

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 9, inclusive, answered orally.

Nitrates Usage

10. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the timeframe for farmers to spread slurry will be extended (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32200/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2014, as amended, give legal effect in Ireland to the Nitrates Directive and to our Nitrates Action Programme (NAP). The Directive requires all member states to define set periods when the land application of fertiliser, including slurry, is not allowed and in Ireland the closed season commenced on 15 October.

The closed periods in Ireland were decided following extensive consultation and were discussed with farming bodies and the European Commission when Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme was introduced. The provisions of the Regulations are underpinned by scientific research and good agricultural practice. The most recent scientific studies carried out on a diverse range of farm and soil types as part of Teagasc's ongoing Agricultural Catchments Programme has provided further evidence in support of the efficacy of the prohibited spreading periods in reducing nutrient losses to waters.

Ireland faces considerable challenges in meeting the requirements of the Water Framework Directive to bring all waters back to good status at least. Taking those challenges and the evidence in support of the benefit of closed periods into consideration, I am not proposing any blanket variation at the present time to the terms of the NAP.

My Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) have closely monitored the situation and a number of farmers experiencing particular animal welfare concerns arising from an inability to spread slurry before 15 October were contacted by the DAFM who advised them of the appropriate action to take. I understand that a round 70 farmers were contacted by DAFM in this regard and the specific concerns have now been alleviated.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

11. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied that the plans for 8,000 homes in the Cherrywood SDZ will deliver sufficient social housing and affordable homes for low and middle income earn-

ers to rent and buy for this planned new town; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35479/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Cherrywood Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) site holds significant potential to deliver residential development at a pace and scale that would assist greatly in addressing the current critical shortage of housing supply in the Dublin Region. As is required under the SDZ process, there is a comprehensive planning scheme in place, approved by An Bord Pleanála, for the development of up to 8,000 homes as well as retail and supporting services and amenities provided for within the SDZ.

I am confident that there will be significant delivery of all housing types, including social housing, as an integral part of this area's development, as well as the provision of housing that is intrinsically affordable for the broad range of households likely to settle in the area including low- and middle-income earners seeking properties to rent or buy.

Implementing Part V alone will provide for some 800 new social housing units to be delivered. It will be a matter for the developers, the housing authority (in this case, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council) and other housing providers such as Approved Housing Bodies to consider if additional State-supported housing should be provided on this site, in line with the approved planning scheme and the county development plan.

More broadly, the overall market development of housing on this site will depend on such provision and investment being viable, relative to what prospective residents can afford in relation to purchase and rental costs. Cognisant of the imperative around ensuring viability of developments and affordability of the housing from those developments for households, the Government has progressed a range of relevant measures, including a targeted development contribution rebate scheme, updated statutory guidelines on apartment developments, the €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) and wider planning reforms, including the provision for improved timelines in making planning decisions.

Taken together, I believe that these measures will further support the delivery of both State-supported and affordable homes, not only in Cherrywood, but across other major residential sites throughout Dublin and other urban areas.

Housing Provision

12. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the progress towards reaching the goal in Rebuilding Ireland that by mid-2017, emergency hotel and bed and breakfast type accommodation for families will only be used in limited circumstances. [35428/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is fully recognised that the period of time that families spend in emergency hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation should be minimised. This is reflected in the commitment in Rebuilding Ireland that by mid-2017, hotels should only be used in limited circumstances for emergency accommodation for families. It is intended that this will be achieved by meeting their housing needs through the enhanced Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and general housing allocations, and by providing new supply to be delivered through an expanded Rapid Build Housing Programme and a Housing Agency initiative to acquire vacant houses.

My Department is working closely with local authorities and with the Housing Agency

towards the achievement of these actions and initiatives. For example, a record level of exits from homelessness - 1,350 – was delivered by local authorities in the first six months of this year and the level of activity in this regard has continued to accelerate. As of 14 November 2016, 594 HAP tenancies had been created for homeless households under the Homeless pilot of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, already exceeding the end-year target of 550 set in Rebuilding Ireland.

The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness contains a clear commitment to provide regular progress updates, particularly through quarterly progress reports. The first quarterly progress report (in respect of Quarter 3 commitments and actions) was published on 1 November, and can be accessed through the Rebuilding Ireland website, *www.rebuildingireland.ie*. Further progress reports will be published on a quarterly basis, with the next report due to be published in January 2017. Each Quarterly Report will focus on the actions due to be progressed or completed in the preceding quarter.

Local Authority Services

13. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of housing developments in County Donegal with stand-alone treatment plants which are waiting to be taken over; when he expects these developments will be taken over; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35223/16]

95. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the progress he has made to date in relation to the taking in charge of developments with stand-alone treatment plants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35222/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 13 and 95 together.

As the Deputy will be aware from previous PQ replies, the National Taking in Charge Initiative (NTICI) for residential estates, with pilot scheme funding of €10m, was launched in April 2016 to accelerate the taking-in-charge process of housing estates by developing new working methods. Further information on the NTICI can be found on my Department's website at a link that will be circulated with the Official Report.

[<http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current?query=Taking%20in%20Charge>].

Baseline surveys carried out to inform the development of the NTICI in December 2015 indicated that, of the 5,566 housing developments yet to be taken in charge, there were approximately 914 estates with developer-provided infrastructure (DPI).

Under the terms of the NTICI, only those developments subject to valid taking-in-charge applications were eligible for inclusion in the call for proposals for pilot funding under Circular FPS3. It is important to recall that NTICI is not intended to establish a rolling annual funding programme to take in charge all estates not yet taken in charge but was instead intended to develop better knowledge and systems to support the taking in charge of further estates over time.

Nationally, 353 developments were approved for funding under the NTICI and of these, 44 contain stand-alone treatment plants or developer-provided infrastructure, which is the focus of the Deputy's questions.

Seven local authorities were allocated funding of some €2.7m under Measure 2 of the NTICI in relation to DPI type infrastructure. To date, six of those local authorities have drawn funding totalling almost €900,000. Works are in progress and further updates are due from the relevant local authorities later this month .

With regard to the position in Donegal, the December 2015 survey that preceded the NTICI indicated a total of 281 developments with stand-alone wastewater treatment plants and, of these, 154 developments are subject to on-hand applications to be taken in charge. In respect of these, Donegal County Council was allocated approximately €634,000 in NTICI funding to progress 8 housing estates with stand-alone wastewater treatment plants to bring them to taking-in-charge standard. I understand that these works are progressing and some €313,000 has been drawn down to date.

I intend that the experience and learning from the operation of the NTICI over the course of 2016 will be used to point the way forward in relation to supporting the taking in charge process in future.

Question No. 14 answered with Question No. 6.

Homeless Persons Supports

15. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the commitment to provide a one-stop-shop in partnership with Tusla, local authorities and the homeless executive for families presenting as homeless. [35441/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As set out in Rebuilding Ireland, a ‘one-stop-shop’ assessment centre will be put in place in Dublin for families presenting as homeless by the end of this year. Implementation of this initiative is being led by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). This centre will have multi-agency participation including the Dublin housing authorities, Tusla, Family Mediation Services, the Department of Social Protection, tenancy protection services and expert NGOs. The services concerned will work together to assess and support families with children presenting as homeless to ensure every effort is made to keep them in their current homes or to ensure appropriate homeless and other support services are provided. DRHE has indicated that it remains on track to have this One-Stop-Shop in place by the end of the year. The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness contains a clear commitment to provide regular progress updates, particularly through quarterly progress reports. The first quarterly progress report (in respect of Quarter 3 commitments and actions) was published on 1 November, and can be accessed through a web link that will be circulated with the official report. [<http://rebuildingireland.ie/First-Progress-Report.pdf>.]

Further progress reports will be published on a quarterly basis, with the next due to be published in January 2017. Each Quarterly Report will focus on the actions due to be progressed or completed in the preceding quarter; therefore the January 2017 progress report will include details of the delivery of the one -stop-shop assessment centre.

EU Directives

16. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in view of the prospect of the State being issued with fines for breaches of

the urban water water directive, the reason he has refused to publish the reasoned opinion from the European Commission; his views on the content of this reasoned opinion; and the actions being funded by his Department and being undertaken by his Department and Irish Water to resolve the issues raised in the Commission's opinion. [35456/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive sets out the requirements for the collection, treatment and discharge of waste water from urban areas/agglomerations. Compliance with the requirements of this Directive is reported annually by the Environmental Protection Agency in their Urban Waste Water Treatment Report. In September 2013, the European Commission commenced formal infringement proceedings against Ireland regarding non-compliance with the requirements of the Directive in the case of certain named agglomerations. An additional letter of formal notice issued from the European Commission in September 2015.

In January 2016, my Department, assisted by Irish Water, and in consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency, responded to the Commission in relation to the infringement. The response set out the plans in place, including timeframes, to ensure compliance. This was followed by a 6 monthly progress update which was sent to the European Commission in July 2016.

In September 2016, a reasoned opinion on this infringement issued from the European Commission. My Department, with the support of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Irish Water, is currently preparing a response which will be completed before the end of November 2016. While these legal proceedings are still ongoing against the State, it would be inappropriate of me to comment further on the matter.

Since 1st 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 management of urban waste water collection and treatment infrastructure. Irish Water has set out in its Water Services Strategic Plan its approach and strategies for the delivery of these services in a manner that will protect the environment and provide wastewater services in an efficient and economic manner. The strategic approach involved, supported by the planned investment for the period to 2021 outlined in more detail in Irish Water's Business Plan, will play a critical role in ultimately supporting Ireland's compliance with relevant EU water legislation.

Planning Issues

17. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has undertaken an audit of potential bottlenecks and undue regulatory burdens slowing down the planning process for building multi-unit housing units, such as apartment buildings or housing estates; the findings of this audit and plans; and his plans to remove such blockages. [35469/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department routinely monitors the planning process and acts to ensure it facilitates appropriate multi-unit housing developments to meet the broader housing requirements of society. The Dublin Housing Supply and Co-ordination Task Force indicates that sufficient planning permissions are in place in Dublin to yield almost 27,000 new dwellings, whereas only approximately 126 sites, producing around 4,000 dwellings, are active. This leaves around 22,000 dwellings uncommenced on approved sites.

While securing a planning permission is obviously important, having the funds or available

potential purchasers necessary to support the activation of a permission is equally important. This is why tackling our current housing crisis demands a whole-of-Government approach, covering budgetary and financing issues, as well as planning and housing policy matters.

The publication of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness reflects the commitment to that whole-of-Government approach, with the theme of the third Pillar, “Building More Homes”, in particular setting the objective to more than double housing output between now and 2021.

In addition, and prior to the launch of Rebuilding Ireland, my Department progressed several measures identified in the policy package, Stabilising Rents - Boosting Supply, including publication of updated statutory guidelines on apartment developments, which addressed inconsistencies in development plan policies.

More recently, the establishment of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LI-HAF) has commenced a process for providing €200m for infrastructure investment over the 2017 to 2019 period, opening up key sites for early development and delivery in an economically efficient manner, and promoting affordable supply in the areas of greatest need.

Furthermore, the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016 commenced debate in the Seanad this week, providing for a radical new approach to streamlining the planning process for urgently needed large-scale housing proposals. This is a response to a review of cases recently decided by An Bord Pleanála, which showed typical periods of up to 18-20 months to get approval for major residential developments from pre-planning consultations through to the final appeal determination.

Acknowledging the complexities of the housing market, the reasons why so many permissions have not been commenced and supply is lagging behind evident demand are multifaceted and no one single fix is going to address the issues. However, I believe that through the multiplicity of actions currently being progressed, the Government will create the conditions required for the restoration of a more sustainable and normally functioning housing market capable of providing the homes that people need, where and when they need them.

Repair and Leasing Scheme

18. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the new repair and leasing initiative (details supplied); if he will set out his vision for the early expansion of this scheme; the total number of housing units that will be brought into use each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35416/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in certain vacant properties across Ireland. The scheme was launched in Waterford and Carlow in early October 2016, on a pilot basis, and it is my intention that the scheme will be available nationally by April 2017 .

My Department and the Housing Agency met with representatives from both local authorities as recently as last week and I understand that the pilot is progressing well at a local level. Waterford and Carlow have been advertising the scheme with local media and have made good progress in engagements with property owners. Inspections of potential units have also commenced.

Several AHBs will be working together with the Waterford and Carlow local authorities to manage the scheme in those particular areas and, as the scheme becomes available nationally, I expect that more AHBs will become involved over time and as the scheme is rolled out nationally.

Over the period 2016 to 2021, it is anticipated that up to 3,500 units will be secured for social housing under this scheme and I will be making up to €140m available. It is expected that 150 units will be delivered in 2017 and based on the early progress of the scheme in both Carlow and Waterford to date, I am confident that we will achieve those numbers.

Rent Controls

19. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether rent controls are urgently needed considering the further dramatic increases in rent in Dublin and other urban centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35477/16]

23. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the measures he plans to take to deal with the escalating rise in rents in the private rental market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35431/16]

34. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will introduce emergency rent controls in view of the fastest increase in rents on record in reports (details supplied) predicting further large increases over the next two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35471/16]

35. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce rent certainty measures, along the lines of those in Germany which cap rents for new tenancies at 10% above the existing rental benchmarks, particularly in view of the recent figures from his Department which show that the number of homeless families in Dublin has surpassed 1,000 for the first time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35484/16]

40. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce an amendment to the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill to provide for rent certainty in view of the recent data from a company (details supplied) which shows ever increasing rental costs. [35439/16]

51. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce measures to link rent during a tenancy to the annual percentage change in the consumer price index; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35485/16]

52. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if, in view of the recent figures indicating large increases in private rental costs in each of our cities, he will propose to the Government that rent increases should be controlled by, for example, linking them to the consumer price index; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35237/16]

53. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the proposals other than increasing supply, he is considering to try to stem inflation in rent prices in the private rental sector in the short term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35470/16]

58. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if a report in a newspaper (details supplied) stating that rent certainty will not be included in the forthcoming strategy for the private rental sector is accurate. [35463/16]

60. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to regulate the rental market by linking rents to the consumer price index; his further plans to make secure rents and protection for tenants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35475/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 19, 23, 34, 35, 40, 51 to 53, inclusive, 58 and 60 together.

The significant increases in rents that we are seeing currently, particularly in urban areas, are caused, primarily, by a severe shortage in supply. The best way to address rents in the long term, and benefit the entire sector, is to increase the supply of rental accommodation and accelerate also the delivery of housing for the private and social rented sectors. However, I acknowledge that there is a need for short-term measures also.

Pillar 4 of the Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness commits to developing a comprehensive strategy for the rental sector. The strategy will include measures to address immediate issues affecting the supply, cost and accessibility of accommodation. In addition, the strategy will consider measures to increase security of tenure and, in particular, the potential of new mechanisms for both setting and reviewing rents. There will also be a focus on maintaining existing levels of rental stock and encouraging investment in additional supply.

The strategy will provide a vision of the role that the rental sector will play in the short, medium and long term in the context of the Government's overall objectives for the housing sector. I expect it to be finalised before the end of the year.

Some of the measures in the rental strategy will require supporting amendments to be made to the Residential Tenancies Act. However, other legislative changes are being accelerated for early enactment in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016, which commenced Second Stage in the Seanad yesterday. Tenants and landlords alike will therefore see a number of improvements in place arising from these legislative provisions.

The key challenge is to ensure the development of a viable and sustainable rental sector that can provide choice, quality, value and security for households together with secure, attractive investment opportunities for rental providers.

Building Regulations

20. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the standards in place or the guidelines provided by his Department to local authorities to ensure that all new social housing new builds funded through the Exchequer meet the highest possible energy efficiency, water efficiency and environmental sustainability standards. [35433/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): It is important that the public sector continues to show leadership in the areas of energy efficiency, water efficiency and environmental sustainability, including in the provision of social housing. My Department has published best practice

design guidelines, Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities, which promote environmental sustainability and resource efficiency in new housing, including social housing. Part L of the Building Regulations deals with the conservation of fuel & energy and applies equally to all new social housing and new private housing. In respect of dwellings, taking the energy efficiency requirements established in 2005 as the benchmark, the current requirement delivers a 60% aggregate improvement in both energy and carbon performance. A further amendment to Part L will be made by my Department over the coming months, in order to ensure that Ireland meets its 'nearly zero energy buildings' obligation under the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive by 2020.

Furthermore the Building Regulations (Part L Amendment) Regulations 2011 require that renewables are included on all new dwellings, including new social housing, which has contributed to both improving energy efficiency and environmental sustainability through reducing carbon dioxide emissions within the built environment.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

21. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will extend the eligibility under the pyrite remediation scheme in order that building condition assessments with a damage condition rating of 1 can be included; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35230/16]

28. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 63 of 5 October 2016 and 124 of 20 October 2016, if he will acknowledge the deficit in the present pyrite remediation scheme for properties with pyrite but a DCR of less than 2; and if he will initiate an immediate review of the scheme to facilitate the inclusion of these dwellings. [35487/16]

31. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will initiate an immediate review of the pyrite remediation scheme starting with a survey of those whose homes have been remediated to evaluate their experiences and improve the scheme for those accepted for remediation but also to survey those whose properties have been excluded to address the problems of gaining access to the scheme. [35486/16]

74. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of dwellings since the establishment of the pyrite remediation scheme which had a damage condition rating of 1 when their building condition assessments were first completed and which were refused under the pyrite remediation scheme that have now progressed to a damage condition rating of 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35231/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 21, 28, 31 and 74 together.

The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme by the Pyrite Resolution Board for certain dwellings affected by significant pyrite damage. The Report of the Pyrite Panel (June 2012) provided the overarching framework for the pyrite remediation scheme and its eligibility criteria are reflective of the conclusions and recommendations of that report. The independent Pyrite Panel was clear in its view that only dwellings with significant damage due to pyritic heave should be remediated and that it would be unreasonable to expect dwellings not exhibiting such damage to be remediated unless or until they exhibit

significant pyritic damage. This remains the position with regard to dwellings which do not display significant pyritic damage.

The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” and is limited in its application and scope. The scheme is applicable to dwellings which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. It is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. I have no proposals to amend this eligibility criterion or to review the scheme in this regard .

Given that the scheme does not apply to dwellings which have a Damage Condition Rating of 1, the Pyrite Resolution Board does not maintain records on the number of properties that fall into this category. Nevertheless, the Board is aware that 7 dwellings, which had a Damage Condition Rating of 1 when their building condition assessments were first completed, and which were refused under the scheme, have now progressed to a Damage Condition Rating of 2; these dwellings have now been included in the pyrite remediation scheme following the submission of new applications.

Library Services

22. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to conduct a full and independent analysis of the staffless libraries pilot scheme on which the current roll-out scheme is based. [35444/16]

79. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will ensure that the continued roll-out of the staffless library scheme will not result in staffing hours being cut. [35445/16]

83. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will reconsider the plan for opening libraries without the necessary skilled staff in view of the nationwide ballot of librarians on the issue of staffless libraries and the widespread public opposition to this plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35478/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 22, 79 and 83 together.

From the outset, I want to make it clear to the Deputies that there will be no reduction in staffing levels or staffed hours. A professional and skilled library staff is vital for a successful library service and my Department is working with local authorities to enhance staffing resources and extend staffed library hours.

‘My Open Library’ is an initiative under Opportunities for All, the national public library strategy 2013-2017 and is part of a strategy to address customer demand. To this end, My Open Library allows library members the freedom and flexibility to use the library at times that suit them. It provides additional opening hours from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days-per-week, ensuring access to library services for users who cannot avail of them during regular staffed hours.

An extended pilot phase of the ‘My Open Library’ initiative will commence in 22 branches from January 2017 and, subject to review, will be considered for wider introduction across the public library network thereafter. I am satisfied that the learning from the original pilots, which

operated in Banagher, Tullamore and Tubbercurry from November 2014, and the very positive feedback from library users, justify extending the pilot phase without the need for a further review.

Question No. 23 answered with Question No. 19.

Housing Issues

24. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the figures released by the CSO at the end of September 2016, which showed almost one fifth of new housing purchases in Dublin over the past two years were made by investment funds and REITS; his further views on the effects this will have on both the rental market and the property market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35476/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): A lack of additional housing supply coming on stream over the past decade or so in the areas of strongest demand is one of the principal root causes of our current housing crisis. Activity by institutional and professional residential sector investment specialists such as Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) in purchasing housing and engaging in the building out of part completed schemes and commencing new housing projects is a positive signal of investment beginning to flow back into the housing sector to provide the housing that people need. The acquisition and management of properties by professional Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) is one component part of a more sustainable, long-term property rental market for both investors and tenants. While commercial property investment has been a key focus for some of the REITs launched to date in Ireland, residential property also forms part of the sector's interest and exposure. It is expected that the sector will continue to develop over time and in so doing to increase the supply of professionally managed, good quality, secure and affordable rented accommodation.

Historically the private rented sector in Ireland has been largely made up of small-scale landlords, who will continue to provide the bulk of private rented accommodation. However, a more diverse sector, which includes institutional investors specialised in providing and managing larger scale residential rental projects, is more stable and less exposed to property market risk and volatility. Institutional investors can also help provide the range of tenancy options that households need across their lifecycles. Attracting large-scale investment in property has an important role to play in helping to deliver the professional high-standard rental sector that tenants deserve.

The forthcoming Rental Sector Strategy will outline more detailed proposals and policies to enhance the stability of, and supply to, the growing rental sector as a key element of a broader restructuring of the housing sector. Moreover, the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016, which commenced Second Stage in the Seanad yesterday, includes measures to prevent a future recurrence of situations where investors seek to serve tenancy termination notices on large numbers of residents in a single development in order to facilitate vacant possession and sale of the property.

Local Authority Funding

25. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of funding drawn down in each county subsequent to being

approved under measure 2 of the NTICI since June and July 2016. [35224/16]

87. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of those projects which were granted funding under measure 2 of the NTICI on which works have actually commenced onsite; and the procedures he has put in place to progress the scheme in Cork. [35225/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 25 and 87 together.

Seven local authorities were allocated funding under Measure 2 of the National Taking in Charge Initiative (NTICI). To date, all of those local authorities, with the exception of Cork County Council, have drawn down 50% of their allocated monies, amounting to a total of €892,982. A breakdown of the funding drawn down to date across the six local authorities is as follows:

| County | Amount |
|-----------|----------|
| Clare | €119,075 |
| Donegal | €312,827 |
| Galway | €45,000 |
| Kerry | €40,098 |
| Waterford | €143,000 |
| Wexford | €232,982 |
| Total | €892,982 |

Works are in progress across a range of sites in these local authorities. Updates on activity are due by the end of this month and consultation has been ongoing with all the relevant local authorities, Irish Water, the EPA and my Department.

With regard to the position regarding Cork County Council, I understand that this authority is working closely with Irish Water and is currently engaging expert technical advice to determine the best solution to address the developer-provided water services infrastructure issues that have arisen on the relevant sites.

Departmental Meetings

26. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of meetings that have taken place between his departmental officials working on the national planning framework and corresponding departmental officials in Government Departments in Northern Ireland detailing the number of meetings, the date on which they took place and the matters discussed; and if he will provide a list any future scheduled meetings of this kind. [35448/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department keeps in regular contact with the relevant Departments and agencies in Northern Ireland on planning matters. Furthermore, recognising the importance of cross-border co-operation on strategic planning and development matters, my Department, together with the former Department for Regional Development in Northern Ireland, has previously published a document entitled the Framework for Co-operation: Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland & the Republic of Ireland.

This Framework for Co-operation on Spatial Planning provides a broad context for interac-

tion between Ireland and Northern Ireland on strategic planning matters, which is now being progressed by the new Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure. In this context, officials from my Department and the corresponding Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland met in Dublin last week to review progress in both the implementation of the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland and the ongoing development of the new National Planning Framework, which is intended to be published in draft form by March 2017.

The two Departments discussed opportunities to co-ordinate and align infrastructure provision that would be of mutual interest as well as common spatial issues and priorities, including balanced regional development, regional economic development and the functional reach of settlements across administrative boundaries. Both Departments agreed on technical working and information sharing arrangements to carry forward these considerations, with further meetings to take place as required.

Question No. 27 answered with Question No. 7.

Question No. 28 answered with Question No. 21.

Private Rented Accommodation

29. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the increase in the percentage of housing owned by private landlords and the consequences for security of tenure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35423/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The rental market in Ireland has grown significantly in recent years. According to the most recent Census data available, almost one-fifth of the population lives in the rental sector and there are now over 324,000 tenancies registered with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB). In publishing the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Government has set out a practical and readily implementable set of actions to create a functioning and sustainable housing system. The Plan is available at the website www.rebuildingireland.ie.

The Plan is divided into five pillars, with each targeting a specific area of the housing system for attention.

Pillar 4 of the Plan commits to developing a comprehensive strategy for the rental sector. The strategy will be structured around 4 key areas: security, standards, supply and services. My Department has just completed a public consultation process, and has received a number of submissions from a wide range of stakeholders, which will contribute to shaping the strategy.

In developing the strategy, all key measures to promote long-term tenancies and provide for increased security of tenure will be explored. One of the specific measures that will fall to be considered under the heading of security is the scope for a move to indefinite leases, replacing the Part 4 four-year tenancy, along with measures which might encourage landlords to waive their right to terminate a tenancy in the event of the sale of the property.

Some of the measures in the rental strategy may require supporting amendments to be made to the Residential Tenancies Act. However, other legislative changes are being accelerated for early introduction in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016, the debate on which commenced in the Seanad yesterday. The Bill includes measures to prevent a future recurrence of situations where large numbers of residents in a single develop-

ment are simultaneously served with termination notices, together with other early actions to enhance the Residential Tenancies Board's (RTB) enforcement and dispute resolution powers. Tenants and landlords alike will therefore see a number of improvements on foot of this legislation .

The overarching objective of the strategy will be to increase supply and support the development of a stable, strong and viable rental sector offering true choice for households, investment opportunities for providers and reflecting the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords.

Planning Issues

30. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will examine with other Departments the wider infrastructural, transport and social needs of towns that have been assigned SDZ housing scheme status on extensive land banks in view of the demand on services and infrastructure that would arise in the designated towns from such extensive housing schemes outside of the narrow scope of the particular zoned lands. [35360/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The designation of an area as a Strategic Development Zone under Section 166 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) is a collective Government decision, taking on board observations from relevant Government Departments and the various Agencies and public bodies under their aegis. Thereafter, the relevant development agency within the meaning of Section 165 of the Act, usually the relevant local authority, is responsible for drawing up a detailed planning scheme or masterplan for the designated area.

The preparation of such a planning scheme demands extensive engagement with, and commitments from, a range of stakeholders, including relevant State Agencies and Government Departments, to ensure a reasonable degree of certainty that, within broader budgetary and fiscal considerations, the implementation of the planning scheme will be supported by a programme of delivery in relation to relevant transport, social and other infrastructural requirements.

Where the decision of the relevant local authority to adopt such a planning scheme is appealed to An Bord Pleanála, the Board independently assesses the planning scheme.

As part of the Construction 2020 Strategy, my Department reviewed broad arrangements in relation to the SDZ process and as a result, decided to progress amendments to the legislative provisions surrounding SDZs, principally concerning the review mechanisms, which ultimately were approved by the Oireachtas as part of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2015.

I am therefore satisfied that, having set a broad legislative and policy framework for the identification and implementation of SDZ designations, and having conducted a review of the arrangements involved, existing arrangements in relation to institutional and infrastructural engagement around the implementation of SDZs are sufficient. Ultimately, it is a matter for the owners of the relevant lands and/or the relevant development agency to develop implementable planning schemes, within the legislative framework set down in the Act .

Question No. 31 answered with Question No. 21.

Question No. 32 answered with Question No. 8.

Question No. 33 answered with Question No. 7.

Questions Nos. 34 and 35 answered with Question No. 19.

Emergency Accommodation Data

36. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to issue a circular to local authorities advising them on the maximum amount of time a family with children should be housed in emergency hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35466/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): 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 housing authorities. It is fully recognised that the period of time that families spend in emergency hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation should be minimised. This is reflected in the commitment in Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness that by mid-2017, hotels should only be used in limited circumstances for emergency accommodation for families. This will be achieved by meeting their housing needs through the enhanced Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and general housing allocations, and by providing new supply to be delivered through an expanded Rapid Delivery Housing Programme and a Housing Agency initiative to acquire vacant houses. My Department is working closely with housing authorities and the Housing Agency towards the achievement of these actions and initiatives. I have no plans to issue a circular to housing authorities in relation to the matter raised in the Question.

Local Authority Housing

37. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the reduction in Dublin City Council's housing stock over the past five years; and his views on whether there is a need to increase the targets for local authority construction and acquisition across the greater Dublin area. [35422/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In 2011, Dublin City Council had a social housing stock of 26,750. In September 2016, stock numbers were 25,602 units (a difference of 1,148). Over this period, complexes in Charlemont St., Ballymun, St. Teresa's Gardens, Dolphin House and O'Devaney Gardens were demolished as part of the regeneration of these complexes/areas. In addition, over the period in question, the City Council supported Approved Housing Bodies to provide an additional 991 homes for applicants from its waiting list, while also sourcing over 1,400 units under the Rental Accommodation Scheme. With the publication of Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, the Government has committed significant additional funding for social housing delivery and my Department has been working closely with all local authorities over the last number of months to support them in accelerating the delivery of social housing.

Based on the results of the Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2016, new targets will be, formally, allocated to all local authorities, beyond 2017. The Summary is well advanced and will provide updated data on the level of social housing need across all local authorities. Using this data will ensure that new social housing targets and funding are directed in line with housing need.

The funding that will be provided to all local authorities, including those in the greater Dublin region, to support the delivery of social housing will be commensurate with the targets set. It should be noted that the existing Dublin City Council target for 2015-2017 is 3,347 units and, to date, the Council has delivered in excess of 3,600 units.

Local Government Reform

38. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether town councils should be restored; his further views on whether there is sufficient local democracy and well-functioning administration in large towns here; and if he is examining proposals to implement new administrative bodies for large towns in the national planning framework strategy. [35468/16]

82. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to establish town councils for towns with a significant population and for the restoration of former town councils in general. [35233/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 38 and 82 together.

The decision to replace town authorities with a new model of municipal governance under the Local Government Reform Act 2014 was designed primarily to strengthen local government within counties and to address widely acknowledged and long-standing weaknesses and anomalies in the previous system, including divided administration between town and county authorities, for example, in relation to matters such as planning, rating and charges.

Municipal districts now cover the entire territory of each county, reflecting European norms, removing outdated boundaries and ending the anomaly of small towns having municipal status and dual representation, while some larger centres and rural areas lacked any sub-county governance. As well as creating a more rational and comprehensive structural arrangement, the new system enables more effective and community-focused decision making and implementation. Under the new arrangements, there is full integration of local authority resources across each county and elimination of duplication both in administrative and electoral terms.

More effective democratic representation and local decision making is provided by the new system in which a wide range of local functions are devolved to the elected members at district level with more strategic matters decided by the plenary county. Unlike the uneven patchwork of separate town councils with outdated boundaries which it replaced, this is a comprehensive sub-county system, with membership in common between district and county levels, rational allocation of functions between levels, and a single administrative and operational structure.

In 2015, which was the first full year of the revised local government structures, a broadly based Advisory Group was convened to carry out a review of their operation, in conjunction with a Local Government Forum for engagement with the Association of Irish Local Government. Feedback from these deliberations and the results of surveys of local authority members and chief executives, indicate that the revised structures are generally operating well but will need more time to bed down fully. The results of this operational review will provide a key input to the consideration of issues in the preparation of a report for Government and the Oireachtas by mid-2017, pursuant to the Programme for a Partnership Government, on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability and to ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy, including the issue of town or borough council status.

Initial scoping work in relation to this report is being undertaken in my Department, and will identify in greater detail the specific issues and options which will fall to be addressed and the approach to be followed in relation to consultation. Decisions will be a matter for the Government and the Oireachtas, as appropriate, following consideration of the report.

Separately, and in line with the PPG commitment, the development of the National Planning Framework is underway and will take into account all of the relevant inputs and statutory requirements. It would be inappropriate at this early stage to comment on the likely content of the Framework, until sufficient preparatory and consultative work has been undertaken.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

39. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding a small social housing scheme in Kells, which had been ready to go to tender but has been postponed; and when it will be constructed. [35232/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I refer to the reply to Question No. 59 of 5th October 2016, which sets out the position in this matter.

Question No. 40 answered with Question No. 19.

Regeneration Projects Funding

41. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the amount of money allocated under his capital budget to Limerick city and county council for regeneration projects for 2016; if that budget will be spent; if there is, as yet, an allocation for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35234/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): An allocation of €30 million was provided for the Limerick Regeneration Programme in 2016 and it is expected that this will be spent by year end. As with all allocations, funding for this programme in 2017 will be linked to delivery; while there is currently a strong programme of projects being advanced, the exact likely funding requirement for this work programme for 2017 has not yet been finalised.

Social and Affordable Housing

42. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the ongoing review of the social housing approval, procurement and tendering process committed to in action 2.11 of the action plan; and if he will respond formally to the four recommendations contained in a policy briefing paper number that his office received on 3 November 2016. [35454/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In line with the commitment in Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the processes and procedures in place for approving and advancing housing construction projects is well advanced and will be finalised over the coming weeks.

The Deputy can be assured that I and my Department are committed to working together

with local authorities and all stakeholders to accelerate the delivery of social housing and to streamline approval processes and procedures, where possible. My Department is, of course, also committed to the achievement of value for money and the delivery of high quality housing as part of sustainable communities.

In relation to the policy briefing paper, *Social Housing: Approval, Procurement and Tendering*, referred to by the Deputy and forwarded to my office by Deputy Ó Broin on 3 November 2016, the recommendations in that policy briefing paper are currently being examined by my Department.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

43. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he anticipates that the current housing needs assessment will result in an increase or decrease in the numbers on housing lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35472/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In accordance with a commitment given in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, the Summary of Social Housing Assessments will be prepared on an annual basis from 2016 onwards. Preparation of the 2016 summary is well advanced and an overall national figure of housing need will be available shortly. As part of the 2016 summary process, all local authorities are required to submit their returns electronically to a central IT system managed by the Local Government Management Agency which will then be verified by the Housing Agency and a report collating the Summary findings will be submitted to my Department.

Pending completion of the verification process and the collation of the report, it is not yet possible to indicate how the 2016 findings will compare to the results of the last summary undertaken in 2013.

Departmental Expenditure

44. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the way he proposes to ensure that the €90 million underspent allocation as of the end of October 2016 to his Department will be spent, particularly in the context of the acute shortage of houses and the growing number of homeless families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35235/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Revised Estimates Volume for Public Services 2016, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in December 2015, provided for gross capital expenditure of € 545 million in respect of my Department in 2016. Following the transfer of functions from my Department in 2016 to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, the gross capital allocation to my Department in 2016 stands at €473m. In addition, €32m is available for capital spending in my Department in 2016 following a carryover of unspent funding from 2015 giving a total available capital of €505m in 2016. Spending in respect of capital programmes in my Department in 2016 currently stands at €233m. I expect significant further expenditure to take place by end 2016; traditionally, a very significant proportion of the Department's capital spend takes place in the final months of the year when projects and initiatives come to a conclusion. If any savings emerge in the finalisation of Department spending in

2016, consideration will be given, in consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, to the appropriate use of the resources concerned.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

45. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will review the income cap for eligibility for those applying for social housing. [35227/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each housing authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy. The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. The limits also reflect a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn and thereby promote sustainable communities.

I am satisfied that the current income limits generally provide for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households unable to provide accommodation from their own resources. These limits will continue to be kept under review by my Department, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Status

46. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the Balyna group water scheme in north-west Kildare; if the scheme will go ahead, and if the scheme does not proceed, if his Department intends to refund the many households in the area that contributed financially to the scheme during the setup phase. [35356/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department engaged with Kildare County Council on costs associated with the Ballyna Group Water Scheme in 2015. Kildare County Council did not include this scheme in its bid for funding under the Multi-Annual Rural Water Programme 2016-2018. I understand that proposals for the Ballyna Group Water Scheme are dependent upon related investment in major public water supply infrastructure by Irish Water. 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. Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

House Purchase Schemes

47. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will review and amend the criteria of the local authority house purchase scheme to accommodate the financial support that families wish to give their parents who are council tenants in the purchase of their homes from the local authority; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [35358/16]

75. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will review the income criteria for the local authority house purchase scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35359/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 47 and 75 together.

The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme.

Under the Scheme, the tenant pays the market value of the house less a discount. It is the responsibility of the tenant to raise the finance to purchase the house. A tenant may fund the purchase money for a house from a mortgage loan and/or their own resources which may include funds provided by family members.

To be eligible for this Scheme, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum. This is in order to ensure that they are in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the Scheme is determined by the relevant housing authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the 2014 Act. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, housing authorities can include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income. The only income that can be included is the income of the tenants of the house.

In line with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government and reaffirmed in Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, it is intended that a review of the Scheme will be undertaken in January 2017 following the first 12 months of operation. Any changes to the terms and conditions of the scheme which are considered necessary based on the evidence gathered at that stage will be brought forward.

NAMA Assets Sale

48. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the advertisement of NAMA rental properties for sale on the basis of the potential for large rent increases and reports that a bank (details supplied) intends to sell off up to €1.9 billion in distressed buy-to-let mortgages to vulture funds, in view of the impact this could have on tenants; and if he has raised cross cutting issues that affect housing such as this with the Minister for Finance, including at the Cabinet sub committee on housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35429/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Residential Tenancies Act 2004, as amended by the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015, regulates the landlord-tenant relationship in the private rented sector and sets out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants.

The Residential Tenancies Act provides that rents may not be greater than the open market rate and may only be reviewed upward or downward every 24 months unless there has been a substantial change in the nature of the accommodation that warrants a review. Tenants must be given 90 days' notice of new rent and can make an application for dispute resolution to the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) where they feel the rent increase is in excess of the market rent. These provisions have effect notwithstanding any provision to the contrary in a lease or tenancy agreement and where a property is sold subject to an existing tenancy, the tenant retains their rights under the Act.

While the circumstances of each case may vary depending on the terms of the mortgage or charge under which a receiver is appointed, the appointment of a receiver cannot affect the statutory or contractual rights of tenants under the Act.

Pillar 4 of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, commits to developing a comprehensive strategy for the rental sector in Q4 2016. The strategy will lay out measures to address immediate issues affecting the supply, cost and accessibility of accommodation. In particular, the strategy will consider measures to increase security of tenure and in relation to rents; there will also be a focus on maintaining existing levels of rental stock and encouraging investment in additional supply. The strategy will provide a vision of the role that the rental sector will play in the short, medium and long term, in the context of the Government's overall objectives for the housing sector.

Some of the measures in the rental strategy will require supporting amendments to be made to the Residential Tenancies Act. However, other legislative changes are being accelerated for early enactment in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016 which commenced Second Stage in the Seanad yesterday. The Bill includes measures to prevent a future recurrence of situations where large numbers of residents in a single development are simultaneously served with termination notices to facilitate vacant possession and sale of the property. These are accompanied by a number of other early actions to enhance the Residential Tenancies Board's (RTB) enforcement and dispute resolution powers. Tenants and landlords alike will therefore see a number of improvements as a result of these legislative changes.

The Cabinet Committee on Housing, chaired by An Taoiseach, is overseeing the implementation of all actions under Rebuilding Ireland, including the development of the rental strategy, and it meets regularly to review progress. Cross-cutting issues which affect the housing market and the rental market are considered by this Committee, of which the Minister for Finance is also a member.

The overarching objective of the strategy will be to retain existing rental stock in the sector, increase supply and support the development of a stable, strong and viable rental sector offering true choice for households, investment opportunities for providers and reflecting the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

49. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to conduct a review of the social inclusion and community activation programme in advance of the second round of tenders in 2017. [35447/16]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Catherine Byrne): My Department has responsibility for the Social Inclu-

sion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2015-2017, the aim of which is to reduce poverty, promote social inclusion and equality through local, regional and national engagement and collaboration. The programme aims to improve the life chances and opportunities of those who are marginalised in society, living in poverty or in unemployment, through community development approaches, targeted supports and interagency collaboration.

SICAP's target groups are children and families from disadvantaged areas, lone parents, new communities (including refugees and asylum seekers), people living in disadvantaged communities, people with disabilities, Roma, the unemployed (including those not on the Live Register), low income workers/households, Travellers, young unemployed people from disadvantaged areas and young people (aged 15-24) who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

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, the current Programme was subject to a public procurement process which was open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that could provide the services to deliver the new Programme. SICAP is delivered locally by the successful tenderers, called Programme Implementers, who operate under the terms of a Funding Agreement with the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in each Local Authority area.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) has undertaken a public consultation on commissioning human, social and community services, to which my Department has contributed. It is expected that, inter alia, the results arising from the consultation process, together with the DPER Public Spending Code and legal requirements, will determine the nature of the commissioning process used for the next programme.

The new Programme will also be influenced by the results of a series of SICAP evaluations planned. These include a DPER Value for Money Policy Review (VFMPR) of the Programme scheduled to commence during 2017, and an in-depth evaluation of the programme by my Department in collaboration with Pobal and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). The Programme is also subject to evaluation by reason of its receipt of co-funding under the European Social Fund Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020. The results of these evaluations, as well as my Department's consultations with relevant stakeholders, over the coming months, will also help inform the shape of the next programme.

Local and Community Development Programme Planning

50. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he is satisfied that the process by which local area plans are devised is fit for purpose in view of the fact that expectations can often be raised that zoning will translate to actual land uses, for example, amenity or educational, in view of the fact that a coincidence of zoning, ownership and intention is necessary in reality to achieve the desired outcome. [35357/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): There is a comprehensive process for the preparation and adoption of Local Area Plans (LAPs) which is set out in Sections 18, 19 and 20 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). This process provides for extensive public and stakeholder consultation with the adoption of any LAP being a reserved function of the elected members of the relevant local authority. To assist the local authority elected members and executives, the public and

wider stakeholders in the LAP making process, my Department prepared and issued Local Area Plans Guidelines for Planning Authorities in June 2013 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). These statutory guidelines include practical advice on all aspects relating to the preparation and adoption of LAPs, including the phasing of development and engagement around the provision of necessary social and community infrastructure, which needs to be realistic and taking account of the likely availability of funding for such infrastructure, mindful of the broader budgetary and fiscal position of the relevant sponsoring agencies, whether they be the relevant local authority or relevant Government Departments and agencies.

Furthermore, with respect to particular matters relating to the provision of educational facilities, my Department also issued statutory guidelines in 2008 on the Provision of Schools and the Planning System which is being implemented under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Education and Skills and the local government system, in respect of identification and acquisition of sites for new schools.

Specifically with respect to the provision of infrastructure, the LAP Guidelines strongly recommend planning authorities use the powers available to them under Section 20 (1) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) to ascertain the views of different infrastructure providers, land owners and developers with particular regard to how future development and infrastructure provision, such as local transport, schools, amenities and water services, might be effectively phased and integrated.

The Guidelines also stress that the results of such statutory engagement with infrastructure providers is a leading influence, in an iterative manner, on the plan - making process, with the practical effect that statutory plans should avoid identifying areas for development where the relevant physical or social infrastructure provider has clearly indicated that investment in essential supporting infrastructure is unlikely to be provided within the lifetime of the plan.

While keeping the matter under general review, I am satisfied that, in view of the extensive legislative underpinning for LAP and the relatively recent statutory guidance on the matter, the processes for devising and implementing statutory LAPs continue to be fit for purpose.

Questions Nos. 51 to 53, inclusive, answered with Question No. 19.

River Basin Management Plans

54. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of his Department's work in preparing the second river basin management plan; and if he plans the plan will be ready to submit to European Commission in quarter one of 2017. [35435/16]

161. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the progress on the development of second cycle river basin management plan; if consideration will be given to the Neagh Bann river basin plan which crosses the border counties in view of Brexit; if these plans will be in place by the end of 2017 as promised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35610/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54 and 161 together.

The Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy) establishes a common framework for the protection of inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater.

The overall aim of the Directive is to maintain high and good status waters where they exist and to restore waters that do not currently adequately support aquatic ecosystems. River basin management planning, structured in six -year cycles, is the tool prescribed by the Directive for achieving these aims.

The second-cycle River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) for the period up to 2021 is in preparation at the moment, and the draft Plan is scheduled to be published in the coming months. A six-month public consultation process will take place in the first half of 2017, and the finalised second-cycle RBMP is due for completion by the end of 2017. Once finalised, the second-cycle RBMP will be submitted to the European Commission within three months of its publication.

There is ongoing north-south cooperation on implementation of the Water Framework Directive. In the context of the development of the second cycle RBMP for Ireland, it is intended that there will be a single national River Basin District (RBD) resulting from a merger of the Eastern, South Eastern, South Western, Western and Shannon River Basin Districts that had been provided for in the first cycle RBMP. In addition, a single administrative area will be established for the purpose of coordinating water management with authorities in Northern Ireland for both the North Western and Neagh Bann International RBDs.

Housing Provision

55. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the latest pillar of the Rebuilding Ireland action plan, that is housing supply; the way it will address the housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35430/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Pillar 3 – Build More Homes – of the Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness seeks to accelerate the increase in the supply of housing in order to overcome the current supply shortfall and increase annual output to over 25,000 new homes by 2021 or earlier if possible. Annual housing output for 2015 was 12,600 homes, meaning that housing supply must be effectively doubled during the lifetime of the Action Plan. A number of actions are already being progressed by my Department in conjunction with other Departments and Agencies, local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies and the construction industry. Last week, I announced details of 23 Major Urban Housing Development Sites with the potential to deliver up to 30,000 additional homes on existing zoned lands and close to the key areas of demand over the next 3-4 years. These sites will be highlighted as exemplars for the co-ordination and delivery of plan-led housing development and active land management.

In order to quickly get these and other key sites moving, a €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) has been established. Twenty-one local authorities, working in conjunction with housing providers, including private developers, home builders and Approved Housing Bodies, have now submitted proposals for funding which are currently being evaluated. Successful bid proposals will be announced before the end of 2016.

Separately, the NTMA and ISIF are currently exploring opportunities to support the delivery of housing-related on-site enabling infrastructure in large-scale priority development areas, with a view to kickstarting the development process.

The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016 was published earlier this month and is a legislative priority during the current term. The Bill provides

for streamlining the planning process in a number of ways, including by facilitating (for a limited time-period) planning applications for large-scale (100 or more units) housing developments and student accommodation developments units (200+ units) to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála.

The combined effect of these and other actions under Pillar 3 of the Action Plan will help reduce costs and deliver more housing at affordable prices where it is most urgently needed.

Social and Affordable Housing

56. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to expand on affordable and co-op housing schemes such as a scheme (details supplied) which recently committed to provide a fully integrated, mixed income, affordable, co-operative housing. [35464/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I understand that O’Cualann Co-housing Alliance was one of twenty-five bodies that made a submission to the Social Housing Proposals Clearing House Group in 2015. The Group reported in November 2015, and arising from its work, measures are being developed with a view to better facilitating private investment into social housing. My Department already has a range of funding programmes that support Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to build or acquire properties for social housing use. For example, the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) operated through my Department currently provides a means whereby properties can be built or bought by AHBs, with the use of private funding, and leased through AHBs and local authorities, for the provision of social housing. This scheme is underpinned by a lease and other legal agreements which provide that rental payments are made by the State over an agreed long-term time period, typically 20 years, in return for which the housing unit is made available for social housing.

The Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) provides funding to AHBs for the provision of accommodation for persons with specific categories of housing needs such as homeless and older people, people with disabilities, returning emigrants and victims of domestic violence.

If an AHB is interested in making use of one of these funding programmes, I would advise them to contact the relevant local authority to discuss how best they can work together and access the relevant funding.

Irish Water Remit

57. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to amend current legislation in order that Irish Water would be responsible for problems pertaining to waste water services which occur on the property of persons connected to the public supply and in doing so ensure that members of Irish Water would enter these properties and alleviate the situation in these pipe networks. [35361/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): 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. Irish Water is responsible for water services infrastructure including water supply pipes or sewers extending from a waterworks or waste water works to the curtilage of a private property.

Under sections 43 and 54 of the Water Services Act 2007, responsibility for maintenance and replacement of any water or wastewater pipes, connections or distribution systems which are located within the boundary of a private property rests with the owner. This was the position that pertained prior to the establishment of Irish Water when individual local authorities held responsibility for public water services and infrastructure.

While the legal position is set out in the 2007 Act, my Department continues to engage with Irish Water in order to set out clearly the responsibilities of Irish Water and property owners in relation to water supply and wastewater infrastructure.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 19.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

59. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the up-to-date number of households and the number of persons on the Galway City Council and Galway County Council waiting list; if he will provide a breakdown of the list in terms of unit size, for the longest waiting time for each list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35473/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Details on the number of households on waiting lists in each housing authority area are provided in the statutory Summary of Social Housing Assessments. The most recent figures available are the results of the 2013 summary and these can be accessed on my Department's website at the following link:

www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownload,34857,en.pdf.

The 2013 results show that there were 2, 471 and 2, 099 households on the Galway City Council and Galway County Council waiting lists, respectively. The results are broken down across a range of categories, including by household size and the length of time spent by households on housing lists.

In accordance with a commitment given in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, the summary will be prepared on an annual basis from 2016 onwards. Preparation of the 2016 summary, which will provide up to date figures of national housing need, is well advanced and will be available shortly.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 19.

Planning Issues

61. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if will he publish the full data report on planning permissions for 2016 as referenced in the Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Committee on 12 October 2016. [35462/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The data referred to by the Deputy have been published on my Department's website and are available on the following link: http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/housing_statistics_planning_timelines_2016_for_joint_oireachtas_committee.xlsx.

Building Regulations

62. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he plans to revise the SI 9 Building Control Regulations for multi-unit dwellings; his views on whether the self regulatory assigned certifier system is the safest and most cost effective building control system. [35467/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): A review of the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 9 of 2014), following its first 12 months in operation, was announced on 2 April 2015. While the review examined the impact of S.I. No. 9 of 2014 on single dwellings and domestic extensions, it was not restricted nor confined to those specific issues; it constituted a full review of the operation of the regulations, which was open to all construction professionals, industry stakeholders, local authorities and other interested parties. The scope and objectives of the review were as follows:

(a) To review the operation of S.I. No. 9 of 2014 in consultation with industry and local authority stakeholders and members of the public;

(b) To consider in particular the impact of S.I. No. 9 of 2014 on single dwellings and extensions to existing dwellings having regard to specific concerns which have been raised in relation to the cost burden of the regulations and the level of certification required for this sector;

(c) To consider more generally the impact of S.I. No. 9 of 2014 on owners, occupiers and users of buildings have regard to the statutory purposes for which building regulations may be made (i.e. public safety, accessibility, energy efficiency, efficient use of resources and good building practice);

(d) To make recommendations that will strengthen and improve the arrangements in place for the control of building activity in keeping with the principles of good and fair administration; and

(e) To report with recommendations to the Minister of State as soon as possible, but in any event no later than 30 June 2015.

A total of 171 submissions were received from private individuals, industry stakeholders and local authorities during the public consultation process. All submissions received were reviewed by my Department and a report on the consultation process was published on my Department's website on 31 July 2015 and remains available at:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/BuildingStandards/FileDownload,42398,en.pdf>

No specific issues were raised during the consultation process in relation to the impact of S.I. No. 9 of 2014 on multi-unit developments.

I am confident that the key reforms introduced by the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 and complemented by the Building Control Management System (BCMS) represent a reasonable, cost effective and appropriate response to the many building failures that occurred in the past decade and will lead to improved quality within the construction sector in the future.

Water Abstraction Regulation

63. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the Water Framework Directive places an obligation on the State to introduce a water abstraction licensing scheme; if so, when he plans to introduce it; the details of the scheme; and if large commercial businesses that extract large volumes of water will be included. [35436/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Water Framework Directive requires that abstractions of surface water or ground water which are likely to have a significant effect on water status must be regulated. My Department is currently examining how best to address this requirement in a proportionate and efficient way.

While no decisions will be made on any proposals in this regard until thorough public consultation is undertaken, I expect that a proportionate abstraction control regime can be developed that would effectively manage abstraction risks and pressures without imposing an unnecessary regulatory burden. Recognising the relatively low abstraction pressures in Ireland, the scale and extent of which will be set out in a draft River Basin Management Plan I expect to publish for public consultation in the coming months, it is expected that such a regime would focus on the most significant abstraction volumes and pressures, recognising that the Directive does not require the registration and licensing of private wells serving individual domestic dwellings.

Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 9.

Presidential Elections

65. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide an outline of explorations into the provision of voting rights for Irish emigrants in the presidential election; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30270/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Convention on the Constitution, in its Fifth Report, recommended that voting rights be extended in presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State. The Government considered the Convention report in February 2015 and decided that it would be necessary to analyse the full range of legal, practical and policy issues arising before any decision could be made on the holding of a referendum on the matter. The estimated costs arising would also need to be fully analysed and considered. The Government asked the then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, in co-operation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Minister of State with responsibility for diaspora affairs, to analyse these issues and to report back to the Government in due course.

A range of complex and interrelated issues are being examined as part of the analysis being undertaken. For example, the potentially very high number of citizens outside the State is an important consideration. Questions arise as to whether voting rights should be extended to all citizens resident outside the State or to particular categories of citizens such as passport holders, those born in Ireland or those who have lived outside the State for a limited period. The registration of voters who are resident outside the State and the way in which they would be enabled to vote are other important matters that need to be considered. This work is ongoing in my Department with a view to its completion as soon as possible.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

66. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the first bundle of social housing PPPs consisting of 677 homes and announced in October 2015 will commence; if he has had meetings with the NTMA to ensure a speedy delivery of these projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35236/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Social Housing Strategy 2020 provided for an investment with a capital value of €300 million in social housing through the public private partnership or PPP model. In total, the programme is expected to deliver 1,500 social housing units. The delivery of social housing through PPP is part of the plan to accelerate the supply of social housing, which is the second pillar of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing & Homelessness, launched in July 2016.

To enable delivery to commence as quickly as possible, the PPP programme is being rolled-out in three bundles. The first bundle, comprising six PPP sites which are to provide over 500 units in the greater Dublin area, was announced in October 2015. The social housing is being developed at these sites in co-operation with the local authorities in each area. Two of the sites are located in Dublin City with one each in South Dublin, Kildare, Wicklow and Louth.

The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), which operates under the auspices of the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), is acting as the procuring authority on behalf of my Department and the relevant local authorities. Dublin City Council has been appointed to act as the lead local authority for the delivery of the social housing PPP Programme in respect of this first project bundle.

These PPP projects are expected to take an estimated 37-48 months to deliver, in total. The design team for the first bundle of sites was appointed in August 2016 and the site appraisal and design development works are currently being undertaken. It is envisaged that a planning application, which will be subject to the relevant public consultation provisions, will be submitted for the sites in early 2017. Progress on the project to date is in line with the estimated delivery timescales. My Department maintains ongoing contact with the NDFA and with Dublin City Council in overseeing the delivery of the project.

Water Charges

67. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the contingency plans, in place to provide Irish Water with an additional €58 million in the event that the Oireachtas votes to abolish water charges in 2017. [35459/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): An Expert Commission has been established to make recommendations for the sustainable long-term funding model for the delivery of domestic water and wastewater services by Irish Water. The Commission will report to a Special Oireachtas Committee and consideration of recommendations on the funding model will ultimately be voted upon by the Oireachtas next year. Pending the outcome of the Expert Commission on the funding of domestic water services and the consideration of the Commission's report by the Oireachtas, it is not possible to determine what financial implications may arise for Irish Water post March 2017; the financial implications arising from the suspension of water charges up to March 2017 have already been addressed by the Government.

On 30 September 2016, the CER published its consultation on the level of Irish Water's allowed revenue, including proposals on operational and capital budgets, for the 2017 and 2018 period with a view to a final decision being made by the CER by end 2016. A copy of the CER's consultation paper is available on its website, www.cer.ie.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

68. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the engagements he or his officials have had with housing officials in South Dublin County Council in recent months regarding the provision of additional emergency accommodation in that council's administrative area. [35452/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the provision of homeless services, including accommodation, on a regional basis. The four Dublin housing authorities have agreed that Dublin City Council acts as the lead local authority with regard to the provision and oversight of homeless services in the Dublin Region and the Dublin Region Homeless Executive carries out these functions under a shared service agreement with the authorities. Accordingly, my Department liaises primarily with the Dublin Region Homeless Executive in relation to funding and service needs across the Dublin Region, and such liaison occurs on an on-going basis.

In addition, my Department also engages with all four Dublin authorities directly on a range of social housing and homelessness issues as necessary and, in that context, is continuing to engage with the authorities to explore a range of homeless accommodation options in the Dublin region.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

69. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total number of new social housing units currently under construction; the location of these units; and the target date for when these units will be tenanted. [35451/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In May 2015, the first major direct build social housing programme for some years was announced with over 100 separate housing projects. This was followed up by further approvals and announcements in July 2015 and January 2016. These three major announcements saw almost €680 million allocated for over 3,900 new social housing units, mainly via new construction projects and also including turnkey developments and acquisitions. Details are available on my Department's website at the following links:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,41340,en.htm>.

<http://www.environ.ie/en/DevelopmentHousing/Housing/News/MainBody,42225,en.htm>.

<http://www.environ.ie/housing/social-housing/ministers-kelly-coffey-announce-further-1000-social-housing-units>.

These projects created a pipeline of new social housing construction projects that had not existed for many years, during which period the role of local authorities in delivering social housing had diminished. Since those announcements, I have continued to approve further construction schemes with an additional 1,100 units of accommodation, worth in excess of €200

million, added to the pipeline.

All of these projects are now at various stages of advancement, ranging from planning and development work by local authorities, across to projects that are on site. I am keen that they are all advanced as quickly as possible and I have assured the local authorities that funding is available to fully support their efforts in this regard.

Overall, our efforts to significantly ramp up social housing construction nationally are taking effect. In 2015, just 74 units were constructed by local authorities, while there are currently in excess of 1,200 units started on site, listed by local authority area, with further projects commencing construction on an ongoing basis.

| Local Authority | Units under construction through local authority direct build, including Rapid Build, regeneration areas and units being constructed by AHBs under the Capital Assistance Scheme and the Capital Advance Leasing Facility |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Carlow County Council | 52 |
| Cavan County Council | 0 |
| Clare County Council | 3 |
| Cork City Council | 37 |
| Cork County Council | 19 |
| DLR County Council | 130 |
| Donegal County Council | 11 |
| Dublin City Council | 604 |
| Fingal County Council | 9 |
| Galway City Council | 0 |
| Galway County Council | 0 |
| Kerry County Council | 6 |
| Kildare County Council | 0 |
| Kilkenny County Council | 50 |
| Laois County Council | 33 |
| Leitrim County Council | 0 |
| Limerick City and County | 137 |
| Longford County Council | 0 |
| Louth County Council | 15 |
| Mayo County Council | 28 |
| Meath County Council | 39 |
| Monaghan County Council | 7 |
| Offaly County Council | 0 |
| Roscommon County Council | 0 |
| Sligo County Council | 22 |
| South Dublin County Council | 10 |
| Tipperary County Council | 0 |
| Waterford City and County | 15 |
| Westmeath County Council | 0 |
| Wexford County Council | 25 |
| Wicklow County Council | 0 |

In addition, over 700 further social housing units are currently under construction by developers for delivery to local authorities and approved housing bodies as turnkeys when com-

pleted, while local authorities and AHBs are also undertaking significant programmes of acquisitions and remediating vacant units for immediate use.

On completion of these units through whatever delivery means, their final tenanting is then a matter for the local authorities directly. However, I am keen that in all cases there should be no undue delay between the completion of units and their tenanting by the local authorities.

Wind Energy Guidelines

70. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to publish updated wind turbine guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32062/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In December 2013, my Department published proposed “draft” revisions to the noise, setback distance and shadow flicker aspects of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. These draft revisions proposed: - the setting of a more stringent day-and night-time noise limit of 40 decibels for future wind energy developments,

- a mandatory minimum setback distance of 500 metres between a wind turbine and the nearest dwelling for amenity considerations, and

- the complete elimination of shadow flicker between wind turbines and neighbouring dwellings.

A public consultation process was also initiated on these proposed draft revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines, which ran until 21 February 2014. My Department received submissions from 7,500 organisations and members of the public during this public consultation process.

As outlined in the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Government is committed to finalising the revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines within the first six months of coming into office. The revisions to the Guidelines will be informed by the public consultation process and by best international practice. My Department is continuing to advance work on the Guidelines, in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, in order to bring the matter to a conclusion as early as possible.

The revisions to the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines, when finalised, will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála are required to have regard to such guidelines, issued under Section 28, in the performance of their functions under the Planning Acts.

Housing Provision

71. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the percentage of the 2016 capital allocation for new builds and house purchases that was expended in the first nine months of 2016; and if he will provide a breakdown per local authority of spending. [35226/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Total funding of €933 million has been made available in 2016 for the provision of housing. This includes a capital provision of €180.12 million to support the provision of lo-

cal authority housing through a programme of construction and acquisitions. To date in 2016, €137 million has been expended under the local authority programme, representing 76% of the 2016 allocation. Details of expenditure to date under the local authority capital programme by individual authority are given in the table.

The expenditure to date figure of €137 million includes a sum of €1.039 million for the procurement of housing for local authorities by the Housing Agency. As is normal with capital programmes, I anticipate a continued high level of spend in the remaining weeks to year end.

| Local Authority | Local Authority Capital Programme Expenditure to date in 2016€ |
|---------------------------|--|
| Carlow | €1,126,796 |
| Cavan | €1,303,754 |
| Clare | €2,668,864 |
| Cork County | €10,993,534 |
| Cork City | €4,706,226 |
| Donegal | €1,409,078 |
| Dublin City | €34,771,469 |
| Dun Laoghaire Rathdown | €4,364,688 |
| Fingal | €1,499,670 |
| Galway County | €1,089,581 |
| Galway City | €475,000 |
| Kerry | €1,654,592 |
| Kildare | €16,399,128 |
| Kilkenny | €4,304,870 |
| Laois | €1,382,085 |
| Leitrim | €447,615 |
| Limerick City and County | €227,043 |
| Longford | €496,881 |
| Louth | €5,617,903 |
| Mayo | €2,201,746 |
| Meath | €5,684,037 |
| Monaghan | €1,316,578 |
| Offaly | €41,188 |
| Roscommon | €890,695 |
| Sligo | €1,704,410 |
| South Dublin | €9,737,281 |
| Tipperary | €5,601,699 |
| Waterford City and County | €4,910,789 |
| Westmeath | €3,030,175 |
| Wexford | €5,396,426 |
| Wicklow | 0 |

Pension Levy

72. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his current position in relation to PRD reductions applying to local authority

workers who are also employed as retained firefighters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30938/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): In 2008, retained fire-fighters were given the option of joining the Local Government Superannuation Scheme (LGSS) and receive a pension and retirement lump sum based on their pensionable remuneration and length of service. Retained fire-fighters who opted not to join the scheme receive, on retirement, a gratuity of 1/8th of the annual retainer multiplied by the number of years of actual service (up to a maximum of four times the annual retainer). All retained fire-fighters appointed after 1 January 2013 must join the Single Public Service Pension Scheme.

The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 states that any public servant who is a member of a public service pension scheme, is entitled to a benefit under such a scheme, or receives a payment in lieu of membership of such a scheme, is subject to Pension Related Deduction (PRD) from their remuneration. Additional pension benefits do not arise as a result of this deduction.

In the case of a local authority worker who is also a member of the Local Government Superannuation Scheme, PRD contributions are payable in respect of the pay applicable to that employment also, on the basis that such a person qualifies for the payment of a pension and lump sum as a member of the LGSS.

The payment of the retirement gratuity to retained firefighters who are not members of the LGSS is a payment in lieu of membership of a pension scheme and, as such, all retained fire-fighters, whether members of a public service pension scheme or not, are subject to the deduction outlined in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009. Responsibility for this legislation rests with my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Local Authority Housing Provision

73. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the contacts he has had with the Minister for Justice and Equality, relevant Department officials and local authority housing managers to discuss the difficulties faced by the 500 people who are currently in direct provision despite having refugee status; and if he will consider providing these persons with additional supports to help them find housing. [35453/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, the issue of direct provision is a matter for my colleague, the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality. My Department has, however, been working closely with that Department on housing issues arising in the context of refugees. An operational sub-group under the auspices of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme Taskforce, composed of all relevant Departments of State and other bodies, such as representatives of local authorities and the Irish Red Cross, is currently being established to support the process of housing these refugees. This sub-group will be co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality.

Arrangements are being advanced at local authority level to support the housing of these refugees, including through the Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP), and a range of other supports to facilitate the integration of individuals into their new communities.

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 21.

Question No. 75 answered with Question No. 47.

Building Regulations Compliance

76. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of his Department's ongoing engagements with Dublin City Council residents and other interested parties in Longboat Quay Dublin; and the steps being taken by the relevant authorities to deal with the outstanding building regulations and fire compliance issues at that site. [35443/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The specific matters in relation to the Longboat Quay development are currently before the Courts and, as a consequence, are *sub judice*. In the circumstances, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the matter at this time. In response to the many building failures that have emerged over the past decade, my Department introduced the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014, which provide for greater accountability in relation to compliance with Building Regulations in the form of statutory certification of design, lodgement of compliance documentation, mandatory inspections during construction and validation and registration of certificates.

Part B of the Building Regulations 1997 (as amended), sets out the legal requirements in relation to fire safety in respect of new buildings and in respect of existing buildings undergoing works involving an extension, material alteration or a material change of use. The requirements under Part B represent the national statutory minimum standards of fire safety provision applicable to the construction of new buildings and dwellings.

The Building Regulations are subject to continuous review and improvement in the light of technical progress, changes in standards and construction practices as well as developments within the construction industry. In this context, a review of Part B of the Building Regulations is now at an advanced stage; a public consultation in the matter has recently closed and my Department is currently reviewing the responses received.

Regeneration Projects

77. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the working group of officials comprising senior representatives from his Department, local authorities and other relevant actors to bring forward proposals for new urban regeneration measures chaired by a Minister of State (details supplied) have decided on a list of proposals or a course of action for urban regeneration; the part that public or private partnerships will play in those proposals; and the time frame for same. [35465/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Programme for a Partnership Government, published in May 2016, sets out the ambitious priority attached to urban regeneration by the Government, incorporating a series of specific actions, aimed at facilitating the regeneration of our urban centres, many of which have been adversely impacted by our recent economic difficulties. The Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland, published in July 2016, further reinforces the Government's commitment to the area of urban regeneration.

In this context, a Working Group, which I chair and which comprises senior representa-

tives from my Department, local authorities and other relevant bodies, has been established and will bring forward proposals for new urban regeneration measures as early as possible. It is intended that the new measures will complement the existing regeneration programme under my own Department's Social Housing Capital Programme, as well as other social regeneration initiatives already under way.

The Working Group will seek to deliver a new urban renewal scheme to regenerate central urban areas in our cities and towns, which will address urban decay and associated issues relating to social housing, poverty, segregation, unemployment, crime, anti-social behaviour, etc. The Group aims to bring forward proposals for consideration by the end of the year.

In the context of the priority being attached to urban regeneration by the current Government, I will be aiming to identify scope for increased funding for a range of measures that will address deep-rooted disadvantage, while simultaneously developing an approach to urban regeneration that empowers people to work together to improve their communities, to reduce poverty, disadvantage and inequality. It is intended that these new measures will also include strengthening the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) as well as re-activating funding to areas covered by the RAPID (Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment and Development) Programme through the local authorities.

Having held its inaugural meeting in mid-June, the Working Group has met on three occasions and is due to meet again in the coming weeks to consider emerging proposals.

Housing Provision

78. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which he has liaised with the various local authorities to determine the progress to date in achieving or exceeding the targets identified in his Rebuilding Ireland action programme with particular reference to the local authorities in the greater Dublin area in County Kildare; if, in view of the ever increasing demand for local authority houses he may find it necessary to broaden the scope and scale of the programme to include; the reintroduction of accessible local authority house building loans, the development of private service sites on which applicants of an appropriate income level may build their own homes and where possible the facilitation of those in rural areas with access to their own sites who may also be in a position to provide their own houses, thereby maximising the opportunities in the housing area with obvious social and economic benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35420/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department is liaising on an ongoing basis with the various local authorities, including Kildare County Council and the other councils in the greater Dublin area, in relation to progress in delivering on the targets identified in Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. There is already a strong pipeline of new social housing delivery projects in place nationally, involving both local authorities and approved housing bodies and that pipeline is being added to through the enhanced targets under Rebuilding Ireland. My Department will remain engaged with all local authorities to support the increased and accelerated delivery of social housing.

In regard to assisting people with building/purchasing their own homes, a standard annuity mortgage is available from local authorities targeted at lower income first time buyers. The loan can be up to 97% of the price of the house subject to a maximum loan of €200,000. A local authority mortgage is an annuity mortgage with variable interest rates so repayments can go up

and down in line with interest rate changes. The Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012 (S.I. No. 408 of 2012) prescribe in detail the terms and conditions applicable to local authority housing loans. Key eligibility criteria provide that a loan applicant must be a first time buyer and must be able to show their local authority that they cannot get a loan from a bank or building society. Also, the gross income (before tax) of a single income household in the previous year must be €50,000 or less and the combined gross income (before tax) of a two - income household in the previous year must be €75,000 or less.

Another option is the Home Choice Loan, a Government backed mortgage for First Time Buyers. First time buyers can apply for a Home Choice Loan to purchase a new or second hand property or build their own home. Home Choice Loan provides up to 92% of the market value of a property purchased. The maximum loan amount is €285,000. The loan is a normal capital and interest bearing mortgage which is repaid on a monthly basis. Home Choice Loan offers one variable interest rate. The rate is currently set at 3.25% variable, APR 3.30%. Further information is available at www.homechoiceloan.ie.

Serviced sites initiatives have been successful in the past in enabling people with the means to build their own homes, but without access to a suitable site, to meet their housing requirement while also contributing to urban and village rejuvenation. Actions 5.12 and 5.13 of Rebuilding Ireland are aimed at ensuring that a range of demonstration projects and brown field development opportunities are progressed by local authorities as part of their public housing building programmes. The potential of a serviced site programme will be considered in the context of the progression of these actions in tandem with wider land supply actions, such as the commitment set out in Action 3.5 to prepare a National Land Supply Management Strategy.

Question No. 79 answered with Question No. 22.

Housing Assistance Payments Data

80. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the progress of the housing assistance payment scheme, HAP, across each local authority; his views on whether it is on target to reach the numbers planned in Rebuilding Ireland; his further views on whether this scheme faces more challenges in areas of the country where rents are particularly high; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35481/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is a key Government priority and the accelerated roll-out of the scheme on a national basis is an important early action for completion in Rebuilding Ireland: An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. HAP is now available to all qualified households in 19 local authority areas, with over 14,900 households currently being supported by the scheme and around 10,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to those households. A breakdown of the number of households supported by HAP in each local authority area at the end of September 2016 is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Rebuilding Ireland commits to accelerating the roll out of the HAP scheme to nine further local authorities by the end of 2016 and the remaining three Dublin local authorities by the end of March 2017, completing the national roll-out of the scheme. An intensive programme of training for Cavan, Kerry, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath, Wexford and Wicklow County Councils is currently ongoing in preparation for the proposed introduction of

the scheme in these areas from 1 December 2016, subject to the necessary regulations being in place.

The full roll-out of the scheme will be completed by March 2017, with the introduction of HAP to the administrative areas of Dublin City Council, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown and Fingal County Council. A multi-agency HAP Implementation Dublin Working Group has been established to advise and prepare for the introduction of the scheme to the Dublin region based on experience of the roll-out to date, and the particular pressures and characteristics of the rental market in Dublin.

Rebuilding Ireland also commits that an additional 12,000 households will be supported by HAP in 2016, and a further 15,000 new households in 2017. Reflecting on the current average weekly rate of new households being supported by the scheme (350 per week over the last three weeks, and 230 per week for the year to date), I am confident that the 2016 target will be met.

The Action Plan makes a specific commitment that as part of the accelerated delivery of the scheme, the housing needs of 1,750 homeless households will be met through the Homelessness Pilot of the HAP scheme over 2016 and 2017. As of 14 November 2016 a total of 594 tenancies had been set up under the pilot scheme this year, exceeding the Rebuilding Ireland target of 550 homeless households to be supported by the scheme in 2016.

While the level of supply in the rental market is challenging, HAP continues to offer many families stable and supported social housing. The recent increases to maximum rent limits underpinning the HAP scheme, together with the additional flexibility provided to local authorities in operating the scheme locally, mean that HAP can and will continue to offer families ongoing support and access to good quality housing in communities of their choice.

Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee Report

81. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position in relation to the proposed Monksland boundary change which proposes moving Monksland from County Roscommon into neighbouring County Westmeath; when the Boundary Commission is expected to deliver a final report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31010/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Athlone Boundary Committee, which was established in June 2015, was tasked with carrying out a review of the boundary between County Westmeath and County Roscommon and to make recommendations it considers necessary in the interests of effective and convenient local government. No boundary change was proposed on the establishment of the committee. The report of the committee was submitted recently and is under consideration. This is the first of four reports to be provided by independent statutory committees which have been conducting reviews of the local authority boundaries at Athlone, Carlow, Drogheda and Waterford. I intend to publish all of the reports together if possible, once received, at an early date.

Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 38.

Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 22.

Local Authority Housing Maintenance

84. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Lo-

cal Government if he will provide additional funding to Donegal County Council to offset the additional costs incurred for providing alternative housing and significant housing stock repairs to council properties affected by mica blocks. [35446/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The management and maintenance of the social housing stock in County Donegal is a matter for the Council in the first instance, as housing authority for the area. My Department provides funding to the authority through a range of programmes for the development and acquisition of new social housing and to upgrade existing stock. It is a matter for the Council to identify issues and remedies if their housing stock is affected by mica blocks and, if necessary, to raise this with my Department with whom there is ongoing technical dialogue around social housing issues.

Private Residential Tenancies Board Data

85. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total number of landlords who currently own more than 20 units of private rented accommodation; the total number of such units and the total number of registered tenancies in these units. [35461/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) is an independent statutory body established under the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to operate a national tenancy registration system and to facilitate the resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants. I have no function in relation to the operational matters of the Board. However, the information concerned could be sought from the RTB. The Clerk of the Dáil has requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG (P) 05/16 from my Department on 20 September 2016, the RTB have set up a dedicated email address for this purpose at OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which he expects revised planning procedures and protocols to facilitate an acceleration of house building in both the public and private sectors; if a reduction in house prices may accrue therefrom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35421/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The main purpose of the recently published Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016 is to give early effect to a number of priority legislative commitments in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, including those relating to Pillar 3 which is about building more homes and making the planning permitting and approvals systems more efficient. In this regard, two key measures in the Bill propose:

the introduction of temporary fast-track planning arrangements whereby planning applications for large-scale housing developments (100+ units), including student accommodation developments (200+ units), will be made directly to An Bord Pleanála and determined within the specified maximum timeframe of 25 weeks; and

the streamlining of timelines, to a maximum of 20 weeks, for presenting and considering

local authority own development proposals, including social housing proposals, through the Part 8 process.

Both of these streamlining measures, in respect of large housing developments and local authority own developments proposals, are intended to provide greater certainty in respect of the timelines for the progression of such housing developments, thereby facilitating the earlier provision of increased housing supply and helping to address the current housing supply shortage situation.

It is estimated that, from the aggregation of factors arising from measures already taken to reduce housing input costs, including the package of interim measures on housing supply, entitled Stabilising Rents – Boosting Supply which was approved by the Government in November 2015, a decrease in the cost of building new residential units by between €20,000 and €40,000 can be achieved, depending on whether apartments or houses are being constructed. Among the main contributing factors are:

implementation of new apartment guidelines, Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments - Guidelines for Planning Authorities published in December 2015;

reforms to the Part V process;

reductions in development contributions and a targeted development contribution rebate scheme in Dublin and Cork to encourage large-scale developments at affordable prices; and

the establishment of the new €200m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LI-HAF).

It is also expected that the additional planning related measures in the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016, in combination with the above measures and those outlined in the Action Plan, will help to activate housing development, increase the supply of new homes and in turn have a further positive impact on house prices.

Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 25.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

88. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if, in conjunction with the Dublin homeless executive and relevant local authorities, his Department will initiate a review of the practice of requiring households presenting as homeless to self-accommodate. [35440/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): 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. In accordance with section 37(2) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless services, including accommodation, rests with individual housing authorities. The matter raised in the Question is an operational matter for housing authorities within their statutory function and I have no plans at present to initiate such a review.

Animal Breeding Regulations

89. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his response to damning national and international reports on puppy breeding farms here; his plans to cease this barbaric treatment of animals and ensure enforcement of the regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [32205/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The regulation of dog breeding establishments is a matter for local authorities in accordance with the Dog Breeding Establishment Act 2010. Each local authority must maintain for public inspection a register of dog breeding establishments in its functional area, which must include the name and address of the applicant seeking entry onto the register, the address of the dog breeding establishment and the maximum number of breeding bitches that may be kept at the dog breeding establishment or premises. The Dog Breeding Establishment Act 2010 provides a robust regulatory framework for, inter alia, the licensing, monitoring and inspection of dog breeding establishments by local authorities and, where a serious and immediate threat exists to public health or animal health and welfare, for the closure of such establishments.

A joint inspection regime of dog breeding establishments, involving the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Local Authority Veterinary Service, was inaugurated last year for the purpose of inspection and follow up action. The discovery of individual problematic dog breeding establishments, and the taking of action by the Gardaí, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and local authorities in an integrated manner in the most serious cases, is a matter for the enforcement authorities concerned.

In late 2015, my Department agreed to begin a process of review of the current Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines, with meetings to review the Guidelines commencing last January. The work undertaken to date has been to produce a first draft revision, which is currently under consideration in my Department. I intend to extend the consultation process on the guidelines shortly.

More generally, the enforcement of welfare standards regarding all animals is a matter for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013.

Pyrite Remediation Programme

90. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total number of properties included in the pyrite remediation scheme; the total number of estates in which these properties are located; the total number of houses in these housing estates; and if he will run a pilot project to test properties in these estates that currently do not have physical damage to determine the level of pyrite that affect such properties in the future. [35432/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The latest figures available from the Pyrite Resolution Board indicate that 1,409 applications have been received under the pyrite remediation scheme, of which 1,064 have been approved for inclusion in the scheme as follows:

271 are at remedial works planning stage,

41 are at tender/tender analysis,

35 are at tender decision,

241 are under remediation, and

476 are complete.

The Pyrite Resolution Board have indicated that applications have been received from 45 developments containing multiple applications, 27 developments with only one application, and 36 single site applications.

The Report of the Pyrite Panel (June 2012) recommended a categorisation system as a means of prioritising pyrite remediation works in recognition of the expensive and intrusive nature of pyrite remediation and the unpredictability of pyritic heave. The independent Pyrite Panel was clear in its view that only dwellings with significant damage due to pyritic heave should be remediated and that it would be unreasonable to expect dwellings not exhibiting such damage to be remediated. Dwellings which have no significant damage but have reactive pyrite in the hardcore should be monitored and only remediated if they display significant damage due to pyritic heave.

The relevant provisions of Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 and the eligibility criteria of the pyrite remediation scheme are reflective of the conclusions and recommendations of Panel's report. In this regard, there is no sunset provision in the Act. Where a dwelling, which has a Damage Condition Rating of 1 and is currently not eligible under the scheme, progresses to a Damage Condition Rating of 2, an application can be made at that point in time for inclusion in the pyrite remediation scheme.

As matters currently stand, there is no requirement on any homeowner to carry out testing on their property in order to confirm the presence or otherwise of reactive pyrite in the subfloor hardcore and I have no proposals to run a pilot programme in this regard. However, I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol does provide an objective, reliable and robust means by which dwellings can be tested and categorised and it is open to any homeowner to test the hardcore material in their home in order to establish whether it is susceptible to expansion due to reactive pyrite.

Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists

91. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the figures on the Galway City Council and Galway County Council transfer list, specifically in relation to those households that have been put on a transfer list after having gone into RAS, HAP and-or long-term leasing; the criteria for allocation of a local authority house to a household on this list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35474/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The practical operation of transfer lists is a matter for each local authority to manage, on the basis of their scheme of letting priorities. My Department does not gather or hold any information on households seeking a transfer to an alternative social housing support whether they are currently having their housing needs met through HAP, RAS and or any other form of social housing support. On 16 December 2014, a statutory direction was issued to all authorities involved in the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, instructing them to take the necessary steps to ensure that households benefiting from HAP can avail of a move to other forms of social housing support, should they wish to do so, through a transfer option. Local authorities were also directed that HAP recipients, who apply to go on the transfer list, should get full credit for the time they spent on the waiting list and be placed on the transfer list with

no less favourable terms than if they had remained on the waiting list.

It is ultimately up to the household to choose if they wish to be placed on a local authority's transfer list, and I understand that the majority of HAP households do avail of this option. As of the start of November 2016, over 190 households across the country have transferred from the HAP scheme to other forms of social housing support.

Rent Controls

92. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of e-mails he has received to date from the secure rents campaign launched on 25 October 2016 by organisations (details supplied). [35457/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Pillar 4 of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan commits to developing a comprehensive strategy for the rental sector in Q4 2016. My Department has just completed a public consultation process in relation to the strategy and has received a number of submissions from a wide range of stakeholders, which will contribute to shaping the final strategy. The number of emails received from the secure rents campaign is 375.

Housing Provision

93. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will request the housing agency to conduct a report on the all-in cost of providing private sector houses and apartments, comparisons of costs here with other OECD countries, and policy recommendations to Government on the best way to bring down the cost of providing private sector homes. [35449/16]

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which he and his Department continue to monitor the cost of house building with particular reference to the need to ensure that house prices do not return to the unsustainable levels experienced before the economic collapse; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35593/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 160 together.

Under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Government is committed to a broad range of measures to tackle, among other things, some of the costs associated with the provision of housing in the interests of reducing construction overheads. This includes undertaking a detailed analysis, in conjunction with the construction sector, to benchmark housing delivery input costs in Ireland, in order to facilitate an increased level of housing output into the future. A working group, chaired by my Department, will begin work on this task over the coming weeks with representatives from the Construction Industry Council.

My Department has also input into work led by the Department of Finance in relation to construction costs which was undertaken under the Construction 2020 Strategy. In addition, costs are examined in the context of proposed legislative changes, particularly in relation to Building Regulations, and a cost benefit analysis and regulatory impact analysis is carried out on any proposed amendments.

In the context of social housing provision, my Department undertakes analysis in respect

of the average costs associated with the delivery of a range of differently sized social housing units, both in terms of construction costs and ‘all-in’ costs. These costs are based on an analysis of returned data from local authorities on social housing schemes and this is kept under constant review.

Further measures taken by my Department to bring down the cost of providing private sector homes include the €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), which will provide much-needed enabling infrastructure on key sites to open up lands for development from early 2017 onwards.

In addition, the NTMA, through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), is developing proposals to offer competitive financing on a commercial basis, and in line with ISIF’s statutory mandate, to meet other infrastructure requirements on large development sites.

Private Rented Accommodation Standards

94. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the national oversight and audit commission report on rented house inspections published in October 2016 and, in particular, on the findings in the report of the low inspection levels in many local authorities, the 55% non-compliance rate in properties inspected and the €1.3 million shortfall in funding in the private rented sector functions in 2014. [35442/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am committed to developing a real and meaningful strategy for the rental sector to enable it to develop to its full potential. Ensuring quality accommodation standards in the sector is an integral part of this process. Minimum standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, as amended by the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) (Amendment) Regulations 2009, made under section 18 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. The Regulations specify requirements in relation to a range of matters, such as structural repair, sanitary facilities, heating, ventilation, natural light and safety of gas and electrical supply. With very limited exemptions, these regulations apply to local authority and voluntary housing units as well as private rented residential accommodation.

To ensure that the standards reflect the requirements of a modern rental market, a review of the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2008, as amended, has been initiated. The review is at an advanced stage with new regulations currently being finalised.

The findings and recommendations of the National Oversight and Audit Commission’s report, Rented Houses Inspections - A Review of Local Authority Performance of Private Rented Houses Regulations Functions will be carefully considered in the context of the development of a strategy for the rental sector, which is well under way in my Department. As indicated in Rebuilding Ireland – an Action Plan for Housing & Homelessness, a number of measures in relation to improving the enforcement of standards in the rental sector will be considered, including a move towards delivery of enforcement services on a regional basis.

Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 13.

Property Registration Authority

96. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the delay in assigning a case to an officer with regard to a file submitted to the Property Registration Authority of Ireland (details supplied); the timeframe for when this will be assigned; when a final decision may be expected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35570/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I can inform the Deputy that under the Registration of Deeds and Title Act 2006, the Property Registration Authority (PRA) was established as and from 4 November 2006. The PRA replaces the Registrar of Deeds and Titles as the registering authority in relation to property registration in Ireland and, subject to the above Act, is independent in the performance of its functions.

The Deputy will be aware of the service to T.D.s and Senators which provides information on the current status of applications, such as the subject of this question, which was introduced in May 2006. The service provides a speedier, more efficient and more cost effective alternative to submitting Parliamentary Questions. It is operated by the PRA and is available all year round.

I can further inform the Deputy that his query has been forwarded to the PRA for attention and direct reply via the above mentioned service.

Commissions of Investigation

97. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the costs incurred to date under headings such as office accommodation, legal expenses, salaries and so on for each commission of investigation formally established since 2012 by her Department; the estimated final cost; the expected completion date of the commission; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35651/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters is the only Commission of Investigation established under the aegis of my Department. It was established by Government on 17 February 2015 (S.I. No. 57 of 2015) and is due to submit its three reports by February 2018.

The costs associated with the Commission are met from my Department's Vote. Since its establishment the Commission has directly incurred costs totalling €3.015m (to end of October 2016). This expenditure consists of €1.630m in pay; €1.117m for operational costs (including accommodation), and €0.268m for other costs related to the investigation.

In addition, my Department has also incurred costs to date of approximately €0.386m in supporting the establishment and operation of the Commission.

Due to the nature of an investigation process, and the volume of information being analysed across the various strands of this investigation, it is not possible to provide an estimate of final costs at this time.

Garda Communications

98. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 77 of 5 October 2016, in which matters pertaining to a criminal investigation were queried, if she has received the information sought from the Garda

Commissioner; if she will provide a comprehensive response to this query; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35552/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Further to my response of 5 October 2016, I understand that the allegations which are the subject of the Deputy's representations on behalf of the person concerned have now been referred to in the course of his legal proceedings.

Accordingly, as these proceedings are ongoing it would not be appropriate for me to comment further in the matter.

Protected Disclosures

99. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality her plans to introduce legislation amending the Official Secrets Act 1963 in view of recently passed related legislation dealing with protected disclosures in the public interest; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35554/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Section 15 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 provides that where a prosecution of a person is brought for any offence prohibiting or restricting the disclosure of information, it is a defence for the person to show that, at the time of the alleged offence, the disclosure was, or was reasonably believed to be, a protected disclosure.

There is, therefore, no conflict between the two Acts.

Female Genital Mutilation

100. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if there have been any convictions for female genital mutilation since the enactment of criminal legislation through the Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012; if so, if she will provide relevant statistics; and if not, the reason there have been no or few convictions through this legislation. [35562/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy may be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the data in respect of the offence specified by the Deputy is not available and could only be retrieved by way of a manual examination of each individual court record. As I am sure the Deputy will appreciate, this would require the expenditure of a disproportionate amount of staff time and resources and it is therefore not possible to provide the detail sought.

The Deputy will also appreciate that the question of prosecuting under a particular legislative provision is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions to decide on independently, based on the evidence available from Garda investigations, and I have no role in this regard.

Citizenship Applications

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status, including eligibility for naturalisation, in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35595/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 30 March 2019, is under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most cases are now generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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

Residency Permits

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current and potential residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35596/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement, in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Residency Permits

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35597/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was granted a right of residency, accompanied by a right to work, based on parentage of an Irish citizen child on 26 August, 2015. An application for renewal of residency was received in the relevant Section of the INIS on 13 September, 2016. The application is under consideration at present and the INIS will be in contact with the person concerned when the case has been finalised.

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

Residency Permits

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35598/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person in question entered the State on 18th June 2012 and was registered as a student on Stamp 2 conditions between 19th July 2012 and 2nd July 2014. It appears that the person in question has remained in the State since that date without permission.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the Residence Division of INIS does not currently have any application for the person before them. It appears that the person concerned does not have permission to remain in the State, and they should be aware that it is illegal, under the Immigration Act 2004, for them to reside in the State without permission from the Minister for Justice and Equality. A person found guilty of such an offence is liable, under section 13 of the Immigration Act 2004, to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both. As the person in question does not have immigration permission to remain in the State, they are not entitled to work. Against this background, the person concerned should attend their local Garda National Immigration Bureau Office as soon as may be.

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

Residency Permits

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality

the progress to date in the upgrade from stamp 2 to stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35599/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person in question entered the State on 1st November 2014 and was provided with permission to remain in the State on Stamp 2 student conditions between 5th December 2014 and 5th December 2016.

I wish to advise the Deputy that the Residence Division of INIS does not currently have any application for the person before them. Should they wish to change the status of their permission to remain in the State, then the person concerned should make an application to the Residence Division of INIS setting out the details of their case. Information on application types, qualifying criteria, and required documentation is available on the INIS website.

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

Residency Permits

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current and-or likely residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35600/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 57 of 27 October, 2016 on this matter as set out below. I am informed by INIS that the position remains unchanged.

I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned made an application for a residence card, under the provisions of the European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2015 on 29 March, 2016.

I understand that INIS has now written to the legal representatives of the person concerned seeking additional information and documentation it considers necessary to process this application. INIS will consider the application further in light of an expected response to the matters raised and will be better placed, upon receipt of same, to indicate when a decision may issue in this case.

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

Residency Permits

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the current and expected residency status or eligibility for stamp 4 naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35601/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned arrived in the State on 22nd September 2008 and was registered as a student on Stamp 2 conditions between 4th November 2008 and 5th January 2015. At the present time, the person in question does not have any permission to remain in the State.

On 8th May 2015, some five months after their permission had expired, the person concerned made an application for further permission to remain in the State. However, they were informed on 12th July 2016 that they had come to the end of their permission to remain in the State and that they should make arrangements to leave the State. They were also informed that they were not entitled to Stamp 4 permission to remain in the State.

Ireland has offered a generous immigration regime to foreign students, not only in allowing them to work to support themselves in their studies, but also in providing ample opportunity for them to obtain academic qualifications that will equip them for their future, whether that is in Ireland or on their return to their home country. It is up to each student to make the best use of that opportunity. If their academic achievement is high, then Ireland offers opportunities to students to stay on as graduates, researchers, or high skilled employees. In other words, student permission gives the person concerned a chance to qualify for an enhanced immigration status on the basis of their academic achievement. However, student permission is of a temporary and limited nature that is not reckonable for naturalisation purposes and that generally does not allow for family reunification. Merely spending time in Ireland as a student does not confer entitlement or expectation to remain.

I wish to draw the Deputy's attention to the document "Guidelines for non-EEA students registered in Ireland before 1 January 2011." This notice clarifies the position in relation to non-EEA students registered here. The overall seven year period, which the person in question has now exhausted, provides students with ample opportunity to achieve the sort of qualifications they need to qualify them for an employment permit should they wish to remain in Ireland afterwards.

If the person concerned leaves the State voluntarily, then it would be open to them to apply for a D reside visa from outside the State. At that point, any family circumstances would be taken into account along with any other reasons why the person in question believes that they should be granted permission to reside in Ireland.

If there are any relevant exceptional circumstances which would justify granting the person concerned permission to remain in the State, they will be taken into account if the person concerned is issued with an intention to deport letter under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended).

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

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35602/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 13th November, 2008 and, therefore, has no entitlement to residency in the State.

Representations were received from the person concerned, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting the revocation of the Deportation Order. The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from any such consideration will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. Once such a decision has been made, this will be notified in writing. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place and, as such, the person concerned is legally obliged to comply with any reporting requirements placed on them by the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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

Citizenship Applications

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if further progress has been made in the determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35603/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most cases are now generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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

Residency Permits

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide an indication of residency eligibility in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35604/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I should inform the Deputy that the person in question has recently renewed his or her residency status and is fully aware of his or her position.

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

Residency Permits

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status and eligibility entitlement in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35606/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I should inform the Deputy that the person in question has recently renewed his or her residency status and is fully aware of his or her position.

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

Deportation Orders Re-examination

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will set aside proposals to deport in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35607/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned are a husband and wife who are the subject of deportation orders made on 11th March, 2005.

Both persons were deported from the State some years ago; however, according to information received from their legal representatives, they returned to this State the year after they were deported.

Representations were received from the persons concerned, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting the revocation of the

deportation orders. The Deputy might wish to note that the decisions to ensue from such considerations will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing deportation orders. Once such decisions have been made, these will be notified in writing. In the meantime, the deportation orders remain valid and in place and, as such, the persons concerned are legally obliged to comply with any reporting requirements placed on them by the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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

Garda Vetting of Personnel

113. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the current system of Garda vetting is local and particular to each school and must be repeated school by school for temporary substitute workers, such as special needs assistants who move around between schools and who find this a barrier to securing work in more than one school, and that it also imposes an unnecessary administrative overhead on the school management; if she will mitigate or explain this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35617/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The primary purpose of the Garda National Vetting Bureau is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults. Vetting checks are conducted by the Garda vetting bureau for each new vetting application received to ensure that the most recent data available are taken into account. This is because once there has been any significant lapse of time between one employment and another, the original Vetting Disclosure must be reviewed to take account of any changes in information, such as more recent criminal convictions.

Furthermore, under the Data Protection Acts, any sensitive personal data which employers use in regard to their employees must be current, accurate and up-to-date. Importantly, the general non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the current process also helps to protect against the risk of fraud or forgery in the process.

There are certain limited circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant. Section 12(3)(A) of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that two or more relevant organisations can enter into a joint written agreement in relation to the employment, contracting, permitting or placement of an person to undertake relevant work or activities thereby providing for only one of the organisations being required to conduct vetting in respect of that person. This is an option that is open to the relevant organisations who seek vetting, including in the education sector.

I am pleased to inform that Deputy that I have been advised by the Garda authorities that there is no particular backlog or delay in Garda vetting applications for schools and temporary substitute workers. At present 80% of overall vetting applications are being processed by the National Vetting Bureau in five working days. In circumstances where there is such a sustained reduction in processing times, the issue of vetting "transferability" is very largely obviated.

This efficiency has been achieved by the deployment of the e-Vetting system which fa-

cilitates the on-line processing of applications for vetting from registered organisations. The e-Vetting system is available to all registered organisations and the Garda Authorities are ready to assist those organisations who are not yet using the e-Vetting system to do so.

Deportation Orders

114. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will revoke a deportation order in respect of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35620/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In accordance with Section 19(1) of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) I am specifically required to take all practicable steps to ensure that the identity of applicants is kept confidential. Accordingly, I am limited in what I can say in relation to individual cases.

On a general note, deportation orders are not made in respect of applicants who are in the protection process, whether part of the Dublin Convention process (whereby applicants have their asylum case processed in the first EU country in which they land) or at the substantive asylum or subsidiary protection stages of the process, and there is therefore no deportation order in place in this case. Due process takes place including appeals of decisions of the Office of the Refugee Application Commissioner to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal and it is also open to any applicant to seek judicial review of any decision made. This applies in the case referred to by the Deputy. It is only at the end of these processes that consideration is given to the making of a deportation order and this is done in accordance with section 3 of the Refugee Act 1996.

Equality Issues

115. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if there is specific legislation in place that recognises that service animals are used by a number of different persons with various disabilities, such as autism, epilepsy, vision impairment, brain injury and hearing loss, which prohibits discrimination against a person with a service animal with respect to accommodation, services or facilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35626/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Equal Status Act 2000 prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods and services, the provision of accommodation and access to education, on any of a number of grounds including that of disability. I would draw the Deputy's attention to section 4, which addresses the reasonable accommodation needs of people with disabilities. The Employment Equality Act 1998 prohibits discrimination in a wide range of employment and employment-related areas; these include recruitment and promotion, equal pay, working conditions, training or experience, dismissal and harassment including sexual harassment. Again, the issue of reasonable accommodation is addressed in sections 3 and 4.

I cannot provide legal advice by way of replies to parliamentary questions or otherwise interpret the application of these provisions. However, any person may obtain advice from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission if they feel that they have been discriminated against contrary to equality legislation, including advice on how to take a claim to the Workplace Relations Commission which provides a free and accessible adjudication service.

Garda Deployment

116. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí, by rank, stationed in each Garda station in County Louth, for each of the years since 2011, in tabular form. [35639/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel, a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

I am further informed that the Garda strength of the Louth Division, on the 30 September 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 302. There are also 33 Garda Reserves and 23 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation (NBCI), the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (formerly the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation) and the Garda National Drugs and Organise Crime Bureau.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Appointments will also be made to the Garda Reserve of approximately 300.

Taking account of projected retirements, reaching a strength of 15,000 will require some 3,200 new Garda members to be recruited on a phased basis over the next four years in addition to the 1,200 that will have been recruited by the end of this year since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014. This is an ambitious target and will require a continuous pipeline of suitable candidates. I am pleased to say that the recruitment campaign launched by the

Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Commissioner last September, the second campaign this year, again received a strong response.

Since the reopening of the Garda College, 683 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána, 149 of these attested today Thursday, 17 November and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am informed that so far 23 of these probationer Garda have been assigned to the Louth Division. The attestation of these further 149 probationer Garda will bring the Garda strength to around the 13,000 mark by year end.

The tables set out the number of members of An Garda Síochána by rank stationed in each Garda Station in County Louth, for each of the years since 2011 to 30 September 2016 the latest date for which figures are readily available.

LOUTH 31 DEC 2011

| DISTRICT | STATION | GD | SG | IN | SU | CS | AC | Total |
|-------------|-------------------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| ARDEE | ARDEE | 21 | 5 | 1 | 1 | | | 28 |
| | CASTLEBEL-LINGHAM | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 |
| | COLLON | 5 | 2 | | | | | 7 |
| | LOUTH | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| | TOTAL | 29 | 9 | 1 | 1 | | | 40 |
| DROGHEDA | CLOUGHER-HEAD | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 |
| | DROGHEDA | 82 | 12 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 98 |
| | DUNLEER | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | TOTAL | 89 | 14 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 107 |
| DUNDALK | BLACKROCK | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | CARLING-FORD | 5 | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| | DRUMAD | 6 | | | | | | 6 |
| | DUNDALK | 105 | 21 | 3 | 1 | | | 130 |
| | HACK-BALLSCROSS | 4 | 2 | | | | | 6 |
| | OMEATH | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | TOTAL | 128 | 26 | 3 | 1 | | | 158 |
| LOUTH TOTAL | | 246 | 49 | 6 | 3 | 1 | | 305 |

LOUTH 31 DEC 2012

| DISTRICT | STATION | GD | SG | IN | SU | CS | AC | Total |
|-------------|-------------------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| ARDEE | ARDEE | 21 | 5 | 1 | 1 | | | 28 |
| | CASTLEBEL-LINGHAM | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 |
| | COLLON | 4 | 2 | | | | | 6 |
| | LOUTH | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| | TOTAL | 29 | 8 | 1 | 1 | | | 39 |
| DROGHEDA | CLOUGHER-HEAD | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 |
| | DROGHEDA | 77 | 12 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 93 |
| | DUNLEER | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | TOTAL | 84 | 14 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 102 |
| DUNDALK | BLACKROCK | 5 | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| | CARLING-FORD | 5 | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| | DRUMAD | 6 | 1 | | | | | 7 |
| | DUNDALK | 101 | 19 | 2 | 1 | | | 123 |
| | HACK-BALLSCROSS | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | OMEATH | 4 | | | | | | 4 |
| | TOTAL | 125 | 23 | 2 | 1 | | | 151 |
| LOUTH TOTAL | | 238 | 45 | 5 | 3 | 1 | | 292 |

LOUTH 31 DEC 2013

17 November 2016

| DISTRICT | STATION | GD | SG | IN | SU | CS | AC | Total |
|-------------|-------------------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| ARDEE | ARDEE | 20 | 5 | 1 | 1 | | | 27 |
| | CASTLEBEL-LINGHAM | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 |
| | COLLON | 4 | 2 | | | | | 6 |
| | LOUTH | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| | TOTAL | 28 | 8 | 1 | 1 | | | 38 |
| DROGHEDA | CLOUGHER-HEAD | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 |
| | DROGHEDA | 76 | 13 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 93 |
| | DUNLEER | 5 | | | | | | 5 |
| | TOTAL | 84 | 14 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 102 |
| DUNDALK | BLACKROCK | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 |
| | CARLING-FORD | 5 | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| | DRUMAD | 6 | 1 | | | | | 7 |
| | DUNDALK | 98 | 18 | 3 | 1 | | | 120 |
| | HACK-BALLSCROSS | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | OMEATH | 4 | | | | | | 4 |
| | TOTAL | 120 | 22 | 3 | 1 | | | 146 |
| LOUTH TOTAL | | 232 | 44 | 6 | 3 | 1 | | 286 |

LOUTH 31 DEC 2014

| DISTRICT | STATION | GD | SG | IN | SU | CS | AC | Total |
|-------------|-------------------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| ARDEE | ARDEE | 20 | 5 | 1 | 1 | | | 27 |
| | CASTLEBEL-LINGHAM | 1 | 1 | | | | | 2 |
| | COLLON | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | LOUTH | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| | TOTAL | 26 | 7 | 1 | 1 | | | 35 |
| DROGHEDA | CLOUGHER-HEAD | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 |
| | DROGHEDA | 74 | 14 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 92 |
| | DUNLEER | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | TOTAL | 81 | 16 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 101 |
| DUNDALK | BLACKROCK | 3 | 1 | | | | | 4 |
| | CARLING-FORD | 5 | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| | DRUMAD | 6 | 1 | | | | | 7 |
| | DUNDALK | 93 | 20 | 5 | 1 | | | 119 |
| | HACK-BALLSCROSS | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | OMEATH | 4 | | | | | | 4 |
| | TOTAL | 115 | 24 | 5 | 1 | | | 145 |
| LOUTH TOTAL | | 222 | 47 | 8 | 3 | 1 | | 281 |

LOUTH 31 DEC 2015

Questions - Written Answers

| DISTRICT | STATION | GD | SG | IN | SU | CS | AC | Total |
|-------------|-------------------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| ARDEE | ARDEE | 21 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | | 26 |
| | CASTLEBEL-LINGHAM | 1 | 1 | | | | | 2 |
| | COLLON | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | LOUTH | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| | TOTAL | 27 | 5 | 1 | 1 | | | 34 |
| DROGHEDA | CLOUGHER-HEAD | 2 | 1 | | | | | 3 |
| | DROGHEDA | 79 | 14 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 97 |
| | DUNLEER | 5 | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| | TOTAL | 86 | 16 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 106 |
| DUNDALK | BLACKROCK | 2 | 1 | | | | | 3 |
| | CARLINGFORD | 5 | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| | DRUMAD | 6 | 1 | | | | | 7 |
| | DUNDALK | 97 | 20 | 5 | 1 | | | 123 |
| | HACK-BALLSCROSS | 4 | | | | | | 4 |
| | OMEATH | 4 | | | | | | 4 |
| | TOTAL | 118 | 23 | 5 | 1 | | | 147 |
| LOUTH TOTAL | | 231 | 44 | 8 | 3 | 1 | | 287 |

LOUTH 30 SEPT 2016

| DISTRICT | STATION | GD | SG | IN | SU | CS | AC | Total |
|-------------|-------------------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| ARDEE | ARDEE | 19 | 5 | 1 | 1 | | | 26 |
| | CASTLEBEL-LINGHAM | 1 | 1 | | | | | 2 |
| | COLLON | 4 | 1 | | | | | 5 |
| | LOUTH | 1 | | | | | | 1 |
| | TOTAL | 25 | 7 | 1 | 1 | | | 34 |
| DROGHEDA | CLOUGHER-HEAD | 2 | 1 | | | | | 3 |
| | DROGHEDA | 77 | 14 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | 96 |
| | DUNLEER | 5 | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| | TOTAL | 84 | 16 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | 105 |
| DUNDALK | BLACKROCK | 2 | 1 | | | | | 3 |
| | CARLINGFORD | 5 | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| | DRUMAD | 6 | 1 | | | | | 7 |
| | DUNDALK | 112 | 19 | 6 | 1 | | | 138 |
| | HACK-BALLSCROSS | 5 | | | | | | 5 |
| | OMEATH | 4 | | | | | | 4 |
| | TOTAL | 134 | 22 | 6 | 1 | | | 163 |
| LOUTH TOTAL | | 243 | 45 | 10 | 3 | 1 | | 302 |

Garda Deployment

117. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide a breakdown in tabular form of dedicated community gardaí, by rank, in each

station in County Louth for each of the years since 2011. [35640/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including Community Gardaí, among the various Garda Divisions and Districts and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I have been informed that as of the 30 September 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, there were 740 Community Gardaí assigned to Garda Divisions throughout the country. The specific information requested by the Deputy is set out in the tables beneath.

Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána. It provides a means of recognising that every community – both urban and rural – has its own concerns and expectations. In this regard I welcome the strong emphasis placed by the Commissioner’s Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 on further developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. Proposed initiatives include the establishment of local Community Policing Teams (CPTs) headed by an Inspector and made up of Gardaí from across a range of areas to proactively work with the community to prevent and detect crime; and the establishment of Community Safety Fora in every District comprising local Gardaí, local communities and key stakeholders.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Appointments will also be made to the Garda Reserve of approximately 300.

Taking account of projected retirements, reaching a strength of 15,000 will require some 3,200 new Garda members to be recruited on a phased basis over the next four years in addition to the 1,200 that will have been recruited by the end of this year since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014. This is an ambitious target and will require a continuous pipeline of suitable candidates. I am pleased to say that the recruitment campaign launched by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Commissioner last September, the second campaign this year, again received a strong response.

Since the reopening of the Garda College, 683 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána, of whom 149 attested today Thursday, 17 November. I am informed that so far 23 of these probationer Garda have been assigned to the Louth Division. The attestation of these further 149 probationer Garda will bring the Garda strength to around the 13,000 mark by year end. It is expected that Community Policing and all other Garda activities, will undoubtedly benefit from these resources now coming on stream.

| COMMUNITY GARDAÍ 31 DECEMBER 2011 | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|----------|-------|-------|
| STATION | INSP | SERGEANT | GARDA | TOTAL |
| Louth | | | | |
| Drogheda | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Dunleer | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 |

Questions - Written Answers

| COMMUNITY GARDAÍ 31 DECEMBER 2011 | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|----------|-------|-------|
| STATION | INSP | SERGEANT | GARDA | TOTAL |
| Dundalk | 0 | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| Clogherhead | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Ardee | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 0 | 2 | 19 | 21 |

| COMMUNITY GARDAÍ 31 DECEMBER 2012 | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|----------|-------|-------|
| STATION | INSP | SERGEANT | GARDA | TOTAL |
| Louth | | | | |
| Drogheda | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Dunleer | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| Dundalk | 0 | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| Clogherhead | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Ardee | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 0 | 2 | 18 | 20 |

| COMMUNITY GARDAÍ 31 DECEMBER 2013 | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|----------|-------|-------|
| STATION | INSP | SERGEANT | GARDA | TOTAL |
| Louth | | | | |
| Drogheda | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Dunleer | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Dundalk | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Clogherhead | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Ardee | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 0 | 2 | 14 | 16 |

| COMMUNITY GARDAÍ 31 DECEMBER 2014 | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|----------|-------|-------|
| STATION | INSP | SERGEANT | GARDA | TOTAL |
| Louth | | | | |
| Drogheda | 0 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Dunleer | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Dundalk | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Clogherhead | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Ardee | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 0 | 2 | 14 | 16 |

| COMMUNITY GARDAÍ 31 DECEMBER 2015 | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|----------|-------|-------|
| STATION | INSP | SERGEANT | GARDA | TOTAL |
| Louth | | | | |
| Drogheda | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Dunleer | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Dundalk | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Clogherhead | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ardee | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 0 | 2 | 14 | 16 |

| COMMUNITY GARDAÍ 30 SEPTEMBER 2016 | | | | |
|------------------------------------|------|----------|-------|-------|
| STATION | INSP | SERGEANT | GARDA | TOTAL |
| Louth | | | | |
| Drogheda | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Dunleer | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Dundalk | 0 | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| Clogherhead | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ardee | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 0 | 2 | 14 | 16 |

Garda Deployment

118. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality if she will provide a breakdown of Garda members who are stationed in County Louth who have been assigned to the Garda national drug unit, for each of the years since 2011 in tabular form. [35641/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, including Community Gardaí, among the various Garda Divisions and Districts and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am further informed that the Garda strength of the Louth Division, on the 30 September 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 302. There are also 33 Garda Reserves and 23 civilians attached to the Division. It is important to note that all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences or otherwise. The Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau leads out the policing strategy for tackling drugs supply. This approach allows for the co-ordinated use of Garda resources in tackling all forms of organised crime, including illicit drug activity nationwide.

I am further informed that the prevention and detection of drug related offences is a priority within the Louth Division and that all Gardaí in the Division, both uniform and detective, are engaged in intelligence-led policing and the undertaking of targeted operations against those involved in drug-related crime. In addition, Garda personnel from the Division continue to work with the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau in this regard.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Appointments will also be made to the Garda Reserve of approximately 300.

Taking account of projected retirements, reaching a strength of 15,000 will require some 3,200 new Garda members to be recruited on a phased basis over the next four years in addition to the 1,200 that will have been recruited by the end of this year since the reopening of the

Garda College in September 2014. This is an ambitious target and will require a continuous pipeline of suitable candidates. I am pleased to say that the recruitment campaign launched by the Public Appointments Service on behalf of the Commissioner last September, the second campaign this year, again received a strong response.

Since the reopening of the Garda College, 683 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána, of whom 149 attested today Thursday, 17 November. I am informed that so far 23 of these probationer Garda have been assigned to the Louth Division. It is expected that prevention and detection of drug activities and all other Garda activities, will undoubtedly benefit from these resources now coming on stream.

Garda members who are assigned to the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau are based in Dublin and, as I have outlined, work with Garda personnel in the Louth Division as required. For the Deputy's information, the table below shows the number of Garda members who are stationed in County Louth and have been assigned to the Louth Division Drugs Unit, for each of the years since 2011 to 30 September 2016, the latest date for which figures are readily available.

| Louth Division Drugs Unit Personnel | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|----------|-------|-------|
| Year | Inspector | Sergeant | Garda | Total |
| Dec 2011 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Dec 2012 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 7 |
| Dec 2013 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| Dec 2014 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| Dec 2015 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| Sept 2016 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 6 |

Garda Expenditure

119. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the budget for each of the three Garda districts in County Louth for each of the years since 2011. [35643/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner, as accounting officer for An Garda Síochána, has responsibility for the allocation of Garda finances and resources, and I, as Minister, have no direct role in these matters.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that the total expenditure in each of the three districts, over the period requested by the Deputy, is set out in the table below.

| Year | Dundalk | Drogheda | Ardee | Total |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 2011 | €10,257,117 | €7,014,232 | €2,763,154 | €20,034,503 |
| 2012 | €9,670,407 | €6,722,582 | €2,748,799 | €19,141,788 |
| 2013 | €11,053,350 | €6,670,877 | €2,796,765 | €20,520,992 |
| 2014 | €10,111,461 | €6,570,531 | €2,754,728 | €19,436,720 |
| 2015 | €10,674,343 | €6,971,788 | €2,764,106 | €20,410,237 |
| 2016 (to end of October) | €10,553,164 | €5,945,995 | €2,195,782 | €18,694,941 |
| Total | €62,319,842 | €39,896,005 | €16,023,334 | €118,239,181 |

Crime Data

120. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the Garda arrest rate in respect of burglaries in County Louth in each of the years since 2011. [35644/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, is responsible for the compilation and publication of the official recorded crime statistics, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose. I have asked the CSO to forward the available statistics in relation to the information requested directly to the Deputy.

Policing Authority

121. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the operation of the Policing Authority and the full implementation of its power with regard to appointments to An Garda Síochána; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35654/16]

Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): As the Deputy will be aware, the Policing Authority is an independent statutory body established on 1 January 2016 for the purpose of overseeing the performance by An Garda Síochána of its functions relating to policing services. Since its inception, the Policing Authority has been focussing, as a matter of priority, on its functions which have statutory deadlines and reform significance. The Policing Authority has met on several occasions with the Commissioner and her senior team, as a follow up on its consideration of the O'Higgins Report and related matters. A number of these meetings have been held in public to reassure the community about the performance of the Garda Síochána. Areas that have been highlighted in the discussions include:

- Implementation of the Modernisation and Renewal Programme within An Garda Síochána;
- Review of the Garda Protected Disclosure policy;
- Plans to conduct a culture audit within An Garda Síochána;
- Corporate governance arrangements and management structures within An Garda Síochána; and
- Arrangements for training and the professional development of members.

The Authority has approved a three-year Strategy for An Garda Síochána. It has also determined the policing priorities for 2017 which will inform the content of the 2017 Policing Plan to be published before the end of the year. It has reviewed and issued recommendations on the Garda Protected Disclosure policy and will also establish a Code of Ethics that includes standards of conduct and practice for Garda members.

The sections of the Garda Síochána (Policing Authority and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015 which remain to be commenced contain provisions essentially enabling the Policing Authority to appoint and remove persons from positions in An Garda Síochána.

Sections 10, 11 and 13 contain provisions governing the removal of the Garda Commissioner, Deputy Garda Commissioners, Assistant Garda Commissioners, chief superintendents

and superintendents, including the procedures to be followed before such removal. Section 12 deals with the appointment by the Authority of persons to the ranks of Assistant Garda Commissioner, chief superintendent and superintendent. Sections 39 to 42 deal with appointments and secondments between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána and the procedures to deal with disciplinary matters in relation to persons comprehended by those sections.

The commencement of these sections is dependent on the regulations governing promotion and discipline in An Garda Síochána being amended to reflect the envisaged role for the Authority. In accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Garda Commissioner and the Authority must be consulted on any proposed changes to these regulations. In addition, the Garda representative bodies must be consulted and that process is well underway. Work on the preparation of the proposed regulation changes is nearing completion with a view to the appointment and removal functions being transferred to the Authority in the coming weeks and in any case before the end of the year.

The Deputy may wish to be aware that the establishment of the Policing Authority has no bearing on promotions to the ranks of sergeant and inspector. These continue to be a matter for the Garda Commissioner in accordance with section 14 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (Promotion) Regulations 2006.

EU Directives

122. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the implementation of the EU victim’s directive in her Department and agencies and bodies under her aegis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35655/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Directive 29/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, known as the Victims Directive, came into force on 16 November, 2015 across the European Union. The Directive provides that victims of crime will be able to:

- understand and be understood
- receive information
- be heard
- access victim support services
- enjoy safeguards in the context of restorative justice services
- access protection
- enjoy privacy in the context of the criminal proceedings
- receive an individual assessment to identify victim’s specific protection needs.

At an operational level arrangements have been put in place by the criminal justice agencies to ensure that the rights conferred by the Directive are provided to victims of crime within existing legislation and on a non-statutory basis. Legislation to introduce the rights provided for in the Directive on a statutory basis is being drafted as a priority and I expect to publish the Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Bill during the current Dáil session. The key arrangements put in place by the criminal justice agencies are set out beneath.

An Garda Síochána

An Garda Síochána have trained members of all ranks to implement the new policies and procedures that they have put in place to ensure that victims of crime receive an appropriate and consistent response.

The Garda Commissioner put in place Garda Victim Service Offices across all 28 Garda Divisions following a successful pilot programme. These offices provide additional assistance to that already provided to victims and their families by investigating officers and Family Liaison Officers. Information on services available is provided to all victims and each victim undergoes an individual assessment of needs.

Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP)

The Office of the DPP, which is independent in its functions, has also put in place the necessary measures to implement the Directive, together with An Garda Síochána, who prosecute cases in the District Court on behalf of the DPP. These measures enable victims to receive reasons in the event of a decision not to prosecute and to seek a review of such a decision.

The Courts Service

The Courts Service has arrangements in place to ensure the final decision in a criminal trial and reasons for such a decision, where there is no jury involved, are given to victims. New court facilities built recently have and those planned will have separate areas for victims to reduce the likelihood of contact with accused persons in their case.

Funding

I have secured a €250,000 increase in the funding for 2017 for the victims organisations funded through the Victims of Crime Office in my Department in the recent Estimates process. This should help fund improved and expanded services by organisations working with victims. This is in addition to an extra €250,000 that I secured for 2016. The advertisement announcing the 2017 grant scheme appeared in the newspapers recently and applications are being received in the Victims of Crime Office. Services to victims that received funding in 2016 included helpline services, face to face emotional support, information and court accompaniment to victims and specialist services for those bereaved by homicide, tourist victims, child victims and victims of sexual crime and victims of domestic violence.

Insurance Costs

123. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address the impact on SMEs of the rising cost of insurance, which if not addressed will result in job losses in an important sector of the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35514/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland, can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept.

This inability to intervene in such matters is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products.

However, I do accept that it is possible for the State to play a role in helping to stabilise the

market. Consequently, I established the Cost of Insurance Working Group and appointed Minister of State Eoghan Murphy as Chair. The initial focus of the Working Group is on the factors that are contributing to the cost and availability of motor insurance and identifying what short-term, medium-term and long-term measures can be introduced to help consumers and businesses. However, as some of the factors are common to all insurance lines, it is likely that many of the recommendations being considered will also address the difficulties being experienced in the cost and availability of insurance in other sectors, including the SME sector.

The Department has received submissions from a number of SME's outlining how the cost of insurance is impacting them. These submissions have informed and fed into the ongoing work of the Working Group.

Finally, it should be noted that at the end of October 2016, the Working Group provided me with an initial set of emerging recommendations. Since then, the Working Group has been working to finalise the Report and developing an action plan to enable the relevant Government Departments and Offices to commence the implementation of agreed priority actions. The report and action plan will detail any legislative or regulatory changes that may be required and will include a detailed timeline for implementation.

Vehicle Registration

124. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the process by which a person (details supplied) can obtain the original certificate of conversion in respect of a vehicle, as requested by the NTRA for the purpose of completing a technical assessor's full report, in a scenario whereby the certifying company is no longer trading and a copy of the aforementioned document has been deemed inadmissible for such purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35527/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that as a certificate of conversion was not required to register the vehicle concerned, Revenue is unable to assist with this matter.

Pensions Legislation

125. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Finance his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding pension legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35533/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am informed by Revenue that an Approved Retirement Fund (ARF) is a post-retirement investment product into which an individual may opt to transfer their pension fund on retirement as an alternative to annuity purchase. The beneficial ownership of the assets in an ARF vests in the individual, and the ARF structure allows those personal assets to be segregated from the individual's other personal assets in order that the ARF taxation treatment can apply. In that regard, section 784A of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997, provides that income or gains arising while the funds are invested in an ARF are exempt from tax. Withdrawals from an ARF are generally taxable at the owner's marginal rate of tax. ARFs are managed by Qualifying Fund Managers, mainly insurance companies, banks and stockbrokers.

Under the Double Taxation Treaty between Ireland and the United Kingdom, in common with double taxation agreements generally, a taxing right in respect of income and capital gains

from immovable property is given to the Contracting State (Ireland or the UK as appropriate) in which the property is situated. As there is no specific exemption for ARFs in the treaty, ARFs with investments in UK property are liable to tax in the UK on the income and gains arising from such property. However, Article 14A of the treaty provides an exemption in relation to income and gains derived by a resident of one Contracting State from immovable property situated in the other Contracting State in certain circumstances. This arises where the competent authority of the first State certifies that the income and gains are tax exempt in that State “by reason of the provisions in the laws of that State which afford relief from taxation to charities and superannuation schemes, as such, or to insurance companies in respect of their pension business “. An ARF must, therefore, be either a superannuation scheme or pension business of an insurance company in order to qualify for the exemption under Article 14A.

As outlined above, ARFs are not superannuation schemes and, therefore, it is only where they come within the scope of “insurance companies in respect of their pension business” that they are covered by Article 14A. I am advised by Revenue that subsection (5) of section 784A of the TCA 1997 specifically extends the scope of references to the pension business of insurance companies to include ARFs provided by such companies. However, it should be noted that such ARFs are exempt under Article 14A not because they are ARFs, but because they form part of the pension business of such companies. I understand from Revenue that HM Revenue and Customs considered whether they were in a position to extend the benefits of Article 14A to all ARFs, but concluded that as ARFs are not superannuation schemes, per se, they are outside the scope of the treaty other than where they fall within the “insurance company” element referred to above.

As regards Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs), the 2016 Finance Bill contains provisions to stop PRSAs being used for tax avoidance purposes. The avoidance concerned involved benefits never being taken from a PRSA so that it never “vests” with the result that certain taxes never applied and a more favourable tax treatment was afforded the PRSA assets on the death of the beneficial owner. To counter this avoidance, the Finance Bill provides that where PRSA benefits have not commenced by the date of the owner’s 75th birthday (as envisaged by the TCA 1997), such benefits are deemed to commence (i.e. the PRSA is deemed to vest) on that date.

Disabled Drivers Grant Eligibility

126. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the criteria to obtain a primary medical certificate regarding Disabled Drivers and Passengers (Tax Concession) Regulations 1994; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Ombudsman has expressed concern that the scheme, as currently framed, is overly rigid and inflexible and may be causing inequity (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35556/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT (up to a certain limit) on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, payment of a fuel grant, and an exemption from Motor Tax.

To qualify for the Scheme an applicant must be in possession of a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 and satisfy one of the following conditions:

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;

- be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs;
- be without both hands or without both arms;
- be without one or both legs;
- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg;
- have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The Senior Medical Officer for the relevant local Health Service Executive administrative area makes a professional clinical determination as to whether an individual applicant satisfies the medical criteria. A successful applicant is provided with a Primary Medical Certificate, which is required under the Regulations to claim the reliefs provided for in the Scheme. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal, which makes a new clinical determination in respect of the individual. The Regulations mandate that the Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions to ensure the integrity of its clinical determinations. After six months a citizen can reapply if there is a deterioration in their condition.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure. Between the Vehicle Registration Tax and VAT foregone, and the repayment of excise on fuel used by members of the Scheme, the Scheme represented a cost of €50.3 million to the Exchequer in 2015, an increase from €48.6 million in 2014. These figures do not include the revenue foregone to the Local Government Fund in the respect of the relief from Motor Tax provided to members of the Scheme.

I am aware that the Ombudsman has made comments regarding the eligibility criteria of the Disabled Driver and Disabled Passengers Scheme. The Ombudsman stated that, in his opinion, the criteria were narrowly focused and prescriptive. The Scheme and qualifying criteria were designed specifically for those with severe physical disabilities and are, therefore, necessarily precise.

I recognise the important role that the Scheme plays in expanding the mobility of citizens with disabilities. I have managed to maintain the relief at current levels throughout the crisis despite the requirement for significant fiscal consolidation. From time to time I receive representations from individuals who feel they would benefit from the Scheme but do not qualify under the six criteria. While I have sympathy for these cases, given the scale and scope of the Scheme, I have no plans to expand the medical criteria beyond the six currently provided for in the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

127. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if he will clarify the position of the first-time buyer's scheme when the building of a home began before 19 July 2016, but still remains a year off its completion, if it is eligible under the scheme announced in budget 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35615/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Help to Buy scheme, as published in the Finance Bill, requires that in order for a first-time buyer to be eligible for the scheme, he or she must have signed a contract to purchase a new residence, or in the case of self-builds,

drawn down the first tranche of a mortgage, on or after 19 July 2016. The date of 19 July was chosen as it was the date of the launch of ‘Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness’, which included a commitment to introduce such a scheme in the Budget. The backdating of the scheme to that date was to avoid any potential interruption in the housing market after that date pending the emergence of the details of the scheme.

There are currently no plans to extend eligibility for the scheme further back than the date of its initial announcement. To do so would consist entirely of deadweight, as individuals who signed contracts to purchase new homes or who drew down the first tranche of their mortgage in respect of a self-build home, in advance of the original announcement did not need the assistance of the State to fund the required deposit. Such individuals made their purchasing decisions on the basis of the information available to them at the time of purchase, and could not have expected a subsequently introduced tax relief to be available to them.

It is unclear from the Deputy’s question as to the precise details of the case concerned. Depending on the particular circumstances of the case in question, the relevant individuals may be in a position to qualify for the scheme.

Banking Sector Investigations

128. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether a probe needs to take place here into a bank’s (details supplied) handling of small and medium-sized enterprise debtor customers similar to the probe in the UK into its parent company (details supplied) and SME debtors being moved into its global restructuring group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35660/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Tomlinson report dealt with the lending practices of UK banks to Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and it alleged that a division of Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), the Global Restructuring Group, was guilty of “systematic and institutional behaviour” in artificially distressing otherwise viable businesses. Following this report, the UK’s Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) appointed Promontory Financial Group to further investigate these allegations. Promontory’s work along with the involvement of the FCA, led RBS last week to announce redress for certain SME customers.

As I have previously answered, Ulster Bank Ireland Limited undertook an independent review into the relevance of these allegations to its corresponding division, namely the Global Restructuring Group Ireland (GRGI). On the 19th December 2014, Ulster Bank published the findings of the independent review by Mahon Hayes Curran into practices at GRGI. The investigation found no evidence to support the allegations and suggested that GRGI’s driving policy was to manage its customers through the cycle, supporting them where possible to return them to viability.

The Central Bank is the statutory body with responsibility for the investigation of any such allegations in an Irish context and I consider this a matter for the Central Bank. I am confident that legislative changes since the financial crisis have equipped the Central Bank with an array of investigative, regulatory and enforcement powers to ensure that regulated financial service providers adhere to the requirements of financial services legislation. These changes include significantly enhanced powers for the Central Bank to gather information under the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 which broadened the Banks’ information gathering and authorised officer powers. It is evident that the Central Bank is properly undertaking its enforcement role by the recent sizeable settlements in enforcement cases.

In addition to this enforcement role, the Deputy may be aware that the Central Bank is proactively regulating the financial system and has issued regulations aimed at protecting SMEs when dealing with regulated and unregulated firms as set out below. These strengthened regulations include the Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (Section 48) (Lending to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) Regulations 2015 which came into operation for regulated lenders (other than credit unions) on 1 July 2016 and in the case of credit unions, will come into operation from 1 January 2017. These revised SME Regulations introduce specific requirements for regulated lenders, including:

- Contacting SME borrowers who have been in arrears for 15 working days;
- Warning SME borrowers if they are in danger of being classified as not co-operating; and
- Expanding the grounds for appeal and setting up an internal appeals panel.

In relation to unregulated firms, the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act, 2015 was enacted on 8 July 2015. It was introduced to fill the consumer protection gap where loans were sold by the original lender to an unregulated firm. The 2015 Act introduced a regulatory regime for a new type of entity called a 'credit servicing firm'. Credit Servicing Firms are now subject to the provisions of Irish financial services law that apply to 'regulated financial service providers'. This ensures that relevant borrowers, whose loans are sold to third parties, maintain the same regulatory protections they had prior to the sale, including under the various statutory codes (such as the SME Regulations noted above) issued by the Central Bank of Ireland.

Financial Services Ombudsman Data

129. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the total amount of funding allocated to the Financial Services Ombudsman in 2015 to 2017, inclusive, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35669/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At the outset, I must point out that the Financial Services Ombudsman is independent in the performance of his statutory functions.

The Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland Act, 2004 provided for the establishment of the Financial Services Ombudsman Council. Under Section 57BE, the Financial Services Ombudsman Council may impose levies and fees to enable the Financial Services Ombudsman to perform the functions assigned to him and to exercise the powers conferred on him by statute. Under Section 57 BF, the regulations do not take effect until the Minister has consented to them in writing.

The following table shows funding levied on the financial service industry to be paid to the Financial Services Ombudsman:-

| Year | Funding to be paid by industry |
|------|--------------------------------|
| 2015 | €3,743,343 (out-turn) |
| 2016 | €4,231,924 |
| 2017 | Not available * |

*Council Regulations under Section 57BE have not yet been received.

Full details of the income and expenditure of Financial Services Ombudsman are available on his website at www.financialombudsman.ie. Actual expenditure may exceed funding provided by industry if funds are carried over from the previous year.

Financial Services Ombudsman Data

130. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of complaints received by the Financial Services Ombudsman in the 2010 to 2016, inclusive, in tabular form. [35671/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services Ombudsman is independent in the performance of his statutory functions. Information on complaints numbers is available in the Annual Reports of the Financial Services Ombudsman at <https://financialombudsman.ie/publications/>.

The Financial Services Ombudsman has informed me that the information requested by the Deputy is contained in the following table:

| Year | Number of complaints received |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2010 | 7230 |
| 2011 | 7287 |
| 2012 | 8135 |
| 2013 | 7722* |
| 2014 | 4477* |
| 2015 | 4872 |
| 2016 (to end October 2016) | 3813 |
| Total | 43,536 |

Note:

*Prior to September 2013 complaints which had not first been submitted to the financial service provider or which were otherwise incomplete were reported as complaints received. For the period from September 2013 to December 2014 incomplete complaints such as these were not included as complaints received. The number of complaints received during the periods concerned are 575 from September to December 2013 and 1,476 in 2014.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

131. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of all pension top-ups paid in respect of chief executives of semi-State companies under the aegis of his Department, including the name of the organisation, the name of the chief executive, the amount of the top-up, the date of payment, and if the top-up was approved by his Department in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [36060/16]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There is one body under the aegis of my Department which could be referred to as a semi-state company.

The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is a private limited company established under the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland Act 2014. The SBCI was formed and registered under the Companies Acts. The issued share capital of the SBCI is owned solely by the Minister for Finance. I am advised by the SBCI that it does not generally consider itself a semi-state company in the usual course of business, it does not have its own staff, the staff of the SBCI are employees of the NTMA who are assigned to the SBCI. I am also advised that the Chief Executive of the SBCI, Nick Ashmore is a member of the NTMA defined benefit pension scheme and does not receive top ups.

National Educational Psychological Service Administration

132. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an appointment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35536/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides educational psychology service to all primary and post primary schools through an assigned NEPS psychologist and in some cases through the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA), full details of which are on the Department's website. Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS will pay the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

In common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

This system allows psychologists to give early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually. It also ensures that children are not referred unnecessarily for psychological intervention.

If the parents of the child, the subject of this question, have specific concerns about his educational progress I would advise, in the first instance, that they speak to the Principal of the school with a view to raising these concerns with the school's assigned NEPS psychologist.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy or local NEPS office.

Apprenticeship Data

133. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action points and deliverables laid out in Enterprise 2025 to increase the number of females enrolled in apprenticeships in view of the imbalanced ratio of female to male apprentices at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35666/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): As the Deputy is aware, in order to be registered as an apprentice by SOLAS, a person must be employed by an approved employer in one of the 27 craft trades. Recruitment to apprenticeship is therefore driven by employers rather than by SOLAS or by education and training providers.

The 2014 Review of Apprenticeship in Ireland acknowledged that the number of women employed in craft apprenticeships is low as they operate in sectors that have traditionally low levels of female employment. SOLAS offers a bursary to employers to encourage women to take up apprenticeships in these areas. Despite this the number of female apprentices remains

low.

Currently the Apprenticeship Council is overseeing the expansion of the apprenticeship system into a range of new areas, following a call for proposals from employers and education and training providers. 25 proposals have been prioritised by the Council for development. In recent months, we have seen the first of these new apprenticeships with the Insurance Practitioner Apprenticeship launching in September and the Industrial Electrical Engineer Apprenticeship recently commencing. Further new apprenticeships will get underway later this year and early next year. Many of these new programmes are in sectors where there is a different gender balance in the workplace and I am confident that this will lead to a strong increase in female participation when these new apprenticeships are launched in the coming months.

Accompanying the renewal and expansion of apprenticeship in Ireland will be a new branding and marketing campaign. SOLAS will examine how this campaign can assist with promoting apprenticeship to women and to their potential employers.

Schools Building Projects

134. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that additional funding is required by a school (details supplied) to upgrade the building and improve access for persons with a disability, especially those who require the use of a wheelchair; his plans to provide this funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35520/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's Planning and Building Unit has no record of receiving an application for funding from the school to which the Deputy refers. If such an application is received it will be fully considered and a decision will issue directly to the school authority.

Minor Works Scheme

135. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the date on which he will pay the minor works grants to primary schools here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35532/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I have today announced the Minor Works Grant 2016/2017 and payments will issue shortly.

Minor Works Scheme Applications

136. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a minor works grant for a school (details supplied) will be paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35539/16]

144. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision on a minor works grant 2016/2017 for a school (details supplied) in County Kerry will be decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35629/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 136 and 144 together.

I have today announced the Minor Works Grant 2016/2017 and payment will issue shortly, including to the school in question.

Minor Works Scheme Applications

137. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the school minor works grant will be paid in 2016 in respect of schools (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35557/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Letters are not issued to primary schools advising on the likely payment or otherwise of the Minor Works Grant. Circular letter 0062/2013, which is available on my Department's website, states "the grant will only be paid in future years as funding permits."

I have today announced the Minor Works Grant 2016/2017 and payment will issue shortly, including to the school in question.

Departmental Correspondence

138. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) will be provided with information requested from his Department some months ago; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35575/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): P60s which are annual statement of earnings were issued in early 2015 and 2016 to the person referred to by the Deputy. This information has been issued to her again. The information in relation to hours worked has also been issued.

Teaching Contracts

139. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if sitting Members in the Houses of the Oireachtas are eligible to apply for the job-sharing scheme if they meet the eligibility criteria set out in chapter 5, section 4 of the terms and conditions of employment for registered teachers in recognised primary and post-primary schools published on 30 September 2016 in his Department's web book; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35612/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The position is that in September 2016 my Department published on its website the 'Terms & Conditions of Employment for Registered Teachers in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools'.

Chapter Four, Paragraph 1.1 of this book details the position for Oireachtas members i.e. that the career break scheme is designed to cater for public representation and states "The main objectives of this scheme below, which are not exhaustive, is for employers, wherever possible to facilitate applicants in the areas of:- Public Representation"

This is in accordance with the Government decision of the 1 February, 2011 to revise the employment and pension arrangements for teachers who became Oireachtas members so that any member of Dáil Éireann or Seanad Éireann who holds a teaching post in a primary, secondary, community, comprehensive or vocational school would have the option of applying for a

career break of up to 10 years. This was to replace existing leave arrangements. This decision was extended by the Government to all staff in the education sector ahead of the 2016 General Election. Therefore the only means by which a teacher who takes up a seat in the Oireachtas can temporarily take leave from their teaching post and subsequently return to it is through taking a career break.

Ministerial Travel

140. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it is appropriate that the Minister of State with responsibility for training, skills and innovation, who has said that Israel's treatment of Palestinians is appalling and unacceptable and would not be tolerated by any other state in the world, would visit Israel and meet a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35613/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan) : The Minister of State for Training, Skills and Innovation's visit to Palestine and Israel originated in an invitation from the Palestinian Minister for Education. The objective on this visit was to both demonstrate what Ireland is doing in the fields of education and training, and to observe and learn from what is being done in other countries, and to discuss problems arising and how they are being approached. It was hoped also specifically to offer support to the education and training sector in Palestine, which Ireland is already directly supporting through Irish Aid assistance and capacity building.

It should be noted that this visit to Palestine entailed transit through Israel. It was natural therefore, as well as courteous, to seek also to discuss these areas with relevant Israeli Ministers. I found these meetings useful and interesting. In this regard, no meeting with the Minister to whom the Deputy refers actually took place.

This visit was arranged with the advice and assistance of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and its diplomatic missions on the ground. This advice was clearly in favour of meeting Ministers in both jurisdictions, if possible. Ireland has consistently voiced criticisms of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory, but the Government does not consider that this should prohibit mutually beneficial relations with Israel in other spheres. Similar concerns would apply to very many states around the world with whom Ireland has human rights concerns.

Questions relating to Ireland's relations with Israel, or Israeli Ministers, should be taken up with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Teaching Contracts

141. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a contract of indefinite duration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35621/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 the Teaching Council is, since 2006, the statutory regulator and standards body for the teaching profession in this State.

A key function of the Council is to register teachers and maintain the register of teachers in the State.

The Teaching Council is also the designated authority in this State for considering applications for registration from teachers who qualified in other States.

If Conditional Registration is granted, the Council will inform a teacher of the conditions imposed, the measures required to meet them, and the timeframe within which they must be met. A teacher should communicate directly with the Teaching Council regarding conditional registration issues.

School Transport Availability

142. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will ensure that a bus service is in place to service two minority schools for the next school year (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35622/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

Currently in the region of 114,000 children, including some 10,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

The purpose of the Department's Primary School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Under the terms of the Department's Primary School Transport Scheme children are eligible for transport where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from and are attending their nearest national school as determined by the Department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language.

A minimum number of 10 eligible children residing in a distinct locality, as determined by Bus Éireann, are required before consideration may be given to the establishment or retention of school transport services, provided this can be done within reasonable cost limits.

The service referred to by the Deputy is operating for the 2016/17 school year. However, Bus Éireann review all school transport services over the summer months. Arising from this review, routes may be established, altered, extended or withdrawn depending on the number and location of eligible children who will be availing of school transport for the following school year.

Third Level Admissions Assistance

143. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the sterling exchange rate and tax year applicable in assessing income under the HEAR scheme for access to third level education for a person who will be applying for the scheme in 2017 where both parents work across the Border; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35628/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is a college and university admissions scheme which offers places on reduced points and extra college support to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The scheme is operated by a number of higher education institutions and not by my Department. Admissions to the institutions are regulated by the institutions themselves.

Individual students who have queries on this matter can contact HEAR Higher Education Institutions directly. Alternatively, the Deputy may wish to contact the Irish Universities Association in this instance

Question No. 144 answered with Question No. 136.

School Patronage

145. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the closing date for expressions of interest from patrons for a new school (details supplied); when thereafter a decision will be announced for the patronage of the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35633/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers was included in the announcement of November 2015 of new schools to be established by my Department in 2017 and 2018.

When it is decided that a new school is required, my Department runs a separate patronage process to decide who will operate the school. The criteria used in relation to patronage of the new school place particular emphasis on parental demand for plurality and diversity of patronage, with parental preferences from the area to be served being central to the process. In this regard, patrons and prospective patrons must collect and demonstrate evidence of parental demand from the area to be served for the model of provision proposed as part of their application under the process. It is hoped to invite applications for the patronage of these new primary schools in the coming weeks. This invitation will be posted on my Department's website *www.education.ie*. The closing date for receipt of completed applications is approximately four to six weeks from the date the invitation issues.

The assessment stage of the process is rigorous and detailed. Once completed, draft assessment reports will be forwarded for the consideration of the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG), which is an external independent advisory group set up to oversee the process. Following their consideration, the NSEG will submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. I will then announce who the successful patron of each of the four schools will be. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations will be available on my Department's website following the announcement.

Education and Training Boards Funding

146. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the proposed headquarters for the Louth and Meath Education and Training Board which is to be constructed in Drogheda on the grounds of a school (details supplied); if money was provided in the Estimates in 2016 and 2017 for this purpose; if contractors have been appointed to complete this development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35663/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Tenders have been received for the project to which the Deputy refers. The project is currently under review subject to the availability of funding in 2017 for this type of project.

Construction funding is allocated to a project when it is approved to proceed to site. A de-

cision is taken in this regard in the context of competing demands from other on-going capital projects.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

147. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of all pension top-ups paid in respect of chief executives of semi-State companies under the aegis of his Department, including the name of the organisation, the name of the chief executive, the amount of the top-up, the date of payment, and if the top-up was approved by his Department in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35884/16]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For the Deputy's information there are no semi-state companies under the aegis of my Department.

Details of non-commercial state agencies under the remit of my Department are available from the Department's website. <http://education.ie/en/The-Department/Agencies/>.

Irish Water

148. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the value of Irish assets and infrastructure that have been signed over to Irish Water to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35516/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The information requested is being compiled and will be provided to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

Vacant Sites Levy

149. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if vacant properties owned by Government bodies, local authorities and semi-State organisations will be subject to the vacant-site levy in 2019; and if not, the reason for the exemption. [35581/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Urban Regeneration and Housing Act 2015 introduced the vacant site levy measure, aimed at incentivising the development of vacant, under - utilised sites in urban areas.

Under the provisions of the Act, with effect from 2019, a levy will be charged on the registered owners of vacant sites in designated areas in local development plans and local area plans as being in need of, and suitable for, housing or in need of regeneration. The Act provides that residential or regeneration land, regardless of ownership, either public or private, will be subject to the levy, if it meets the criteria for a vacant site.

Development Contributions

150. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the details of the development contribution rebate scheme including the cost

of the scheme; and the number of properties the scheme is estimated to have had an effect on incentivising their development. [35582/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The development contribution rebate scheme was one of a number of measures included in the housing package, Stabilising Rents, Boosting Supply, which was announced by the previous Government in November 2015. The aim of the scheme is to enhance the viability of construction and sale of residential housing units at affordable prices in the locations of greatest need.

The scheme was subsequently launched by my Department in December 2015 and applies to the metropolitan areas of Cork City and County Councils, and all of Fingal, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and South Dublin County Councils, as well as Dublin City Council.

Eligibility under the scheme is confined to residential developments of at least 50 units which must be completed and sold by 31 December 2017 at a price not greater than €300,000 in Dublin and €250,000 in Cork.

Under the scheme, the rebate will be paid in full for dwellings in the Dublin area with a confirmed sale price of up to €275,000, with an 80% rebate payable for units with a sale price of €275,000 - €300,000. In the Cork area, a 100% rebate will apply for dwellings with a sale price of up to €225,000, with an 80% rebate for sale prices of €225,000 - €250,000. The rebate will be paid solely in respect of development contributions paid to the relevant local authority for local authority infrastructure and services.

Further details of the scheme can be obtained on the Circular letter which launched the scheme and which issued from my Department to the relevant local authorities, which is available at following link – <http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/sub-type/circular?query=circulars>.

Returns to date from the local authorities concerned indicate that some 1,068 housing units are projected to benefit from the scheme at an estimated overall cost of approximately €8.5m between 2017 and 2018, subject to compliance with the requirements of the scheme.

Local Authority Housing Provision

151. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which he has sought and or received confirmation from the local authorities, currently having the highest number of applicants for local authority housing, information relating to their respective programmes in terms of new house acquisitions, building starts and existing house acquisitions with particular reference to addressing the most serious aspect of the housing crisis; if further initiatives are required to accelerate the house building programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35584/16]

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which each local authority has advised him and his Department as to the maximum number of housing units likely to be provided by them in the next 12 months; if existing targets need to be revised upwards to meet the challenge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35591/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 151 and 158 together.

I have previously acknowledged the good start made on social housing delivery in 2015 with 13,000 households' needs met, but my ambition is that the delivery of homes under each of the social housing programmes will be accelerated and that the target of 17,000 units for 2016 will be fully achieved.

More broadly, the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan has put an even more intensive focus on the work to tackle the housing crisis. The increased target of 47,000 new social housing units by 2021 is backed up by €5.35 billion funding. My Department is engaged on an ongoing basis with all local authorities concerning their plans and programmes for the delivery of those targets. I have met directly with the local authority chief executives and assured them that funding is available to advance new projects and to urge the swiftest possible progress on their overall programme of projects.

Our efforts to significantly ramp up social housing construction nationally are taking effect. In 2015, only 74 units were constructed by local authorities. In 2016, circa 1,400 units will start or have already started on site. More than 3,000 additional units will start on site in 2017. The continuous contact between my Department and all local authorities is focused on both the existing projects and on bringing forward additional, new proposals through a range of delivery means. This contact also includes a focus on housing acquisitions, which are providing a strong and immediate stream of delivery. Over 1,000 new social homes were delivered last year through acquisitions and I anticipate a significant programme again this year. Local authorities and AHBs are also undertaking new turnkey construction projects with private developers.

The targets for social housing under Rebuilding Ireland represent a substantial increase over previous targets. While a challenge for all of us who are involved in their delivery, I am confident that the range of measures provided for in Rebuilding Ireland provide a solid basis for the full achievement of our targets.

Housing Policy

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has examined the existing restrictions in respect of meeting the housing needs of the indigenous rural population in view of the urgent necessity to encourage the building of more houses, thereby enhancing the housing stock and relieving pressure on the urban housing programme and taking into consideration good and sustainable planning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35585/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The *Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Rural Housing* published by my Department in April 2005 set out the national policy framework for planning authorities in drawing up their statutory development plans in relation to the issue of housing in rural areas, taking into account local circumstances and the type of area involved, including areas adjacent to large cities and towns that require careful management of development pressures and other rural areas experiencing population decline.

The Guidelines require planning authorities to frame their planning policies in a balanced and measured way that ensures that the housing requirements arising from rural communities are met, while avoiding excessive urban-generated housing and ribbon development in areas adjacent to cities and towns. The Guidelines also aim at ensuring that sites being developed for rural housing are suitable with regard to access and wastewater disposal, and also from landscape and design perspectives.

It is a matter for individual planning authorities to prepare their development plans and the policies contained within such plans, taking account of local and varying geographical and landscape circumstances, as well as the approaches set out under the Guidelines in relation to rural generated housing. It is also a matter for planning authorities, as well as An Bord Pleanála, to implement the Guidelines and local planning policies in assessing and deciding on individual planning applications and appeals under the development management consent process.

My Department maintains a constant overview of the practical implementation of all statutory planning guidelines, including the 2005 Rural Housing Guidelines. I intend to keep the Guidelines under review, particularly in view of the commitments in the Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland, which aim to accelerate the delivery of housing in order to address the current housing supply shortage and the projected housing needs over the coming years. The Action Plan indicates that achieving this aim will contribute to wider objectives, including the need to support sustainable urban and rural development and communities.

Emergency Accommodation Provision

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which the emergency housing needs of local authority housing applicants, in each of the local authorities including County Kildare, continues to be met; if, by reference to the current position, he is satisfied that adequate provision has been made or is being made to cater for the number of persons likely to become homeless for one reason or another over the next two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35586/16]

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which emergency housing provision is being made by the local authorities adjacent to Dublin in sufficient scale to meet the likely number of cases to be dealt with based on experience over the past year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35587/16]

156. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which emergency housing accommodation remains available to each of the local authorities throughout the greater Dublin area with particular reference to the ability of each of the authorities to meet the housing needs in their respective areas in the next six months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35589/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 153, 154 and 156 together.

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 homeless services, including accommodation, rests with individual housing authorities. Accordingly, the issues raised in the question in relation to the provision of emergency accommodation are a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

Local Authority Housing Data

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the total number of houses allocated to tenants by each of the local au-

thorities in the greater Dublin area over the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35588/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department does not hold information on the allocation of social housing supports to households on the waiting list. The allocation of such support is a matter for each housing authority in accordance with its allocation scheme made under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009.

Question No. 156 answered with Question No. 153.

Housing Policy

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which he has investigated the inclusion of a rapid build housing programme in each local authority experiencing a housing crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35590/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The key aim of the rapid build housing programme is to fast-track the delivery of much needed homes, particularly for homeless families. Under the Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a total of 1,500 rapid-build units will be delivered by 2018.

My Department is currently working closely with the four Dublin local authorities in relation to the rapid delivery programme. To date, 22 rapid build units have already been delivered and are occupied and by end year a total of 350 rapid-build homes will be advancing through various stages of delivery, including construction. A further 650 rapid-build homes will be advanced in 2017, with another 500 units to be delivered in 2018.

In addition to working with the four Dublin local authorities on their rapid delivery programmes, my Department is also encouraging other local authorities with urgent housing needs to advance a range of rapid delivery projects so as to ensure the delivery of units in the quickest manner possible.

Of particular note is the establishment of a framework of rapid build contractors by the Office of Government Procurement, which is currently at the final stages of tender evaluation. The framework will be in place next month and will mean that local authorities across the country will be able to run quicker procurement competitions and advance rapid build projects to site more efficiently and effectively.

Question No. 158 answered with Question No. 151.

Housing Policy

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the extent to which enhanced measures can be put in place to make housing more affordable to first-time buyers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35592/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The lack of a sufficient supply of homes to meet demand has led to the current pressures in the housing market, making it difficult for first-time and other buyers to access housing

at affordable levels.

The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness outlines the Government's commitment to develop a fully functioning housing market that meets the housing needs of all, by overcoming the current supply shortfall and increasing the national supply level to over 25,000 new homes per year by 2021. Rebuilding Ireland takes a holistic approach in addressing the many interacting structural constraints affecting the housing market by including actions to streamline the planning system, remove infrastructure blockages and support the delivery of affordable housing. These measures should help make new developments economically viable in areas where supply constraints and price pressures are particularly acute.

Only last week, I announced details of 23 Major Urban Housing Development Sites with the potential to deliver up to 30,000 additional homes on existing zoned lands and close to the key areas of demand over the next three to four years. These sites will be highlighted as exemplars for the co-ordination and delivery of plan-led housing development and active land management.

In order to quickly get these and other key sites moving, a €200 million Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) has been established. Twenty-one local authorities, working in conjunction with housing providers, submitted proposals for funding which are currently being evaluated. Successful bid proposals will be announced in December.

Separately, the NTMA and ISIF are currently exploring opportunities to support the delivery of housing-related on-site enabling infrastructure in large-scale priority development areas with a view to kick starting the development process.

Given the particular challenge faced by first-time buyers in accessing the housing market, my colleague, the Minister for Finance, recently announced a Help-to-Buy initiative as part of Budget 2017. The Help-to-Buy initiative has been designed to complement the structural measures announced in Rebuilding Ireland; by providing immediate and targeted support for first-time buyers of new homes in meeting their deposit requirements, greater certainty regarding the pool of available purchasers is provided to the house-building sector, encouraging the construction of new housing units.

The combined effect of these, and other actions, under the Plan, will help reduce costs and deliver more housing at affordable prices, where it is greatly needed.

Question No. 160 answered with Question No. 93.

Question No. 161 answered with Question No. 54.

Urban Renewal Schemes

162. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the details of the incentives currently in place to address the need for revitalising town and village centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35624/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Programme for a Partnership Government, published in May 2016, sets out the ambitious priority attached to urban regeneration by the Government, incorporating a series of specific actions aimed at facilitating the regeneration of our urban centres, many of which have been adversely impacted by our recent economic difficulties. The Government's Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – Rebuilding Ireland,

published in July 2016, further reinforces the Government's commitment to the area of urban regeneration.

In this context, the Government launched the Town and Village Renewal Scheme last August with an allocation of €10 million in funding for the year. A sum of €380,000 was made available to each of the 26 counties for 2016 under this initial phase of the scheme. Local Authorities, in conjunction with local communities and businesses, were each invited to submit up to eight proposals by the end of September for approval. Following an assessment of the proposals received, my colleague, the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, announced (on 4 November) details of 172 towns and villages which will benefit from the funding available under this year's Town and Village Renewal Scheme. The full list of towns benefitting under the scheme is available on the website of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Increased funding of €12 million has been provided in Budget 2017 to enhance this scheme with a view to increasing the attractiveness and sustainability of our towns and villages as places in which to live and work.

The Programme for Government also commits to examining a series of further initiatives, such as:

- the introduction of a similar scheme to the 'Living City Initiative' to regenerate urban centres and villages throughout Ireland (Year 1 action),

- examining the scope to reform the Derelict Sites Act to tackle the under-use and hoarding of derelict land by the State, semi-State and private sectors (Year 1 action),

- the establishment of a National Register of Derelict Sites, in addition to the new vacant site levy, to bring vacant and under-utilised sites into beneficial use for housing and urban regeneration purposes (Year 2 action),

- the mandating of local authorities with better land management powers, including the possibility of additional CPO capabilities (Year 2 action), and

- various other measures, which were further developed under the Rebuilding Ireland, Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, and especially those under Pillar 5 aimed at re-using vacant housing stock, such as the:

To drive forward these and other considerations, a Working Group, chaired by my colleague, the Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal, and comprising senior representatives from my Department, local authorities and other relevant bodies, has been established and will bring forward proposals for new urban regeneration measures as early as possible. It is intended that the new measures will complement the existing regeneration programme under my Department's Social Housing Capital Programme, as well as other social regeneration initiatives already under way.

Having held its inaugural meeting in mid-June, the Working Group has met on three occasions and is due to meet again in the coming weeks to consider issues and emerging proposals.

Library Services

163. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the rationale for funding the surveillance and other technologies necessary to run

a staffless library that opens later than staffed libraries, rather than funding extra staff for these libraries so that they can extend their opening hours. [35627/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): ‘My Open Library’ is an initiative under Opportunities for All, the national public library strategy 2013-2017 and is part of a strategy to address customer demand. To this end, ‘My Open Library’ allows library members the freedom and flexibility to use the library at times that suit them. It provides additional opening hours from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days-per-week, ensuring access to library services for users who cannot avail of them during regular staffed hours.

An extended pilot phase of the ‘My Open Library’ initiative will commence in 22 branches from January 2017 and, subject to review, will be considered for wider introduction across the public library network thereafter. The review will consider, among other things, the cost of the service compared with alternative approaches to improving access for library users.

The set-up and operating costs of ‘My Open Library’ technology are relatively modest. These costs cover the installation of security technology; however, they also cover technologies that enhance services during both staffed and unstaffed hours. These include, for example, self-service technologies that free up staff to provide greater assistance and information to users, and to deliver other services such as literacy development, digital literacy and outreach programmes.

There will be no reduction in staffing levels or staffed hours as a result of the ‘My Open Library’ service. A professional and skilled library staff is vital for a successful library service and my Department is working with local authorities to enhance staffing resources and extend staffed library hours.

Housing Policy

164. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the projected spend on housing for the lifetime of the Rebuilding Ireland plan broken down into capital and current spend for each year of the plan in tabular form. [35631/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): To support the implementation of Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, I have secured €5.35 billion in exchequer investment to deliver 47,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisitions and leasing, over the period 2016 to 2021. This €5.35 billion investment comprises some €4.5 billion in capital funding and €844 million in support of programmes funded from current expenditure. In addition, €200 million is being provided for the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund through investment in key enabling infrastructure.

Under Budget 2017, some €1.3bn will be invested across the broad range of housing programmes next year, including those covered by the Rebuilding Ireland investment programme. The annual allocations for the years 2018 to 2021 will be finalised in the context of the annual Budgetary process.

Local Authority Funding

165. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local

cal Government if he will provide a breakdown of the annual allocation of capital and current spend and the annual drawdown of capital and current spend by each local authority for each of the years from 2011 to 2016, in tabular form. [35632/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The data requested are currently being compiled and will be provided to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

Local Authority Housing Eligibility

166. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his proposals to increase the income eligibility limits for local authority housing for councils such as Cavan in view of the increasing difficulties faced by persons slightly above the existing income limits in purchasing a home themselves; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35635/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each housing authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. The limits also reflect a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn and thereby promote sustainable communities.

I am satisfied that the current income limits generally provide for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households unable to provide accommodation from their own resources. These limits will continue to be kept under review by my Department, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020 .

I am aware of the difficulties experienced by some households in purchasing their own home where they are not eligible for social housing support on income grounds. It may be possible for such households to avail of a mortgage from a local authority which is targeted at lower income first-time buyers who can demonstrate that they are unable to get a loan from a building society or bank. A loan can be up to 97% of the price of the property, subject to a maximum loan of €200,000. The relevant terms and conditions applying to local authority housing loans are set out in the Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012 (S.I. 408 of 2012), which prescribe a maximum annual gross income threshold of €50,000 for a single person household or a combined annual gross income of €75,000 for a two person household. The Regulations are available on my Department's website at: *Housing (Local Authority Loans) Regulations 2012*.

Another option is the Home Choice Loan, a Government backed mortgage for first time buyers. The Home Choice Loan is available through authorised mortgage brokers and can be used to provide up to 92% of the market value of the property being purchased, up to a maximum loan amount of €285,000. A new or second hand property may be purchased under the scheme. Further information is available at: www.homechoiceloan.ie

Local Authority Housing Funding

167. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if an application has been received from Louth County Council regarding the proposed Drogheda Northern Cross route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35673/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): The aim of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund is to relieve critical infrastructural blockages to enable the accelerated delivery of housing on key development sites and to improve the economic viability of new housing projects in Dublin and in urban areas of high demand for housing. The €200m Fund will be composed of an Exchequer allocation of €150 million, matched by a €50 million contribution from participating local authorities.

A call for proposals under the fund was issued to local authorities on 26 August 2016, with a closing date for receipt of proposals of 14 October. It was open to all local authorities to apply, with funding to be allocated on the basis of a competitive bid process. 21 local authorities have submitted a total of 74 project applications relating to specific sites or development land areas. Louth County Council submitted a proposal in relation to Northern Environs, Drogheda which includes the Port Access Northern Cross Route.

The overall total cost of the 74 funding bid applications is approximately €800m, with funding of some €600m being sought from the Exchequer and local authorities agreeing to fund approximately €200m as part of their matching fund requirements. It will not be possible to approve all applications, given the scale and value of applications received.

The viability of the applications is currently being examined in detail against the assessment criteria set out in the Call for Proposals, with a focus on the level of funding required and what it might leverage, the number of housing units that could be delivered, their strategic location and speed of delivery, and affordability levels of a proportion of the homes.

In light of the different financial assessments required for the different scales of proposals under the Public Spending Code, there will be two phases of announcements. I intend to make initial announcements for successful smaller-scale projects in mid-December and a second phase announcement by end March 2017 for those project bids requiring more detailed financial appraisals.

Local Government Reform

168. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the appropriateness of appointing a person (details supplied) to the Cork expert advisory group. [35699/16]

169. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans in appointing an external adviser (details supplied) to the Cork expert advisory group; and his views on whether this appointment may influence the direction of the Cork expert advisory group. [35700/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 168 and 169 together.

The role of the Cork expert advisory group is to review the recommendations of the Cork Local Government Committee report. The group is tasked with examining both the majority

and minority reports and underlying material and has a mandate to identify and examine a wider range of options for Cork than might have been considered previously.

In considering members for the Cork expert advisory group, consideration was given to suitable candidates meeting the specific skill sets required. Specific professional expertise in strategic planning, local government administration and governance was sought to deal with the complexity of the issues involved.

I chose individuals who, in my view, have the necessary professional expertise in these areas and I included a mix of both national and international experts.

Housing Policy

170. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of the measures in pillar 1 of Rebuilding Ireland to address homelessness with timelines of Q3 and Q4 of 2016, including the delivery of rapid build houses, preventing family homelessness, extending housing first and the tenancy protection service and providing adequate emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35705/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Implementation of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness is being advanced across a number of departments and agencies, under the oversight of the Cabinet Committee on Housing, chaired by An Taoiseach, and there is a clear commitment to reporting progress, particularly through quarterly progress reports. The first quarterly progress report, which is in respect of Quarter 3 2016 commitments and actions, was published on 1 November and can be accessed through the following link: - <http://rebuildingireland.ie/First-Progress-Report.pdf>.

Further progress reports will be published on the same quarterly basis, with the next due to be published in January 2017. Each quarterly report will focus on the actions due to be progressed or completed in the preceding quarter.

The various ‘Pillar 1’ actions contained in Rebuilding Ireland are being advanced across a number of Government departments and agencies. The Quarter 4 actions, such as the implementation of a National Tenancy Protection Service and a One-Stop Shop assessment centre for families, are progressing in line with the timeframes identified in Rebuilding Ireland. Also, measures are being put in place to ensure sufficient emergency accommodation is in place over the winter period.

With specific regard to Rapid-Delivery Housing Programme, 22 units have already been delivered and are tenanted and Dublin City Council is currently advancing a number of projects, which will deliver a further 131 units on a phased basis from end-year. Work is also underway across the four local authorities, which will bring to 350 the number of rapid delivery homes advancing through various stages of delivery, including construction, by the end of the year. Construction dates will be finalised in the context of completion of procurement and award of contracts.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

171. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and

Local Government the details of all pension top-ups paid in respect of chief executives of semi-State companies under the aegis of his Department, including the name of the organisation, the name of the chief executive, the amount of the top-up, the date of payment, and if the top-up was approved by his Department in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35892/16]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Simon Coveney): Retirement benefits payable to staff of agencies under the aegis of my Department is a matter primarily for the agencies themselves, under their approved superannuation schemes. On the basis that “top-ups” refers to superannuation payments beyond contractual entitlements, no such payments were approved by my Department in the period in question.

Labour Activation Measures

172. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason social protection recipients who participate on the JobPath programme are being told that they cannot during the term of the programme take up a Tús position despite otherwise meeting the criteria for Tús participation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35522/16]

173. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his attention has been drawn to the fact that certain companies administering the JobPath programme do not make it clear to participants who join that programme that they cannot take up a position with Tús while they are participating in the JobPath programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35523/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 172 and 173 together.

JobPath is an employment activation service that supports people who are long-term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to secure and sustain paid employment. Participants on JobPath receive intensive individual support to help them tackle barriers to employment and to assist them in finding full-time sustainable jobs. Each participant is assigned to a personal adviser who assesses a person’s skills, experience, challenges and work goals. The personal adviser works with the jobseeker to agree a personal progression plan that includes a schedule of activities, actions and job focused targets. Participants receive the JobPath service for a period of 12 months (which can be extended by up to six months to facilitate the jobseeker completing training programmes) or until such time as they find employment whichever is the sooner. If the jobseeker secures employment during this period they will continue to receive support for at least three months and up to twelve months while in employment

TÚS is a community work placement initiative providing short-term working opportunities for jobseekers as a stepping stone back to full-time employment. TÚS placements are not full-time sustainable jobs. Unemployed people do not apply to participate in TÚS. Eligible people are selected for TÚS by my Department. In general, in order to manage the allocation of places effectively, jobseekers cannot participate in two schemes simultaneously. This restriction applies to TÚS, JobPath and other schemes. However, if a person has completed their engagement with the one service and continues to be unemployed, participation on other schemes remains an option that can be considered for that person subject to an assessment by a departmental case officer.

Jobseekers, who are selected for JobPath, are invited to attend an initial information session that is jointly hosted by my Department and the JobPath company and at which the jobseekers’

rights and responsibilities are explained. I have asked my officials to arrange for information on referrals to TÚS (as well as other scheme such as Community Employment and Gateway) to be provided at future sessions.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Applications

174. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if he will expedite a review of a disability allowance application with a view to granting this allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35531/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The application for disability allowance (DA) from this man, based upon the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds and the person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 25 October 2016.

Further evidence was received on 7 November 2016 and this is currently being reviewed by a deciding officer. The person in question can expect a decision on the review of his DA application shortly. If the decision to refuse the allowance is confirmed following review, the person concerned will have the right to appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Training Support Grant

175. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the criteria to be considered to become a HGV driver instruction tuition provider for Intreo; and the process to apply for same. [35560/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Training Support Grant (TSG) provided by my Department is designed to fund quick access to short-term training where this cannot be provided by a state provider within a reasonable time or where an intervention is identified that can support individual jobseekers to access work opportunities.

The maximum fund available to jobseekers under the scheme is €500 p.a. Access to the scheme is via my Department's case officers. The training sought by a jobseeker, such as HGV driver instruction, must form part of the agreed personal progression or action plan for the individual to enter/re-enter the labour market.

The agreement to provide training under the TSG is made between the customers of the Department and the individual training company. Therefore, the Department does not endorse any specific course providers and it does not enter any contracts with individual companies for the provision of training.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy. If you require any further assistance on this please do not hesitate to contact Philip in my office.

Social Welfare Schemes Data

176. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons

in receipt of social protection payments who reside abroad; if he will provide a breakdown of the types of payments being received, in tabular form; the persons entitled to receive these payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35563/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The information requested by the Deputy is not available in respect of all eligible schemes and is not routinely collated by my Department in the format requested. I am however informed that at the end of October there were in excess of 53,600 recipients of payments of the schemes detailed in the attached tabular statement. This figure is based on the information communicated to my Department by the recipient and may exclude persons who have failed to provide an updated address.

With regard to the persons entitled to receive these payments the position remains unchanged from that which I informed the Deputy of in response to Parliamentary Question 405 on the 15th inst.

Recipients of Invalidation Pension, State Pension Contributory, State Pension Transition, Widow's/Widower's and Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension who are resident abroad at the end of October 2016

| Invalidity Pension | State Pension Contributory | State Pension Transition | Widow's/Widower's and Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension |
|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 839 | 44,991 | 102 | 7,694 |

Education and Training Boards

177. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the options available to persons drawing credits but not receiving a social protection payment in terms of training; the schemes open to such persons; and his plans to extend options for job training for this category. [35571/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The key objective of activation policy and labour market initiatives has been to offer assistance to those most in need of support in securing work and achieving financial self-sufficiency. Accordingly the employment services and schemes provided by the Department are focused in the first instance on the cohort of people who are unemployed and in receipt of a social welfare payment (either Jobseekers Allowance or Jobseekers Benefit).

Despite this focus, access to training and employment programmes is also open to other groups under certain circumstances.

The main training opportunities open to unemployed people receiving social protection payments are through ETB (formerly FÁS) training for unemployed people, or, if they have been signing for six months or more, through the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS). Unemployed persons not in receipt of payments, but signing for credits, are also eligible to avail of training opportunities under these schemes. In these cases, such participants do not receive a training allowance but may receive travel and lunch allowances from the ETB.

There are no plans to make changes to these arrangements at present.

The Government is committed to supporting as many people as possible to participate more fully in employment and to become more self-sufficient by providing supports that address bar-

riers they may encounter in finding and sustaining employment.

Carer's Allowance Applications

178. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35583/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 12 July 2016.

Additional information was requested on 5 October 2016. Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and she will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when a carer's allowance will be paid in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35594/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's allowance from the person in question on 5 October 2016. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

Disability Allowance Eligibility

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when a disability allowance payment will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35605/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath) : Except in certain exceptional circumstances which must be appropriately notified to my department in advance of travel, disability allowance (DA) is not payable for any period in respect of which the claimant is resident outside of the State.

Following a review of this man's entitlement to disability allowance (DA), his payment was disallowed with effect from 1 June 2016 as he was found to be out of the State without prior notification. On 14 June 2016, he was notified in writing to his last known address of this revised decision and of his right of appeal.

I confirm this gentleman has been back in contact with my department within the last few weeks. At present, he is being paid basic supplementary welfare allowance pending a reassessment of his entitlement to DA. He has been advised to reapply for DA by fully completing and submitting the application form. My department has confirmed that, despite a number of reminders, he has not reapplied for DA.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme Applications

181. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an application by the County Wicklow Partnership to seek an additional rural social scheme of 20 places in view of the demand for this service throughout County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35611/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As the Deputy will be aware the purpose of the rural social scheme (RSS) is to provide income support to farmers and fishermen and women who have an entitlement to specified social welfare payments. The Government, as part of the budget package for 2017, announced 500 additional places on the scheme which will increase the overall number to 3,100.

A request for expressions of interest in additional RSS places was recently sent to all RSS Implementing Bodies, including County Wicklow Partnership. My Department intends allocating these places as early as possible in 2017, taking into account a number of factors. These include the number of places already allocated, the demand for new places in particular areas, work opportunities available in local areas and the numbers of farmers and fishermen and women in receipt of income support.

In allocating the additional places, the Government recognises the benefits the RSS provides for participants and their families, as well as the valuable contribution the scheme is making to the provision of services in communities across Ireland. At this stage it is not possible to give specific details on the allocation of the additional 500 places announced in the Budget.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

182. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Social Protection his plans to extend the access to rent supplement to those who may not be on a local authority housing list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35619/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Rent supplement continues to play a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme currently supporting some 49,700 recipients for which the Government has provided €267 million for in 2016.

The policy direction of my Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose, that of a short-term income support scheme for those who are temporarily unemployed. The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), which has been in operation since 2014 and is a key pillar of the Social Housing Strategy 2020, will, over time transfer responsibility for all those on rent supplement with long term housing needs to the local authorities. It is expected that HAP will be available in all local authorities in early 2017.

Rent supplement will continue to be paid to households who are already in the private rented sector but who, generally because of a loss of income through unemployment, require a short term income support to pay their rent. I have no plans to further extend access to rent supplement which would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Farm Assist Scheme

183. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection the total extra funds allocated to farm assist in budget 2017 to cater for the reintroduction of a farm income disregard and dependent child disregard; if the new disregards will be applied to all existing farm assist recipients in 2017 in order to recalculate payment rates; the date the reassessed payments will apply from; the total number of recipients whose payments will be reassessed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35623/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The farm assist scheme provides support for farmers on low incomes and recipients retain the advantages of the jobseeker's allowance scheme such as the retention of secondary benefits and access to activation programmes. The 2016 Revised Estimates for my Department provide for expenditure of €85 million on the farm assist scheme.

Budget 2017 introduces new measures in relation to the assessment of means for farm assist. These include that farm income will now be assessed at 70%, down from 100%, with an additional annual means disregard of €254 for each of the first two children and €381 for the third and subsequent children.

On 30 September 2016 there were approximately 8,000 farm assist claims in payment. All existing farm assist recipients currently assessed with means will have their payments adjusted so that the new measures contained in Budget 2017 will come into effect from the 8th March implementation date with relevant payments changing on the 15th March. (Farm Assist is paid weekly in arrears). It is estimated that the measure will cost €8.5 million in 2017.

Farm Assist recipients will also benefit from the following measures announced in Budget 2017; the €5 per week increase in the weekly rates of payment; the 85% Christmas Bonus; and Farm Assist recipients are eligible to avail of the 500 additional places on the Rural Social Scheme.

Community Employment Schemes Review

184. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Social Protection when he will make a statement on the recent review of community employment which his Department recently conducted; if he will publish this review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35652/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The Department of Social Protection completed a report on the Community Employment (CE) Programme in late 2015. This report was completed in the context of the Government's activation strategy Pathways to Work and meets the Department's commitment to analysing CE, as the largest employment programme, and to ensuring the delivery of services, value for money and progression of the individual is central to its core objective.

I met with my senior officials who have responsibility for CE schemes to discuss the findings of the review. I hope to be in a position to bring a Memorandum to Government on these matters in the coming weeks. If there are any changes to be made, consultations with stakeholders will be facilitated.

State Pensions

185. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Social Protection the details of the current system for pension entitlements (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the way it is discriminating against persons, particularly women; his plans to review the current system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35658/16]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The rate of payment of the State pension (contributory) is related to contributions made over years into the Social Insurance Fund. As such, those with a stronger attachment to the workforce, who have paid more into that fund, are more likely to be paid under that scheme. There are a number of criteria which must be satisfied in order to qualify for a State pension contributory. One of the conditions of the State pension (contributory) is that a person needs a minimum of 520 weekly contributions (i.e. 10 years) paid since entering insurable employment. If a person does not have this minimum number of contributions paid, they will not generally have an entitlement to this particular pension, either at a full or reduced rate. Since 1961, when contributory pensions were introduced, the average contributions test has been used in calculating the rate of pension entitlement.

Entitlement is banded, with the maximum rate payable to those with a yearly average of 48-52 contributions, and the minimum rate payable to those with a yearly average in the range of 10-14 contributions per year. Even if someone has only 10 years (520 weeks) of paid reckonable contributions between their 16th and 66th birthdays, they would generally qualify for a State pension (contributory), although the rate payable would vary depending on their circumstances, and it will not always be their most advantageous payment to claim.

The State assists those with caring roles to qualify for a State pension (contributory). The homemaker's scheme makes qualification for State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age or incapacitated people to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes. Given the valuable nature of the State pension (contributory), those who qualify under the homemaker's scheme still need to fulfil the eligibility requirements for that scheme, and have at least 520 paid contributions over the course of their working lives.

Prior to the introduction of the Homemakers scheme in 1994, there was no provision for the recognition of periods of homemaking. This scheme introduced such recognition of periods going forward from that date, but had it been backdated, the costs would have been very considerable. I am advised that if the Homemakers scheme was to be backdated to all dates prior to 1994, for payments from January 2017, the net cost to the Exchequer could be expected to amount to approximately €290 million in 2017, and this annual cost would rise at a faster rate than the overall cost of State pensions.

Where people who were unattached to the labour market during most of their adult lives cannot qualify for a contributory pension in their own right as they have paid few or no contributions, or cannot qualify for a full rate as a result of an intermittent PRSI record, the social protection system provides alternative methods of supporting such pensioners in old age. Therefore, if their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

The National Pensions Framework (2010) proposed that a "Total Contribution Approach" (TCA) should replace the yearly average approach, for new pensioners from 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. Officials of my Department are currently working on the detailed develop-

ment of the TCA with a view to making proposals for consideration in the first half of next year. It's worth noting that this is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of people who have gaps in their contribution records for various reasons, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

186. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the initiatives he proposes to undertake with the new Administration and Congress in the United States in relation to regularising the status of the undocumented Irish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35636/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Achieving relief for undocumented Irish migrants in the US and agreement on a facility for future legal migration between Ireland and the US have been and will remain key objectives for the Government. The Government is committed to working constructively with the new Administration when it assumes its responsibilities on January 20th. In the meantime, we will avail of all opportunities during the transition period to sensitise the incoming Administration to our concerns on immigration related matters. The Government continues to believe that progress on this issue will also require intensive work on a bi-partisan basis in both Houses of Congress, an approach we will continue to take once the new Congress takes office in the New Year.

I most recently raised the question of immigration reform, including relief for undocumented Irish citizens in the United States, during my meeting with US Secretary of State, Mr John Kerry, on 30 October. While Secretary of State Kerry does not carry policy responsibility for immigration reform, he was personally very sympathetic to the plight of the undocumented Irish and was hopeful that progress could be made in the future.

I also availed of my visit to New York for the United Nations General Assembly in September to meet Irish community leaders in the United States, to discuss with them the prospects for achieving immigration reform and to reassure them of the Government's commitment to the issue. In addition, Minister of State McHugh met representatives of the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers, representing a broad group of Irish centres across the United States, in New York on 20 September. That meeting was also attended by Senator Billy Lawless of Seanad Éireann.

The Government, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our Embassy in Washington continue to work closely with Irish American community leaders in actively pursuing all viable opportunities to advance immigration reform. There is little prospect of the comprehensive reform that we seek being achieved within the lifetime of the outgoing Congress and the current policy platform of the Trump campaign would not suggest that it will be an immediate priority for the incoming Administration. Nevertheless, our Ambassador and Embassy staff in Washington DC are working with their contacts on both sides of the political aisle to assess the basis for a renewed initiative once a new Administration and Congress have been established in Washington DC.

Trade Relations

187. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of companies based in Northern Ireland that have been assisted in business and trade promotion or participated in business events organised through the embassy and consulate network throughout the world in each the years 2010 to 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35645/16]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Ireland's network of Embassies and Consulates worldwide works to promote Ireland's international trade, tourism and investment priorities in close co-ordination with key stakeholders including Tourism Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and Bord Bia. Our missions host a large number of trade and economic events and liaise closely with governments and the private sector in their countries of accreditation to support Irish exporters, to promote Ireland as a location for investment and to enhance our international reputation.

The Government also supports cross-border economic flow through the work of North-South bodies such as InterTradeIreland, which is working to reduce trade barriers and to develop economic links between businesses on both sides of the Border. InterTradeIreland is making a significant impact building the exporting capability of SMEs and creating jobs in both jurisdictions.

Although information of the type requested by the Deputy is not kept centrally, our network of diplomatic and consular offices continues to be available to assist Northern Ireland businesses and joint North-South trade missions. Furthermore, Embassies and Consulates have, through events and promotional activities, supported Tourism Ireland's hugely successful work promoting tourism to the island of Ireland on a cross-border basis.

We continue to reach out to Northern Ireland's economic and business sector to grow cross-border economic links. The attendance and participation by business figures from Northern Ireland at the recent All-Island Civic Dialogue on Brexit, for instance, was very welcome, and it is clear from our contacts that the Northern Ireland business community recognises how much the economies North and South can gain from co-operation.

Humanitarian Assistance Scheme

188. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the terms of the targeted voluntary homeowners relocation scheme, which was announced on 10 November 2016, to relocate homeowners whose primary residences are unsustainable due to the threat of flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35524/16]

189. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the Department that will administer the targeted voluntary homeowners relocation scheme, which was announced on 10 November 2016, to relocate homeowners whose primary residences are unsustainable due to the threat of flooding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35525/16]

190. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when applications for the targeted voluntary homeowners relocation scheme, which was announced on 10 November 2016, to relocate homeowners whose primary residences are unsustainable due to the threat of flooding, will be accepted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35526/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 to 190, inclusive, together.

Last Tuesday, 8th November I announced a fund of €2m for a targeted humanitarian aid scheme for those primary residential properties that flooded during last Winter and had flooded in previous years to ensure those worst affected homeowners have a primary residence.

While the Government has agreed that the terms of funding for relocation will be in line with the previous scheme in 2009; I am to apprise Government of the ongoing review of the administrative arrangements from that earlier scheme, to ensure that the arrangements for this once-off scheme are reflective of its targeted objective and all relevant circumstances.

I want to ensure that the funding is targeted at those homeowners at greatest risk of future flooding and would gain greatest benefit from State support to relocate. Therefore, this will be a targeted, prioritised scheme and will not be open for general applications.

The Office of Public Works is working jointly with Local Authorities and the Department of Social Protection to identify and prioritise homeowners and review the administrative arrangements for this scheme. I hope to be able to appraise Government and subsequently make initial contact with a small number of targeted homeowners towards the end of this year.

Flood Prevention Measures

191. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a grant for flood gates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35625/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Seán Canney): The Interdepartmental Flood Policy Coordination Group that I chair is considering the potential costs and benefits associated with the introduction of an individual property protection scheme. The Group will be informed by two pilot projects which are currently underway in Thomastown and Graiguenamanagh in County Kilkenny and Crossmolina in County Mayo. The Group's work, when completed, will be submitted to Government for consideration in the context of the merits of the introduction of any such scheme.

The Group recently presented for consideration and agreement by Government an interim report setting out progress on its work and making appropriate recommendations for consideration by Government at this time. The report has been published and is available on the OPW website, www.opw.ie.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

192. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of all pension top-ups paid in respect of chief executives of semi-State companies including the name of the organisation, the name of the chief executive, the amount of the top-up and the date of payment, and if the top-up was approved by his Department in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35649/16]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In reply to the Deputy's question, I can confirm that there are no semi-State companies under the aegis of my Department.

Departmental Funding

193. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the total overall amount paid by way of grant aid to An Taisce from 2010 to 2016; the amount per each year from 2010 to 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35513/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since 2011, funding has been provided by my Department, by way of grant aid, as a contribution to the Green Schools programme, an environmental education programme for schools administered by An Taisce. This funding is reviewed on an annual basis.

Grants have also been provided on occasion to help fund biodiversity awareness projects carried out by An Taisce, such as the Nature's Way series of publications, a valuable educational resource addressing a range of biodiversity topics including peatlands and ecosystems in Ireland.

The amounts paid each year are outlined in the following table.

Funding Provided to An Taisce 2011 to 2016.

| Year | Amount € | Description |
|-------------------------|----------|---|
| 2011 | 64,713 | Green Schools Programme and Biodiversity Awareness Projects |
| 2012 | 59,800 | Green Schools Programme and Biodiversity Awareness Projects |
| 2013 | 59,415 | Green Schools Programme and Biodiversity Awareness Projects |
| 2014 | 40,000 | Green Schools Programme |
| 2015 | 40,000 | Green Schools Programme |
| 2016 (to 14th November) | 40,000 | Green Schools Programme |
| Total | 303,928 | |

Wildlife Rangers Appointments

194. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs his plans to replace wildlife rangers (details supplied) in County Kerry, as the lack of these rangers has left large areas of the county unattended; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35576/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department is currently working with the Public Appointments Service to create a Conservation Ranger panel from which gaps across the country will be filled. The campaign was advertised by the Public Appointments Service on 11 November 2016, on www.publicjobs.ie, and is open for applications until the 1st December.

Easter Rising Commemorations

195. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the reason her Department or any bodies under its aegis are not purchasing

the final order of surrender by Pádraig Pearse in Easter 1916; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35650/16]

196. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if her Department has considered purchasing the original Pearse surrender letter on behalf of the State; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35653/16]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht(Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 and 196 together.

There exist a number of historically important original documents in the possession of the State written by Pádraig Pearse during the 1916 Rising and during his subsequent imprisonment. Following consultation with the relevant institutions under the aegis of my Department, it is a shared view that the amount being sought for this one letter – between €1m and €1.5m - was not justifiable in terms of expenditure of public monies and in the context of historical material already held.

Traveller Community

197. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that the last all-Ireland Traveller health study was completed six years ago, in 2010, and that no study of the specific health needs or outcomes of Travellers has since been conducted; his further views on the fact that the data in the 2010 study is now out of date; when the next comprehensive traveller health study will be funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35508/16]

198. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the National Traveller Health Advisory Committee has not met since 2012, particularly in view of the findings of the all-Ireland Traveller health study which showed that Travellers experience extremely serious health challenges and poor health outcomes relative to the rest of the population. [35509/16]

199. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if he will account for the 18% underspend in allocated budgets to Traveller health programmes between 2008 and 2013 in view of the fact that the all-Ireland Traveller health study showed that Travellers experience extremely serious health challenges and poor health outcomes relative to the rest of the population. [35510/16]

200. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase and ring-fence funding for Traveller health units. [35511/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 197 to 200, inclusive, together.

A review of the role and functionality of the Traveller Health Advisory Committee (THAC) took place in 2013. The review found that the transfer of the health budget to the HSE in 2006 resulted in significant changes to the functioning of the THAC and that the original purpose and focus of the Committee had changed. The THAC has not been convened since the review. The Traveller Health Advisory Forum, chaired by the HSE, continues to act as a national forum for discussion on issues around traveller health.

The Deputy will be aware that the Department of Justice and Equality is leading on the development of a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. The Strategy, which is expected to run from 2016 to 2020, aims to provide a set of specific actions that need to be

taken to improve the situation for Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. It is envisaged that the Strategy will include agreed actions in relation to improving the health of travellers. In the circumstances, the Department of Health intends to await the completion of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy to inform consideration of the need for a repeat of the All Ireland Traveller Health Survey and the necessity for any additional national structures to address traveller health.

In relation to the funding for traveller health programmes and traveller health units, this query has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

201. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35512/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Mental Health Services Funding

202. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 133 of 27 October 2016, the reason only €15 million of the €35 million additional funding for mental health will be released to the HSE for 2017; the purpose this funding will be used for; the timing factors that are preventing the expenditure of the full €35 million in 2017 in view of the huge demand for mental health services here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35517/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): The allocation for Mental Health in 2017 will be €851.3 million, an increase of €24.7 million, or approximately 3%, over 2016.

I am initiating €35 million in new services in 2017 to further implement "A Vision For Change". Key priorities to be addressed in the HSE's 2017 Service Plan include youth mental health, further improvement to child & adolescent and adult services, older people's services and further enhanced out-of-hours response for those in need of urgent services. Recognising the time lag in new staff taking up posts and the completion of preparations for the introduction of these services, it is estimated that the revenue spend in 2017 associated with this increased allocation will be some €15 million. There will also be a further additional spend of €9.7 million in mental health associated with increased pay rates.

Orthodontic Services

203. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for orthodontic treatment through the national school programme in counties Cavan and Monaghan; the length of time they have been waiting on their assessment and appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35528/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

204. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if services provided at a centre (details supplied) will be enhanced, invested in and developed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35530/16]

205. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds available at a centre (details supplied); the number that are occupied at present; if there is space for further beds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35537/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 204 and 205 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Card Eligibility

206. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider extending enhanced medical card provision similar to that of survivors from the Magdalene laundries to survivors of abuse in other institutions of the State, in particular those who are eligible to apply to the Caranua organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35542/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As part of a support package, including a range of financial payments, that was approved by Government for former residents of Magdalen Laundries, eligibility for health services for the Magdalen women is provided by the Redress for Women Resident in Certain Institutions Act 2015. The Act sets out the primary and community health services made available, free of charge, to qualifying women. The health services included in the legislation are: a general practitioner service; prescribed drugs, medicines, aids and appliances; dental, ophthalmic and aural services; home nursing; home support; chiropody; physiotherapy; and counselling services. In addition, the prescription fee is not payable for all medicines, medical devices or other medical products that are reimbursed by the community drug schemes. A specific card has been issued to the qualifying women so that they can access the health services they require without charge, as set out in the Act. There are no proposals at present to extend automatic eligibility to other victims of institutional abuse.

Caranua is an organisation which offers support, information, advice and advocacy to survivors. For example they will help members get the services they are entitled to as citizens, and improve access to those services. They can also pay for services so that each member has the supports needed, and can give grants to individuals to source services themselves. The areas Caranua provide help with will depend on the needs and circumstances of each individual.

However, where there are people with medical needs it is important that they should be able to access necessary assistance in a straight forward manner. It is clear greater discretion is being exercised by the HSE because the number of discretionary medical cards in circulation has increased from about 52,000 in mid-2014 to over 113,210 as of 1 November this year.

Medicinal Products Availability

207. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the drug Kalydeco; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35543/16]

211. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the drug Kalydeco; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35559/16]

213. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will allow the drug Kalydeco to be available to a person (details supplied); the reason this drug is not available for children aged two to five years of age at the same agreed price as it is available to the over six age group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35573/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 207, 211 and 213 together.

The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a Company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the Community Drug Schemes or as a hospital medicine, the Company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the Reimbursement List or to be priced as a hospital medicine.

Within 180 days of receiving the application (or such longer period which may arise if further information is sought from the Company), the HSE will decide to either:

- add the medicine to the Reimbursement List/agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine,
- or,
- will refuse to reimburse the medicine.

In reaching its decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant in its view for the decision (including the information/dossier submitted by the Company) and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which may have been sought by the HSE at its sole discretion (for example, from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics).

In considering an application, the HSE will also have regard to Part 1 and Part 3 of Schedule 3 of the 2013 Act. Part 3 requires the HSE to have regard to the following criteria:

1. the health needs of the public;
2. the cost-effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services;
3. the availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement;

4. the proposed costs, benefits and risks of the item or listed item relative to therapeutically similar items or listed items provided in other health service settings and the level of certainty in relation to the evidence of those costs, benefits and risks;

5. the potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item;

6. the clinical need for the item or listed item;

7. the appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety;

8. the efficacy (performance in trial), effectiveness (performance in real situations) and added therapeutic benefit against existing standards of treatment (how much better it treats a condition than existing therapies); and

9. the resources available to the HSE.

I am informed that the HSE received a request and economic dossier from the manufacturer of Ivacaftor, brand name Kalydeco, for the treatment of cystic fibrosis patients aged 2 years and older weighing less than 25kg. In March of this year the HSE asked the NCPE to carry out a health technology assessment of the applicant's economic dossier on the cost effectiveness of this treatment.

The NCPE completed its assessment and made a recommendation in October 2016. The NCPE determined that the manufacturer failed to demonstrate cost-effectiveness of the drug for its intended cohort of patients and did not recommend that it should be reimbursed for this indication at the submitted price.

A summary of the health technology assessment has been published on the NCPE website and is available at: <http://www.ncpe.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Ivacaftor-2-5-years-web-summary.pdf>.

The HSE will enter into negotiations with the manufacturer in an effort to secure significant price reductions for Kalydeco.

The HSE will consider the outcome of these engagements, together with the NCPE recommendation, in making a final decision on reimbursement. This decision will be made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE in line with the 2013 Act.

As you will appreciate, I cannot comment on the case of any individual, or intervene in individual patient cases.

Medical Card Eligibility

208. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason a decision was made to disallow persons (details supplied) in County Donegal a full medical card on a discretionary basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35544/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 was issued to Oireachtas members.

Primary Care Centres Provision

209. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the proposed location for primary care centres throughout the State; the stage the planning or construction of these primary care centres are currently at; if Dundalk has been included as a location for a primary care centre; if so, the proposed location of this centre; and when construction will commence. [35548/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this 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.

Mental Health Services Data

210. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number of appointments with practitioners connected to counties Louth and Meath mental health services which patients did not attend in each month for 2015 and 2016. [35549/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Question No. 211 answered with Question No. 207.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

212. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the reason a power wheelchair was sanctioned for a person (details supplied) in July 2016 but was not ordered until October 2016 with a waiting time of 12 weeks for delivery; if the HSE will fast forward the delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35572/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for reply to the Deputy.

Question No. 213 answered with Question No. 207.

Medical Card Applications

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card will issue in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35608/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 was issued to Oireachtas members.

Palliative Care Services

215. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with a group (details supplied) in relation to palliative care services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35609/16]

221. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with a group (details supplied) at an early date as requested some months ago due to the urgency attaching to a project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35647/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Helen McEntee): I propose to take Questions Nos. 215 and 221 together.

The provision of an inpatient hospice in Cavan/Monaghan has been included in the HSE Capital Plan for 2020/21 and is the subject of discussion between the HSE and the local Hospice Group. I understand that the HSE National Lead for Palliative Care will meet with the local Hospice Group and visit St. Christopher's facility in the near future.

I will be very happy to meet with the group in question but I think this would be most productive after a further meeting with the HSE has taken place and the issues arising on both sides have been clarified insofar as this is possible. I have accordingly asked my office to arrange a meeting for me with the Group once I have received a full report of the above meeting with the HSE.

Water Fluoridation

216. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if he will recommend a public consultation on the issue of fluoridation of public water (details supplied) and consider a plebiscite to ensure a public mandate to continue the policy of fluoridation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35614/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Water fluoridation is the adjustment of the natural concentration of fluoride in drinking water to the optimal recommended level for the prevention of dental decay. In 2002 the Forum on Fluoridation, which was established to review this policy, concluded that the fluoridation of public piped water supplies should continue as a public health measure. More recently, a review of evidence on the impact of water fluoridation at its current level on the health of the population was conducted by the Health Research Board (HRB) on behalf of the Department. This review was published by the HRB in June 2015. The HRB found no definitive evidence that community water fluoridation is associated with negative health effects. A research project "Fluoride and Caring for Children's Teeth" (FACCT) is being conducted by UCC and supported by the HSE. Preliminary results indicate that children's oral health has been improving, fluoridated communities have lower levels of dental caries.

The Irish Expert Body on Fluorides and Health, established in 2004, monitors new and emerging issues on fluoride and its effects on health and related matters. It has already considered the specific issues raised by the Deputy and advises that the balance of scientific evidence worldwide confirms that water fluoridation, at the optimal level, is a safe and effective method

of protecting the oral health of the population. Given that the policy has already been reviewed and is under constant review, a further public consultation is not considered necessary. Fluoridation policy is provided for in the Health (Fluoridation of Water Supplies) Act, 1960. There are no plans to consider a plebiscite.

Hospital Appointments Status

217. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35618/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

218. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of a business proposal brought forward to him by the HSE relating to a centre (details supplied) being designated as a centre for an acquired brain injury unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35630/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Programme for Partnership Government places a particular focus on a number of key programmes and strategies, including publishing a plan for advancing Neuro-rehabilitation services in the community. Currently a National Steering Group, chaired by the Health Service Executive (HSE) Head of Disability Reform, is considering feedback on a draft implementation framework which was circulated for consultation to wider stakeholder interest groups. The revised framework will guide and oversee the reconfiguration and development of Neuro-rehabilitation structures and services at national and local level from a non-acute perspective. Proposals for specialised residential services for people with acquired brain injury will be considered in the broader context of the finalisation of the implementation framework for neuro-rehabilitation services.

With regard to this specific business proposal, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

National Drugs Strategy Budget

219. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health his plans to continue the pilot funding, under the dormant accounts programme, measure 4, in 2017, to assist the Tallaght drugs and alcohol task force and other task forces to develop an alcohol strategy and the delivery of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35634/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): In line with

the National Drugs Strategy, the Government is committed to continuing support for initiatives to tackle the drug problem. Drug and Alcohol Task Forces play a key role in assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem in their areas and coordinating action at local level, so that there is a targeted response to the problem of substance misuse in local communities.

Following a review of Task Forces completed in 2012, increased responsibilities were given to Drug and Alcohol Task Forces to address the alcohol problem. In light of their expanded role, a substance misuse measure was included in the Dormant Accounts Action Plan 2014 and the Task Forces were identified as the key structures through which the measure would be implemented. In excess of €930,000 in additional funding was recommended for disbursement to Drug and Alcohol Task Forces from the Dormant Accounts Fund for substance misuse initiatives, including over €35,800 for the Tallaght Drug and Alcohol Task Force. The grants to Task Forces were provided from the Dormant Accounts Fund on a once-off basis to undertake a range of coordinated activities aimed at raising awareness of drug and alcohol-related harm in local communities in line with the National Drugs Strategy. There are no further grants available for this purpose under this round of funding.

In addition, a number of Task Forces, including Tallaght Drug and Alcohol Task Force, have benefitted from training provided by the Alcohol Forum for the development of local alcohol action plans.

The Department of Health will shortly be inviting Task Forces to submit recommendations for the funding of projects from the Drugs Initiative budget in 2017. It is a matter for Task Forces to ensure that their budget is effectively deployed to address current priorities and locally identified needs.

HIV-AIDS Programmes

220. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE will provide pre-exposure prophylaxis medication in view of its effectiveness in preventing HIV infection. [35646/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020 was launched in October 2015. The strategy was developed in response to a recommendation of the National AIDS Strategy Committee on the need to establish clear leadership within the health sector around the area of sexual health. The Strategy contains 71 recommendations that address all aspects of sexual health and a Sexual Health Action Plan for 2015-2016 contains 18 priority actions for immediate attention.

One of the priority actions identified in the Action Plan for 2016 is to 'Prioritise, develop and implement guidance to support clinical decision making for STI testing, screening and treatment and on the appropriate use of antiretroviral therapy in HIV prevention'. An Implementation Group has now been established within the HSE as an outcome of this action. This group will make recommendations on the appropriate use of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in the overall context of the national approach to HIV prevention. It is intended that work will start on a national demonstration project on PrEP in 2017.

Question No. 221 answered with Question No. 215.

Medicinal Products Availability

222. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made regarding the drug Kalydeco and its availability for children aged two to five years of age with cystic fibrosis (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35648/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drugs schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In line with the 2013 Act, if a Company would like a medicine to be reimbursed by the HSE pursuant to the Community Drug Schemes or as a hospital medicine, the Company must first submit an application to the HSE to have the new medicine added to the Reimbursement List or to be priced as a hospital medicine.

Within 180 days of receiving the application (or such longer period which may arise if further information is sought from the Company), the HSE will decide to either:

- add the medicine to the Reimbursement List/agree to reimburse it as a hospital medicine, or
- will refuse to reimburse the medicine.

In reaching its decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant in its view for the decision (including the information/dossier submitted by the Company) and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which may have been sought by the HSE at its sole discretion (for example, from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics).

In considering an application, the HSE will also have regard to Part 1 and Part 3 of Schedule 3 of the 2013 Act. Part 3 requires the HSE to have regard to the following criteria:

1. the health needs of the public;
2. the cost-effectiveness of meeting health needs by supplying the item concerned rather than providing other health services;
3. the availability and suitability of items for supply or reimbursement;
4. the proposed costs, benefits and risks of the item or listed item relative to therapeutically similar items or listed items provided in other health service settings and the level of certainty in relation to the evidence of those costs, benefits and risks;
5. the potential or actual budget impact of the item or listed item;
6. the clinical need for the item or listed item;
7. the appropriate level of clinical supervision required in relation to the item to ensure patient safety;
8. the efficacy (performance in trial), effectiveness (performance in real situations) and added therapeutic benefit against existing standards of treatment (how much better it treats a condition than existing therapies); and
9. the resources available to the HSE.

I am informed that the HSE received a request and economic dossier from the manufacturer of Ivacaftor, brand name Kalydeco, for the treatment of cystic fibrosis patients aged 2 years and older weighing less than 25kg. In March of this year the HSE asked the NCPE to carry out a health technology assessment of the applicant’s economic dossier on the cost effectiveness of

this treatment.

The NCPE completed its assessment and made a recommendation in October 2016. The NCPE determined that the manufacturer failed to demonstrate cost-effectiveness of the drug for its intended cohort of patients and did not recommend that it should be reimbursed for this indication at the submitted price.

A summary of the health technology assessment has been published on the NCPE website and is available at: <http://www.ncpe.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Ivacaftor-2-5-years-web-summary.pdf>.

The HSE will enter into negotiations with the manufacturer in an effort to secure significant price reductions for Kalydeco.

The HSE will consider the outcome of these engagements together with the NCPE recommendation, in making a final decision on reimbursement. This decision will be made on objective, scientific and economic grounds by the HSE in line with the 2013 Act.

As you will appreciate, I cannot comment on the case of any individual, or intervene in individual patient cases.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

223. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the details of all pension top-ups paid in respect of chief executives of semi-State companies under the aegis of his Department, including the name of the organisation, the name of the chief executive, the amount of the top-up, the date of payment, and if the top-up was approved by his Department in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35930/16]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to Non-Commercial State Agencies under the remit of the Department, this information is being sought and will be forwarded to the Deputy when collated.

Animal Welfare

224. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he is taking to ensure that the use of wild animals in circuses is banned here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35515/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The conditions under which circus animals are kept and managed come under the scope of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, which contains rules relating to the welfare of all animals and requires a person having an animal under his or her control to safeguard and not endanger the health and welfare of the animal. My Department continues to engage with stakeholders, including circus groups, animal welfare organisations, in relation to the welfare of wild animals in circuses. According to the information available to my Department, there are in fact very few wild animals currently performing in Irish circuses.

Animal Welfare

225. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of inspections officials in his Department made into the welfare of animals in circuses over the past year; if any welfare issues were identified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35534/16]

226. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on prohibiting the use of animals in circuses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35535/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 225 and 226 together.

The conditions under which all species of animals in circuses are kept and managed come under the scope of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, which contains rules relating to the welfare of all animals, including wild animals in circuses. Officials from my Department have inspected 4 circuses to date this year but no significant animal welfare issues were identified.

My Department continues to engage with stakeholders, including circus groups, animal welfare organisations, in relation to the welfare of wild animals in circuses. According to the information available to my Department, there are in fact very few wild animals currently performing in Irish circuses. I have no plans at this juncture to ban the use of wild animals in circuses.

Animal Welfare

227. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the current regulation concerning the welfare of wild animals used in circuses here; if any animal welfare complaints that have been submitted to his office in this regard have resulted in investigations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35538/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The conditions under which circus animals are kept and managed come under the scope of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, which contains rules relating to the welfare of all animals and requires a person having an animal under his or her control to safeguard and not endanger the health and welfare of the animal. My Department has received general complaints from members of the public with regard the welfare of circus animals and these complaints have been investigated. No welfare issues were detected.

If the Deputy is aware of any specific complaints relating to the welfare of animals currently performing in Irish circuses, she should bring them to my Department's attention.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

228. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for TAMS by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35546/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application for grant-aid under the Dairy Equipment Scheme, Tranche 4 of TAMS 11 on 5 September 2016. The application concerned has passed all the relevant administrative checks. All the applications received in a given tranche are examined and then go through the Ranking and Selection process.

Following that step the application will be forwarded to the local office and checked for technical issues before approval issues. It is anticipated that this stage will be reached within a matter of weeks.

Young Farmers Scheme Eligibility

229. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the criteria for the young farmers scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35550/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): EU Regulations governing the operation of the Young Farmers Scheme set down the definition of a young farmer for the purposes of eligibility under the Scheme. This definition applies to all Member States and my Department has no discretion with regard to its implementation in Ireland. The status of ‘young farmer’ introduced under the reformed Common Agricultural Policy is designed specifically to assist young farmers in the initial stages of establishing a farming enterprise. For this reason payment is confined to young farmers for a period not exceeding the first five years following commencement of their agricultural activity.

Fish Landings

230. **Deputy Jim Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 331 of 6 April 2016, if he will provide an updated reply noting that new information has been received by his Department regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35555/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) is the agency with responsibility for recording landings of fish (excluding farmed fish) into Irish ports. I am informed by the SFPA that landings of fish (excluding farmed fish) into Castletownbere Fishery Harbour Centre in 2015 amounted to a total of 45,762 tonnes with a value of €112.7 million. This shows a significant increase on 2014 figures which stood at 35,004 tonnes valued at €82.1m.

Additionally 3,027 tonnes of farmed salmon were landed into Castletownbere in 2015 which is the first year we have these statistics available. I do not have accurate figures for the value of the farmed salmon landed into Castletownbere.

Dairy Sector

231. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is dedicated funding that does not involved taking out finance available to dairy farmers in counties Cavan and Monaghan who are struggling to pay their bills; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35561/16]

232. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason there is no monetary incentive for farmers who comply with the Bord Bia dairy inspection similar to the premiums offered in the beef sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35577/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to

take Questions Nos. 231 and 232 together.

As Minister for Agriculture, I am concerned with the livelihoods of farmers in all sectors in each of the 26 counties. I am acutely conscious of the pressure farmers are under at present, and I can assure the Deputy that I am committed to exploring all of the appropriate options for providing assistance to the farm sector through current difficulties.

After a prolonged period of price volatility in dairy markets, there are some tentative signs of recovery. However, volatility will continue to be a feature of global dairy markets. There has been significant progress in terms of responses from all stakeholders across a number of areas, with EU measures, initiatives by processors and a new flexible loan fund for dairy and other farmers announced in Budget 2017.

On the market front, since taking office I have led trade missions to Asia and to North Africa, with a view to increasing the profile of Ireland as a producer of quality food products, particularly dairy products. This work on market diversification is a critically important element in mitigating market volatility and is particularly important in the context of Brexit.

On-going efforts within industry to move dairy production up the value chain wherever possible are also critically important and continue to be supported by Government. These efforts are supported by investment by my Department and its agencies in research and innovation. By providing financial support for Teagasc, ICBF and Animal Health Ireland, and for knowledge transfer groups, we continually invest in the provision of advice and education to farmers, which facilitates technology adoption and improves profitability at farm level. My Department is also providing support for investment at farm level through the TAMS scheme.

The Dairy Quality Assurance Scheme is also critically important in developing a unique selling point for Irish dairy products on EU and international markets. Dairy processors make a substantial contribution to cover some of the costs of audits under the scheme, but of course the question of price incentives for participation is a matter for the industry.

Where appropriate, we must continue to focus on appropriate national and EU measures that can play a role in supporting the sector. It is vital that we continue to work closely with the Commission and all other key stakeholders in this regard.

The Commission, in many instances based on suggestions from Ireland and other like minded Member States, has already deployed a range of market supports including intervention and Aids to Private Storage, and a financial package of €500 million for liquidity assistance was agreed at the Agriculture council in September 2016, with Ireland topping up its allocation to provide a total assistance package of approaching €27M to Irish farmers in late 2015 and early 2016.

The Commission also announced a further €500m support package for EU farmers in July 2016. The first €150m was reserved for an EU-wide scheme compensating farmers who reduce their milk output over certain reference periods towards the end of 2016. This was very well subscribed to in Ireland and, should the commitments for reduction be adhered to, will be worth over €10M to Irish dairy farmers in 2017.

For the other element of the Commission package, €350m is set aside for Member State initiatives with fixed allocations per MS. Ireland's allocation under this scheme is €11m. I have decided to provide an additional €13 million national aid in that in order to optimise the effectiveness of this measure and to use it to support the development of a €150 million fund for low interest loans for farmers.

A further measure that has assisted in reducing the burden on all farmers, including those

in the dairy sector, was the negotiation and agreement of advanced payments for the Basic Payment and the RDP schemes, allowing us to pay out 70% and 85% respectively from 16th October.

I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to work closely with the dairy sector, with EU colleagues and International counterparts to ensure the development and maintenance of a sustainable dairy sector in Cavan, Monaghan and elsewhere.

Animal Welfare

233. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to ban wild animal circuses here on the basis of cruelty to animals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35657/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The conditions under which circus animals are kept and managed come under the scope of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013, which contains rules relating to the welfare of all animals and requires a person having an animal under his or her control to safeguard and not endanger the health and welfare of the animal. My Department continues to engage with stakeholders, including circus groups, animal welfare organisations, in relation to the welfare of wild animals in circuses. According to the information available to my Department, there are in fact very few wild animals currently performing in Irish circuses. I have no plans at this juncture to ban the use of wild animals in circuses.

Forestry Premium Payments

234. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of withheld premiums in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35659/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are no forestry premiums being withheld in respect of the person named.

The application under the reference number quoted was approved for payment of the 1st grant and premium on 26 April 2016 with the 2 premium paid on 08 June 2016.

The person named queried the area approved for payment of 9.47 hectares as it is less than the area of 9.54 hectares submitted for payment by his registered forester. The reason for the reduction is attributable to two factors. The first is that the Department, under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme rules, pays on the lesser of the area claimed and the area of the claim as digitised by the Department. In addition the area of biodiversity enhancement is limited to 15% of the area determined for payment. When the necessary adjustments were made in accordance with the Scheme rules this resulted in a slightly reduced payable area to that claimed on behalf of the person named.

Ash Dieback Threat

235. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress to date in dealing with ash dieback disease; the number of confirmed findings of this disease in each of the years 2012 to date in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[35661/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I would advise the Deputy that on the Department's website there is a dedicated section on Ash Dieback disease. It gives a comprehensive account of all the work by my Department to date to try to curtail and eradicate the disease on a national basis and the findings from each of the targeted and systematic surveys undertaken from 2012 to 2016. The website also provides information on the Reconstitution Scheme (Chalara Ash Dieback) which is available to assist owners of forests planted under the Afforestation Scheme which have suffered from the disease to restore those forests, as well as information on research projects into the control and management of the disease, in particular projects to identify trees that show strong tolerance and or resistance to the disease. There is also a national distribution map and summary table of all confirmed findings up to the second quarter of 2016 (i.e. 30 June this year). This table and map will be updated with the figures for third quarter of 2016 in the coming days.

To summarise the current situation and to speak to the long term outlook, at this juncture it is important to note that notwithstanding the positive effects at local level of the eradication actions undertaken to date, both by affected landowners supported by the Reconstitution Scheme or directly by the Department itself, the annual systematic surveys and targeted surveys as well as follow up inspections by Department Inspectors have indicated year on year that there is a continuing rise in the number and geographic distribution of confirmed findings nationally. By June of this year, at a time when the targeted and systematic summer surveys were still underway, the initial results were already such as to confirm the presence to a greater or lesser extent of the disease in all 26 counties.

Another factor is that initially the findings were in imported ash trees. Later the disease was found in native hedgerows beside infected imported ash trees. The Department is now finding the disease in native hedgerows where there is no obvious introduced source of infection nearby. In addition over half the recent findings in forest plantations are in ash trees of native Irish origin. It is also worth noting that in Britain the disease has spread quickly and widely in the natural environment over the same time period.

As already noted, the Department is actively supporting a number of research projects into disease, in particular projects with a key long-term focus of developing an ash tree breeding programme to identify trees that show strong tolerance and or resistance to the disease and the genetic basis for tolerance. It is through such programmes that a long term strategy for ash can be identified and supported.

Ash Dieback Threat

236. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the average length of time it takes to respond to reports of possible ash dieback disease; the average time it takes to complete appropriate investigations and determine a positive or negative finding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35662/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department, in line with the commitments given in the Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan 2015-2020 endeavours to acknowledge reports of possible ash dieback disease received by email within 1 working day and in the case of reports received by letter within 3 working days. The Department will endeavour to issue a more comprehensive reply within 20 working days thereafter. Receipt of all reports successfully submitted using the TreeCheck App are also automatically acknowledged.

The time taken to complete field investigations and testing can vary greatly depending on the individual circumstances of the case reported. The time taken to complete this work and inform the forest owner of the outcome is dependent on the following factors:

- the level of detail initially supplied by a reporting party;
- assessment by the Department's Inspectors as to whether ash dieback disease is actually involved and an evaluation of the potential risk associated with the report;
- the need in terms of the efficient and prudent use of public resources to schedule follow-up visits on such reports with other already planned survey work or inspections, and
- the need for both the Department's Inspectors and its laboratory scientists to prioritise different bodies of work at different times of the year.

Depending on the above factors, the time taken to report the final outcome to forest owners could be anything between three weeks and three months.

In terms of calculating the average time taken to reply to reported cases it is not practical to do so given that there are now 255 confirmed cases of ash dieback disease in forest plantations.

The number of cases that would have to be revisited to calculate this figure is much greater than this figure if sites with negative test results are taken into account. Furthermore, an average figure would be a poor indicator of how long an individual forest owner could expect to wait for a reply from the Department given the significant range that exists between the shortest response time and the longest.

Agriculture Schemes

237. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will make an allocation for 2016 and 2017 for young farmers under the national reserve scheme; when he will announce the conditions for such a scheme for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35693/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2015 the National Reserve fund was based on a 3% cut to the Basic Payment Scheme financial ceiling and provided some €24.7 million in funding which was the maximum financing rate available under the relevant EU Regulations. There were some 6,260 successful applicants under the 2015 National Reserve. The EU Regulations governing the operation of the National Reserve set down that the two priority categories of 'young farmer' and 'new entrant to farming' have priority access to the Reserve.

There was no National Reserve in 2016 as all available funding has been utilised under the 2015 scheme. In order to provide for a National Reserve in 2017 funding is required to replenish the Reserve. EU Regulations governing the scheme provide that funding for the replenishment of the National Reserve may be obtained by means of surrender of entitlements that remain unused by farmers for two consecutive years and by claw-back derived following the sale of entitlements without land. It is envisaged that funding derived from these two sources in 2017 will be very limited. The Regulations also provide for the application of a linear cut to the value of all farmers' entitlements to replenish the National Reserve. Decisions in relation to the National Reserve for 2017 will be considered once the position on potential funding has been established.

Basic Payment Scheme

238. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of participants under the national reserve scheme in each year to date in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35694/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Basic Payment Scheme National Reserve was introduced in 2015. In 2015 the National Reserve fund was based on a 3% cut to the Basic Payment Scheme financial ceiling and provided some €24.7 million in funding. This was the maximum financing rate available under the relevant EU Regulations. The total number of beneficiaries under the National Reserve in 2015 is detailed in the following table.

| Scheme Year | Total Number of Beneficiaries |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 2015 | 6,260 |

There was no National Reserve in 2016 as all available funding has been utilised under the 2015 scheme. In order to provide for a National Reserve in 2017 funding is required to replenish the Reserve. EU Regulations governing the scheme provide that funding for the replenishment of the National Reserve may be obtained by means of surrender of entitlements that remain unused by farmers for two consecutive years and by claw-back derived following the sale of entitlements without land. It is envisaged that funding derived from these two sources in 2017 will be very limited. The EU Regulations also provide for the option for Member States to apply a linear cut to all farmers' entitlements in order to replenish the National Reserve. Decisions in relation to the National Reserve for 2017 will be considered once the position on potential funding has been established

Young Farmers Scheme

239. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total budget allocation for each year under CAP pillar 1 2014 to 2020 for young farmers under the national reserve scheme in tabular form; the total amount drawn down in each year and to date in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35695/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2015 the National Reserve fund was based on a 3% cut to the Basic Payment Scheme financial ceiling and provided some €24.7 million in funding which was the maximum financing rate available under the relevant EU Regulations. The EU regulations governing the National Reserve provides that priority under the National Reserve must be given to 'young farmers' and to 'new entrants to farming'. There was no National Reserve in 2016 as all available funding has been utilised under the 2015 scheme. There were 6,260 beneficiaries under the 2015 National Reserve of which 5,567 were successful applicants under the 'young farmer' priority category. Details are set out in the following table.

| Scheme Year | Total Number of beneficiaries under the National Reserve | Number of beneficiaries under the Young Farmer priority Category |
|-------------|--|--|
| 2015 | 6,260 | 5,567 |

In order to provide for a National Reserve in 2017 funding is required to replenish the Reserve. EU Regulations governing the scheme provide that funding for the replenishment of the National Reserve may be obtained by means of surrender of entitlements that remain unused by

farmers for two consecutive years and by claw-back derived following the sale of entitlements without land. It is envisaged that funding derived from these two sources in 2017 will be very limited. The Regulations also provide for the application of a linear cut to the value of all farmers' entitlements to replenish the National Reserve. Decisions in relation to the National Reserve for 2017 will be considered once the position on potential funding has been established.

Young Farmers Scheme

240. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of participants under the young farmers scheme in each of the years 2014 to date in 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35696/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Young Farmers Scheme was introduced in 2015 as a measure to support young farmers under the reformed Common Agricultural Policy. In 2015 there were 8,170 successful applicants under the Young Farmers Scheme. For 2016 my Department has received some 8,600 applications for funding under the scheme and processing of these applications is currently being finalised in advance of payments issuing under the Scheme in early December.

| Scheme Year | Number |
|-------------|------------------------------|
| 2015 | 8,170 successful applicants. |
| 2016 | 8,600 applications received. |

Young Farmers Scheme

241. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total budget allocation for each year under CAP pillar 1 2014 to 2020 for participants under the young farmers scheme in tabular form; the total amount drawn down in each year and to date in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35697/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Young Farmers Scheme was introduced in 2015 as a measure to support young farmers under the reformed Common Agricultural Policy. Ireland has allocated 2% of the national ceiling to the Scheme each year from 2015 to 2019. Payments under the 2016 Young Farmers Scheme are due to issue after payment of the Basic Payment Scheme balancing payment on 1 December 2016.

The following table sets out the total budget allocation for each year 2015-2019 for the Young Farmers Scheme and details of the amount paid under the Scheme for 2015.

| Year | Annual National Ceiling 2015-2019 | YFS fund - 2% of National Ceiling | Total Paid under YFS |
|------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 2015 | €1,215,003,000.00 | €24,300,000.00 | €18,774,796.09 |
| 2016 | €1,213,470,000.00 | €24,269,400.00 | Payments commencing early December 2016 |
| 2017 | €1,211,899,000.00 | €24,237,980.00 | N/A |
| 2018 | €1,211,482,000.00 | €24,229,640.00 | N/A |
| 2019 | €1,211,066,000.00 | €24,221,320.00 | N/A |

TAMS Payments

242. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 741 of 21 July 2016, when he will issue a reply regarding permitting young farmers who are under 40 years of age, who have been farming for five years or more, to qualify for an intermediary grant aid level of 50%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35675/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are no current proposals to introduce an intermediary grant of 50% to farmers who fall into the category of being less than 40 years of age who have been farming for five years or more under TAMS II. However, such farmers do receive priority in the current TAMS II Schemes through the marking and Ranking and Selection System.

Departmental Appointments

243. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he will appoint a chairperson to the independent commonage appeals committee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35676/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Proposals regarding the terms of appointment of a new independent chairperson have been submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and it is expected that a chairperson will be appointed shortly.

GLAS Payments

244. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of 2016 GLAS commonage farmer payments that are being held up due to the fact that planners assigned to a commonage are no longer able to complete such plans as they have been released from contract or moved on; the number of farmers this concerns who are in GLAS; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35677/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): GLAS payments in respect of 2016 are due to commence in December for all applications which meet all of the regulatory checks and validations.

I am aware that in some instances issues have arisen concerning the preparation of the commonage management plan for a number of Commonages. My Department is actively managing the issue to ensure that all GLAS participants, including those who may be affected by this issue, will be paid at the same time as other GLAS participants who meet the regulatory checks.

GLAS Payments

245. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will enable 2016 GLAS payments to be made to farmers by accepting GLAS commonage plans where the planner assigned to a commonage is no longer doing plans due to reasons outside of the control of affected farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35678/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am aware that in some instances issues have arisen concerning the preparation of the commonage man-

agement plan for a number of Commonages. My Department is actively managing the issue to ensure that all GLAS participants, including those who may be affected by this issue, who meet all regulatory checks and validations for 2016 will be paid at the same time.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

246. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers participating in the beef data genomics scheme that have completed a beef carbon navigator, on a county basis, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35679/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the deputy is set out in the following table. I have extended the deadline for the completion of the carbon navigators by one month to 30 November to enable all participants to complete the navigator in order that payment can issue to them in December, subject to all other requirements having been met.

| | |
|-----------|-------|
| County | |
| Carlow | 248 |
| Cavan | 1017 |
| Clare | 1404 |
| Cork | 1568 |
| Donegal | 1183 |
| Dublin | 43 |
| Galway | 2233 |
| Kerry | 1028 |
| Kildare | 273 |
| Kilkenny | 452 |
| Laois | 497 |
| Leitrim | 840 |
| Limerick | 614 |
| Longford | 559 |
| Louth | 198 |
| Mayo | 2034 |
| Meath | 389 |
| Monaghan | 768 |
| Offaly | 476 |
| Roscommon | 1227 |
| Sligo | 857 |
| Tipperary | 820 |
| Waterford | 326 |
| Westmeath | 637 |
| Wexford | 484 |
| Wicklow | 336 |
| Total | 20511 |

247. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a mid-term review of the present CAP will be envisaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35680/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current CAP is still in the early stages of implementation, and discussions until now have focused on simplification rather than on a formal mid-term review. This simplification process is ongoing, and Ireland has been actively contributing to the process over the past 18 months.

Commissioner Hogan has recently indicated his intention to undertake a wide public consultation on the CAP in the first half of 2017, following which he is likely to table a communication aimed at addressing Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's commitment to modernise and simplify the CAP.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

248. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the latest timetable and information at hand concerning negotiations around the CAP post-2020 at EU level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35681/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A number of informal discussions on the CAP post 2020 have taken place at EU level in recent months, including at the Informal Council of Agriculture Ministers in the Netherlands in May, at an informal gathering of Ministers in Chambord in France in early September, and at the Cork Rural Development Conference, which also took place in early September. More recently, the future of the CAP was discussed over lunch at this week's Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting in Brussels.

This debate is still in its very early stages. The discussions so far have been very preliminary and exploratory in nature. Commissioner Hogan has indicated his intention to undertake a wide public consultation in the first half of 2017, following which he will table a communication that will address Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's commitment to modernise and simplify the CAP.

I am very much of the view that the CAP is a progressive policy that can make a critical contribution to addressing the strategic challenges faced not only by the European agricultural sector in the coming years, but also those facing the EU itself. One of the key challenges will be to facilitate an increase in food production by up to 70% by 2050 in order to meet the requirements of a growing global population, while doing so in an environmentally sustainable way that also facilitates adaptation to climate change. The CAP has been increasingly effective in this regard in recent years as it has evolved and responded to the consumer and environmental demands placed upon it, while at the same time helping farmers to deal with price and income volatility. I will be working to ensure that it continues to do so, and to ensure that it provides a solid and effective foundation for the development of the sector into the future.

Flood Risk Management

249. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a Government study around the feasibility of introducing a voluntary farm building relocation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35682/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Responsibility for flood risk management lies with Mr. Sean Canney, TD, Minister of State for OPW & Flood Relief.

Following consideration of Flood Risk Management at Cabinet recently, the Government announced a number of initiatives. It indicated that further examination is ongoing by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, OPW and Local Authorities in evaluating on an individual basis if any alternative remedial works can be undertaken to protect those at risk farm buildings that flooded again last winter in order to determine the feasibility of any future once-off targeted scheme for Voluntary farm Buildings relocation.

Environmental Protection Agency Reports

250. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the EPA report, Ireland's Environment - An Assessment 2016, regarding meeting climate change targets including greenhouse gas emissions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35683/16]

251. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the EPA report, Ireland's Environment - An Assessment 2016; if Food Wise 2025 targets are still achievable in view of the analysis outlined on meeting climate change responsibilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35684/16]

252. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the EPA report, Ireland's Environment - An Assessment 2016, and the analysis on economically viable farms in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35685/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 250 to 252, inclusive, together.

I welcome the publication of the EPA report "Ireland's Environment: An Assessment 2016", which underlines the vital importance of agriculture, forestry and land use to environmental sustainability. Food Wise 2025, the ten year strategy for the agri-food sector, identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectoral recommendations. In July this year, I launched the first annual progress report of Food Wise 2025: Steps to Success 2016. Food Wise Steps to Success showed that, of the 330 detailed actions which were due to commence in 2015 or 2016, 28% have been achieved or substantial action has been undertaken; and a further 67% have commenced and are progressing well. I believe that this is a good start and I will press on to get as many actions as possible completed within the next year. Environmental sustainability is at the heart of Food Wise, which states that "environmental protection and economic competitiveness are equal and complementary: one cannot be achieved at the expense of the other". An Environmental Sustainability Subgroup was established under the auspices of HLIC to monitor and drive the sustainability actions outlined in Food Wise 2025. Ireland's whole of Government approach to sustainability includes development of coherent and cost-effective policies to meet the twin challenges of sustainable food production and climate change in the agriculture and land use sector. The EPA report will help to inform the development of coherent and cost-effective policies to meet these challenges. The national policy position is based on an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including for-

estry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production. Officials from my Department work very closely with other Departments and in particular, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment which is the lead in this area. Through the deployment of innovative and efficient practices at farm level, combined with the application of emerging scientific knowledge, Ireland is taking the necessary steps towards addressing the challenge of greenhouse gas emissions in the Irish agriculture sector. The Rural Development Programme, worth almost €4 billion over 7 years, is strongly targeted towards environmental benefits, including knowledge transfer programmes, which will bring the latest innovative sustainability research and practices direct to farmers. My Department is also contributing to the National Mitigation Plan, which is being prepared under the 2015 Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act. The work on the national plan is overseen by Government through a hierarchy of committees and sub-groups, with independent advice from the Climate Change Advisory Council. These committees and groups include the Cabinet Committee and the Senior Officials' Group on Infrastructure, Environment and Climate Action, a Technical Research and Modelling Group and a Domestic Climate Finance Group. DAFM is a key stakeholder in the implementation of the National Regulations referred to as the Nitrates or the Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) Regulations. These regulations protect water through the implementation of specific controls and are aimed at minimising the loss of Nutrients from Agriculture. Substantial investments has been made both by my Department and the farming community to implement the GAP measures under the Nitrates Action Programme since their introduction in 2006. Additionally, under our Agri-environment scheme, GLAS, farmers in areas of high water status and vulnerable water bodies have priority entry to the scheme whilst measures such as 'Fencing of Watercourses' within the scheme are designed specifically to enhance water quality. The scheme is therefore very much targeted at improving water quality and this objective is supported by both the Knowledge Transfer and the Targetted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes.

The effectiveness of the Nitrates regulations is monitored by the Agricultural Catchments Programme. This is an integrated research/advisory programme established in 2008 with over 300 participating farmers in six catchments, funded by my Department. The Nitrates Regulations provide a considerable environmental baseline which all Irish farmers must achieve. The next review of these regulations will take place in 2017. With regard to the economic viability of farms outlined in the EPA report, this analysis is based on research by my Department and Teagasc. The overarching emphasis of Food Wise is to support increased competitiveness and profitability on farms with a view to delivering sustainable growth. In that regard the three pillar strategy I announced as part of the recent Budget - comprising payments, agri-taxation measures and the innovative Agri Cashflow Support Loan Fund - is designed to alleviate the difficulties caused to farmers by current market difficulties and the uncertainty engendered by the UK decision to leave the EU, and to provide them with longer-term financial stability.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Data

253. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of farmers enrolled in the agri-environment options scheme, AEOS, whose contracts will end in 2018, by county, in tabular form; if he will permit such farmers to join GLAS under a fourth round; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35686/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The third tranche of GLAS was recently launched with a view to bringing participation in the Scheme to at least 50,000 farmers and to utilise the full budget allocated to the Scheme. It is now open to current AEOS participants to apply now to join GLAS under tranche 3 and avail

of a 5 year contract under that scheme. The table below gives the number of current AEOS 3 participants per county that have contracts which are due to expire on 31 December 2018.

| County | AEOS 3 |
|-----------|--------|
| Carlow | 23 |
| Cavan | 118 |
| Clare | 272 |
| Cork | 184 |
| Donegal | 807 |
| Dublin | 5 |
| Galway | 736 |
| Kerry | 361 |
| Kildare | 11 |
| Kilkenny | 23 |
| Laois | 22 |
| Leitrim | 251 |
| Limerick | 87 |
| Longford | 32 |
| Louth | 18 |
| Mayo | 815 |
| Meath | 28 |
| Monaghan | 56 |
| Offaly | 56 |
| Roscommon | 251 |
| Sligo | 188 |
| Tipperary | 63 |
| Waterford | 42 |
| Westmeath | 44 |
| Wexford | 22 |
| Wicklow | 34 |

Agriculture Scheme Data

254. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the total number of farmers that enrolled in the crop damage assessment form in 2010, in tabular form; the way the scheme operated; if he will provide a breakdown of national Exchequer and EU funding; the timeline for getting EU approval for this scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35687/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Aid Scheme for Potato and Vegetable Crops Damaged by Frost was launched in February 2010. The scheme aimed to provide compensation for damage to potatoes and vegetables on foot of heavy frost in January 2010. Application for the scheme was via a “Crop Damage Assessment Form” and each applicant was required to provide details of their holding and the damage incurred to their crop. This form provided the basis for on farm verification visits to establish any losses arising due to the frost.

The scheme was paid in accordance with the Agriculture Block Exemption Regulation (EC)

No. 1857/2006 on the application of articles 87 and 88 of the Treaty to state aid to small and medium-sized enterprises active in the production of agricultural products. At the time of the launch of the scheme, applicants were advised that payment would not issue until EU clearance under this regulation had been received.

The Block Exemption Regulation required the frost damage to have destroyed more than 30% of the average annual production and provided the basis for this scheme to be funded from national funds.

The scheme applied to primary producers in the potato and vegetable sector, and the maximum aid intensity was 80% (90% in Less Favoured Areas). In all, 180 farmers received compensation under the scheme. A total of some €4 million was paid in compensation under the scheme with payments commencing in September 2010.

Rural Development Programme Funding

255. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide an overview of the process involved including at EU level in transferring moneys allocated from one rural development programme scheme to another; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35688/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As the Deputy will be aware, financial allocations under the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 are set out at measure and sub measure level and not at scheme level.

Under the RDP, the financial allocations by measure are detailed in the Financial Plan (section 10 of the RDP). Any changes to the Financial Plan in the RDP, including any transfer of funds between measures, are part of the official RDP amendment process. The RDP amendment process usually involves the following steps:

1. Development of the proposed amendment
2. Consultation with the RDP Monitoring Committee on the proposed amendment
3. Submission of the proposed amendment to the European Commission
4. European Commission considers the proposed amendment including inter-service consultation
5. European Commission issues official observation letter
6. Managing Authority responds to the Commission's observation letter
7. European Commission approves the proposed amendment by way of a Commission Implementing Act (as per Article 11 of EU regulation 1305/2013).

Scheme allocations are done as part of the annual budgetary process used for the exchequer (voted) funds. As information becomes available about requirements in the course of a year, scheme allocations can be adjusted by way of the usual public financial procedures. The transfer of funds may be effected by the Department itself, by virement with the permission of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, or by way of a supplementary estimate depending on the amount to be transferred and the subhead from which and to which the funds are to move.

GLAS Applications

256. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the total €1.4 billion programme funding allocated to green low-carbon agri-environment scheme up until 2020 will be fully drawn down; if any unspent GLAS funds will be kept within the 2014-20 RDP window and not transferred to post-2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35689/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The third tranche of the GLAS scheme was recently launched and is open to applications until mid-December 2016. I am satisfied that the level of interest even at this early stage indicates that applications under this tranche will bring participation levels to the projected figure of at least 50,000 in 2017. It is projected that all available European Funds over the programming period will be fully utilised.

GLAS Expenditure

257. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine whether the target, as announced in budget 2016, of €250 million to be spent annually on the GLAS programme when 50,000 farmers are enrolled will be realised in 2017 and the remaining years of this RDP; if not, the reason; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35690/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I recently launched the third tranche for applications to the GLAS scheme and I am satisfied that the level of interest even at this early stage will bring participation levels to the projected figure of at least 50,000 in 2017. I am happy all available European Funds over the programming period will be fully utilised.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

258. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a breakdown in tabular form of the specific programme funding for AEOS, GLAS, REPS and organics in 2017 following budget 2017, where it was announced that €241.7 million had been allocated for agri-environmental schemes for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35691/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The estimated allocation for 2017 will not be available until the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) is published later this year.

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

259. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the status of the latest EU proposals regarding the definition of an active EU farmer and application at member state level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35692/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The definition

of an active farmer has been discussed recently in the context of the so-called Omnibus Regulation, which proposes to give effect to the Commission's mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework 2014-2020, while also making some changes to the CAP regulations in the interest of achieving further simplification.

As regards the definition of an active farmer, the Commission has acknowledged that the application of the existing criteria has proven very difficult for Member States, and that the costs associated with its implementation outweigh the benefits to be derived from excluding a very small number of farmers. It is therefore proposing that the application of the active farmer definition should be optional for Member States.

From Ireland's perspective, we are very much in agreement with the Commission's view. Extensive checks have been carried out in my Department, involving all 132,000 farmers, and I can confirm that no farmer in 2015 was excluded from receiving the Basic Payment Scheme as a consequence of failing the active farmer criteria. It is our understanding that other Member States had similar results, despite extensive and costly administrative checks. On this basis, Ireland is very supportive of the proposal to make the application of the active farmer optional for Member States.

Single Payment Scheme Eligibility

260. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set down the number of garnishee orders that have been taken against farmers and their single farm payment in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35698/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The number of Garnishee Court Orders received in my Department against Scheme Payments in the previous 5 years is as follows:

2012 - 385

2013 - 421

2014 - 456

2015 - 496

2016 - 477.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

261. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out in tabular form the details of all pension top-ups paid in respect of chief executives of semi-State companies under the aegis of his Department, including the name of the organisation, the name of the chief executive, the amount of the top-up, the date of payment and whether the top-up was approved by his Department in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35880/16]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are twelve State Bodies under the aegis of my Department and none of them have made pension top-ups to their Chief Executives.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

262. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 533 of 27 September 2016 to outline his views on the ruling of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission on a sale (details supplied); his plans to give this sale the go-ahead; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35541/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is an independent body with a separate role and remit in relation to Media Mergers. It would not be appropriate for me to provide any comment on its ruling on this matter. The proposed purchase has been cleared by the CCPC on competition grounds and it must now be notified to me as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The deadline for this notification is 24 November 2016. Following this notification my Department has 30 working days to conduct an initial assessment of the case on media plurality grounds.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the case until that process and my Department's initial assessment is completed. I refer the Deputy to my response to Question No. 862 of 27 September 2017 which outlines how the Media Mergers regime functions.

In accordance with the Guidelines on Media Mergers, my Department facilitates pre-notification meetings with the parties to a proposed media merger. The purpose of such meetings is to answer questions the parties may have about the media mergers process and the notification form.

I can inform the Deputy that an initial pre-notification meeting was held with the legal representatives of the parties to the proposed transaction on 22 September 2016 and a further pre-notification meeting was held on 11 November 2016.

Recycling Policy

263. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to outline the extent to which his Department supports the principle of recycling of electrical goods, having particular regard to the efforts made by a company (details supplied) which endeavours to recycle such goods but finds it difficult to access the material for such recycling due to alternative disposal methods other than recycling, in view of the fact that Ireland is unlikely to meet its 5% target for recycling of electrical goods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35707/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Ireland has met every target prescribed by the European Union under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive to date and I am satisfied that my Department has put in place the legislation and supporting structures and systems required to ensure that all future targets will continue to be met.

Each Member State is obliged to meet targets for the collection of household WEEE per person per annum, and separate targets for recovery, reuse and recycling for each of the ten categories of WEEE. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) statistics, published in September 2016, illustrate Ireland's current progress towards meeting EU waste targets including WEEE. The most recent WEEE statistics are with respect to 2014 and demonstrate that 7.2 kg of household WEEE was collected per person in Ireland, compared to the EU target of 4 kg per person, and

that Ireland is also meeting recovery rates of 80% and 90% across different recycling processes. This information is available on the EPA's website www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/waste/stats.

These statistics are tangible proof of the positive response to the implementation of the WEEE directive in Ireland. Since the introduction of the Irish WEEE legislation, some 100 million waste electrical items have been collected and over 300,000 tonnes of WEEE diverted from landfill. The Irish public have supported the WEEE system and have fully utilised the network of free collection facilities and take-back options available to them. In so doing, they have played an important role in eradicating the visible blight on our countryside and towns caused by waste fridges and washing machines and other electro-scrap.

More than 300 people are employed in Ireland in direct connection with WEEE collection, recycling and treatment activity and 65% of all WEEE collected in Ireland is recycled by treatment facilities in Ireland. The introduction of the WEELABEX requirements into Irish WEEE legislation requires producers with obligations in Ireland to work with recyclers that are certified to the highest standard in the WEEE industry. This has had the effect of raising standards in the WEEE system in Ireland generally with domestic processing plants for small mixed WEEE, lamp recycling and television and monitor recycling in operation all of which have achieved WEELABEX certification.

While repair and re-use of WEEE is already well developed in Ireland, particularly in the social economy sector, the key to re-use organisations developing further is access to quality product, a fact acknowledged in the Irish WEEE legislation. Our legislation provides for such access in a co-ordinated and efficient manner for approved re-use organisations, who under our domestic WEEE Regulations now have a legal right to access WEEE from producer's designated collection hubs.

There are a number of key social, economic and environmental benefits to be gained from the development of a strong re-use marketplace in Ireland and re-use of WEEE is consistent with EU and Irish strategies, policies and directives towards a more sustainable future and circular economy. I am satisfied that we have created the appropriate regulatory environment to facilitate WEEE re-use and look forward to working with all stakeholders who wish to play a full and active role in realising the potential of this market.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

264. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to set down in tabular form the details of all pension top-ups paid in respect of chief executives of semi-State companies under the aegis of his Department, including the name of the organisation, the name of the chief executive, the amount of the top-up, the date of payment and whether the top-up was approved by his Department, in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35882/16]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I can confirm that there have been no pension top-ups paid to the Chief Executive of any semi-State Company under the aegis of my Department for the years in question. Pensions are negotiated on a case by case basis between the relevant company and the CEO as part of their contract, in accordance with the Guidelines on contracts, remuneration and other conditions of Chief Executives and senior management of State Bodies, subject to statutory provision for the approval of remuneration and terms by Ministers and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Questions - Written Answers
Wild Atlantic Way Project

265. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will provide the necessary resources and support to both Clare County Council and Limerick County Council to enable these local authorities to enter a joint venture in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland to introduce a tourist route along the Shannon and Fergus estuaries in counties Clare and Limerick as a spur off the Wild Atlantic Way, with the necessary signage, web site with direct link to the Wild Atlantic Way website (details supplied) and marketing function; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35521/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects, such as the Wild Atlantic Way, which is an operational matter for Fáilte Ireland. I have accordingly referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for attention and direct reply to the Deputy. If you have not heard from Fáilte Ireland within ten working days, please contact my private office.

Driver Test Centres

266. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to set out in tabular form the total number of tests taken and the total number of fails specifically for truck licences at each of the driving test centres in County Tipperary, that is, Nenagh, Thurles, Tipperary town and Clonmel, individually by centre and by tester, unnamed, for each of the years 2011 to 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35529/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the driver testing service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in these matters. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Sports Capital Programme Expenditure

267. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 42 of 2 November 2016 to set out the amount of moneys to be allocated to the sports capital grant for 2017. [35547/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the Government's primary vehicle to support the development of sports facilities and the purchase of sports equipment. The most recent rounds of the programme were in 2012, 2014 and 2015.

Following the conclusion of the 2017 Estimates discussions, a total of €52 m has been provided for sports capital projects. This will meet all existing commitments under previous rounds of the Sports Capital and Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme, and also allow for a new round of the of the Sports Capital Programme.

The new round will be open for applications by January at the latest. The new Programme will include a revised online portal which will make the process more user-friendly. Other supports will include a comprehensive written guide and video guides. Based on previous rounds of the programme, the assessment process takes a number of months to complete so I expect

that actual final grant allocations will be announced some time during Summer 2017. All other relevant details of the new round will be announced shortly including the relevant closing dates.

Road Improvement Schemes

268. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date on which the specific improvement grants were closed; and his plans to reopen this grant. [35551/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

The extent of the cutbacks in grant funding during the recession meant that the position in relation to Specific and Strategic grants had to be reviewed in 2013. Because of the cuts, expenditure on maintenance/renewal was falling well short of what was required to maintain the regional and local road network adequately. For this reason the then Minister informed Government in February 2013 that given the impact of the expenditure cuts on maintenance/renewal of roads the decision had to be made to prioritise expenditure on the protection of the existing network and to curtail road improvement grants with effect from 2014.

Since then the main focus of the grant programme has been on maintenance/renewal including bridge rehabilitation. In this context my Department is not operating a general application process for Specific and Strategic grants at present. Where funding is being provided for Specific Grant type projects, it is primarily to meet existing commitments, address important safety issues and progress projects included in the Capital Investment Plan. While 2017 will see a modest increase in funding for regional and local roads, it will still take some years for funding to reach "steady state" levels and the main focus in 2017 will continue to be on maintenance and renewal. It is expected the 2017 allocations will be announced early in the new year. It is open to Councils to fund road improvement projects from their own resources. The purpose of Exchequer funding is to supplement the own resources of local authorities, not to meet the full cost of schemes.

Taxi Regulations

269. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the fact that the NTA is advertising and running small public service vehicle, SPSV, tests for persons who wish to become taxi drivers and charging a fee of €170 to issue a new wheelchair-accessible taxi licence following successful completion of the SPSV test, despite the fact that such newly licensed taxi drivers will not be able to work because insurance companies will not insure drivers with less than two years' experience driving a taxi; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35564/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am acutely aware that the rising costs of motor insurance for drivers generally are also affecting the taxi industry. There are reports of large increases for existing policy holders and significant difficulties in obtaining insurance for new operators. The implications of the current insurance difficulties faced by those in the taxi sector are of serious concern to me.

The Minister for Finance has established a task force to review policy in the insurance sector. As part of its work, it is examining the factors which have led in recent times to the significant increase in motor insurance costs and will be recommending steps to influence the situation. The difficulties of taxi and hackney operators in obtaining insurance have been highlighted to the task force by my Department and the National Transport Authority (NTA). I am advised that the NTA has also had a bi-lateral meeting with the Department of Finance to apprise them on the situation pertaining to small public service vehicle (SPSV) licence holders in relation to both the availability and cost of SPSV insurance. It is expected that a report of the work of the task force will be completed late this year and the Government will then consider the appropriate actions to be taken.

As the Deputy has alluded to, the regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the SPSV Entry Test, is a matter for the NTA under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

Transport Infrastructure Ireland Expenditure

270. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 479 of 8 November 2016, if it is the case, as implied in his response, that his Department does not hold estimates of, and does not know the amount invested in, maintaining the national roads network in each year from 2008 to 2016 and is unwilling to provide this information; his views on concerns that his Department does not consider that this is under its policy remit; and if he will provide such information, which undoubtedly pertains to road policy and the overall funding framework rather than simply operational matters. [35616/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As you are aware, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) (formerly known as the NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

I understand that TII wrote to you directly on the 15th November 2016 (in answer to PQ 32305/16) detailing the funding for ordinary maintenance on the national road network for 2008 to 2016. These figures are in the public domain.

However, when it comes to calculating steady state requirements, capital expenditure related to road pavement renewals, bridge rehabilitation and safety works are also included in the assessment. As indicated to you previously, the “Background Paper 13: Analysis of Steady State Cost of Transport in Ireland”, published by my Department last year, includes an estimate of the level of expenditure required to maintain the current land transport system, including the national road network, in its steady state.

As also indicated previously, TII, as the agency with operational responsibility for the network, is best placed to provide an updated assessment based on its ongoing evaluation of the condition of the network, including pavements, bridges and tunnels. I understand that TII has indicated to you that it estimates that the current level of annual funding available for ordinary maintenance, operations, road pavement renewals, bridge rehabilitation and road safety works is in the region of €150 million less than the amount required to maintain the network in a steady state in the long run. If there is additional information you require from TII, please let my office know.

Driver Test Data

271. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of approved driving instructors for cars currently in the State; if his attention has been drawn to the number of those instructors who are franchisees of a company (details supplied); the percentage of the overall essential driver training lessons accounted for by these franchisees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35656/16]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Oversight of the system of Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs) is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in these matters. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Third Level Funding

272. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total funding allocated to the programme for research in third level institutions in the period 2010 to 2016 annually in tabular form; the programme funding that has been allocated in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35674/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTLTI) was launched in 1998, with five cycles of expenditure to date. The PRTLTI supports the provision of top-class research infrastructure (buildings, laboratories and cutting edge equipment) as well as human capital development, through Structured PhD/Emergent Technology programmes across Ireland's Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).

The Programme is designed to facilitate Ireland's HEIs to produce world class research in key strategic areas, including but not limited to bioscience/biomedical; medical technologies; energy, environment and marine; food and drink; social sciences and humanities; ICT and advanced communications; and platform technologies and materials.

The total funding allocated by Government to PRTLTI for each of the years 2010 to 2016 is set out in Table A.

Table A - PRTLTI funding 2010-2016

| Year | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| €m | 49.9 | 57.9 | 54.7 | 45.2 | 39 | 55.5 | 10.4 |

My Department is using the PRTLTI allocation to meet remaining liabilities from Cycle 5 of PRTLTI. The funding allocation for 2017 is €14.2m.

The planning and design of a successor to Cycle 5 of PRTLTI is a commitment in Innovation 2020 and is being progressed by my Department working with the Department of Education and Skills.

Disability Support Services

273. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if there are specific measures or schemes overseen by her Department to promote or

support self-employment as a viable option for persons with disabilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35566/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the First-Stop-Shop front line service assisting in delivering business growth and jobs for the micro-enterprise sector. They pull together Government Departments and Agencies to support anyone with a good business idea and to strengthen the enterprise sector in the local area. The LEOs can support anyone considering entrepreneurship as a career option, including the self-employed and persons with disabilities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEOs can offer direct financial assistance to microenterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities.

The LEOs may also be able to offer 'soft' supports in the form of training, or providing a mentor to work with the business proposer. In addition, the LEOs provide a 'signposting' service in relation to all relevant state supports available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, Credit Review Office and Microfinance Ireland. The LEOs can also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates, public procurement and other regulations affecting business.

Enterprise Ireland provides a range of supports, both financial and non-financial, to foster entrepreneurship throughout the country. These supports are available to all entrepreneurs who meet the eligibility requirements. People with disabilities can avail of these supports once they meet the required eligibility for the respective support.

The 'Supporting SMEs' online search tool (www.actionplanforjobs.ie), contains information on the range of Government supports for SMEs.

Local Enterprise Offices Staff

274. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if staff at local enterprise offices have received disability awareness training; the cost of training staff in disability awareness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35567/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): The staff of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) have not yet received disability awareness training since their inception in 2014.

However, as part of the LEO Customer Service Charter, I have asked Enterprise Ireland to liaise with the Local Authorities (as the LEOs are now units within the Local Authorities) and the National Disability Authority in order to determine the needs for disability awareness training for LEO staff in order to enhance the delivery of accessible and inclusive supports for disabled persons. The cost of the training will be determined following the assessment of the specific training requirements.

Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities

275. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the specific actions taken by her Department to support and encourage employers to develop more inclusive recruitment and workplace practices; and if she will make a statement

on the matter. [35568/16]

276. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the specific actions taken by her Department to support employers to hire people with disabilities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35569/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 275 and 276 together.

My Department's mission is to encourage the creation of high quality and sustainable full employment by championing enterprise across government, supporting a competitive enterprise base, and promoting fair and competitive markets. My Department does not have a direct role in the formulation of policy on the provision of employment or other supports for people with disabilities.

My Department does however participate on the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for Persons with a Disability Implementation Group (CES) and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy Group (NDIS), both of which are being led by the Department of Justice & Equality.

My Department has implemented the CES action, whereby we were requested to highlight the supports that are available to facilitate the employment of people with disabilities in the open labour market, or to retain in the workforce employees who acquire a disability. This will operate through the provision of appropriate links by the relevant Departments and agencies to the DJEI's website.

The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 prohibit discrimination on nine grounds including the ground of disability. The Acts apply to prospective employees in claiming discrimination in access to employment. Any person who believes that s/he has experienced discrimination which is contrary to the Employment Equality Acts may seek redress by referring a complaint to the Director General of the Workplace Relations Commission, which is an Office of my Department. A case may be lodged through the Workplace Relations Commission's website at www.workplacereactions.ie. General information relating to employment rights is available on the website and from the Workplace Relations Commission's Information Service at Telephone: 1890 80 80 90.

IDA Portfolio

277. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if the IDA has plans on future enterprises occupying an industrial estate (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35574/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): IDA Ireland continues to bring Clonsaugh Business and Technology Park to the attention of companies that are interested in situating themselves in the area. The Park is already home to a number of the Agency's clients – including Forest Labs and Amazon – but there are a number of vacant industrial units there which could be suitable for investors.

Agri-food Sector

278. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her proposals to introduce an employment subsidy similar to such support provided in 1992 and 1993 for the mushroom sector, which faced serious difficulties at that time due to currency

fluctuations and similar problems which have also arisen for that sector since June 2016; if she will give this request urgent consideration in view of the importance of this industry and its dependence on the sterling area for exports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35642/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I do not intend to introduce an Employment Subsidy Scheme for the mushroom sector at this time, in the context of economic difficulties arising from the UK vote to leave the EU, and the resultant currency fluctuations.

I am aware that a similar Scheme was introduced here in 2009, during the most difficult period of the world economic downturn, to assist Irish companies in overcoming those difficulties. This Scheme was approved by the EU Commission under its Temporary Framework state aid rules for that downturn, which concluded at end-2010.

However, a whole of Government approach is in place here today to address the UK vote.

As Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, I am responsible for supporting Irish firms, especially our SMEs, across the whole of the economy. That is why I am making sure that I am in possession of all the detail of how Brexit impacts on each and every sector and company type – be they micro, small, medium, or even larger companies in some instances - before I finalise my proposals or make any announcements about specific measures.

My Officials have also engaged with the European Commission to gain clarification on, and a full understanding of, the scope of EU State Aid rules that currently apply. The Commission is also aware from our contacts with them that Ireland, above all other Member States, stands to be uniquely impacted by Brexit.

In order to build further on the foregoing, my Department is currently scoping out various possible responses to the short term currency challenge and I expect to be in a position to announce more detail, based on actual company needs, shortly. Any new initiative must be tailored, targeted and evidence-based in order for our SMEs to receive the maximum support possible, and in the sectors most needed.

From the strategic perspective, Enterprise Ireland, an Agency under my remit, is assisting companies to maintain and grow UK exports and extend their international reach, as well as helping companies to enhance their competitiveness. In addition, the Local Enterprise Offices, also under my remit, are working closely with those clients likely to be impacted by Brexit.

Finally, I am also aware that my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed TD, and Agencies under his remit, are equally engaged in monitoring the impacts of Brexit on all relevant sectors, including the mushroom sector, and is drawing the attention of all firms to supports being provided to the industry through national and EU Schemes.

Enterprise Ireland Staff

279. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the total number of staff that availed of Enterprise Ireland's voluntary leaving programme in 2015 and 2016; the approximate number of new posts that will be created at the agency in 2017 following budget 2017 allocations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35664/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): In recent years, Enterprise Ireland has implemented an ambitious reform agenda to ensure more

effective delivery of services to Enterprise Ireland clients. As part of the organisation's resource plan, Enterprise Ireland launched a Voluntary Leaving Programme in November 2014, which closed in January 2015. Fifty-one staff availed of the Voluntary Leaving Programme in 2015 and 2016. The reform agenda included an ongoing process to analyse the skills and capabilities of the organisation. Recruitment has been ongoing within the agency to address critical gaps in the management structure and current skill gaps in emerging and future sectors to reflect the needs of Irish industry.

In Budget 2017, I secured additional pay monies which will provide for 50+ new posts for the Department and its agencies to respond to Brexit and to work with companies to help them respond to the challenges and opportunities.

Enterprise Ireland has a critical contribution to make in my Department's overall strategic response to Brexit. Therefore, Enterprise Ireland will create 39 new posts in 2017 in targeted overseas markets including in the UK and also in Dublin, to prepare companies at home and in market to manage the challenges that arise as a result of Brexit. This immediate need is aligned with Enterprise Ireland's ongoing strategic objective to diversify Ireland's export trade by supporting clients to continue to sustain and win new business in existing markets while exploring opportunities in new markets.

New posts will be created in a number of overseas markets where Enterprise Ireland and their client companies see strategic opportunities. It will be hugely important to intensify export growth to other markets, to reduce reliance on the UK, re-orienting companies towards North America, Canada, Asia and the Middle-East. On foot of 2015 export figures, there is immediate opportunity and potential for strengthening our foothold in existing established markets and for diversified export growth. Last year sales to North America grew by 27%, Northern Europe by 8% and Asia-PAC by 11%.

The additional staff placed in the UK will provide market expertise in support of clients dependent on the UK market, to help them sustain existing sales and to win new business. Some 1500 Enterprise Ireland client companies have recorded exports to the UK and it will remain a priority market for many Irish exporters, particularly first-time exporters.

In relation to additional staff in Dublin, the experience of the Department, through Enterprise Ireland, is that those clients who are more prepared before entering the market and engaging with in-market Enterprise Ireland teams, have a greater chance of sustained success. To maintain and grow market share in the UK and broaden the global exporting figures, companies need to be more competitive and innovative. For Enterprise Ireland, that means proactive engagement with clients in delivering their suite of programmes, such as LEAN, innovation and R&D projects, management and leadership capability as well as sales and marketing and export diversification strategies. This suite of supports will help companies reduce supply-chain costs and increase efficiencies as a means of improving operating margins, building market share and creating new market opportunities.

Enhancing EI's Irish based team will increase client preparedness before they enter the market and ensure that the resources in market are being used strategically and to best effect.

Other key elements of the 2017 Enterprise Ireland strategy include an enhanced programme of trade and investment missions and other trade promotional events and the rollout of EI's new 'Global Ambition Campaign' which will promote Irish companies and their products and services to international buyers.

280. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will extend the expiry date as provided under section 279(2) of the Companies Act 2014 to enable qualifying companies to use the United States of America's generally accepted accounting principles financial reporting standard here following the recent public consultation; if so, the timetable for this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35665/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Section 279 of the Companies Act 2014 provides that in limited cases for a particular transitional period, US Accounting Standards may be used by certain companies. This is conditional on compliance with Irish company law and is subject to the company meeting a number of qualifying criteria.

This transitional arrangement was first introduced in 2009 in the Companies (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, and was later amended and extended in the Companies (Amendment) Act 2012 to run until 31 December 2020. Section 279 of the Companies Act 2014 re-enacts the 2012 provision with the same period.

A number of factors need to be considered before a decision is made on any possible extension. Accordingly, my Department conducted a public consultation on the matter in September and is currently consulting with the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority and the Department of Finance. I expect to consider the outcome of that process in the coming weeks.

If the deadline is to be extended, it will need to be done in primary legislation, which is ultimately a matter for the Oireachtas.

Foreign Direct Investment

281. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on Irish competitiveness and the ability to attract new and retain existing foreign direct investment employment from the United States should the US reduce its corporation tax rate in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35667/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): There is no denying that American investment is very important to Ireland's economic well-being. The US is the largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) here, accounting for over 70% of the country's FDI. Approximately 680 US corporations employ 135,000 people directly in a broad range of sectors such as information technology, biopharma, medical technology and financial services.

I recognise that changes to the US taxation regime could have an impact on the investment environment in Ireland. That is why the Government will analyse and assess any American reform proposals and will prepare accordingly for them. However, it is important to remember that US companies come to Europe and to Ireland for many reasons. A lower US corporate tax rate, for instance, would not reduce the need for American companies to have operations in Europe. Ireland remains, and will continue to remain, a very attractive location in which to invest and operate from for US businesses.

Within Europe, Ireland is seen as one of the most stable and pro-enterprise jurisdictions. We are also one of the most competitive, as evidenced by various international competitiveness rankings. The Government is determined that we retain that competitiveness going forward and will continue to take steps to address areas where we need to improve.

Departmental Strategies

282. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 332 of 10 November 2016, and the admission that growth potential in Enterprise 2025 was informed by macroeconomic forecasts at that time, if she will review Enterprise 2025 and employment and export forecasts in view of the fact that latest macroeconomic forecasts for the short medium term have changed since the UK referendum result; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35668/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): As a small open economy, Ireland has in the past, and will continue to operate in an environment of continuous and fast-paced change globally. In today's interconnected world, Ireland's enterprise policies aim to build resilience into our economy – by strengthening the capabilities of our enterprises, diversifying export markets and source markets for investment and by maintaining our focus on Ireland's relative competitiveness. Enterprise 2025, our agreed national enterprise policy, was developed in the context of ongoing global uncertainties.

It is accepted that the UK referendum result has created a high degree of uncertainty and, in that context, it can be expected that many, fluctuating macro-economic, trade and employment forecasts will be produced between now and the UK leaving the European Union.

Enterprise 2025 provides a robust framework that remains valid and sets out an ambitious policy approach. That ambition must be maintained despite any turbulence in international developments. If anything, the result of the UK referendum has placed an increased emphasis on re-doubling our efforts. At the same time, I know that the UK referendum result requires specific policy responses in parallel with the implementation of Enterprise 2025. My Department and others across government are taking action. The enterprise development agencies are working closely with companies to provide the support and advice needed. As part of Budget 2017 I secured additional resources for the Department and its agencies, with up to 50 additional staff to be provided to secure our ambitious indigenous exports, inward investment and jobs growth targets. My focus remains on achieving the Government's ambition of having an extra 200,000 at work by 2020. Details of action taken to date were provided in my earlier reply to a related question (REF 34327/16, question number 332 of November 10th 2016).

In light of the foregoing, and notwithstanding the challenge facing us, I do not anticipate any revision to Enterprise 2025, or its ambition, at this time.

Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement

283. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to ensure a full debate takes place in Dáil Éireann in relation to the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA, trade deal with Canada with special focus of the investor state dispute settlement, which permits and empowers foreign companies to sue sovereign governments when laws are enacted nationally which interfere or restrict such companies projected unearned profits; if the Government is rejecting this private court system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35701/16]

284. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if it is the intention of the Government to pursue under an Article 218 (II) reference to the European Court of Justice under the Treaty of the Functioning of EU to clarify the legality of the investment arbitration proposals in Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement under EU law; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35704/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): I propose to take Questions Nos. 283 and 284 together.

On 30 October 2016, EU leaders and the Canadian Prime Minister met in Brussels for the 16th EU-Canada summit and signed the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement. CETA is a comprehensive and progressive trade agreement between the EU and Canada. It removes over 99% of tariffs that currently hinder trade between the EU and Canada. It is expected to increase bilateral trade by €12 billion per year, and to generate growth and new jobs on both sides of the Atlantic.

Given the position taken by Ireland and other Member States, the Commission submitted CETA to the Council for decision as a mixed Agreement. That is one requiring both EU and individual Member States ratification. As this process may take a number of years to complete the Agreement provides for provisional application. The Agreement has now been signed so the next step is the ascent of the European Parliament.

It is important to note that investment protection and investment dispute settlement provisions have been excluded from the provisional application of the Agreement. This means these provisions will not come into being until voted for by the Dáil and every other Member State according to their constitutional requirements.

The EU and Canada have also agreed a legally binding Joint Interpretative Instrument that has been added to CETA to provide further assurances in relation to public services, labour rights, environmental protection and investment.

The Government does not propose to seek an opinion from the European Court of Justice on the legality of the Investment Court System in CETA under EU law. The Deputy will be aware that the opinion of the ECJ has already been sought in relation to the EU Singapore Free Trade Agreement and the outcome of this case is awaited.

CETA and the EU's other trade agreements help to open new markets, break down barriers and provide new opportunities for Irish firms. Ireland stands to gain substantially from this Agreement and I am looking forward to Irish firms enjoying the benefits and new opportunities as soon as possible.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

285. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the details of all pension top-ups paid in respect of chief executives of semi-State companies under the aegis of her Department, including the name of the organisation, the name of the chief executive, the amount of the top-up, the date of payment, and if the top-up was approved by his department in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35885/16]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Mary Mitchell O'Connor): Enterprise Ireland is the only Semi State Company under the aegis of my Department to pay a pension top up to it CEO during the period in question. Frank Ryan former CEO of Enterprise Ireland was awarded 3.824 added years to his pension in accordance with the terms of the 1998 Severance and Early Retirement Scheme to CEO's of State Sponsored Bodies. Details of the additional amounts paid are listed in the following table.

| Agency | Additional Years | Additional-Pension p.a | Additional Net Lump Sum | Date of Payment | Approved by Dept. |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Enterprise Ireland | 3.8247 | €9,041.35 | €14,466.17 | 7/3/2014 | Yes |

Commissions of Investigation

286. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the costs incurred to date under headings such as office accommodation, legal expenses, salaries and so on for each commission of investigation formally established since 2012 by her Department; the estimated final cost; the expected completion date of the commission; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35651/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters is the only Commission of Investigation established under the aegis of my Department. It was established by Government on the 17th February 2015 (S.I. No. 57 of 2015) and is due to submit its three reports by February 2018.

The costs associated with the Commission are met from my Department's Vote. Since its establishment the Commission has directly incurred costs totalling €3.015m (to end of October 2016). This expenditure consists of €1.630m in pay; €1.117m for operational costs (including accommodation), and €0.268m for other costs related to the investigation.

In addition, my Department has also incurred costs to date of approximately €0.386m in supporting the establishment and operation of the Commission.

Due to the nature of an investigation process, and the volume of information being analysed across the various strands of this investigation, it is not possible to provide an estimate of final costs at this time.

Child and Family Agency Data

287. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of Tusla social workers allocated to work with unaccompanied minors; the amount of funding required to increase this team by 20, 30 and 50 social workers; her plans to increase the capacity of this team; the timeframe for such an expansion; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35518/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information requested is not readily available in my Department. My officials have requested the information from Tusla and I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with it.

Foster Care Supports

288. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she and her Department, along with Tusla, will embark on an information and awareness raising campaign to attract new foster families willing to foster unaccompanied minors leaving refugee camps; her targets in that regards; if she is working with An Garda Síochána to fast track vetting

for such families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35519/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have asked Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to review its ability to provide safety, protection and hope to greater numbers of unaccompanied children, and to assess the additional resources that may be needed. This review will address the possible placement options that may be needed to meet the needs of the individual children involved. As this work progresses, the foster care capacity that is needed to support unaccompanied minors will be clarified. Any decisions regarding information campaigns to recruit or the assessment process for foster carers will be made in this context.

Child and Family Agency Remit

289. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 674 of 18 October 2016, if the action 1.8 in the Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, which states that Tusla will provide additional emergency refuge accommodation spaces for victims of domestic violence, is the same as the extra eight family units that were promised for 2016 for the greater Dublin area as stated in the reply to the parliamentary question. [35638/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 2016, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has allocated funding of €20.6m for a network of some 60 organisations providing services to victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence in Ireland. Almost €12.0m is provided for emergency refuge and support services and a further €4.6m is provided for other community based domestic violence support services. The level of expenditure in this area will further increase in 2017, arising from the provision of €37m in additional funding to Tusla for services generally.

Tusla provides revenue funding towards the running costs of emergency refuge accommodation. Local authorities are responsible for capital funding in respect of emergency accommodation spaces. In the current year, Tusla is providing funding to support eight additional family units of accommodation; six additional family units of emergency accommodation in Dublin and Kildare and two emergency safe housing units in Sligo. The emergency domestic violence accommodation spaces in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing will be in addition to those already supported by Tusla.

Tusla is engaged with a number of specialist domestic violence service provider organisations and other stakeholders about additional provision to support families in safe accommodation in 2017 and beyond. Tusla's focus is on achieving the optimum use of emergency shelter accommodation and effective community based services to avoid, in so far as possible, the need for use of refuges by vulnerable women and families.

My priority, and that of Tusla, is to ensure that the needs of women and children fleeing domestic violence are being met in the most effective way possible. I am committed to continuing support for these vital services.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

290. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the details of all pension top-ups paid in respect of chief executives of semi-State companies under the aegis of her Department, including the name of the organisation, the name of the chief

executive, the amount of the top-up, the date of payment, and if the top-up was approved by his department in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [35881/16]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There have been no pension top-ups paid in respect of Chief Executive Officers in the agencies under the aegis of my Department, namely, the Ombudsman for Children's Office, the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the Children's Detention Schools and Tusla.

Civil Defence

291. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there are any funding schemes available to voluntary search and rescue units (details supplied) as the work they do in supporting the civil authorities at a time when persons are missing or injured is vital and requires funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35540/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Civil Defence, which operates under the aegis of the Department of Defence, provides assistance to the Principal Response Agencies, such as An Garda Síochána. Civil Defence services are delivered at local level by the relevant local authority. Civil Defence is funded on a 70:30 basis by the Department of Defence and the local authorities.

The Department of Defence does not provide funding to any other voluntary search and rescue units.

Defence Forces Medicinal Products

292. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of the 14 self-inflicted deaths and suicides in the Defence Force personnel, who had previously been prescribed Lariam that were reported as a possible adverse drug reaction by Defence Forces medical staff to the Health Products Regulatory Authority or its predecessor, the Irish Medicines Board. [35703/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I have requested the information sought by the Deputy from the Defence Forces. I will revert to the Deputy in due course.

Semi-State Bodies Remuneration

293. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the details of all pension top-ups paid in respect of chief executives of semi-State companies under the aegis of his Department, including the name of the organisation, the name of the chief executive, the amount of the top-up, the date of payment, and if the top-up was approved by his department in each of the years 2011 to 2016 to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [35883/16]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The only state body currently under the aegis of the Department of Defence is the Army Pensions Board which is an independent statutory body established under the Army Pensions Act 1927. The Army Pensions Board does not have a Chief Executive so the question of pension top ups does not

arise.

In the years 2011-2012 two other state boards operated under the aegis of the Department of Defence – the Civil Defence Board and the Board of Coiste an Asgard. In the case of the Civil Defence Board it was headed up by a civil servant at Principal Officer level to whom relevant civil service pensions applied. During the years 2011 and 2012 the formal wind up Coiste an Asgard, including voluntary strike off with the Companies Registration Office, was being managed by staff of my Department and as such the question of a pension top up to a Chief Executive did not arise.