December 2014. The tenders received are currently being evaluated and it is intended that tenderers will be informed of the outcome by mid February.

Question No. 41 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Appeals Data

42. **Deputy James Bannon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the total amount repaid to the State from fraudulent social welfare claims in the past 12 months; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4010/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Overpayments arise in circumstances where a person is in receipt of a social welfare payment in excess of their actual entitlement. Overpayments are categorised as fraud, non-fraud or estate cases.

Fraud cases arise mainly on foot of false declarations by customers concerning their employment, income or family status. Non-fraud cases are primarily due to customer or departmental error. Estate cases arise where undisclosed means by customers (usually pensioners) come to light after their deaths.

People who have received an overpayment from the Department have a liability under law to refund the amounts involved. Recoveries are not categorised by whether the original overpayment was fraud or error.

In 2013, the total value of debt recoveries amounted to €70.7m.

The Department is not yet in a position to publicly comment on recoveries recorded in 2014 as these figures form part of the statutory accounts of the Department and are subject to audit by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Question No. 43 withdrawn.

Job Creation

44. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection the measures in place to support the creation of jobs in the social economy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4066/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Kevin Humphreys): Support for job creation in all sectors, including the social economy, is a matter for the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. I understand that the Deputy's question is broader in nature and relates to supports that are available to not-for-profit companies and organisations under various work placement and training programmes. The key programme providing supports to the community, voluntary and not-for-profit sectors is Community Employment (CE) using a combination of training and related on-the-job placement. CE is also available in some public sector employment, mainly with local authorities. Two other programmes provide support in the form of work placements exclusively to the community and voluntary sectors. These are the Rural Social Scheme and Tús – the community work placement initiative. Both of these schemes are delivered through local development companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta in Gaeltacht areas.

The Community Services Programme provides supports in the form of wage subsidies to not-for-profit companies and co-operatives providing services of a social inclusion nature or where services are not provided due to lack of demand or other factors. Private and not-for-profit employers may also access JobsPlus which provides a wage subsidy to employers who employ jobseekers who have been on the live register for periods of 12 months or more.

In addition, a variety of supports are available from the Department to employers who provide employment opportunities to persons with a disability.

Further details in relation to all of these schemes are available on the Department's website – www.welfare.ie

Social Welfare Code

45. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection her views on changing the situation where only the person in direct receipt of a social welfare payment receives an increase of €10 once they turn 80 years of age, but a qualified adult on a payment is not eligible for the same increase; her views that this is extremely unfair on those persons affected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4073/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The over 80 allowance is an additional payment of €10 per week, automatically paid to recipients of State pension on attaining 80 years of age. It is one of a number of allowances payable on claims to payments such as the State pension contributory, which is paid in respect of people who have paid PRSI prior to pension age.

Another of these allowances, namely the Qualified Adult Payment made in respect of spouses and civil partners, is normally paid where the pensioner has a spouse or civil partner who is financially dependent on them, and who does not have enough contributions to claim a maximum rate State pension contributory in his/her own right. In most cases, such couples have additional income or means above their State pension, as otherwise they would obtain a higher payment by the spouse making a claim to the State pension (non-contributory), which is means-tested and has a maximum personal rate of €219 weekly (plus additional allowances, such as the

over-80 allowance, where applicable).

There are some 7,750 qualified adults on contributory pensions who are at least 80 years of age, although this is expected to increase in the coming years. The cost of extending the full allowance to both spouses on such claims (which would effectively double the allowance for claims where both spouses are over 80) would be over €4 million per annum.

The overall concern of the Government in recent budgets has been to protect the primary weekly social welfare rates. Maintaining the rate of the State pension and other core payments is critical in protecting people from poverty. Any proposals to extend the over 80 allowance would have to be considered in a budgetary context

Dietary Allowance Applications

46. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection when a dietary allowance will be restored in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4080/15]

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): As previously notified to the Deputy in responses provided to PQs 44094-14 of 18th November 2014, 47062-14 of 9th December 2014 and 2076-15 of 15th January 2015, relating to this client. The position remains unchanged because the client has failed to supply the financial information requested. This claim is now suspended for 21 weeks and if information is not supplied by Friday, 13th February 2015, it will be closed.

Tax Rebates

47. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Finance if a person (details supplied) in County Limerick is due a tax refund; if so, if same will be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3989/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that Limerick District has written to the person concerned requesting the information necessary to determine whether any tax refund is due. On receipt of this information the matter will be dealt with as soon as possible.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

48. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a home that has been certified by a consulting engineer as having pyrite present but has not gone through laboratory testing will qualify for property tax relief. [3994/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The exemption from Local Property Tax (LPT) based on “significant pyritic damage” was comprehensively dealt with in a number of Parliamentary Questions last year, including Questions no. 217 (8212/14) on 18/2/14, no. 121 (19698/14) on 30/4/14, no. 43 (26462/14) on 19/6/14, no. 14 (37016/14) on 2/10/14 and no. 38 (41718/14) on 5/11/2014.

Section 10A of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a temporary exemption of at least three consecutive years from the charge to Local Property Tax

(LPT) for residential properties that have been certified under Regulations made by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (S.I. No. 147 of 2013) as having “significant pyritic damage”. These Regulations describe the methodology that must be used when a property is being assessed for pyrite damage.

Under the Regulations, significant pyritic damage” means a residential property which -

(a) has a Damage Condition Rating of 2 or a Damage Condition Rating of 1 (with progression) established on foot of a Building Condition Assessment carried out by a competent person under and in accordance with Irish Standard 398-1:2013, and

(b) has sub-floor hardcore material classified, by the appropriate competent person(s), as susceptible to significant or limited expansion, established on foot of testing the sub-floor hardcore material.

The legislation in this area is consistent with the recommendation set out in the Report of the Pyrite Panel (July 2012) which recommended that an exemption from the LPT should be provided for dwellings where damage from pyritic heave has been proven by testing.

Revenue has an obligation to act in accordance with section 10A of the LPT legislation which requires that an LPT exemption can only apply where the residential property has been assessed and a certificate confirming “significant pyritic damage” has been issued. This is the only type of certificate that is relevant and a homeowner cannot claim the exemption until it has been issued. A certificate may be obtained from a competent person, i.e. a person, company or partnership having sufficient theoretical and practical training, experience and knowledge appropriate to the nature of the work to be undertaken as detailed in Irish Standard 398-1:2013.

Tax Yield

49. **Deputy Robert Dowds** asked the Minister for Finance the measures he will take to increase the tax generated from stallion fees to support Irish horse racing (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4001/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I dealt comprehensively with the issue of profits and tax yields from the thoroughbred breeding industry, including stallion fees, in my recent replies to questions, including Questions 157 to 160 on 18 November last year and Question 177 on 9 December last.

In these replies, I explained that there was a range of variables associated with the stallions industry and that profits from a number of activities within the thoroughbred breeding sector are not separately identifiable. As a result, it is unwise to draw any firm conclusions from the figures supplied.

The Deputy will be aware that the figures supplied related only to profits for income tax and corporation purposes and took no account of the overall contribution made by the sector in terms of employment taxes and VAT. I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that these amounts may not include gains from the sale of stallions, nor does it include profits earned from the provision of stallion stud services that are owned by syndicates as these are not regarded as having been earned in the course of a trade. It is not possible to state the amount of any profits associated with these activities as they are not separately captured on tax returns.

As to plans to increase the tax contributions from the thoroughbred breeding industry, I have no plans for changes in this area at this time. The Deputy will be aware that matters regarding

the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund are a matter for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Fuel Quality

50. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance further to meeting the Minister of State and senior officials, the progress to date on investigations into petrol stretching; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4022/15]

52. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance the number of complaints of petrol stretching received by Customs and Excise in each of the past seven months; the number which were investigated; the number which are ongoing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4024/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50 and 52 together.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners, who are responsible for tackling fuel fraud, that they are very aware of the risks posed to consumers' vehicles, legitimate businesses and the Exchequer by all forms of fuel fraud.

Revenue has, since last summer, received reports from a variety of locations around the country of problems relating to petrol quality, and suggestions that these problems are attributable to petrol stretching. The total number received to date is 134, and the numbers received in each month since July 2014 are set out in the following table.

Numbers received in each month since July 2014

July 2014	August 2014	September 2014	October 2014	November 2014	December 2014	January 2015
1	12	28	34	42	11	6

Revenue investigates all complaints of this kind and Revenue officers have visited and taken samples from every filling station about which a complaint has been made about fuel contamination, and these samples have been referred to the State Laboratory for scientific analysis. Despite extensive testing by the State Laboratory, evidence of a prohibited stretching agent has been found in only two samples, both taken from one site. The conclusive results received in that particular case resulted in seizure of the product and a file is being prepared with a view to prosecution.

Following a series of further tests conducted by the state laboratory, results were received which indicated the presence of traces of road diesel in several samples taken from a variety of locations. This could indicate that petrol was contaminated with road diesel at some point in time. There is no rational economic reason or fraudulent incentive for anyone to mix normal road diesel with petrol. This contamination could have taken place well ahead of the problems related to fuel quality that manifested themselves in vehicles.

If the problems that have come to light were caused by unintended contamination resulting from diesel being inadvertently mixed with petrol at some point along the supply chain, there would be no Revenue offence involved. In any instances where the analysis of petrol samples by the State Laboratory indicates the presence of illegal stretching agents in petrol, Revenue will take robust action and pursue prosecutions against offenders where possible. Revenue will also continue to work closely with An Garda Síochána and to share information and intelligence

with them on this issue.

I am also advised by the Revenue Commissioners that they undertake, on an ongoing basis, an extensive programme of compliance and enforcement actions to ensure adherence to the legal requirements governing the supply and sale of mineral oil and to allow action to be taken against fraud. This involves, among other things, carrying out analysis of the monthly oil movement returns that oil traders are required to make, and of other supply chain data. In addition, Revenue officers conduct control or compliance visits to mineral oil traders, during which they examine transport and movement documentation and take samples of fuel for analysis.

I am assured by the Revenue Commissioners that action on this matter continues to be a priority. They will, accordingly, take all possible steps to identify the problem, to challenge any instance of identified fuel fraud and, where possible, to prosecute anyone found to be involved in fraudulent activity of that kind.

Banking Sector

51. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he has held with the international banking sector regarding the possibility of expanding operations to Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4023/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I have been informed by Minister of State Harris that he met with Cathaoirleach and CEO of Leitrim County Council in November regarding the MBNA closure, there were also EI and IDA representatives present. Minister of State Harris, in his role regarding international banking, is currently developing an International Financial Services Strategy. A key feature of this revised Strategy will be the focus on building employment in regions outside of Dublin and the Minister of State will continue to work closely with the state agencies, EI and the IDA, to support their initiatives.

Question No. 52 answered with Question No. 50.

Tax Data

53. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 307 of 17 September 2014, where he stated the annual report on high income individuals restrictions for 2012 will be published shortly if he will ensure it is made available immediately; and if he will provide the likely publication date of the 2013 report. [4054/15]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The relevant report for the tax year 2012 was published and laid before the Oireachtas on Budget Day, 14 October 2014. A copy of the report can be found on the Department of Finance website at <http://www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/tax-policy/publications/reports-research/restriction-reliefs/restriction-reliefs>.

In relation to the report for the tax year 2013, income tax returns for that year were filed in November 2014 and are currently being processed. As a result, the report for 2013 will not be available until sometime later this year.

Office of Public Works Properties

54. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he

will provide in tabular form the number and percentage of the property portfolio which falls under the heading of heritage buildings; the overall budget allocation to these buildings out of the total Office of Public Works property budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4002/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The Office of Public Works (OPW) is responsible for the management of a significant proportion of State owned property assets, including Heritage estate and certain prestige properties, in all parts of the country. For the purposes of this Question however, the type of properties covered in the response requires to be defined: by including the term “Heritage buildings” in his Question, it is understood therefore that the Deputy is referring particularly to those properties which formed the built heritage estate which was transferred to the management and care of the OPW following a decision by the then Government in March 2003.

Defined in these terms, the Heritage estate managed by the OPW falls generally into two categories, as set out below:

Category Title	Number of properties	General Description
National Monuments in State care	768	These comprise almost 1,000 individual Monuments at 768 locations nationwide. A full list of National Monuments in State Care, by County, is available at: www.archaeology.ie/national-monuments/search-by-county Monuments are divided by those in State Ownership and those where Guardianship arrangement apply with the Owners’ consent.
National Historic Properties	27	These comprise properties which are, for a variety of reasons considered noteworthy or historic. Though some of them (either wholly or partially) are National Monuments and are therefore also counted within the list of Monuments in State care, for the purposes of day to day management, they are treated separately within the OPW. A full list of National Historic Properties is available at: www.opw.ie/nhp

From an annual Estate Portfolio Management allocation of €310m approximately, the allocation, inclusive of staffing, presentation, maintenance and upkeep for heritage properties, as defined above is €46.4m.

It is not feasible to determine the percentage of the total OPW property portfolio, which these properties represent as the nature, type and state is very varied - for example, the land area of the Phoenix Park alone might equate to the land area of much of the rest of the property portfolio combined.

Flood Prevention Measures

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which continued assessment is undertaken throughout the country, with a view to identifying areas of potential flooding which could be remedied by way of improved drainage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4047/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Simon Harris): The problem of flood risk in Ireland is being addressed through the Office of Public Work’s Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. This is a

major national programme under which the most comprehensive assessment of flood risk in the country to date is being undertaken.

The purpose of the CFRAM Programme is to:

- assess and map the existing and potential significant flood hazard and risk 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; each involving public consultation:

- Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment: The Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) is a national screening exercise, based on available and readily-derivable information, to identify areas where there may be a significant risk associated with flooding. These areas are referred to as Areas for Further Assessment, or 'AFAs'. The PFRA was completed in 2011, and 300 AFAs were identified nationally. The PFRA will be reviewed by the end of 2018 and every 6 years thereafter.

- Flood Hazard Mapping: This phase involves more detailed assessment of the AFAs to more accurately assess the extent and degree of flood risk and is undertaken through CFRAM Studies. These Studies are well underway, and detailed flood maps are currently being consulted upon locally within the AFAs through a programme of Public Consultation Days which are advertised locally. A national consultation on the flood maps will be undertaken in the Spring of 2015.

- Catchment Flood Risk Management Plans: Where the risk of flooding is significant, the CFRAM programme develops, where possible, measures to manage and reduce the risk. Making use of the detailed assessments and flood maps, potential flood risk management measures are being assessed for the AFAs to determine viable and acceptable options for managing the flood risk within the AFAs, and such measures may include drainage works. The options will be taken to public consultation in the summer and autumn of 2015, with a view to preparing draft Flood Risk Management Plans by the end of 2015 that will set out the proposed strategies and measures for managing flood risk, and that will also be taken to consultation.

The CFRAM Programme will be used to determine national priorities for State investment in flood defences on a systematic and objective basis using Multi-Criteria Analysis. More information on the Programme is available on www.cfram.ie.

Pending the completion of the CFRAM Programme, 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. Cost benefit analysis is the standard methodology used to determine priorities and for selection of major schemes. Benefits are measured in terms of the damage and loss avoided. Details of major schemes are available on www.opw.ie under Flood Risk Management.

The Office of Public Works continues to maintain Arterial Drainage Schemes which it carried out under the Arterial Drainage Act 1945. This involves a total of 11,500 km of river channel and 800 km of embankments. The annual maintenance programme is published by OPW on its website and typically involves some clearance of vegetation and removal of silt build-up on a five-yearly cycle.

OPW has no role in relation to urban storm water drainage. This is a matter for the local authorities.

OPW has been allocated a total of €225m for Flood Risk Management for the period 2012 - 2016. This allocation will allow OPW to continue to progress its current programmes including major flood relief schemes, the Minor Works & Coastal Protection Scheme, the CFRAM Programme and Arterial Drainage Maintenance.

Parliamentary Party Allowances Expenditure

56. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide, in tabular format, the total amounts paid to each qualifying political party in respect of annual Exchequer payments under the Electoral Acts in each of the years 2012, 2013 and 2014; the fixed payment amount each year; the variable amount in each case and the way this was calculated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3953/15]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The information requested by the Deputy is set out in my reply to question number 262 on 21 October 2014 (ref. 40211/14). The total amounts paid for the year 2014 are as follows:

Total amounts paid for the year 2014

Section 17(1)(a), as amended	2014
Fianna Fáil	€126,973.80
Fine Gael	€126,973.80
Labour	€126,973.80
Sinn Féin	€126,973.80
Total	€507,895.20
Section 17(1)(b), as amended	2014
Fianna Fáil	€1,040,882.44
Fine Gael	€2,154,080.84
Labour	€1,160,292.92
Sinn Féin	€592,945.48
Total	€4,948,201.68

Health and Safety Regulations

57. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide the details of the regulations that are in place to deal with removal of asbestos; if it is envisaged that there will be assistance to help with the removal of asbestosis in the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3968/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The remit of my Department, in relation to asbestos in the workplace, arises under occupational health and safety policy where the focus is on prevention. The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Exposure to Asbestos) Regulations 2006 and 2010, which are enforced by the Health and Safety Authority, place obligations on employers and employees to ensure that the risk of exposure to asbestos is eliminated or reduced to a minimum and that any remaining residual risk is adequately controlled in accordance with the legislation. These Regulations are relevant to the matter of removal of asbestos.

In addition, national guidelines for the management and removal of asbestos-containing materials can be found on the website of the Health and Safety Authority (www.hsa.ie).

Asbestosis is a chronic (long-term) lung condition caused by prolonged exposure to asbestos. The Regulations of 2006 and 2010 on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work provide for the health surveillance of employees exposed to asbestos and for the maintenance of an occupational health register in relevant employments and for the maintenance by the Authority of an Asbestosis and Mesothelioma Register of diseases which have been reported to the Authority. The presence of asbestosis within the wider community is a public health matter. I am assured that patients suffering from asbestosis have access to the same range of diagnostic and treatment services provided in the public health system as other patients with chronic lung conditions. Accordingly, neither my Department nor the Authority has a role in relation to the removal of asbestosis in the community.

Health and Safety Inspections Data

58. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if he will provide figures on cases of asbestosis that are collated across the State on the asbestosis and mesothelioma register maintained by the Health and Safety Authority; the incidence of same in County Kildare, particularly in Athy when compared to the national average; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3970/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Exposure to Asbestos) Regulations 2006 and 2010, which are enforced by the Health and Safety Authority, place obligations on employers and employees to ensure that the risk of exposure to asbestos is eliminated or reduced to a minimum and that any remaining residual risk is adequately controlled in accordance with the legislation.

The Regulations provide for the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work provide for the health surveillance of employees exposed to asbestos and for the maintenance of an occupational health register in relevant employments. Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Exposure to Asbestos) Regulations 2006 (S.I. No. 386 of 2006) the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is required to maintain an Asbestosis and Mesothelioma Register of diseases which have been reported to the Authority.

Under the Regulations a registered medical practitioner who becomes aware of a case of asbestosis or mesothelioma is required to report that fact to the Authority which maintains the Register. I am informed that 61 cases have been recorded in the Asbestosis and Mesothelioma Register from June 2005 to date. Of these cases, 4 referenced asbestosis – 3 in Dublin and 1 in Kildare.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

59. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the position regarding bursaries or grants available to a start-up enterprise providing spinning and hand weaving classes and demonstrations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4076/15]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Anyone looking for advice or information on starting up a small or micro enterprise should contact their nearest Local Enterprise Office (LEO) in the first instance.

The LEOs are the first-stop-shop front line service assisting in delivering business growth and jobs for the micro-enterprise sector. They pull together all the players – other Government Departments and Agencies – to support everyone with a good business idea and strengthen the enterprise sector in the local area. The LEOs 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.

The LEOs themselves provide a range of financial and non-financial supports to help enterprises at start-up or during business expansion phases. It should be noted, though, that the LEOs generally only grant assist enterprises in the manufacturing or internationally traded services sector, which over time can develop into strong export entities. However, there are other non-financial supports available, such as mentoring and training, and the LEO staff can advise as to which supports would be most appropriate to your situation.

In addition, any business can use the LEOs as a gateway to accessing finance from Micro Finance Ireland (MFI), which offers support in the form of loans of up to €25,000 to start-up, newly established or growing microenterprises employing less than 10 people with viable business propositions that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks. The Fund available to MFI has a significant entrepreneurship focus and is open to anyone with a viable business proposal. Applications for the Microfinance Fund should be channelled through the local LEO. Further information can be found on the LEO website at www.localenterprise.ie

Businesses can also access the new online search tool for SME business supports that was launched last May. The Supporting SMEs Online Tool is a cross-governmental initiative to help Irish start-ups and small businesses navigate the range of Government business supports for which they could be eligible.

By answering the eight questions in the Tool, a small business will, in one location be able to:

- Find out which of the over 80 Government business supports from 27 different Government Departments, Agencies and Initiatives are available to them
- obtain information on the range of Government supports for accessing credit
- identify their nearest Local Enterprise Office where they can discuss the outcomes of the guide further
- download all these filtered results into a document for their further use.

The Supporting SMEs Online Tool is available at: www.localenterprise.ie/smeonlinetool

For enterprises starting up in County Wicklow, the contact details for the LEO Wicklow are: Wicklow County Campus, Clermont House, Rathnew, Co. Wicklow, tel: 0404 30800, email: enterprise@leo.wicklowcoco.ie.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Appeals

60. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on a disadvantaged area payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Sligo. [3971/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 11

April 2014. During the validation of the application, issues relating to the verification of compliance with the minimum stocking density were identified.

There are two criteria to be satisfied in relation to those applicants under 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme availing of equines to meet the minimum stocking density requirement. In the first instance, the holding itself must meet the definition of an Equine Breeding Enterprise and secondly, horses must be aged one to five years and, where older, must be a breeding mare for the purposes of the Scheme.

The person named had bovines and one equine on the holding during 2014. He submitted one equine passport to my Department but, on examination it was found that this was not in respect of a breeding mare that foaled in years, 2011, 2012 or 2013. Accordingly, no payment is due under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. An official from my Department has been in direct contact with the applicant with regard to this issue.

Animal Welfare

61. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 553 to 555, inclusive, of 20 January 2015, the measures in place to ensure dogs in the care of local authorities comply with the provisions of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 and are adequately cared for with appropriate accommodation and veterinary care including those put into the care of outsourced companies or institutions by local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3991/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Section 11 of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 provides that a person who has a protected animal, including a dog, in his or her possession or under his or her control, is obliged to ensure that the animal is kept and treated in a manner that safeguards the health and welfare of the animal and does not threaten the health and welfare of that animal or another animal. This basic principle is the same for local authorities as it is for others who keep dogs.

Of course, the issue of dog control remains a matter for local authorities under the aegis of my colleague, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government.

GLAS Administration

62. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when GLAS will open for applications; the likely applicants that will be approved for participation in the scheme; the total expenditure for this scheme in 2015; the projected number of participants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3993/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): GLAS (the Green Low-carbon Agri-environment Scheme) is part of a suite of proposed measures under Ireland's Rural Development Programme (RDP) which was submitted to the European Commission in July. The Commission services notified us of their detailed observations on the draft Programme at the end of October last year, to which my Department provided immediate and detailed replies. Since then, bilateral discussions have been ongoing with the Commission, with the objective of securing approval for the Irish Programme at the earliest possible date. Once approval is granted, my Department will move to open the Scheme as soon as possible.

I anticipate that between 25,000 and 30,000 farmers will be approved for entry to GLAS

this year and, as the regulations require that all applications be administratively checked before any application is approved, it will take some time to process applications. This work will be prioritised with a view to having it completed as quickly as possible. As with the introduction of previous agri-environmental schemes, payment in the first year of application (2015) will be on a part-year basis, followed by annual payments for a further five full calendar years. I have included a sum of €20m in my Department's Estimates for 2015 to cover expenditure on GLAS this year.

Farm Safety Scheme

63. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding an application under the farm safety scheme in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4007/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): 6,300 applications received, including the application referred to in this case, for the Farm Safety Scheme are currently being examined in my Department. Approvals will issue at the earliest possible opportunity.

Rural Development Plan

64. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the rural development programme will be approved and become operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4020/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The draft Rural Development Plan (RDP) 2014-2020 was formally submitted to the European Commission on 3 July 2014, a number of weeks in advance of the regulatory deadline. The Commission's formal observations on the draft RDP were received on 20 October 2014 with a total of 266 observations, incorporating a range of informational, technical and policy matters.

Negotiations in relation to the formal adoption of the RDP are currently underway between my Department and the Commission. It is, however, difficult to predict the exact timing of RDP approval given the capacity constraints experienced by the Commission in approving 118 RDPs across all Member States.

At present, Department officials are in ongoing and intensive discussion with the Commission in order to seek a speedy resolution of outstanding issues. The agreement of the new RDP and the subsequent roll-out of schemes is being pursued as a matter of priority.

Fish Quotas

65. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review a fishing matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4027/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): My understanding is that the issue raised relates to mackerel management. The allocation of mackerel has long been a contentious issue and this has been addressed by a comprehensive policy on the management of the stock.

Prior to 2001, an allocation of 1,500 tonnes was set aside for polyvalent segment vessels out of the total national quota. This was increased to a set amount of 7,000 tonnes and did not take account of changes in quota. This changed in 2009, after a review, and a set percentage level was introduced to allow for increased allocations when the quota increased (or indeed reductions when the quota reduced).

This policy provides that the Polyvalent Segment vessels are allocated 13% of the quota and the RSW Pelagic Segment is allocated 87% of the quota. The distribution of quota amongst the vessels in the RSW Pelagic Segment is made in accordance with long standing ratios based on historic vessel size which has been in place for many years. The distribution of the quota for the Polyvalent segment vessels is made in accordance with Ministerial policy put in place in 2010. Under this policy, mackerel allocations were made available to vessel owners based on track record from the two best years 2007, 2008, 2009.

In terms of the allocation of quota between the RSW Pelagic segment vessels and the Polyvalent segment vessels, I do not consider that there are changed circumstances that would support a review of the allocations between the segments. I consider that the percentage based allocation between the segments can properly deal with year on year fluctuations in national quota in a fair, transparent and balanced way. Any change in the current arrangements would be justified only if circumstances have changed since the 2009 review. At that time, the Minister fully consulted with industry representatives on the issue and as a result was fully aware of the divergent views that prevailed within the industry at that time in relation to the management of this fishery. The specific management arrangements for the allocation of the mackerel quota introduced in 2009 were developed by the Minister for the proper and effective management of the mackerel fishing opportunities while at the same time fully cognisant of the divergent views that existed on the issue within various segments of the fishing industry.

The quota available to the Irish fleet for 2015 amounts to 89,200 tonnes and authorisations for the 2015 fishery have been issued in accordance with the policy in place.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

66. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a disadvantaged area payment for 2014 will be granted in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4029/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the Single Payment/Disadvantaged Area Scheme was received from the person named on 4 April 2014. During the validation of the application, an over-claim was discovered in respect of a parcel of land declared on this application. As the person named does not hold any Single Payment entitlements, no payment is due under the Single Payment Scheme. However, as the over-claim exceeded 20% of the area declared by the applicant, no payment is due to the person named under the 2014 Disadvantaged Area Scheme.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

67. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an agri-environment option scheme payment will be granted in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4030/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person

named was approved for participation in the 2012 Agri-Environment Options Scheme (AEOS 3) with effect from 1 May 2013 and payment has issued in respect of the 2013 Scheme year.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme and other area-based payment schemes, a comprehensive administrative check, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. This process is under way in respect of the 2014 Scheme year and I expect 75% payment for 2014 to issue shortly. The balancing 25% payment will follow in due course.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

68. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara cén uair a íocfar íocaíocht AEOS atá ag dul d'fheirmeoir (sonraí leis seo); agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [4031/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ceadáíodh rannpháirteacht an duine ainmnithe sa Scéim um Roghanna Comhshaol Talmhaíochta 2011 (AEOS 2) le héifeacht ón 1ú Meán Fómhair 2011 agus eisíodh íocaíocht iomlán i ndáil leis na blianta Scéime 2011, 2012 agus 2013.

Faoi Rialacháin an AE a rialálann an Scéim sin agus scéimeanna íocaíochta limistéir-bhunaithe eile, ní mór seiceálacha cuimsitheacha riaracháin, lena n-áirítear tras-seiceáil leis an gCóras Aitheanta Dáileachtaí Talún a dhéanamh, sular féidir aon íocaíocht a eisiúint. Tá na seiceálacha sin tugtha chun críche go rathúil i ndáil leis an mbliain Scéime 2014 agus eisíodh 75% den íocaíocht iomlán chuig an duine ainmnithe an 12 Nollaig 2014. Bheinn ag súil go n-íocfaí an 25% atá fanta go luath.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

69. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) in County Galway will receive payment of the disadvantaged area payment for 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4032/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): An application under the 2014 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme was received from the person named on 11 April 2014, processing of which has recently been completed. Payment under the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme is due to issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Rural Environment Protection Scheme Payments

70. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an update on a REP scheme payment for 2013 (details supplied) [4068/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named commenced REPS 4 in April 2008 and received payments for the first five years of their contract. REPS 4 is a measure under the 2007-13 Rural Development Programme and is subject to EU regulations which require detailed administrative checks on all applications to be completed before any payments can issue. During the SPS cross-checks in 2013 an issue arose in relation to the re-digitization of land parcels contained in the REPS Agri-environmental plan

of the person named which required further investigation. This issue has now been resolved and the 2014 75% REPS payment will issue shortly, the remaining 25% balancing payment will issue thereafter.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

71. **Deputy Noel Coonan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a 2013 disadvantaged area payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4069/15]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A review of the land parcels declared by the person named under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme revealed that several of the land parcels declared by the person named contained ineligible features. Following the review of my Department's decision, sought by the person named, a visit by a Department official to verify the position on the ground is deemed necessary. The visit has now taken place and the person named will shortly be advised, in writing, of the findings of the verification visit.

Family Reunification

72. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she will report on the increase in processing time in family re-unification visas due to lack of resources and a higher volume of applications; if she will increase the resources to minimise the hardship on separated families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3983/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In January, 2014, my predecessor, Deputy Alan Shatter, introduced a Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification. Contained therein is a stated business target that visa applications to join Irish citizens should be dealt with within six months of receipt of application. A target of twelve months applies to other applications for family reunification. However, it must be made clear that these are business targets for the immigration service. Accordingly, they in no way constitute legal obligations or convey any indication that a case not completed within the time-frame will in default of decision be resolved in the applicant's favour.

These business targets reflect the detailed assessment that is required to be carried out in relation to applications for family reunification and are qualified by availability of resources. These targets are largely being met. Delays in achieving them are primarily related to more complex cases where the provision of additional documentation is requested by my officials, or where detailed assessments of family rights under the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights are required.

The stated targets are being largely met despite a 58% increase in the number of visa applications from persons wishing to join an Irish citizen spouse/partner from 2010 to 2014. This can partly be attributed to the significant increase in grants of Irish citizenship since this Government took office.

The management of resources is kept under constant review in my Department. While I am mindful of minimising the hardship on separated families as alluded to by the Deputy, I must balance the needs of this specific area of my Department with the requirements of other areas.

Garda Recruitment

73. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the cost to recruit 1,000 new members of An Garda Síochána. [4008/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Garda authorities that payroll costs for new Garda recruits include a basic allowance of €184 per week plus a living allowance of €77.92. After 32 weeks of training, Garda recruits are attested and move on to the first point of the Garda pay scale starting at €23,171 and rising to a maximum of €45,793 per annum after 19 years. They may also qualify for other allowances depending on their assignments.

The annual cost of 1000 new Garda recruits in their first year (assuming a commencement date of 1st January) is €18.8m. This figure includes Employer's PRSI but excludes any allowances which the recruits may qualify for following attestation. The annual cost will obviously increase as the members move up the Garda pay scale each year.

Fuel Quality

74. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of complaints of petrol stretching received in each Garda division in the past seven months; the position regarding these complaints; the number that have been investigated resulting in a person being charged or a file being forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4025/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Garda authorities and I will be in contact with the Deputy again when the information is to hand.

UN Conventions

75. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when Ireland will ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4050/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Government intends to proceed to ratification of the Convention as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to ensure all necessary legislative and administrative requirements under the Convention are met. As the Deputy is aware, Ireland has a dualist legal system and therefore does not become party to treaties until it is first in a position to comply with the obligations imposed by them, including the amendment of domestic law as necessary.

A team has been charged with examining all outstanding obstacles to ratification, and has nearly completed the first phase of its work, which includes identifying all areas which will need attention to make ratification possible. An Interdepartmental Committee is in place, and met recently to review issues and the action and timeframe required to tackle them. Many of these issues involve amending unsuitable and outmoded language and in some cases, archaic legal provisions, in existing legislation. Another key task which is underway involves examining how the important issue of Reasonable Accommodation can be achieved in a meaningful way within our Constitutional framework as interpreted by the Supreme Court.

Progress towards ratification therefore continues to be made. One of the core elements of the remaining work to be completed is the enactment of capacity legislation. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill will comprehensively reform existing legislation governing capacity and will provide a series of options to support people with decision-making capacity difficulties to make decisions and exercise their basic rights in line with the principles of the Convention. The Bill is currently awaiting Committee Stage in the Dáil.

Prison Regulations

76. **Deputy David Stanton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures in place in the prison services to prevent unlawful use of mobile phones by inmates; if consideration has been provided to the use of any form of technology to block mobile phone signals in prisons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4065/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I wish to advise the Deputy that possession of a mobile phone in prison is a criminal offence under section 36 of the Prisons Act, 2007. A prisoner found to be in possession of a mobile phone is liable to be dealt with under the prison disciplinary system and the matter referred to an Garda Síochána for investigation and possible prosecution.

My officials in the Irish Prison Service are currently considering a number of technologies with a view to blocking mobile phone signals in and out of prisons and for obvious security reasons, the Deputy will appreciate that I cannot go into detail on the range of options and issues currently being considered.

Through a vigorous approach to screening and searching, the Operational Support Group continues to recover numerous mobile phones and components. The provision of mobile phone blockers would limit this activity and reduce the threat that it poses to society both inside and outside of prisons.

The measures currently in place to prevent the use of mobile phones by prisoners include metal detectors and other screening equipment at the point of entry to prisons, the use of active canine detection teams in recovering same from vehicles and buildings, as well as random and intelligence-led targeted searching of prisoners and locations within the prison Estate.

These searches have been particularly effective and local intelligence indicates that the availability of mobile phones has decreased across the prison system. The number of mobile phones seized in prisons has reduced, year on year, since 2009, and the Deputy can be assured that the prevention of the smuggling of phones and other contraband remains a priority for the Irish Prison Service.

Mobile Phone Seizures 2010 to 2014

Prison/Place of Detention	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Arbour Hill	1	2	1	1	0
Castlerea	43	42	29	43	38
Cloverhill	16	20	35	30	50
Cork	13	30	11	8	3
Dóchas Centre	12	42	10	1	6
Limerick	133	100	123	55	18
Loughan House	155	104	57	52	66

Prison/Place of Detention	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Midlands	92	123	82	114	59
Mountjoy (Male)	742	420	336	238	223
Portlaoise	18	27	3	11	52
Shelton Abbey	88	77	86	19	5
St. Patrick's	138	220	278	119	109
Training Unit	191	113	78	92	55
Wheatfield	76	48	21	22	44
Total	1,718	1,368	1,150	805	728

Penalty Points System

77. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the fact that senior members of An Garda Síochána continued to abuse the penalty points system despite a change in practice in this area in June 2014; the actions that will be taken against these members; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4070/15]

78. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if she is satisfied that the penalty points system is now beyond abuse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4071/15]

79. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the actions she will now take to protect the integrity of the penalty points system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4072/15]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 to 79, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will be aware, yesterday I published the Garda Professional Standards Unit Examination of the Procedures, Policy and Decision Making Processes in Relation to Cancellations on the Fixed Charge Processing System of Road Traffic Offences. This report represents a further important milestone in addressing concerns in relation to the operation of the penalty points system, and builds on the new Garda Policy on the operation of the Fixed Charge Penalty System (FCPS) which came into effect on 16 June, 2014. The report recognises that significant improvements have been made, confirming that only the three persons authorised to cancel fixed charge notices under the new policy are in fact carrying out cancellations. Furthermore, the impact of the new policy is evident in the reduction in the number of cancellations on discretionary grounds.

It is the case, however, that the report has identified areas which require further attention and a series of recommendations are made to address these.

A number of these relate to Garda operations and procedures and have been accepted by the Commissioner. These include a proposal to establish a new Enforcement Unit within the Fixed Charge Processing Office to allow for more extensive enquiries to be made when considering whether to cancel a notice. This will include additional scrutiny of cases where notices are returned. Other system enhancements are also recommended, and accepted by the Commissioner.

A further key recommendation, which has also been accepted is that, in order to maintain public confidence in relation to the operation of the FCPS, where an application for cancellation is made by a Garda to avail of the statutory exemption for emergency vehicles where the

Garda is driving a private vehicle in the course of their duties, such applications would now be forwarded to the Office of the DPP for evaluation.

The report also makes a number of recommendations with respect to legislative and related cross-cutting aspects of the fixed charge processing system, and I intend to refer these to the Criminal Justice (FCPS) Working Group for further examination. This group was set up to take forward the recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate on the FCPS and is jointly chaired by the Departments of Justice and Equality, and Transport, Tourism and Sport.

I have also decided, again in the interests of maintaining public confidence in the system, to put in place a further assurance and oversight mechanism. In particular, I have appointed Judge Matthew Deery, former President of the Circuit Court, to act as Independent Oversight authority for the FCPS cancellation process. This role would be in addition to the ongoing internal audit of the system. He would be free to inspect at random any fixed charge notice cancellation and report his or her findings on the operation of the system to the Minister.

Finally, it is also important to note that the Commissioner is forwarding the Report to GSOC, the CA&G and the Garda Inspectorate. The Garda Inspectorate had already indicated, as part of the recommendations in its March 2013 Report on the operation of the FCPS, that it intended to carry out a follow-up examination after 12 months, and this is expected to commence as indicated.

I am determined that the progress and improvements recognised in the report will continue and will be further enhanced by these additional measures I have announced, so that the public can have confidence in the operation of the penalty points system.

Detention Centres Places

80. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs his views on the lack of beds in juvenile detention centres for juveniles who have been convicted, but have to be discharged due to the bed shortage. [4005/15]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy James Reilly): The 3 children detention schools, located at Oberstown, Lusk, Co. Dublin, currently provide a total of 46 detention places for young people ordered to be remanded in custody or committed to serve a sentence of detention by the courts. These comprise 6 places for girls up to the age of 18 on admission and 40 places for boys up to the age of 17 on admission. Boys aged 17 on admission are currently accommodated by the Irish Prison Service. This practice will cease, meeting the commitment in the Programme for Government to end the practice of detaining children in adult prison facilities, with the new children detention facilities currently being constructed to extend the capacity of the Oberstown campus. It is intended that this will provide sufficient accommodation for all children under 18 years of age ordered to be detained by the courts.

In the interim, pending introduction of the expanded facilities, the existing facilities at Oberstown are being used to meet demand from the courts. The Irish Youth Justice Service of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs operates a twenty four hour bed management service for children detention places, with the aim of having the maximum degree of coordination in this area. This service is available at all times to courts, the Probation Service and the Garda Síochána to assess the up to date position with regard to the availability of places. This is a demand led service and every effort is made to meet the needs of the courts in this area.

Services for People with Disabilities

81. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health the reason a child (details supplied) in Dublin 15 was only provided a special needs assistant for two hours a day when they require one between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. due to difficulties arising from delayed global development syndrome; and if he will review the matter. [3990/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, which is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, provides for a free pre-school year to eligible children in the year before they commence primary school. The objective of this scheme is to support early learning in a formal setting in advance of starting school. I understand that certain flexibilities are built into the scheme in an effort to accommodate children with special needs, such as an overage exemption, or waiver, for children with special needs who do not meet the age criteria and the option to avail of the free pre-school year over two years.

The Health Service Executive has no statutory obligation to provide assistant supports for children with special needs wishing to avail of the free pre-school year. However, the HSE does work at local level and in partnership with the relevant disability service providers to address individual needs as they arise. This is done, for example, by funding special pre-schools that cater specifically for children with disabilities. In some limited cases at local level, disability services have also facilitated children with disabilities to attend mainstream pre-schools by providing assistant supports where possible and where resources are available.

In general terms, the HSE's role in supporting children with disabilities involves it working in close co-operation with the disability service providers that it funds, with the education sector, with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and with the parents and families of the children in question. At a national level, a dedicated Cross-Sectoral Team, comprising representatives of my Department, the HSE, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs plays a key role in fostering greater collaboration on children's disability issues and to build on the cross-sectoral working arrangements that are already in place. A sub group of this Cross-Sectoral Team is examining the issue of the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream pre-school settings, including supports for these children. It is expected to conclude its work shortly.

Finally, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy in respect of the individual case that he has raised. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Ministerial Correspondence

82. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding laboratory facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4033/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Waiting Lists

83. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if there is any evidence that there is alleged gaming of waiting lists at Beaumont Hospital, whereby citizens waiting for investigation or treatment are arbitrarily and unfairly removed from lists for non-reply to letters which had actually not been sent prior to them receiving letters informing those citizens they had been removed from the waiting lists concerned. [3955/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Special Delivery Unit (SDU) Protocol: The Management of Outpatient Services Ver 2.0 (Jan 2014) sets out the process for referral and management of outpatient services. The protocol also helps to maximise efficiency and reduce duplications. Also, the National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, 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 Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists. In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Medical Qualifications

84. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health if the phlebotomy course that is provided for by the Irish Training Institute based in County Longford is recognised by his Department as a qualification to work in the health care system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3961/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Section 22 of the Health Act 2004 gives the HSE the authority to appoint persons to be its employees and may determine their duties. Under Section 22 of the Act, the HSE has responsibility for setting and approving eligibility criteria, including qualifications and relevant experience, for appointments to HSE posts. This includes recruitment to posts in the area of Phlebotomy. In this context, the Deputy's question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, she can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Disease Incidence

85. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent cases of Guillain-Barré syndrome diagnosed in the Duleek area, County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3964/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Services Executive for direct reply.

If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

Medical Card Administration

86. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the processing times of medical card applications for young children who have been identified as having a medical need; if he will report on the standard timeframes from receipt of such application to decision. [3973/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Medicinal Products Availability

87. **Deputy Emmet Stagg** asked the Minister for Health when Tecfidera on BT12 will be available to multiple sclerosis sufferers under the long-term illness scheme. [3976/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicinal products under the community drug schemes in accordance with the provisions of the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. This requires consideration of a range of statutory criteria prior to reimbursing any medicine, including clinical need, cost-effectiveness and the resources available to the HSE.

The decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer, are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics. They are not political or ministerial decisions.

The HSE received an application for the inclusion of Tecfidera, in the GMS and community drugs schemes. The application was considered in line with the procedures and timescales agreed by the Department of Health and the HSE with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association for the assessment of new medicines.

In accordance with these procedures, the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics conducted a pharmacoeconomic evaluation of Tecfidera and concluded that it is not considered cost-effective for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing remitting MS and therefore is not recommended for reimbursement at the submitted price.

The HSE is considering the findings of the report. No further comment is possible at this time as the HSE decision making process is ongoing.

Medical Card Applications

88. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card application that was made in February 2014 in respect of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3977/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): 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.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Services for People with Disabilities

89. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health the supports, such as funding and respite that are available for those families who look after a family member with Prader-Willi syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3978/15]

90. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health his views on concerns that there is little specialist knowledge here regarding Prader-Willi syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3979/15]

91. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that more support is provided by his Department to the Prader-Willi Syndrome Association; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3980/15]

92. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that enough funding is provided so that the Health Service Executive can properly manage people with Prader-Willi syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3981/15]

93. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with a person (details supplied) to discuss their concerns about Prader-Willi syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3982/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 to 93, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy's question's relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question's to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Medical Aids and Appliances Expenditure

94. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will be reimbursed by the Health Service Executive for the cost of specialised glasses for their child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3984/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will

follow the matter up.

Respite Care Services

95. **Deputy Terence Flanagan** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding respite care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3985/15]

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 (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, he can contact my Private Office and they will follow the matter up with the HSE.

Medical Card Eligibility

96. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will alter medical card guidelines in order that those under 26 years of age who are in receipt of less than €164 per week are ineligible for medical cards as they are deemed dependent on parents (details supplied). [4013/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): It is the statutory function of the HSE to decide on entitlement to a medical card and the Medical Card Assessment Guidelines developed by the HSE is the basis upon which they assess eligibility.

The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office who will follow up the matter with them.

Hospitals Funding

97. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if extra funding will be found for Cappagh National Orthopaedic Hospital in view of the fact that the orthopaedic surgeon has said that level of funding for the hospital has been nowhere near sufficient to look after persons in a timely way and this lack of funding is preventing a person (details supplied) in Dublin 10 from having an urgent hip replacement which they are in critical need of; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4016/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The HSE has advised that it has been engaging with Cappagh Hospital on an on-going basis to identify potential initiatives that would allow for a reduction in waiting times for patients for surgery. The HSE has provided Cappagh Hospital with additional resources in 2015. The 2015 budget allocation process has made provision for the opening of closed and underutilised capacity at Cappagh Hospital. This will enable the opening of an additional 1.5 theatres per day, bringing the total to 4 and will allow Cappagh to increase activity levels. The hospital will target this new capacity to significantly address its current waiting list breach volumes.

The HSE has also advised that it will continue to engage with the hospital to explore mechanisms to ensure optimal use of resources, including theatre capacity, at the hospital within the

overall resources available to the acute sector.

Ministerial Correspondence

98. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding red eye doctors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4034/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Officials from my Department together with the Department of Justice and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation have given consideration to visa and work permit arrangements for doctors who come from non-EU countries. Recent immigration and visa changes have been aimed at ensuring, in the first instance, that they support the recruitment of doctors from abroad to fill vacant posts. The revised arrangements enable doctors to be recruited on an agency basis, however they are aimed primarily at facilitating the filling of posts on a permanent basis.

In July 2013 a Working Group was established, chaired by Professor Brian MacCraith, to carry out a strategic review of medical training and career structures. The Group submitted its final report in June 2014. The final Report of the Strategic Review of Medical Training and Career Structures (3rd MacCraith Report) stated – in relation to doctors in service posts in the acute hospital sector that:

“Career structures and pathways for these doctors are limited. The Group recommends that processes are put in place by the HSE, as a matter of priority, to consider how best to address this issue, having due regard to the following:

- The needs and requirements of the public health system, including service reconfiguration and integrated models of care;
- Patient safety and quality of the patient experience;
- Registration, qualifications and training, clinical governance, CPD and supervisory arrangements.”

My Department, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, is pursuing implementation of the recommendations made by the MacCraith Group to support NCHD and consultant recruitment and retention.

We are currently finalising with the HSE a proposal for the re-grading of non-training NCHD posts to a Service Grade doctor post. This proposal will soon be issued to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for sanction.

Hospital Appointment Status

99. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a nerve conduction operation in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4037/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, 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 Health Service Executive, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up with them.

Maternity Services

100. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 962 of 17 September 2014, and to the correspondence from the Health Service Executive (details supplied), his plans to introduce national policy in on antenatal screening and foetal abnormality testing. [4051/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The National Clinical Programme for Obstetrics and Gynaecology was established in 2010. One of the programme's key objectives is to develop and disseminate national guidelines. Such guidelines provide standardised guidance for all maternity units in the country on a range of clinical issues relating to women's health.

As the query raised relates to a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Hospital Waiting Lists

101. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the problems with growing waiting lists in Cappagh Hospital, Dublin 11 being caused due to a lack of nursing staff which means that one theatre for elective surgeries has remained closed; his plans for staffing levels which will see the theatre opened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4052/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days please contact my Private Office and my officials will follow the matter up.

Maternity Services

102. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 365 of 25 November 2014 that as the terms of reference relating to a systems analysis investigation rely on the identification of a particular incident, the particular incident that lead to the systems analysis investigation in the case (details supplied). [4055/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I wish to thank the Deputy for the question raised.

In relation to the terms of reference referred to by the Deputy, as this issue is an operational matter, it is appropriate that it should be dealt with by the HSE. Therefore, I have referred this issue to the HSE for attention and direct reply. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my private office and they will follow up the matter

with them.

In regard to the particular incident that led to the systems analysis, as this is still the subject of investigation, it would not be appropriate to provide details at this time.

HSE Data

103. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant geriatricians currently working here; the hospitals they are attached to and the cohort attached to each hospital; his plans to hire additional consultant geriatricians in 2015; if they will work in a community setting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4062/15]

104. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultant geriatricians working here in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4063/15]

Minister for Health (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 104 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on the matter. If you have not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, please contact my Private Office and they will follow up the matter with them.

HIQA Inspections

105. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to ensure agencies that provide care for persons in their homes are regulated by the Health Information and Quality Authority or any other State agency. [4081/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): *Government for National Recovery, 2011-2016* commits to developing and implementing national standards for home support services which will be subject to HIQA inspection. Primary legislation and resources will be required for the introduction of a statutory regulation system for home care services. This will be considered by Government on a prioritised and phased basis as resources, legislative and planning processes allow. In the meantime the HSE is progressing a range of measures to improve Home Care provision overall, to standardise services nationally and to promote quality and safety.

Foreign Conflicts

106. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to recent protests in Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, that the protests are in opposition to proposed legal reform to keep President Joseph Kabila in power, that the security services are reported to have killed more than 40 political protesters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4014/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo involves one of the most complex and enduring humanitarian crises in the world. This is the result of decades of political and economic mismanagement, exacerbated by difficult relations with neighbouring countries, ongoing violence in the Great

Lakes region and chronic underdevelopment.

I share the strong international concern at the violence during demonstrations in Kinshasa last week. Demonstrators were protesting against proposed changes to the electoral law, which many believed would permit President Joseph Kabila to stay in office beyond his mandated two-term limit. Reports indicate that some 36 people, including one police officer, were killed during the demonstrations in Kinshasa. It is reported that the security forces were responsible for the deaths of at least 21 people. Additionally, on 22 January, at least four people were killed during demonstrations in the eastern city of Goma.

On 17 January, the Congolese National Assembly had adopted modifications to the electoral law that would require the holding of a national census ahead of the next election, a step that could significantly delay presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 2016. On 23 January, the Congolese Senate adopted an amended version of the law, clarifying that the holding of elections would not be conditional on a census being completed and that the constitution's electoral timeframe would be respected. If signed into law, the amended law would address a main concern of the protesters.

I attended the EU Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 19 January, just as the protests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were taking place. We adopted Conclusions on the situation, which, while primarily addressing the ongoing civil conflict, also stressed the need for political action that will also build a long-term basis for stability. Key to this is the organisation of credible and free elections.

The violence has been widely condemned internationally, including by the Secretary General of the United Nations, who additionally called on all key stakeholders to resume political dialogue and ensure that issues relating to the elections are discussed in an inclusive and peaceful fashion in the appropriate forum. Ireland fully supports this call.

Ireland's long engagement with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which dates back to its independence in 1960, continues today and we are a significant humanitarian donor in the region. Since 2009, through Irish Aid, the Government has provided over €44 million in humanitarian assistance for the people of the country, including through the work of the former UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Mary Robinson. We are continuing to monitor developments closely.

Human Rights Issues

107. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the case of Abdallah Abu Rahme, a Palestinian human rights activist and advocate of non-violent protest, that Catherine Ashton recognised him as a Human Rights Defender in 2010 and the Elders called for his immediate release, calling him a prisoner of conscience, that he is due to stand trial in an Israeli military court on 8 February 2015, that Mr. Abu Rahme is being charged with military laws which are at odds with international and human rights law; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4015/15]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of the case of Abdallah Abu Rahme, who was convicted of obstructing military operations in the West Bank, by blocking a military bulldozer engaged in construction. His is one of a series of cases of concern related to the protests around construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian land belonging to the villagers of Bil'in

The size of the Irish mission in Ramallah makes it impossible to attend such court cases

on any but an exceptional basis. Cases can be long and unpredictable, and are frequently adjourned, and access to them is not always permitted.

Nonetheless, in certain cases it can be important to have an international presence at court hearings, to demonstrate clearly that proceedings are under scrutiny. For this reason EU missions in the Palestinian Territory regularly exchange information on upcoming cases, and consider if it will be possible for one or more partner to be present at a given case.

It is planned that EU representatives will attend the hearing in this case on 8 February 2015.

Bullying in Schools

108. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if anti-bullying and suicide prevention numbers have been published on homework journals for second level students; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3952/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Homework journals are generally used by pupils every day and can therefore be a useful mechanism for schools to communicate important information to pupils in relation to matters such as anti-bullying, mental health and suicide prevention. However, my Department has not prescribed that schools must use such journals or that they should contain specific information.

The Deputy may be aware that my Department, along with the Department of Health and the HSE, jointly published ‘Well-Being in Post- Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention’ in 2013. The guidelines provide practical advice to post-primary schools on how they can promote mental health and well-being in an integrated manner within the school environment. The Guidelines build on the significant work already taking place in schools, including through the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, the whole-school guidance plan, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) continuum of support model and the HSE Health Promoting Schools Process. Information is also provided on how to access support from the SPHE Support Service and other external agencies and support services.

The Deputy will also be aware that new anti-bullying procedures for all primary and post primary schools were published at the beginning of the 2013/14 school year. The purpose of these procedures is to give direction and guidance to school authorities and school personnel in preventing and tackling school-based bullying behaviour amongst its pupils. In that regard, the procedures recognise that a positive school culture and climate is the cornerstone for preventing bullying and the procedures contain provide practical tips for building such a positive culture and climate. Under the procedures, the Board of Management must also ensure that the school’s anti-bullying policy is regularly highlighted and promoted on a school-wide basis with particular attention being given to incoming pupils and their parents. The procedures are not prescriptive in relation to how this should be done and it is open to schools to do so in the manner that best suits their individual circumstances.

Data Protection

109. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she is satisfied that the primary online database operated by her Department is in compliance with data protection legislation; and the basis upon which she is making this statement. [3956/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Department of Education and Skills has consulted with the Data Protection Commissioner in relation to the collection and retention of individual pupil information for the Primary Online Database in December 2013. That office has stated that PPSN can now be collected by schools with the purpose being it is a requirement of the Primary Online Database. The ODPC was satisfied the Department of Education had a “legitimate and proportionate” purpose for requesting personal details on primary school pupils for a new national database. The retention policy was discussed with the Data Protection Commissioner’s office and no issues of concern were raised.

Schools Building Projects Status

110. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on progress for new accommodation for a school (details supplied) in County Galway; if she will provide an update on the application for an additional temporary classroom; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3962/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the project for the school, referred to, is being progressed into architectural planning and has been assigned for the appointment of a design team.

As the Deputy will be aware, the school in question is one of a number of schools which it was not possible to include in the 5 Year construction programme. However the school project is being progressed to the final planning stages so that it will be well placed for further progression in anticipation of further funds being available to the Department.

With regard to the application for an additional temporary classroom, approval in principle was granted to the school in March 2014 in respect of the accommodation in question. Details of the tendered costs were only recently submitted to the Department for consideration. I can confirm that the documentation submitted has been examined and a final approval letter will issue to the school authorities in the coming days.

Schools Building Projects Status

111. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a school development application (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3963/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): I wish to advise the Deputy that the school in question has recently submitted an application for additional accommodation to my Department. The application will be assessed and a decision conveyed to the school authorities as soon as this process has been completed.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

112. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will take steps to have an application for a higher education grant in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Westmeath at Galway Mayo Institute of Technology finalised, as all the additional information required has been furnished; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3975/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): As part of a comprehensive

customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service compliments the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

Student Grant Scheme Administration

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will ensure all forms of social protection payment, including supplementary welfare allowance, are recognised as evidence of income in part or entirely in the determination of applications for higher education grants, thereby ensuring natural justice for applicants for higher education grants who may have no other evidence of income or who may only have partial evidence of income in view of the fact that eligibility for the payment is the subject of a means test; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4003/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): It is necessary that information regarding all income is accounted for when completing the grant application form. In this regard the assessment of means under my Department’s student grant scheme is based on the applicant’s gross income from all sources and his/her parent(s)/legal guardian where applicable; with certain social welfare and health service executive payments being exempt.

Persons in receipt of the supplementary welfare allowance may apply for a student grant. Assuming that students satisfy all of the relevant terms and conditions of the student grant scheme, eligible students on this payment qualify for the maintenance grant and student contribution or fees where applicable.

For 2014 SUSI improved its data sharing arrangements with existing and additional Government agencies. The arrangement with the Department of Social Protection allows direct access by SUSI to information on social welfare payments in respect of the applicant and other relevant parties. This arrangement reduces the volume of documentation required from grant applicants.

The decision on eligibility for new student grant applications for the 2014/15 academic year is a matter for the centralised grant awarding authority, SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland).

Teacher Data

114. **Deputy Jonathan O’Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who availed of the voluntary redundancy scheme in 2013 and 2014; and if these teachers were primary, secondary, or third level, in tabular form. [4017/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The Government decided in late 2012 that voluntary redundancy can be introduced in certain targeted sections of the pub-

lic service where staff surpluses are identified by management and where redeployment is not suitable. The purpose of the scheme is to assist Government in implementing restructuring and reform in a strategic and targeted manner. In terms of my own Department, there is currently no Voluntary Redundancy scheme in operation for teachers and none is planned.

However, it should be noted that the Teaching Council Act 2001, as enacted by the Oireachtas, provides for the regulation of the teaching profession. A primary function of the Council is to maintain the register of teachers and to determine the requirements for entry onto the Register. Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act provides that only registered teachers should be paid from Oireachtas-voted funds.

My predecessor as Minister for Education and Skills, Deputy Ruairí Quinn, signed the commencement order on 1 November 2013 for section 30 of the Teaching Council Act 2001 to become operational from 28 January 2014. From that date, regulations now govern the limited conditions under which an unregistered person may be employed where a registered teacher is not available.

Circular 52/2013 which was issued by my Department and which is available at the following link http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0052_2013.pdf provided details of the procedures to be followed by school managerial authorities and Education and Training Boards on commencement of section 30 of the Teaching Council Act.

A number of options were made available for people employed as teachers in a permanent/CID capacity in recognised schools who were not eligible for registration and who would be unregistered with the Teaching Council on or after 28 January 2014. These were outlined in Circular letter 52/2013 as follows:

“Where staff cannot be reclassified they will have the option of availing of one of the following:

(a) Teaching Council Non Registration (TCNR) leave, subject to a maximum duration of 6 years, or

(b) Voluntary redundancy in accordance with the terms of the Collective Agreement Redundancy Payments to Public Servants (June 2012), or

(c) Redeployment to non-teacher posts for such persons who are comprehended by the Hadlington Road Agreement.

Twelve (12) staff who were employed as teachers in a permanent/CID capacity in recognised schools prior to the introduction of Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act on 28 January 2014 opted to avail of the voluntary redundancy option that was made available to them at that time.

Physical Education Facilities

115. **Deputy Derek Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of secondary schools without a sports hall, the number that have applied for funding for construction of same; her plans for capital funding for sports halls; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4021/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): The specific information sought by the Deputy is not readily available. However, I wish to assure the Deputy that my

Department fully recognises the key role of physical exercise within the school environment and continues to respond to the need to improve PE facilities for all pupils attending schools within the constraints of the available funding.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the Physical Education curriculum has been designed on the basis that facilities in schools may vary. Many post primary schools have a PE hall and practically all schools have outdoor play areas which are used for teaching different aspects of the P.E. programme. In addition, many schools use adjacent local facilities, including public parks, playing fields and swimming pools.

The provision of playspace, where site conditions and circumstances allow, is one of the issues considered in the architectural design of new schools and major extensions. My Department's design guidelines for schools include guidance in the provision of P.E. Halls, general purpose rooms and outdoor hard play areas such as basketball courts.

Schools Building Projects Status

116. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if she will provide an update on the provision of new buildings for a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; the progress of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4060/15]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): I can confirm to the Deputy that the schools in question have applied to my Department for significant funding to undertake major capital works. In this regard, my Department undertook a site visit to the schools and is currently considering the outcome of this visit. My Department expects to be in further contact with the schools regarding their application shortly.

Capital Assistance Scheme Applications

117. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when a capital assistance scheme application in respect of an organisation (details supplied) in County Limerick will be signed off by his Department's inspector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4019/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The implementation of projects under my Department's Capital Assistance Programme is a matter for each individual local authority.

My Department issued approval in principle to the local authority in July 2012 for this project, subject to it complying with the requirements of the Capital Works Management Framework.

Additional information in connection with this scheme sought by my Department was received from the local authority in late December and is currently under consideration. My Department will be in further contact with the local authority when this correspondence has been fully assessed.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

118. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and

Local Government if his Department has allocated the planned expansion of social housing across each local authority in the State; the criteria being used to determine the greatest need and to ensure a fair demographic spread of the extra investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3676/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Social housing is a key priority for Government, as evidenced by the additional €2.2 billion in funding announced for social housing in Budget 2015 and the publication of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 in November 2014, which sets out clear, measurable actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing, reform delivery arrangements and meet the housing needs of households on the housing list. The total targeted provision of over 110,000 social housing units, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme, will address the needs of the 90,000 households on the local authority housing waiting list in full, with flexibility to meet potential future demand.

Action 1 of the Strategy requires the agreement of national targets for delivery of social housing on a local authority by local authority basis this year and in subsequent years. Action 4 of the Strategy requires the 4 Dublin local authorities to agree similar targets. Action 1 will be delivered by the Project Board while Action 4 is the responsibility of the Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce. Both actions will be delivered in quarter 1 2015 and to this end both Groups have recently met and have agreed the process on setting targets for each local authority. Consultation with individual Local Authorities is now taking place.

The Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2013 identified 89,872 households assessed by local housing authorities as being eligible and in need of some form of social housing support. The results of this assessment have informed the Project Board, the Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce and local authorities in terms of the target setting process underway. Furthermore, the Strategy commits to the undertaking of the Housing Needs Assessment on an annual basis from 2016 to ensure that social housing supports delivered continue to match the variable profile of those in need. This action will also support the commitment in Construction 2020 that a National Framework for Housing Supply be established to ensure the supply of housing is matched with projected demand.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

119. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will ensure that community development is provided a separate funding stream away from the SICAP. [3951/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): My Department's Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) is the largest social inclusion intervention of its kind in the State. The current Programme officially ended at the end of 2013 having operated for four years with funding of €281 million over that period. It is being implemented on a transitional basis until March 2015, pending the roll out of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in April 2015.

The SICAP is one of my Department's key priorities. The Programme's target groups are:

- Children and Families from Disadvantaged Areas
- Lone Parents

- New Communities (including Refugees/Asylum Seekers)
- People living in Disadvantaged Communities
- People with Disabilities
- Roma
- The Unemployed (including those not on the Live Register)
- Travellers
- Young Unemployed People from Disadvantaged areas

Community development is an integral part of SICAP and underpins the entire programme.

In accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients, SICAP is subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway.

The public procurement process is a competitive process that is open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that can provide the services to be tendered for to deliver the new Programme. The outcome of the procurement process will be known next month.

Social and Affordable Housing Expenditure

120. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when the funding from the social housing strategy will be provided to Meath County Council in order that it may start to build new homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3954/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Social housing is a key priority for Government, as evidenced by the increased provision made for the area in Budget 2015. The overall social housing funding provision for 2015 has been increased by in excess of €200 million, with capital funding increasing by €180 million, which will allow for significant expansion in social housing provision. The Social Housing Strategy 2020: Support, Supply and Reform builds on the provisions contained in Budget 2015 and sets out clear, measurable actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing, reform delivery arrangements and meet the housing needs of all households on the housing list. Importantly, the Strategy restores the State to a central role in the provision of social housing.

The total targeted provision of over 110,000 social housing units, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme, will address the needs of the 90,000 households on the housing waiting list in full, with flexibility to meet potential future demand. In committing to provide these 35,000 new social housing units, at a projected cost of €3.8 billion, the strategy marks a fresh start for social housing in Ireland.

Actions 1 and 4 of the Strategy require the agreement of national targets for delivery of social housing across local authorities in 2015 and in subsequent years. The Project Board responsible for oversight of the delivery of actions and targets under the Social Housing Strategy, and the Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce have each agreed a process on setting social housing delivery targets. The allocation of funding to local authorities, in the context of

the increased funding now available, will be based on the targets that are set and the plans of individual authorities to deliver on those targets. Consultation with individual local authorities in this regard is currently taking place.

Capital Assistance Scheme Applications

121. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when a capital assistance scheme application in respect of an organisation (details supplied) in County Limerick will be signed off by his Department's Inspector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4018/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The implementation of projects under my Department's Capital Assistance Programme is a matter for each individual local authority. In this case, my Department issued approval in principle to the local authority in May 2014, subject to the proposal complying with the requirements of the Capital Works Management Framework and the Public Spending Code.

Full approval can only be given by my Department when the proposal is finalised within those requirements. Further information in that regard has recently been received from the local authority and is currently under consideration. My Department will be in further contact with the local authority when this correspondence has been fully assessed.

Housing Data

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which provision will be made hereby first family home buyers will compete in the market place with the investment sector, thereby addressing part of the housing need and shifting the balance in favour of homeowners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4038/15]

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the number of house purchase transactions undertaken by family home buyers in the past 12 months to date; the number of homes acquired by the investment sector in the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4042/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 122 and 125 together.

The Government is acutely aware of the difficulties facing people in accessing housing and is undertaking a range of actions to address the matter.

My Department's Housing Land Availability Survey (HLAS) estimates that there is in excess of 25,000 hectares of undeveloped residentially zoned land nationally, which equates to a capacity for over 500,000 new homes (based on a national average of 20 units per hectare). This capacity is considered to be sufficient to meet the housing requirements nationally for in excess of the next ten years.

The challenge is to translate this potential supply line into actual construction on the ground to meet demand. Most of the difficulties currently being encountered can be addressed by increasing the supply of properties available to buy, to rent, and to be provided by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

The Government recognises that a whole of Government approach, working in close cooperation with key stakeholders, is the only way to tackle the challenge of increasing the supply of housing. The implementation of the Construction Strategy 2020 forms the basis for a properly functioning and sustainable construction sector. It provides for a strategic approach to the provision of housing based on real and measured demand and addresses the full range of relevant issues including the planning process, financing, access to mortgage finance, and developing the construction workforce. Construction 2020, and two Planning Bills currently being drafted, aim to remove blockages from the system in order to support increased supply, reducing the pressure on house price growth and helping homebuyers to acquire a family home in their community of choice at reasonable cost.

Measures to increase supply will also impact positively on the private rental sector. Historically, the private rental sector has been characterised by small scale landlords. Attracting large scale investment in professionally managed residential property, for example using Real Estate Investment Trusts and other options for long-term investment, has an important role to play in helping to deliver a more professional and higher quality sector.

Social housing is also a key priority for Government, as evidenced by the additional €2.2 billion in funding announced for social housing in Budget 2015 and the publication of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 in November 2014. The Strategy builds on the provisions contained in Budget 2015 and sets out clear, measurable actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing, reform delivery arrangements and meet the housing needs of all households on the housing list.

The total targeted provision of over 110,000 social housing units, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme, will address the needs of the 90,000 households on the housing waiting list in full, with flexibility to meet potential future demand. This will help to ease pressure on the private sector.

In 2015, I expect that some 7,400 new social housing units will be provided- 3,000 units through the leasing initiative; 1,000 vacant local authority units will be returned to use through a programme of refurbishment; a further 1,400 units to be built or acquired by local authorities and approved housing bodies through the Social Housing Investment Programme and the Capital Assistance Scheme; and a further 2,000 new Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) units will be delivered. In addition, 8,400 households will be assisted through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

I will be continuing to assign the highest priority to the implementation of both Construction 2020 and the Social Housing Strategy.

As regards statistics on types of homebuyers over the last year, whilst my Department gathers and publishes a wide range of housing and planning statistics, the closest source of data to that requested by the Deputy is the Residential Property Price Register, which is produced by the Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA) pursuant to section 86 of the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011 and which is available at: www.propertypriceregister.ie .

The Register includes Date of Sale, Price and Address of all residential properties purchased in Ireland since 1 January 2010, as declared to the Revenue Commissioners for stamp duty purposes. However, the Register is not intended as a “Property Price Index” and does not record whether house purchases are made by family home buyers or investors.

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which his Department has sought information from the various local authorities on a county basis in respect of the local authority housing need with particular reference to the Dublin local authorities and the other counties of Leinster adjacent thereto; if it has been possible to determine a minimum number of houses needed to address the housing crisis in their respective areas without exception; the total number of houses needed to address the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4040/15]

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government his plans to meet the rapidly increasing local authority housing needs in the counties adjoining Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4041/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 and 124 together.

Social housing is a key priority for the Government, evidenced by the additional €2.2 billion in funding announced for social housing in Budget 2015 and the publication of the Social Housing Strategy 2020 in November 2014. The Strategy builds on the provisions contained in Budget 2015 and sets out clear, measurable actions and targets to increase the supply of social housing, reform delivery arrangements and meet the housing needs of all households on the housing list. Importantly, the Strategy restores the State to a central role in the provision of social housing.

The total targeted provision of over 110,000 social housing units, through the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment and Rental Accommodation Scheme, will address the needs of the 90,000 households on the housing waiting list in full, with flexibility to meet potential future demand. In committing to provide these 35,000 new social housing units, at a projected cost of €3.8 billion, the strategy marks a fresh start for social housing in Ireland.

Over the 6 years of the strategy, I anticipate that the 35,000 units will be delivered as follows: some 22,300 units to be built and acquired utilising both current and capital monies; 11,000 units to be leased; and 2,300 units to be supplied through the refurbishment and bringing back in to use of vacant local authority stock.

Under the relevant actions of the Social Housing Strategy, national targets for delivery of social housing on a local authority by local authority basis are to be agreed for each year. Action 1 of the Strategy requires the agreement of national targets for delivery of social housing on a local authority by local authority basis this year and in subsequent years. Action 4 of the Strategy requires the 4 Dublin local authorities to agree similar targets. Action 1 will be delivered by the Project Board while Action 4 is the responsibility of the Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce. Both actions will be delivered in quarter 1 2015. To this end both Groups have recently met in recent days and have agreed the process on setting targets for each local authority. Consultation with individual Local Authorities is now taking place.

The Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2013 identified 89,872 households assessed by local housing authorities as being eligible and in need of some form of social housing support. The results of this assessment have informed the Project Board, the Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce and local authorities in terms of the target setting process underway. Furthermore, the Strategy commits to the undertaking of the Housing Needs Assessment on an annual basis from 2016 to ensure that social housing supports delivered continue to match the variable profile of those in need.

Question No. 125 answered with Question No. 122.

Unfinished Housing Developments

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which his Department continues to monitor progress in regard to the completion of development works in unfinished housing estates, on a county basis; the extent of the works completed so far and that remaining; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4043/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): Since 2010, an annual national housing survey of unfinished housing developments has been conducted during the summer months to monitor progress. Since 2010, the number of unfinished housing developments has decreased by approximately, two-thirds; from nearly 3,000 in 2010 to 992 in 2014. It is expected that with the aid of the Special Resolution Fund (SRF), outlined further below, a further 74 developments should be resolved in the months ahead. The SRF has already positively contributed to 12 developments inspected under the 2014 Annual Survey being removed from the list of Unfinished Housing Developments. The detailed findings of the annual surveys, annual progress reports and other useful publications and information in relation to Unfinished Housing Developments are available on the Housing Agency's website at:

<http://www.housing.ie/Our-Services/Unfinished-Housing-Developments.aspx> .

As Minister for Housing and Planning and Coordination of Construction 2020, I now chair the National Coordination Committee on Unfinished Housing Developments. The Committee comprises senior representatives of the key stakeholders, including the banking and construction industries, NAMA, local authorities, the Health and Safety Authority, residents and officials from my Department. The Committee was established to drive and oversee the implementation of the recommendations of 'Resolving Ireland's Unfinished Housing Developments – Report of the Advisory Group on Unfinished Housing Developments', published in May 2011.

The Committee has met on 13 occasions and has adopted a collaborative approach amongst its constituent members to promote the work of resolving the housing situation faced by residents of unfinished housing developments. The Committee is scheduled to meet again on 10 February 2015.

The development of Site Resolution Plans (SRPs), agreed between residents, developers, funders and local authority personnel for the finalisation of works on site to render estates as habitable as possible, have been pivotal in resolving a large number of estates. The 2014 National Housing Survey shows that, of the 1,263 estates inspected, there were 587 estates going through the SRP process. This collaborative approach serves the best interests of all concerned and is an effective tool in the resolution process. For more information on Site Resolution Plans, please refer to section 3.4 of the Guidance Manual on Managing and Resolving Unfinished Estates, August 2011 –

http://www.housing.ie/Our-Services/Unfinished-Housing-Developments/Guidance-Manual-on-Resolving-Unfinished-Housing-De/Guidance-Materials/Guidance-Manual_Managing-and-Resolving-Unfinished.aspx .

Budget 2014 contained a special provision, in the form of a targeted €10m Special Resolution Fund (SRF), to assist further in addressing the legacy of unfinished housing developments. The SRF is designed to encourage the resolution of the remaining tranche of unfinished developments identified in the National Housing Development Survey 2013 and, particularly, those developments not likely to be resolved in the normal way through solely developer/owner/

funder action because of the presence of specific financial barriers.

On 2 May 2014, allocations from the Special Resolution Fund were announced and 86 developments were approved for funding. The following link contains a list of all developments approved for SRF funding:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,37940,en.htm> .

The management and administration of issues relating to unfinished housing developments is a matter for individual local authorities. Each local authority has appointed an Unfinished Housing Development co-ordinator; contact details can be found on the Housing Agency's website at: www.housing.ie .

Shared Ownership Scheme

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which he and his Department have managed to address the inherited issue of distressed shared ownership mortgages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4044/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Paudie Coffey): In 2013, the Housing Agency was asked to conduct a stand-alone review of the shared ownership scheme, including identification of the main difficulties and recommendations for mitigating measures. While an initial draft of the review was received from the Agency, 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 substantial data collection project involving my Department, the Local Government Management Agency and the local authorities themselves is under way. It will be a number of months before sufficient data has been collected in order to complete the requisite analysis to finalise the review.

Pending full conclusion of this review, my Department issued a circular letter to local authorities setting out some of the options and interim actions that might be explored to alleviate the difficulties of those in shared ownership distress, such as allowing use of the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process and room rental for Shared Ownership mortgage holders. It is accepted that these proposals are not a complete solution to the issues that arise for such mortgage holders but are intended as an interim measure pending the outcome of the review.

My Department issued revised guidelines to local authorities for dealing with mortgage arrears within the local authority sector in June 2014. Dealing with Mortgage Arrears: A Guide for Local Authorities is available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,30943,en.pdf>.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which provision has been made to date to address the issue of carbon emissions; his targets in this regard; if they are in line with global and European targets;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4045/15]

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the current position in regard to Ireland's response to EU or other international agreements in relation to climate change; if a progressive plan has been formulated to address any issues arising with a view to ensuring that no damage is done in the context of economic recovery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4049/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128 and 131 together.

Ireland is on course to comply with its greenhouse gas emission reduction target for the purposes of the Kyoto Protocol in the commitment period 2008 to 2012. The Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol, which establishes a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol from 2013 to 2020, was agreed in 2012 but has not yet entered into force. Ireland has completed the necessary domestic acceptance procedures in relation to the Doha Amendment and will be in a position to formally accept it in the third quarter of 2015.

For each year between 2013 and 2020, Ireland has an ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction target under the 2009 EU Effort-Sharing Decision (406/2009/EC).

Furthermore, in October 2014, the European Council endorsed a binding EU target of an at least 40% domestic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and specified that the target will be delivered collectively by the EU in the most cost-effective manner possible, with the reductions in the ETS and non-ETS sectors amounting to 43% and 30% by 2030 compared to 2005, respectively. While the specific details of the contribution to be made by each Member State remain to be defined, the Council agreed that all Member States will participate in this effort, balancing considerations of fairness and solidarity.

The extent of the challenge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in line with our EU and international commitments, is well understood by Government, as reflected in the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development, published in April 2014, and in the Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development Bill 2015, published last week. The National Policy Position provides a high-level policy direction for the adoption and implementation by Government of plans to enable the State to move to a low-carbon economy by 2050. Proposed statutory authority for the plans is set out in the Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development Bill 2015.

In anticipation of enactment of the planned legislation, work is already underway on developing a low-carbon plan - the National Mitigation Plan, the primary objective of which will be to track implementation of measures already underway and identify additional measures within the longer term to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and progress the overall national low carbon transition agenda to 2050. I am satisfied that Ireland is on course to comply with the annual mitigation targets under the 2009 EU Effort-Sharing Decision (406/2009/EC) in the first half of the 2013-2020 compliance period.

However, there will be a significant compliance challenge in the years 2017-2020 and therefore the first iteration of the National Mitigation Plan will place particular focus on putting the necessary measures in place to address this particular challenge in the years 2017 to 2020 but also in terms of planning ahead to be ensure that appropriate policies and measures will be in place beyond that. It is also important to note that the Bill will provide for long-term successive planning in this respect.

2015 will also be a pivotal year in terms of the international response to climate change,

with all 196 Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change working to conclude a new global agreement in Paris in December. The Paris outcome will build on existing agreements and chart a course for future global emissions reductions. Ireland, through the EU, will play its part in these negotiations and the globally agreed actions arising. The October 2014, European Council commitment will be the basis of the EU's intended nationally-determined contribution to the new agreement.

On economic considerations, the National Policy Position clearly identifies competitiveness as a pillar of the fundamental national objective on transition to a low-carbon economy by 2050. The National Policy Position also sets out a number of key issues for consideration in the on-going evolution of national climate policy, including:

(i) the need to ensure that objectives are achieved at the least cost to the national economy and that any measures adopted to achieve those objectives are cost-effective, and do not impose an unreasonable burden on the Exchequer; and

(ii) the need to take advantage of environmentally sustainable economic opportunities both within and outside the State.

The Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development Bill 2015 also includes provisions to statutorily underpin these and other key economic considerations, to be taken into account in the development of the mitigation and adaptation plans to be adopted by the Government for the purpose of progressing the national transition agenda.

Air and Water Pollution

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which carcinogenic air or water pollutants have been identified at the various monitoring points throughout the country; the degree to which it will improve the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4046/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Air quality monitoring 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 CAFE 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 CAFE Directive.

The most recent report, Air Quality in Ireland 2013 – Key Indicators of Ambient Air Quality, was published in October 2014 and provides an assessment of air quality in Ireland for 2013, compared to the CAFE Directive standards as well as 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 in some areas. Particulate matter levels are of concern, particularly during the winter heating season in areas where the sale of smoky coal is permitted. As a result, levels of particulate matter in smaller towns are similar or higher than those in cities where smoky coal is banned. To help protect our good air quality, the Irish consumer must become more aware of their choice in home heating fuel and the potential impact that choice can have on air quality in their locality

and on human health.

Nitrogen dioxide levels (NO₂) levels showed a slight increasing trend in the years 2008 □ 2010. During this period, NO₂ levels were close to the CAFE limit value in Dublin and Cork cities, due primarily to traffic congestion. However, NO₂ levels decreased from 2010-2012, and thereafter may have stabilised in 2013. To further reduce NO₂ levels in cities, we must develop and implement policies to reduce travel demand, emphasising sustainable transport modes such as cycling, walking and public transport and improving the efficiency of motorised transport.

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.

It is anticipated that a new national update for 2010-2012 will be available early this year. In the meantime, 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 on-going 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.

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> .

Housing Adaptation Grant

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the extent to which adequate resources remain available to the various local authorities to facilitate the provision of housing adaptation grants to meet the requirements of those with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4048/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): Last year, Exchequer funding of over €37 million was provided for the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability. I am pleased to be in a position to increase that funding by some 10% in 2015 to €40.4 million; individual allocations to local authorities will be made shortly.

Through careful management of my Department's housing budget in 2014, additional funds were made available to local authorities with high levels of grant activity under this scheme. The same scrutiny will be applied to the capital budget for 2015 and, in the event of savings arising, opportunities will be examined to reallocate funds accordingly.

Question No. 131 answered with Question No. 128.

Legislative Measures

132. **Deputy Gabrielle McFadden** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government when Part 2 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 will be commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4061/15]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Alan Kelly): The Government's Social Housing Strategy 2020, published in November 2014, includes a commitment to commence Part 2 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 in the first quarter of this year.

Rural Development Programme Funding

133. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding bursaries or grants available to a start-up enterprise providing spinning and hand weaving classes and demonstrations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4078/15]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Ann Phelan): Funding for start-up enterprises and associated training was eligible under the LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013. However, that Programme is now fully committed.

I expect that the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme will commence during 2015 and projects involving enterprise development and job creation, if identified as a priority in the Local Development Strategy, will be eligible for funding.

Renewable Energy Incentives

134. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if a renewable heat incentive will be introduced for renewable energy this year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4036/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): In October last year, I published a Draft Bioenergy Plan which is available on my Department's website (www.dcenr.gov.ie). The draft Plan will undergo Strategic Environmental and Appropriate Assessments, including public consultation, which will inform the content of the finalised Plan.

The analysis underpinning the draft Plan is that an additional bioenergy focused measure in the heat sector would represent the most cost effective means of meeting a number of different policy goals. Therefore, the draft Plan recommends the introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) for larger heat users to change to heating solutions that produce heat from renewable sources.

The terms and conditions of the RHI, including those relating to support tariffs and eligible technologies, will be established during the process of designing the scheme which is due to commence later this year. The RHI scheme, once designed, will require State Aid approval from the European Commission and further Government approval. It is proposed to have the scheme in place in 2016.

Commission for Energy Regulation

135. **Deputy Áine Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the regulator's role in ensuring that proper reductions are passed on to the consumer considering the huge reductions in oil in recent times. [3988/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Commission for Energy Regulation's (CER) primary economic responsibilities in energy are to regulate the Irish electricity and natural gas sectors. There is free entry to the Irish oil market, no price control and it is Government policy to encourage price competition and consumer choice. It is important to note that the Irish oil sector is completely privatised, liberalised and deregulated i.e. CER has no role in the oil market.

Oil is consumed in two sectors of the economy - in transport and heating. The amount of oil used in the electricity sector is negligible at less than 1%. In terms of gasoline and diesel prices at the pump and home heating prices, the Consumer and Competition Commission (under the aegis of the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation) has a role in ensuring that the market is functioning correctly and that consumers are not being disadvantaged. Previous investigations and surveys into oil prices, including home heating oil, have been undertaken by the National Consumer Agency (now the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission), and these are available at www.ccpcc.ie. The research indicates that the price paid by consumers is largely determined by taxation levels, the internationally traded price of crude oil and the consequent price at which refined product is traded in Europe, along with the level of competition in the retail market.

The European Commission maintains a Statistics and Market Observatory, which presents consumer prices and net prices (excluding duties and taxes) of petroleum products in EU Member States (known as the Oil Bulletin) on a weekly basis. The Oil Bulletin is designed to improve the transparency of oil prices and to strengthen the internal market. The relevant link is: http://ec.europa.eu/energy/observatory/oil/bulletin_en.htm. The latest bulletin from 19 January 2014 shows that diesel prices (including taxes) in Ireland were €1.20 litre while gasoline prices (including taxes) were €1.30 litre. A year ago, prices in the euro area averaged €1.40 per litre (including taxes) for diesel and €1.56 per litre (including taxes) for gasoline.

Broadband Service Provision

136. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if his attention has been drawn to the fact that County Kerry now has a broadband crisis; his views on the huge disadvantage the lack of adequate broadband is causing in Kerry; if urgent action will be taken by him to address the problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4057/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): The Government has acknowledged the unreliable quality of broadband connectivity in many rural parts of the country including County Kerry. The NBP will deal conclusively with rural connectivity issues so that current and future generations will have a guaranteed access to high quality, high speed broadband service. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investments and a State led intervention in areas where commercial services will not be provided.

The commercial telecommunications sector is currently investing approximately €2.5 billion in network upgrades in both the fixed and mobile segments of the market. Approximately

1.6 million of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland are expected to have access to commercial high speed broadband services over the next two years. These very significant investments, which include many parts of County Kerry, represent a step-change in the quality of broadband services available.

On the 24 November last, a public consultation on a national high speed coverage map 2016 was launched. The map can be accessed at www.broadband.gov.ie. The areas on the map marked Blue will all have access to high speed broadband services of at least 30 Mbps from the commercial sector by end of 2016. The areas marked Amber will require the intervention of the State.

The map allows all members of the public, be they business or residential, to see whether their premises/home will have access to commercial high speed broadband services by end 2016 or whether they will be included in the Government's proposed intervention. It also provides detailed information on over 50,000 townlands in every county in Ireland, including County Kerry.

It is anticipated that speeds of at least 30 Mbps will be also delivered through the Government's intervention and the network will be designed to cater for future increased demand from consumers and business.

In tandem with the mapping consultation, intensive design and planning work is underway in my Department to produce a detailed intervention strategy. The strategy will address a range of issues in relation to the intervention including the optimum procurement model, ownership model for the infrastructure, intervention cost and likely market impact.

My Department has engaged external advisors to provide legal, economic, technical and financial advice on the various aspects of the Plan over the next two years. The next steps in this process will see a further public consultation on a detailed intervention strategy in mid-2015. The Intervention Strategy will be notified to the European Commission for State Aid clearance.

Following the public consultation, towards the end of this year a detailed procurement process will be undertaken in order to select preferred bidder or bidders. The Department will design a tender in a way that maximises efficiencies and keeps the cost of the network build as low as possible. It is expected that the physical build of this network will commence from 2016 with services being available incrementally as the network is rolled out.

This complex and ambitious project is a key priority for Government. It aims to conclusively address current connectivity challenges in Ireland.

Job Creation

137. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if action will be taken by him to move forward the Shannon LNG project and its associated jobs and investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4058/15]

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (Deputy Alex White): Since 2002, the regulation of the gas market has been the responsibility of the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER), which is independent in the performance of its functions. I have no direct statutory function in relation to liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects, including specific projects such as the Shannon LNG project.

Both I and Government colleagues have consistently been supportive of the proposal by

Shannon LNG to construct a LNG terminal near Ballylongford, county Kerry. The LNG facility would provide additional security of supply to Ireland in that it would bring diversity to Ireland's supply sources and would bring connectivity for the first time to the global LNG market. Such a facility would be a positive step for the island of Ireland. While neither I, as Minister, nor my Department has any direct role in regard to the project, representatives of Shannon LNG have had meetings with my predecessor and with my officials to discuss various issues. Any final investment decision in the proposed Shannon LNG project would be a commercial matter and one entirely for the company to take.

Public Transport Provision

138. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps that will be taken, following a decision on the future transport solution for Dublin north, to allow for the construction of the new transport link to begin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3967/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): All projects costing over €20m are subject to appraisal and evaluation (including review of a detailed business case) under the Public Spending Code. The project recommended following the outcome of studies currently underway will be subject to review in my Department and in the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform before a final decision is made.

Any decision on the timeline for delivery would be premature at this stage pending the outcome of the studies and identification of the preferred project.

However the projected cost of the selected project, funding availability and funding options will be a key determinant on timing of delivery.

Road Safety

139. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the procedures for issuing on-the-spot fines for cycling on the footpath; if young children will be exempt from these fines as the Road Safety Authority states that children under 12 should not cycle on public roads; his plans to improve cycling infrastructure in view of the imposition of this fine. [3987/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Action 92 of the Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020 provides that the fixed charge notice system will be extended to include offences committed by cyclists. My Department is consulting with the Gardaí and the Road Safety Authority at present to develop proposals in relation to this Action. The legal provisions necessary will be drafted in the coming months and any primary legislation necessary will be included in a draft road traffic Bill that I expect to bring to Government shortly.

Taxi Regulations

140. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the delay in issuing a person (details supplied) in Dublin 6W with their taxi identification badge; and when they will receive same. [4012/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The regulation

of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

141. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the new sports capital programme will open to applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4028/15]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): Detailed preparations are being made at present in my Department for the next round of the Sports Capital Programme. I expect to make an announcement about the 2015 Programme in the near future.

Tourism Project Funding

142. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding/support available for a community group (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4067/15]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): All funding available to my Department for the development of cycleways/greenways is fully committed up to the end of 2016. It is possible, given the success of the projects already delivered, that funding may become available from other sources over the coming years.

I am familiar with the details of the proposed project having met with representatives of Boyneside Trail Ltd in November, 2014. Should any funding become available for the purpose of greenway design or development this project can be considered, but it should be noted that funding for this purpose is normally awarded following a competitive process.

The LEADER programme may also be a possible source of funding for progressing the initial stages of this project.

Finally, I always recommend that Community Groups work closely with the relevant local authority to continue to progress plans for suitable projects so that when funding does become available that they are in a position to apply for that funding.

Cultural Policy

143. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department is currently working on a national cultural policy; the process for drafting this policy; when this policy will be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3995/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am committed to the delivery of the country's first ever national cultural policy - *Culture 2025*- and will be initiating a wide-scale consultation process to ensure that all stakeholders and members

of the public can make their views known. With this in mind, a draft discussion paper is currently being finalised, which I hope to publish shortly.

National Concert Hall

144. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the current relationship between the Lincoln Centre and the National Concert Hall; the total budget spent by the National Concert Hall from 2011 to date in 2015; the money accrued from that relationship to the National Concert Hall from 2011 to date in 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3996/15]

145. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the conflicting legal advice received by the board of the National Concert Hall with regard to its relationship with the Lincoln Centre and the NCH's fundraising activities; the reason the Attorney General was asked to advise the NCH Board; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3997/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 144 and 145 together.

My Department provides funding to the National Cultural Institutions, including the National Concert Hall (NCH). However, the board of the NCH is responsible for all operational matters, including fundraising, and I have no direct function in these matters. In this regard, I understand that the board decided not to proceed with the proposed arrangement between the Lincoln Centre and the NCH in 2013.

However, in order to address general queries being raised at that time, my Department sought advice from the Office of the Attorney General on the issue of the establishment by the NCH of a fundraising foundation. The outcome of that advice was subsequently communicated to the board.

It is my intention that the proposed Bill to place the NCH on a statutory footing will clarify the legal position regarding fundraising activities.

National Concert Hall

146. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if reports have been carried out on the future of the National Concert Hall between 2011 and 2015; if all these reports are public; her views on the recommendation of the reports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3998/15]

148. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she is satisfied with the current governance of the National Concert Hall; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4000/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 and 148 together.

An independent review, commissioned by the board of the National Concert Hall (NCH), regarding the programming, marketing, financial and operational performance of the NCH was carried out by CHL Consulting Company Ltd in association with IMD Group and completed at the end of 2013. A copy of the report was furnished to my predecessor, following which,

in November 2013, he requested the board of the NCH to address the matters arising from the report and prepare an implementation plan, including timelines for the effective delivery of the various elements. As the report was commissioned by the board of the NCH, publication is a matter for it.

My predecessor also commissioned the former Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills to carry out a governance review at NCH, which was completed in July 2014. My Department subsequently referred the report to the Chair of the NCH for consideration. It is also being considered by my Department in the context of the preparation of the legislation to put the NCH on a statutory footing. The report will be made available on my Department's website.

With regard to placing the NCH on a statutory footing, my Department has prepared a general scheme of a Bill, which has been the subject of pre-legislative scrutiny by the Oireachtas Committee on the Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht. It is intended that the Bill will provide, inter alia, for a governance framework that will ensure appropriate reporting and accounting to the Minister and the Oireachtas by the NCH. I am satisfied that the board is focused on helping the NCH make the transition from a company to a statutory body, while maintaining the highest standards of musical performance for the enjoyment of the public.

It is my intention to publish the National Concert Hall Bill in the coming weeks.

National Concert Hall

147. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reasons five board members of the National Concert Hall resigned in April 2014; if she has been in contact with these former board members since their resignation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3999/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): A number of changes took place on the board of the National Concert Hall during April 2014. Ms Margaret Ryan stepped down as both Chair and member of the board, while four ordinary members also stepped down. Ms Ryan had already indicated her intention of stepping down was to focus entirely on her role with Fáilte Ireland, while I understand that the four ordinary members stepped down due to differences on the board. My predecessor appointed new members to replace those who had stepped down. Since my appointment, correspondence from a former board member was received in my office and has been responded to.

Question No. 148 answered with Question No. 146.

Grant Payments

149. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding bursaries or grants available to a start-up enterprise providing spinning and hand weaving classes and demonstrations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4074/15]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department does not provide bursaries or grants to a start-up enterprises providing spinning and hand weaving classes or demonstrations.

