Written Answers.

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

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

Questions Nos. 11 to 22, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 23 to 25, inclusive, answered orally.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation

26. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the measures she will take to ensure that parents and children have access to suitable places under the affordable childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31297/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Parents need to act now – that's the message which I would encourage Deputies to bring back to their constituencies this weekend. The best way to find out information is for parents to go on the website www.affordablechildcare.ie, The benefits are set out there in a way which is accessible and easy to follow.

Deputies we must get this message out so that the estimated 70,000 children eligible for supports will benefit from September. Can I encourage you when on local radio or in your local newspaper to please draw attention to the website. In addition to the website we have posted out information packs to over 4,000 childcare providers and my officials have been on the road holding special information events – each booked to capacity.

There is understandably a lot of interest from parents in the first instance but also from providers. From September a number of administrative measures will take place. We are enhancing existing targeted childcare supports by as much as 50%. There will be better access to subsidies for providers – with the traditional Community Childcare Scheme being extended to both community and private providers.

In order to encourage involvement in the schemes I have secured an extra $\in 3.5$ m for providers for non-contact time – this is on top of the $\in 14.5$ m secured in Budget 2017. As I have outlined the technical, legal and technical work is also continuing to achieve the goal of genuine affordable accessible quality childcare. There are a lot of figures to take in during the limited time today. But the bottom line for families is the benefits available from September. Some families will qualify for as much as $\in 145$ per week, per child, in childcare subsidies, totalling approximately $\in 7,500$ per child, per year.

Examples of the impact we will have:

- A working family in receipt of Family Income Supplement and with a Medical Card, who currently benefit from a full-time CCS childcare subsidy of €95 per week, will from September benefit from a subsidy of €145 per week. This represents an increase in childcare subsidy of up to €2600 per child, per annum, or, for families who have not received the subsidy before, an annual saving on childcare, per child, of up to €7540.
- A family in receipt of One Parent Family Payment, with a Medical Card, working parttime, who currently benefit from a part-time CCS childcare subsidy of \in 47.50 per week, will from September benefit from a subsidy of \in 80 per week. This represents an annual increase of up to \in 1,690 per child, or for single parents who have not benefitted from this subsidy in the past, a reduction of up to \in 4,160 per child in their annual childcare costs.

There are many more examples which we are always happy to share.

I hope this information is useful for Deputies when explaining the changes to constituents.

Question No. 27 answered orally.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

- 28. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has held discussions with the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government regarding the family hubs that are planned to replace the use of hotels for families in emergency accommodation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30783/17]
- 30. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will consult with the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government as to the suitability of accommodating children in hubs as a response to the housing crisis; if she will make recommendations to ensure the safety and well-being of children being housed in those circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31023/17]
- 44. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to support homeless families that will be moved into hubs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30852/17]
- 56. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation is suitable for homeless families; her further views on whether the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is delivering on its responsibility to these families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31216/17]
- 58. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the work she is undertaking with the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to support homeless families with young children remaining in emergency accommodation, hubs and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30853/17]
- 59. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of families in emergency accommodation being supported by community child care subvention; the status of free travel and other measures for families in emergency accommodation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31163/17]
- 62. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department has determined the number of homeless children here; the measures being taken to

protect their welfare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31215/17]

550. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation is suitable for homeless persons; her further views on whether the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is delivering on its responsibility to these persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31229/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 28, 30, 44, 56, 58, 59, 62 and 550 together.

Firstly let me say that I have had discussions with the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in relation to the family hubs. They are a temporary solution as we, as a government get to grips with the devastating plight of homelessness in our country. The hubs are a better temporary solution than hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation which I do not believe are suitable accommodation for homeless families.

I know Minister Murphy has as his target that any new family presenting as homeless will be accommodated in a hub and not in a hotel or bed and breakfast. His other target is to move families that are currently homeless and living in hotels, out of those hotels.

Hubs provide shared facilities and important supports that are difficult to organise in hotels. They allow families to lead their lives in a way that is better for children and better for their parents. They have additional space in hubs. In a hotel setting, families are often cramped into one bedroom. They have no privacy. It is difficult for children trying to do their homework. It is restricted in terms of preparing meals. In general it leads to untold amounts of stress.

The hubs are custom developed to facilitate much better responses to the needs of homeless families. They allow for on-site access to necessary services such as health, housing, cooking, and laundry facilities. The hubs provide a better setting for supports such as homework clubs, meeting with support workers and activities that are being organised for children and parents. Importantly, while far from ideal, they have play areas, which allow children to be children, and parents some peace of mind.

When I met with Advocacy groups a year ago, these were among the issues that they high-lighted. They also pressed me to provide free childcare for families that are homeless, which I have done. Initially this was available in Dublin. Many other counties have since signed up. It is currently available in Limerick, Cork, Cavan, Clare, Donegal, Galway, Kildare, Kilkenny, Leitrim, Offaly, Westmeath and Wicklow. We will make arrangements also to support any cases that are brought to our attention outside of these counties.

I have a budget of €4m for this. In my opinion it is a well-targeted and much needed support for families that are homeless. It is good for children and good for parents. At the moment the parents of 94 children are availing of this. 112 providers have signed up to be part of the scheme. Child care providers get a grant of €110 per week to cover 25 hours of childcare. Families with children aged 0-5 years inclusive are identified by Focus Ireland and encouraged to participate. I will continue to support children and families with free childcare that move from hotels and B&B accommodation into hubs.

These children will also continue to be prioritised in terms of the school completion programme. The School Completion Programme identifies and supports children at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system. It does this through initiatives such as afterschool supports, homework clubs, mentoring programmes, therapeutic interventions and breakfast clubs.

Sadly, I am aware that families become homeless during the course of the year and may not be on the target list drawn up by the SCP at the start of the school year. For this reason all SCP programmes are now engaging with their schools on an ongoing basis, and not just at the start of the year, to ensure that children receive the appropriate supports. The Education Welfare Office also prioritise the sourcing of an appropriate school placement for children who are homeless. In DEIS schools where there is a Home School Community Liaison the Co-ordinator proactively engages with parents who are experiencing homelessness. The HSCL also supports families to access any other services that can be of assistance to the family. The Tusla Homeless Liaison officer will continue to work with these families until such time as they are moved to permanent housing.

Tusla will offer "one stop shop" assessments at the hubs. The agency will participate in respect of child protection and welfare services, educational welfare, and Domestic, Sexual and gender based violence services. With the help of the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, Tusla has arranged an awareness and training session for homeless service providers on Domestic, sexual and gender based violence. We will continue to offer services through the Family Resource Centres. Families living in hubs can continue to avail of the services such as family fun days, play therapy and transport services.

When developing the Government's response to our Homeless Crisis I advocated strongly for the plan Rebuilding Ireland to include a commitment to provide children in emergency accommodation with LEAP cards for school journeys. While this did not happen as quickly as I would have liked, it did happen. In my meeting with Minister Murphy this week I emphasised the need to continue providing these to children who are in hubs and need to use public transport to travel to school. In addition five separate 24 hour family LEAP cards were provided to all homeless families in hotels during 2016. I know that people found these helpful in terms of giving them family days out. I wish to see this repeated this year.

Children and Young People Service Committees have been established in each of the 17 Tusla areas with relevant coordinators in place. They will contribute to greater interagency working and help to ensure that there is a coordinated approach on homelessness. The Tusla Homeless Liaison Officer has contacted the 5 CYPSC coordinators in Dublin and attended briefing sessions with them. They must each now consider the best approach and response within their specific area to homeless related matters. This will include working with families living in hubs. This briefing session is scheduled to take place in each of the 17 areas.

At the end of May, there were 1,312 families homeless. There are 2,777 children in these homeless families. 647 homeless families are being accommodated in hotels and B&Bs in Dublin. These are shocking figures. In my role as Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I have concentrated my efforts around minimising the impact where and when possible. I will continue to do this.

Question No. 29 answered orally.

Question No. 30 answered with Question No. 28.

Questions Nos. 31 to 34, inclusive, answered orally.

Refugee Data

35. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of unaccompanied minors that had been in the migrant camp in Calais that have come here; if work is ongoing to expand Tusla's capacity for this purpose; and if she will make a statement

on the matter. [30782/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am happy to report to the Deputy that 22 children have arrived from France under the Calais Special Project. Aged between 13 and 17, they are all boys, and come from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Syria, and South Sudan. 20 are in care placements and 2 were reunited with family members.

The French authorities are responsible for identifying and nominating separated children seeking asylum who are eligible to participate in the Irish programme. The criteria for the programme, developed as a result of an all-party motion in November 2016, requires that separated children seeking asylum in Ireland were unaccompanied, living in a camp in or near Calais, were under 18 years of age and had an expressed wish to come to Ireland.

Social workers from the Tusla Social Work Team for Separated Children and members of the An Garda Síochána travelled to the locations where the children were accommodated, to conduct initial needs assessments and security checks. The children were then engaged in orientation activities in France and were accompanied to Ireland by staff from the International Organisation for Migration.

On arrival the children were granted refugee status by the Minister for Justice and Equality. Full intake assessments were completed by Tusla at this stage. All of the children were allocated a social worker, and were placed in residential settings while their care, educational and medical needs were assessed. To co-ordinate Tusla's role in this effort, Tusla established the Calais Special Project which is led by their Separated Children's Team. Additional resources were allocated for the assessment and care needs of the young people. The Team has expanded to include additional social workers, aftercare workers and administrative support. Tusla have opened three new residential units specifically for separated children, which means there are now a total of 7 units available to separated children. Tusla also continues to recruit and assess potential foster carers for this cohort of children. Tusla liaises closely with the HSE, the Education and Training Boards and other State bodies to address each young person's identified needs, including educational, psychosocial and health supports.

I wish to acknowledge that the Calais Special Project has received support and co-operation from national and international organisations and NGOs who have provided valuable information on young persons who expressed an interest in relocating to Ireland.

Questions Nos. 36 and 37, inclusive, answered orally.

Preschool Services

38. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if training or upskilling is provided to persons working with children on the autism spectrum in preschool settings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30781/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Yes – there is training and upskilling provided. In addition to affordability and quality – our radical new approach to childcare must also ensure accessibility. I am fully and absolutely committed to that. One of my first official duties as Minister was to launch the Access Inclusion Model or AIM. The model supports children with disabilities to attend main-stream pre-school education. This includes children on the autism spectrum.

AIM is comprehensive – it offers seven levels of progressive support. The degree of support provided depends on the needs of the child in the context of the pre-school which they

are attending. The levels range from a new Inclusion Charter for all pre-schools, to support for equipment and upgrades, as well as training. Indeed one of the great successes of AIM has been the huge interest in a newly developed Higher Education Programme in Leadership for Inclusion in Early Years Settings – known as LINC. In the 2017-2018 year I can confirm that 978 people will take part in this leadership programme.

I met some of the 850 students currently taking part in the programme and due to graduate this Autumn when I recently attended the conference of Early Childhood Ireland. They are passionate about their work and about offering the best possible service to all children.

Looking to the future, my Department and I are determined to further improve accessibility. We have established a new Training Working Group to develop further courses under AIM Level 3. This will not be a long process. I would expect its recommendations will include further assistance for early years practitioners working with children with autism. There is a website where the information is set out www.aim.gov.ie

Child Care Services Provision

39. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when a decision will be made to the request for 24-hour services at a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31161/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla has two emergency children's residential centres that cater for young people in need of emergency care. One of these is the centre referred to by Deputy O'Sullivan, which is based in Dublin city centre. The young people receive a 24 hour seamless service. For operational reasons, the service for the young people during the day is located nearby.

This dedicated service for the young people operates during the day, at weekends and public holidays. Its aim is to support each young person individually and to tailor the service to their unique needs. Young people may continue to attend school or training courses or, where this is not the case, a project worker will work with them during the day. The project worker will engage with all aspects of the young the person's needs including bringing them to meetings and other appointments, making contact, as appropriate, with their family and keeping in contact with the social work team from the child's home area. The aim of the services is to ensure the young person's stay in the emergency residential centre is for as short a period as possible. This approach, of individual support outside of the emergency centre, also means that if a young person is out of home for the first time, they do not spend all day with other young people who are frequently out of home, or who have persistent problems. This prevents the normalisation of a situation which should be, and usually is, exceptional.

All children under 16 year old in the situation of being homeless without their parents are taken into care. In some cases young people in the 16-17 year age group are resistant to this option, and they are offered full support care services appropriate to their needs.

Foster Care Supports

40. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to ensure that foster carers can have immediate access to medical and psychological supports required by the children in their care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31181/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I think that it is worth commenting that 92% of the children in care under the Child Care Act 1991 are placed with foster families living in the community. This figure is amongst the highest internationally and something about which we should be proud. I do not take this for granted and am aware that Tusla services must constantly be alert to the need for improvements, especially as children with increasing complexity are placed with foster carers. When a child is received into care there is a full assessment of their identified needs and this includes a medical assessment. A medical card is provided in respect of the child in foster care.

Following this assessment, the child's statutory care plan should identify outstanding medical, emotional, psychological and educational supports required. The Deputy will be aware that the HSE is responsible for the provision of medical and psychology services and children are referred to these services as needed. Where an identified need cannot be met by the HSE, or the waiting time is too long, Tusla have sourced the necessary service through the private sector.

Children who are received into care at an older age, or where they have experienced significant trauma or attachment difficulties have particular needs. It is important to note that the greatest need of all children in foster care is for stability in a loving nurturing family environment. It is the role of Tusla, and other State services, to ensure that foster carers are supported in providing that care.

I am alert to the National Review Panel whose reports have drawn attention to the heroic work of foster carers who care for babies with serious life limiting disabilities, and the need, in these and other situations for appropriate and timely supports. Foster carers also provide ongoing care for children with serious disabilities, and need all the supports available.

Following recent concerns regarding children in care and leaving care with life long serious disabilities, I engaged with both the Minister for Health and the Minister for Disability. The purpose was to make sure we work in a better way across Departments and on the ground, to provide safe and seamless services for these children/young adults and their carers. A detailed protocol was agreed between the HSE and Tusla with respect to their mutual responsibilities in the provision of care and disability services, particularly where a young adult will need ongoing intensive support.

I intend to closely monitor this situation and will work closely with the relevant Departments to keep the medical and psychological needs of children in care to the fore.

Early Years Strategy Publication

41. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to support stay at home parents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31227/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to the provision of childcare options for families that respect parental choice and reflect international evidence on how to attain the best outcomes for children.

I support the Government's plans for extension of parental leave for parents; particularly in the crucial first year. The introduction of two weeks Paternity Benefit for the first time this year must also be welcomed.

The Government has provided additional support for stay-at-home parents through the home carer tax credit, which has been increased to €1,100 per year. I support an increase in the

earnings threshold for this, and have raised this with the Minister for Finance.

A key responsibility of mine as Minister for Children is to make childcare costs more affordable for parents who need to work or who choose to work. For this reason, I have focused on the delivery of the new Affordable Childcare Scheme and the delivery of interim measures this September to make childcare more affordable. I hope that access to more affordable childcare will give families real choice as to whether they wish to remain at home to care for their children, or whether they wish to return to work or education and avail of childcare supports.

Delivering more affordable childcare is only one element of a broader set of commitments and supports aimed at parents and children that I intend to lead out on. The provision of improved centre-based childcare services is very important, but I will not lose sight of the needs of children who do not attend them. In this regard, *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* contains a commitment to produce Ireland's first-ever National Early Years Strategy. The intention is to deliver a cross-cutting strategy which will take a joined-up, whole of Government approach to the issue of supporting children and their families during the early years (0-6 years). The drafting of the National Early Years Strategy is being advanced by my Department. In December of last year I hosted an Open Policy Debate on the Strategy with a view to completion of the Strategy later this year. My officials will be engaging further with key Government Departments and other stakeholders in the coming months to bring it to a conclusion.

School Completion Programme

42. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the rationale behind the decision to cut all funding for counselling services in the school completion programme; her views on whether this could have serious negative consequences for the children and young persons currently availing of these services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31175/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have not ceased all funding for counselling services under the School Completion Programme. However, the available funding is very limited and is only benefitting a small proportion of schools. I am retaining the grant in its current form for the present, pending a decision on alternative approaches.

In 1994 the Department of Social Welfare opened a grant scheme to provide counselling supports to children who had experienced bereavement or loss. This grant scheme then passed to the Family Support Agency (FSA) when it was established in 2003 and subsequently to Tusla on establishment in January 2014.

Up until 2011 applications were invited through an annual public advertisement. The scheme was then closed for financial reasons and no new applications have been accepted since that time. Those who received funding in 2011 have continued to receive an annual grant equivalent to their 2011 grant. This Counselling Grants Scheme is for a total of &245,900 annually and currently there are only 64 grantees nationwide benefitting from it. With over 4,000 schools in Ireland 64 grantees means that less than 2% of schools are in receipt of support from this scheme currently.

I have decided that until an alternative methodology for provision of counselling can be established, the grant should stay in place in its current format.

4 July 2017

Departmental Reports

43. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the various reports into Oberstown juvenile detention centre; the reports which have been completed; when she plans to publish all reports; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31223/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Oberstown Board of Management commissioned independent reviews in 4 key areas as follows: Operations, Security, Health and Safety and Behaviour Management.

The reports relating to the reviews of Security and Health and Safety have been issued to the relevant stakeholders involved in Oberstown by the Director as per terms of references. The review of Behaviour Management is still in progress, however it is understood the Board of Management intend to publish the report of that review as soon as it is finalised. The Review of Operations has also been concluded and following consideration of legal advice to the Board it has decided to publish the recommendations of the review report at an early date.

I have established an Implementation Group tasked with analysing and prioritising the recommendations from the review reports, taking account of policy and resource parameters, with a view to implementing the recommendations as appropriate, to support the development of Oberstown so it can provide the best possible care to children referred there by the courts. The Implementation Group will report regularly on progress to me and to the Oberstown Board of Management. The Group, chaired by Professor Kilkelly, includes representatives of Oberstown staff and management, the Oberstown Board of Management, a child development expert and also representatives of the IMPACT trade union and my Department.

My paramount objective for Oberstown is the safety and well-being of the children, the staff working in Oberstown and the people living in the local community. I believe that good progress has been made and the implementation of the recommendations of the 4 review reports will bring about further improvements.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 28.

Child Care Services Expenditure

- 45. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of capital funding available in 2017 for the provision of new or the upgrading of existing child care facilities; her plans for new initiatives in the provision of new child care places; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31178/17]
- 60. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if new schemes will be introduced to assist in the upgrading of existing child care places or the provision of new accommodation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31179/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 45 and 60 together.

On 20 March 2017 I announced a €4m Early Years Capital programme for 2017 in three strands, as follows:

- Strand 1: Additional Places (€3 million is available, with a maximum of €50,000 per grant);

- Strand 2: Building improvements and maintenance/refurbishment (€500,000 is available, with a maximum of €20,000 per grant. This is available to Community childcare services only);
- Strand 3: Natural outdoor play area (€500,000 is available, with a maximum of €5,000 per grant).

The application process opened on Friday 24 March and closed on Thursday 27 April.

Additionally, under the Action Plan for School Age Childcare, a separate €3 million is being provided in capital funding for services providing school age childcare. This capital scheme opened on Friday 7 April and closed on Wednesday 17 May. It will encourage expansion in the number of school age childcare places, along with enhancements to quality.

A large volume of applications was received under both programmes and in particular under the Early Years Capital 2017 programme. Pobal has completed appraisal of applications under the Early Years scheme, and has provided the Department with its recommendations on Friday last, June 23. Officials in my Department are currently reviewing these recommendations, and an announcement regarding the successful applications will be made in the coming weeks. I expect Pobal's recommendations on the school age capital shortly also.

In light of the level of demand, I am pursuing the possibility of securing additional funding over and above the €7m allocated to these schemes.

Both the Early Years Capital and the School Age Capital Programmes are focused on creating new accommodation and capacity, as well as increasing the quality of existing childcare facilities. Capital funding is allocated on the basis of need, and the level of application is reflective of the high level of demand within the sector. I am committed to the continuous development and reform of the programme in respect of the needs of children and providers, with the aim of providing access to childcare facilities of the highest quality.

Child Poverty

46. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to address child poverty here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31218/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In recognition of the higher risks and life-long consequences of child poverty, the Government set a child-specific poverty target in *Better Outcomes*, *Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* to reduce consistent child poverty by at least two-thirds by 2020. This figure currently represents 102,000 children.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is a whole of government policy framework, which requires all Departments and Agencies to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children and young people. The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, which I chair, has responsibility for whole of government implementation, and includes representatives from all government Departments and Agencies.

The Department of Social Protection has the lead role in coordinating government strategies on child poverty. It also has lead responsibility for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and has identified child poverty as a key cross-sectoral priority to be addressed.

Officials in my Department are working closely with the Department of Social Protection in

informing the development of this cross-sectoral priority.

Officials in the Department of Social Protection have co-convened a subgroup with members of the Advisory Council for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* to progress solutions to child poverty.

In recognition of the fact that child poverty is a multifaceted problem, this group also includes officials from other Departments, including the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Skills.

Led by the Department of Social Protection, this group has developed a paper which outlines a whole of government approach to tackling child poverty. This is based around the three pillars outlined in the EU Recommendation on Investing in Children:

- Access to adequate resources
- Access to affordable, quality services
- Children's right to participate.

Key priorities arising from this include providing universal access to GP care for under 18s, reducing the cost of education, housing, affordable childcare, labour activation and provision of in-work benefits.

In line with this, my Department is developing a Single Affordable Childcare Scheme to provide families with quality childcare at a cost they can afford. Budget 2017 provided additional funding for the scheme's development and initial roll-out, to include both a targeted and a universal element. Subsidies will be available for children aged from 6 months up to 15 years and will meet families' full-time and part-time childcare needs, including outside of school hours and during school holiday time. The highest levels of subsidy will be provided to those on low incomes, helping families to overcome disadvantage and contribute to a reduction in child poverty.

The Advisory Council held a round table event on 22 June with a range of key experts and stakeholders. The learning from this event will inform the further alignment of efforts across government and from civil society.

My Department has also established a Children's Equality Commission to ensure that the voices of children who experience or understand economic hardship or poverty are directly heard and acted on by policymakers. The Commission will be comprised of Child Commissioners and Adult Commissioners. The Child Commissioners are children who experience or have an understanding of economic hardship or poverty. The Adult Commissioners will be senior policy makers from Government Departments, Stage agencies and other bodies relevant to the issues raised by children.

Consultations with relevant children and young people have been ongoing for some months. The findings from the work with the children and young people were discussed in detail at a closed meeting held on 22 June 2017 between Child and Adult Commissioners. The next phase of this process is now at design stage and details will be announced shortly.

I and my colleagues in Cabinet are committed to advancing these efforts and actions in our collective response to addressing child poverty.

47. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the current work of the commission of investigation on mother and baby homes; the scoping exercise on the terms of reference; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31221/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related matters was established by Government Order on 17 February 2015.

In accordance with its comprehensive Terms of Reference, the Commission is tasked with thoroughly examining the experience of mothers and children resident in 14 named Mother and Baby Homes and a representative sample of County Homes during the period 1922 - 1998. The Commission is required to address seven specific questions on the practices and procedures relating to the care, welfare, entry arrangements and exit pathways for the women and children who were residents of these institutions. The Commission's work is ongoing and it is now more than two years into a three year investigation.

As the Deputy will be aware the Commission is independent in the conduct of its investigations and I have no role in this regard. Therefore I am not in a position to provide progress updates on its investigations.

In relation to milestones to date the Commission submitted its First Interim Report in July 2016. The Government agreed to a request from the Commission to extend the time frame of two of the three Reports the Commission is preparing. The Social History Report and Confidential Committee Report will now be submitted along with the Final Report by February 2018.

A Second Interim Report was submitted by the Commission. This report focuses on a number of issues which had come to the Commission's attention during its analysis of information and evidence collected up to August 2016. The Report was published in April 2017.

I will introduce enhanced communication arrangements to provide regular updates on the programme of work relating to mother and baby homes and to engage with former residents and their advocates in relation to the issues of concern to them. Starting from July, I plan to publish a monthly update which will be available on my Department's website on the first Friday of every month.

While the Commission has stated that it is not seeking an extension to its present remit I have indicated that I am open to considering whether broader terms of reference would help to answer some of the questions which have been raised again in public debate. It is essential that this question be examined with a full understanding of the considerable breadth and scope of its current terms of reference.

In accordance with the legal framework under which the statutory Commission was established, it is my intention to consult with the Commission on this matter. I hope to undertake this process during the Summer.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

48. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether new revelations regarding vaccine trials carried out on children at a location (details supplied) in 1974 warrants a separate investigation to ascertain the person or body that gave permission to a pharmaceutical company to carry out trials for baby formula and other products; the measures she will take to secure files relating to those trials; and if she will make a statement

on the matter. [31024/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and certain related Matters was established by Government (S.I. No. 57 of 2015) in response to significant public concerns relating to the care and welfare of the women and children who were resident in these institutions. The comprehensive scope of the Commission's remit ensures it can provide a full account of what happened to women and children in these institutions during the period 1922 to 1998.

Article 1(II) of its terms of reference requires the Commission to examine the living conditions and care arrangements experienced by women and children during their period of accommodation in these institutions. In addition to this broad requirement, Article 1(V) of the terms of reference refers specifically to the examination of vaccine trials in these institutions.

The Commissions of Investigation Act 2004, which is the legal framework underpinning this investigation, provides the Commission with robust legal powers to compel persons to produce documents and answer questions. With regard to records held by third parties, the Deputy may wish to note that section 31 of the 2004 Act requires that any person in possession of documents, or information in any form, relevant to the matters before the Commission shall preserve such information until the Commission concludes its work. As the Commission is independent in the conduct of its investigations it should be understood that the precise timing and approach to the gathering and examination of evidence are matters for the Commission to decide and progress.

For these reasons, I am satisfied that separate investigations are not required in relation to the matters raised by the Deputy. The Commission already has sufficient scope and the necessary legal powers to examine these matters, and to make a determination on their relevance to the central issues in question, and where appropriate to make any recommendations to Government which the Commission deems necessary.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Establishment

49. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the interim arrangements for the new child care supplement in view of the fact that the database will not be ready in time to receive new applications in September 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30784/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): On 11 April, I announced that the Affordable Childcare Scheme would not commence this September, but that a range of measures would be introduced by my Department to make childcare more affordable for thousands of families throughout Ireland. This honours a key commitment in the Programme for Government. I can confirm that these measures will commence this September. The measures are as follows:

A new universal subsidy will be available for all children aged between 6 months and 3 years of age (or until they are eligible for ECCE e.g 3 years and 3 months) in Tusla registered childcare. This will amount to as much as €1,040 per year for children in full time childcare.

In addition, subsidies provided under existing childcare schemes, specifically the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Schemes, have been increased significantly, in some cases by as much as 50%. To illustrate the effect of this increase, the highest subsidy provided under the CCS scheme for full time childcare in 2016 was €95 per week. This will increase to €145 per week from September. This should

decrease the co-payment required by families who qualify and therefore make childcare more accessible and affordable to these families; assisting parents in their return to training or employment and lifting families out of poverty.

These subsidies, both universal and targeted, will be available through childcare services who contract with my Department to deliver the schemes. The schemes are open to 4,500 community (not-for-profit) and private providers across the country.

In order to ensure that parents and childcare providers are aware of the changes to the schemes this September, a comprehensive information campaign is underway. Information packs have been sent to over 4,000 registered childcare services and information events for services have been provided at eight locations throughout the country.

A dedicated website has been launched (affordablechildcare.ie) and information for parents went live on this website on Monday 29 May to inform them of the various enhanced childcare supports they may qualify for this September. A campaign via various media, including digital and radio, has also raised awareness among parents.

There are no IT issues which will prevent the roll-out of the September measures to all eligible families. Registrations of children for the various programmes will go live from August 21. Work on the development of the new Affordable Childcare Scheme continues, in parallel to these September measures, and I will provide additional information on this in due course.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Establishment

50. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the affordable childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31226/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As announced in April of this year, the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) will not commence this September, as development continues on the legislation and IT system to underpin it.

As the ACS will not be ready in time for this September, my focus turned to ensuring that the benefits of more affordable childcare could be delivered to as many children as possible from this September and that additional funding I secured in Budget 2017 would be delivered to families. Existing targeted childcare supports provided under the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and the Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Schemes will be enhanced significantly from September, some by up to 50%. In addition, every child in Tusla-registered childcare services, between the ages of 6 months and eligibility for ECCE (3 years or over) will be eligible for some level of childcare support totalling as much as €1,040 per year.

I remain strongly committed to introducing the ACS and will do so at the earliest possible date. My Department has made considerable progress in this regard. The Government has approved the Heads of Bill for the Scheme, and officials are working intensively to plan for successful implementation of the Scheme. However, I am conscious that this is a complex project which we must get right from the beginning. We need to have the legislation, business processes and a new robust IT system in place. We will need to test the Scheme rigorously to ensure that it works properly for families and providers.

Whilst delivering the scheme as soon as possible remains a priority, I believe that it is prudent to take time to ensure we get the new systems right, so that they operate smoothly for everyone. I want to build a system that will underpin childcare supports for children and investment in the childcare sector for years to come. We are well on our way to introducing the ACS.

When fully operational it will be a state of the art system which will be capable of delivering, not just for this generation of children, but also for generations to come. In the meantime, I am satisfied that the September measures will honour the Government's commitment to delivering more affordable childcare to families

Child and Family Agency Staff

51. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate support staff remain available to children or families deemed at risk arising from clinical determinations; if a sufficient number of appropriately trained staff are likely to become available in the future in line with anticipated requirements; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31212/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla has statutory responsibility for the care and protection of victims of domestic, sexual and gender based violence whether in the context of the family or otherwise. At all times, Tusla's key priority is to ensure that the needs of victims of domestic and sexual violence are being met in the best way possible. A network of 60 organisations provide services to victims of domestic, sexual and gender based violence in Ireland, including 20 services providing emergency refuge accommodation to women and children and 24 community-based domestic violence services.

Tusla employs approximately 3,637 whole time equivalent (WTE) staff and the vast majority of these are focused on responding to the needs of children and families at risk. I wish to assure the Deputy that with the current available staff, all urgent and emergency cases, such as in situations of abandonment, allegations of physical and sexual abuse, parental ill-health and the need to find an immediate placement, or a threat to the safety or life of a child by a third party, are dealt with immediately.

I am aware also that to ensure Tusla staff are able to support children and families, it is the organisation's policy to ensure that all staff are trained in child protection and Children First guidelines and staff attend a broad range of child protection training including:

- Core Court Room Skills
- Introduction to Court Skills
- Domestic Sexual & Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) Awareness and Response
- Practice Development for Newly Appointment Social workers
- Supervision Making the most of Supervision for Supervisees
- Supervision Staff Supervision Skills Training for Supervisors
- Foundations for Assessment
- Evidence Informed Practitioner Programme
- Legal Briefing Seminar

I am very mindful of the correlation between recruitment and cases where a child does not have a dedicated social worker and the need for Tusla to closely link its recruitment programme with operational decisions to effect improvements. As part of my regular engagement with the Tusla Board, I have requested that the Agency provides me with an assessment of recruitment

for the remainder of 2017, linked to specific targets to reduce the number of children awaiting allocation of a dedicated social worker. I have requested that Tusla develop a robust workforce plan which addresses succession planning, retention, career pathways, training and development, future workforce needs, priority gaps and a strategy for tackling the priority gaps and reducing unallocated cases.

Tusla's 2017 recruitment target is 369 additional staff across its grades. Tusla's social work target for the end of 2017 is 1,520 whole time equivalent and Tusla appears to be on track to meet this target. However, it is unlikely that 1,520 WTE social workers will be sufficient to execute Tusla's current and future responsibilities without changes to the composition of Tusla social work teams. Accordingly, Tusla is evaluating management and staff skills mix with a view to service enhancement, including reviewing the roles of family support workers; social care workers in the community; and administrative structures to support the delivery of more efficient and cost effective services. Part of the evaluation also includes looking at enhanced job roles, increasing multidisciplinary team-working in an effort to alleviate pressure; redesigning tasks; and promoting greater efficiency in working.

Tusla has also appointed a dedicated Workforce Planner to work closely with Tusla services / operations with a view to identifying the areas' required resource mix reflecting the on-going challenge of recruiting social workers and the potential for more social care workers and family support workers.

Consideration is being given to the current and future issues with social worker supply in Ireland, and the challenges this poses for Tusla, and discussions are ongoing between my Department and the Higher Education Authority to examine how this might be addressed.

I am confident that the Exchequer funding of €713m in 2017 will provide Tusla with significantly increased capacity to respond to areas of identified risk and anticipated demand and to progress a number of key service developments which will ensure better outcomes for vulnerable children, and families, who need our services and support.

Question No. 52 answered with Question No. 29.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation

- 53. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which parents will be able to access the subsidies offered under the affordable childcare scheme in September 2017 in view of the fact that there is no onus on childcare providers to offer the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31177/17]
- 55. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which she envisages the affordable childcare scheme being rolled out in September 2017; the guarantees there are that childcare providers will take up the scheme in order to ensure access to it to all parents that are eligible for subsidies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31176/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 53 and 55 together.

On 11 April, I made an announcement that the Affordable Childcare Scheme would not commence this September but that a range of measures will be introduced by my Department to make childcare more affordable for thousands of families throughout Ireland. This honours a key commitment in the Programme for Government. I can confirm that these measures, which

will benefit the families of tens of thousands of children, will commence this September.

These measures are being put in place to ensure that parents of up to 70,000 children due to benefit under the Affordable Childcare Scheme will be given the opportunity to avail of increased childcare subsidies from September. This will be achieved by significantly increasing the subsidy rates for the Community Childcare Subvention and the Training and Employment Childcare Schemes, in some instance by as much as 50%. There will also be a new universal, non-means tested childcare subsidy that will benefit parents with children aged between 6 months and 36 months.

These measures mean that the families of up to 70,000 children can look forward to benefitting from increased childcare subsidies starting from this September.

Following on from a coordinated online and postal information campaign targeting both childcare providers and parents with key information about the measures, my Department along with Pobal and the City/County Childcare Committees are currently hosting public information "roadshows" to build awareness and encourage providers to sign up the September measures.

In addition, I have recently announced a payment for non-contact time to services who sign up to the September measures. The payment to providers is intended to make a contribution towards the administration and non-contact costs involved in providing my Department's child-care programmes. In particular, the new funding recognises the time providers need to spend familiarising themselves with the new affordable childcare measures, signing contracts, meeting regulatory and compliance requirements and assisting parents with understanding how they can most benefit from the various childcare programmes available.

The measure provides for a payment equivalent to an additional seven days' funding for services. €3.5m has been allocated for this purpose.

I am very aware that delivering these enhanced childcare supports is only possible because of the commitment and co-operation of more than 4,000 childcare providers throughout the country. I want to acknowledge their continuing support and, in recognition of their invaluable contribution, I will be asking for extra funding during Budget 2018 negotiations so we can address some of the issues raised by childcare providers.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Establishment

54. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the date by which she hopes to enact legislation on the single affordable childcare scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31217/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54 and 551 together.

The Heads of Bill and General Scheme for the Affordable Childcare Scheme Bill were approved by Government on 24 January 2017 and were examined by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs on 8 February 2017 before being transmitted to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel (OPC).

Since that time, officials at my Department have worked closely and intensively with the drafter assigned to this legislation. The ACS is a complex scheme that includes both universal and targeted supports, as well as additional supports for vulnerable children, which will involve Tusla and other Government Departments and Agencies in application procedures. While much

progress has been made, including submission of a number of requests for legal advice, further work is necessary before the Bill can be finalised and therefore it is unlikely that the ACS Bill will be published before mid-July.

In the meantime, to ensure delivery of the Government's commitment to provide more affordable childcare to the families of tens of thousands of children from this September, my Department has put in place a series of measures; including both universal and targeted financial supports. These measures, available from September, will see families of all children under three, in Tusla-registered childcare, being able to access up to €1040 per year towards the cost of their childcare. Also, families on lower incomes or in training will be able to access as much as €145 per week towards the cost of their childcare.

Intensive work is also ongoing between my Department and Pobal on the IT system needed for the new scheme.

Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 53.

Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 28.

Departmental Strategies

57. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will report on the progress of the national LGBTI+ youth strategy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31214/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Programme for Government (2016) gives a commitment to develop a National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy. A specific focus on LGBTI+ Youth will aim to ensure that appropriate measures are taken so that young members of the LGBTI+ Community are not in any way prevented from achieving their full potential.

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 - 2020 and The National Youth Strategy 2015 - 2020 will provide a framework within which the strategy can be framed with a focus on appropriate measures to ensure that young people identifying as LGBTI+ are supported in achieving their full potential.

The five national outcomes that we want for all our children and young people are that they:

- (i) Are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental well-being;
- (ii) Are achieving their full potential in all areas of learning and development;
- (iii) Are safe and protected from harm;
- (iv) Have economic security and opportunity; and
- (v) Are connected, respected and contributing to their world.

An Oversight Committee was appointed to oversee the development of the strategy and represents a broad cross sectoral grouping of relevant organisations, bodies and Government Department/Agencies who will have a role in the development and implementation of the strategy.

The Strategy will be youth centred and in this regard a youth advisory group has also been established. They have had significant input into the work done so far, particularly in relation to developing the branding for the Strategy and the consultations which were held for young

people. The youth advisory group are also represented on the Oversight Committee, providing two nominees to the Committee.

Consultations with young people are vital to the development of the Strategy. An online survey on *www.spunout.ie* as carried out in April and May which attracted approximately 4,000 responses. In addition to this, officials from my Department held seven consultations with young people across the country, one aimed at all young people who wished to contribute to the development of the Strategy and six reserved for young members of the LGBTI+ Community.

Two of these consultations were held in Dublin with the others taking place in Cork, Dundalk, Galway, Sligo and Waterford. A report writer was appointed for these consultations and the report will be published in the coming weeks. Finally a stakeholder consultation was held last week on June 28 in Farmleigh House, which was attended by representatives from approximately seventy different organisations.

The data arising from these consultations will be used to shape the development of the Strategy and identify priorities for the Oversight Committee to examine in the coming months.

Questions Nos. 58 and 59 answered with Question No. 28.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 45.

School Completion Programme

61. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will reconsider the withdrawal of funding for the school completion programme's counselling grant scheme and instead significantly increase the scheme's budget to allow the scheme to be opened up nationally; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31174/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have not ceased all funding for counselling services under the School Completion Programme. However, the available funding is very limited and is only benefitting a small proportion of schools. I am retaining the grant in its current form for the present, pending a decision on alternative approaches.

In 1994 the Department of Social Welfare opened a grant scheme to provide counselling supports to children who had experienced bereavement or loss. This grant scheme then passed to the Family Support Agency (FSA) when it was established in 2003 and subsequently to Tusla on establishment in January 2014.

Up until 2011 applications were invited through an annual public advertisement. The scheme was then closed for financial reasons and no new applications have been accepted since that time. Those who received funding in 2011 have continued to receive an annual grant equivalent to their 2011 grant. This Counselling Grants Scheme is for a total of €245,900 annually and currently there are only 64 grantees nationwide benefitting from it. With over 4,000 schools in Ireland 64 grantees means that less than 2% of schools are in receipt of support from this scheme currently.

I have decided that until an alternative methodology for provision of counselling can be established, the grant should stay in place in its current format. Any increase to Tusla Education Welfare Service will have to be considered in the context of the estimates process for Budget 2018.

Housing Data

63. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Taoiseach the number of vacant properties in Bray, County Wicklow. [30970/17]

The Taoiseach: The Census of Population 2016 publications include a comprehensive report titled Profile 1 - Housing in Ireland which was published on the Central Statistics Office website on 20 April 2017.

There are five electoral divisions in the Bray area and the following statistics on vacant properties are available.

| Electoral Division | Housing Stock | Total Occupied | Temporarily Absent | Vacant houses | Holiday homes |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Bray No. 1 | 832 | 749 | 24 | 59 | 0 |
| Bray No. 2 | 2599 | 2300 | 95 | 199 | 5 |
| Bray No. 3 | 2636 | 2433 | 84 | 117 | 2 |
| Rathmichael (Bray) | 849 | 806 | 16 | 23 | 4 |
| Kilmacanoge | 5008 | 4760 | 97 | 144 | 7 |
| Total | 11924 | 11048 | 316 | 542 | 18 |

A breakdown of vacant dwellings by type shows the following:

| Type of Vacant Dwelling | Detached | Semi- De- tached | Terraced | Apts/Flats in purpose built | Converted Flats | Bed-sits |
|----------------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Bray No. 1 | 5 | 6 | 29 | 17 | 2 | 0 |
| Bray No. 2 | 33 | 16 | 30 | 36 | 84 | 0 |
| Bray No. 3 | 5 | 28 | 48 | 22 | 14 | 0 |
| Rath- michael (Bray) | 3 | 1 | 11 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| Kilma- canoge | 55 | 35 | 33 | 18 | 3 | 0 |

Further information on vacant dwellings by small area is available on the CSO web site.

The complete set of 2016 census housing statistics for the census settlement of Bray will be available on the CSO web site from 20 July 2017.

Government Information Service

64. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the staffing and media monitoring in the Government Information Service unit; and if there will be changes in the unit. [30895/17]

The Taoiseach: As I stated in my reply of 20 June, 2017, the Government Information Service is comprised of:

- Government Press Secretary;
- Deputy Government Press Secretary;
- Assistant Government Press Secretary (Vacant);
- Two Assistant Principal Officers, one of whom is assigned to MerrionStreet.ie;
- Four Press Officers (Higher Executive Officer equivalent) there are currently vacancies in two of these positions;
- Three Communications & Media Assistants (Executive Officer equivalent; two of whom are assigned to MerrionStreet.ie) there are currently vacancies in all three of these positions; and
 - 1 Clerical Officer.

All relevant recruitment processes are being finalised. However, temporary arrangements are in place to cover the vacancies detailed above.

I have not as yet made any decisions as to whether to make changes to the resourcing or structure of the Government Information Service.

Brexit Issues

65. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach his understanding of an invisible border with Northern Ireland following Brexit. [30896/17]

The Taoiseach: The Government's position in relation to the border with Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit is very clear. Continued freedom of movement, absence of an economic border, and protection of the Good Friday Agreement are key objectives for the Irish Government

We want to see the closest possible future relationship between the EU and the UK.

We want to maintain the reciprocity of civic rights that exist between Britain and Ireland as part of the Common Travel Area, the right of Irish citizens and British citizens to travel, live, work, study, reside and access public services in each other's countries and that we are citizens in both.

We want to ensure as much as is possible that while there may be a political border between our two countries, that there should not be an economic border.

But we also recognise that this will be extremely challenging. The EU negotiation guidelines recognise that the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland will require "flexible and imaginative" solutions.

This Government will play its part in working constructively with all our partners - in Northern Ireland, in Britain and across the EU - to find solutions that are in the best interests of everyone on these islands.

Dáil Reform

66. Deputy Micheál Martin asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the commitment in

the programme for Government regarding political reform; the actions that have been taken to date in 2017 regarding same; and the way in which he proposes to introduce changes in the near future [31252/17]

The Taoiseach: In relation to Dáil Reform, this Government continues to build on the Oireachtas reform packages introduced by the last Government. Implementation of the Programme for a Partnership Government requires a new relationship between the Government and Oireachtas. This is reflected in significant Dáil reforms which are being implemented, providing a significantly greater role for members of Dáil Éireann.

In the last few weeks two Private Members Bills have been passed by the Oireachtas. The Competition (Amendment) Act 2017 was originally published by Senator Ivana Bacik in January 2016 and the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development (Prohibition of Onshore Hydraulic Fracturing) Act 2017 was originally published by Deputy Tony McLoughlin in June 2016.

These arrangements require greater collaboration and sharing of information by the Government with the Oireachtas.

Central to our approach for delivering on this ambitious programme is the concept of 'good faith and no surprises'.

This Government, and the previous Government, played a crucial role in the process of Dáil Reform including the first election of a Ceann Comhairle by secret ballot and the selection of Oireachtas Committee Chairs under a D'Hondt system among others. Following the General Election in 2016, the Dáil established an All Party Dáil Reform Committee. The Committee issued a Report in May 2016 and a number of the recommendations it made have since been introduced. The new structures are now in place a year and the Government along with the other Parties and Groups in the Dáil are currently reviewing the changes and making a number of proposals including reform of the way Private Members Bills are dealt with, the proportionality of speaking time in the Dáil and the amount of Dáil time provided to debate Government legislation among other issues.

Within my Department, there is an expanded role for the Chief Whip's Office, alongside the new Parliamentary Liaison Unit, to support these arrangements including supporting good communication between Departments and the Oireachtas, particularly in relation to progressing Government legislation through the Oireachtas.

The new arrangements include more pro-active communication between Ministers and their Departments and Opposition spokespeople and Oireachtas Committee Chairpersons and Members. It requires greater sharing of information with the Oireachtas to inform its deliberations, for example through the new Budgetary procedures, use of pre-legislative scrutiny by Committees, and more briefing on significant developments or issues.

There is a new Dáil Business Management Committee established to discuss and agree on the Dáil Schedule, more time for Private Members Business, new arrangements for Topical Motions and reformed structures for Parliamentary Questions. These all require a new approach from Ministers and their Departments and this Government is committed to ensuring it works effectively.

As regards Seanad Reform, in the Programme for a Partnership Government the Government restated its intention to reform Seanad Eireann and committed to pursuing implementation of the Report of the Working Group on Seanad Reform (the Manning Report). That Report was published in 2015 and it is available on my Department's website.

One of the recommendations of the Report was the establishment of an Implementation

Group to oversee implementation of the reforms contained in the Report. The former Taoiseach agreed with a suggestion made in the Dáil some time ago by Deputy Martin that this Group should be based in the Oireachtas and should comprise members of the Dáil and Seanad from all parties and groups, with access to independent expert advice as required. The former Taoiseach wrote to Party Leaders in September last year seeking their agreement to the setting up of the Implementation Group and seeking nominees for same. This process is ongoing with a small number of nominees awaited. I hope this process is concluded as soon as possible and the Joint Committee is established in the very near future.

Brexit Data

67. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; and the anticipated cost. [31280/17]

The Taoiseach: Brexit is treated as a crucial cross-cutting issue by my Department, through the International, EU and Northern Ireland Division, under a Second Secretary General who also acts as the Irish Sherpa in EU matters, including Brexit.

While the Division handles a range of responsibilities across international, EU and British and Northern Ireland relations, Brexit is the dominant issue at present. Staff in other divisions also contribute to the work on Brexit, notably the Economic Policy Division in respect of the economic implications and policy responses.

The International, EU and Northern Ireland Division has included secondment of personnel from Enterprise Ireland and the private sector to strengthen its capacity in this area.

Costs associated with Brexit were factored into my Department's 2017 Revised Estimate provision which stands at €36.7 million. Resources allocated to Brexit in my Department are kept under ongoing review.

Trade Agreements

- 68. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will address matters in relation to the CETA agreement (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30917/17]
- 69. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if she will address matters in relation to the CETA agreement (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30979/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 68 and 69 together.

On 15 February 2017, the European Parliament gave its consent to the provisional application of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Provisional application is a standard part of EU trade agreements and allows only those parts of the agreement for which the EU has competence to be provisionally applied, pending the completion of each Member State's internal procedures for its ratification.

Provisional application will include the all-important reductions in tariffs on our exports,

access to the Canadian procurement market, easing regulatory barriers and ensuring more transparent rules for market access. The provisions relating to investment protection, investor-state dispute settlement and the Investment Court System are excluded from provisional application. The provisional application of this Agreement shall be by the Union only. This means Ireland or the other Member States will not be bound by these provisions until they are ratified by all Member States in accordance with their national procedures.

In accordance with Articles 29.5.1 and Article 29.5.2 of the Constitution, and pursuant to a Government Decision, CETA will be laid before Dáil Éireann with a motion to approve the Agreement. In addition to the approval of Dáil Éireann, the authority of the Government will be required in order for Ireland to notify of the completion of its internal procedures. Relevant Government Departments will be consulted to ensure that all legislative or administrative steps that may be required have been taken.

The means by which Ireland notifies the completion of its internal procedures is by way of a written letter, delivered in hardcopy, from the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the EU addressed to the Secretary General of the Council of the European Union.

Canada is currently finalising its internal implementation procedures to allow for its ratification of the Agreement. This process is expected to be completed in the near future and should facilitate provisional application by Autumn this year.

In accordance with Article 30.7.2 of CETA, the Agreement shall enter into force on the first of the second month following the date the EU and Canada exchange written notifications certifying that they have completed their respective internal requirements and procedures or on a date agreed by the EU and Canada. Once all the Member States notify the General Secretariat of the EU that their internal procedures are complete, the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU may then submit a notification to Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development.

Trade Promotion

70. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the reopening of Enterprise Ireland offices or other representative offices in Taipei to promote Irish business; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30983/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Enterprise Ireland and IDA currently consider that, given the competing demands on limited resources, they can best manage the needs of their clients in China, including those in Taiwan, from their offices in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

Enterprise Ireland currently serves Taipei and Taiwan markets from its offices in Hong Kong and the Manager visits both countries 3 – 4 times per year. A "pathfinder", which is a specialist trade consultant with the capability of providing clients with the appropriate support in markets, has also been identified for these markets to assist EI clients.

The State agencies keep their allocation of resources under review in order to promote Ireland's economic interests as effectively as possible.

Company Data

71. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innova-

tion the number of companies that are registered here with the Companies Registration Office in 2017 that are deemed to be an external company; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31053/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Companies Registration Office (CRO) is the statutory authority for registering companies in Ireland and is the central repository of public statutory information on Irish companies.

As of the end of June 2017, the number of Irish companies on the register of companies was 209,886. The number of external companies on the register of companies was 2,706, comprising 1,842 European Economic Area (EEA) companies and 864 from non-EEA countries.

Statistics for previous years on the make-up of the register of companies and activity on the register of companies throughout a year are published in the Annual Reports produced by the Companies Registration Office, which may be accessed for free on the website www.cro.ie.

Departmental Schemes

72. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the date on which the terms of reference for the review of the Succeed in Ireland initiative were finalised; the status of the review to date; the financial obligations in regard to the Succeed in Ireland initiative that have arose as the termination of the contract; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31070/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzger-ald): As was announced previously, my Department will soon be commissioning an independent review of the Succeed-in-Ireland programme. That review, which will be carried out after details of the initiative's full and final costs are available, will equip us with a thorough understanding of the programme's results and its contribution to employment generation in the State. This is in the interests of good governance and ensuring value for money for the taxpayer.

On 20 April my Department launched a public consultation calling for observations on the draft terms of reference for that review. The consultation period ended on 26 May. I am pleased that the consultation process elicited 17 different submissions. The responses that we received came from a broad range of stakeholders, including public representatives and the general public.

The terms of reference have not yet been finalised. My Department is completing the examination of all the responses to the public consultation, a process which will help to shape the final text.

The IDA has paid €2.27m to Connect Ireland in respect of confirmed jobs to date. In addition and in accordance with the terms of the contract, a further advance payment of €1.54m was made in respect of potential future jobs that have not yet been created. This advance payment is refundable to the IDA by Connect Ireland in the event that these further potential jobs do not materialise.

Departmental Schemes

73. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of community enterprise schemes in Dublin south west; the number there have been in the same area in each of the years 2011 to 2016, and to date in 2017; and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [31098/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzger-ald): My Department has run various community enterprise schemes, via Enterprise Ireland, since 1989. A number of projects in Dublin south west have been successful in receiving funding under these schemes.

Community Enterprise Centre Scheme

Since the launch of the first Community Enterprise Centre (CEC) scheme in 1989, €64 million has been approved by Enterprise Ireland for the development of CECs across the country. Supported by four CEC schemes (operated in 1989, 2000, 2006 and 2008) 157 centres have been approved for financial support.

In 2012 a €2m programme was launched for a Community Enterprise Centre Business Development Function/Manager by Enterprise Ireland. 46 business development managers were funded under this initiative.

Five Community Enterprise Centres from Dublin South West have benefitted from Enterprise Ireland under these various initiatives.

Community Enterprise Initiative Scheme

In 2015 Enterprise Ireland launched a €5 million Community Enterprise Initiative Scheme. This competitive scheme was open to new and existing organisations, groups and alliances, who collaboratively seek to promote entrepreneurship, create jobs, foster innovation and enhance export opportunities for small business. 32 projects were funded to a level of €3 million under this initiative.

Five projects were funded from Dublin County, one of which is Action Community and Enterprise Limited, based in South West Dublin, and is a project focused on enhancing an effective enterprise ecosystem in Dublin West.

LEO Competitive Fund

In 2015 Enterprise Ireland also launched a competitive fund to foster collaboration across the national LEO network. 16 projects were funded under this initiative to a level of €2 million.

One collaborative project involving LEO Fingal, LEO Dublin City, LEO South Dublin, and LEO Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown received funding under this initiative. This project is targeted at the Dublin food producer cohort and focuses on the creation of an online video education platform to enhance knowledge, improve skill sets and develop producer competencies.

Regional Enterprise Development Fund 2017-2020

Launched in May 2017, this €60 million competitive fund will support major new collaborative and innovative initiatives that can make a significant impact on enterprise development in the region/across regions or nationally to build the unique USP capabilities to grow the regions. Funding will be awarded via a competitive process and the call for applications closes on August 18.

International Bodies Membership

74. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and In-

novation if she is considering advancing Ireland's efforts to join CERN; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31261/17]

75. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the levels of engagement between her Department and the governing bodies of CERN. [31262/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Innovation 2020, the national strategy for research and innovation, which was launched in December 2015, recognised that membership of International Research Organisations (IRO) is an important, strategic aspect of Ireland's international collaboration in science, technology and innovation. Such engagement is a prerequisite for Ireland to become a global innovation leader.

Ireland is a long-standing member of the European Space Agency, the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, the European Molecular Biology Conference, EUREKA, COST and CECAM. As part of the ongoing implementation of Innovation 2020, Ireland joined ELIXIR, the European data infrastructure for the life sciences, in July 2016 and Ireland will join the International LOFAR Telescope, the European radio astronomy collaboration, in July 2017.

Innovation 2020 contains an action to initiate negotiations with CERN on Ireland's membership options.

In January 2016 the then Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation, Damien English T.D, wrote to the President of the CERN Council, Professor Sijbrand de Jong, in order commence the process. Discussions between my department and CERN have been ongoing, at both official and Ministerial level, ever since.

Senior officials from my department, Enterprise Ireland and Science Foundation Ireland visited CERN in July 2016. The Director-General of CERN, Dr Fabiola Gianotti, visited Dublin in October 2016 and met with my predecessor as Minister for Enterprise and Innovation, Mary Mitchell O'Connor.

The information gathered during these engagements has provided my officials with a comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits of membership of CERN. However, while the potential benefits of membership of CERN are significant, the cost of membership is also significant.

The cost for Ireland to become a full member of CERN would be approximately €15 million per annum. Alternatively, Ireland could become an Associate Member for 10% of this of cost (€1.5 million per annum). However for Associate Membership, there would be a commensurate reduction in the benefits available, for example, access to contracts for enterprise.

The case for membership of CERN is being assessed in the context of other investment priorities and no conclusion can be reached before the national budget discussions for 2018 are concluded. My objective is to ensure that we obtain the best overall return on our investment in research and innovation.

Additionally, the case for membership of CERN has been considered in the overall context of the Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan, which covers the period 2018-2021. The Mid-Term Review will be completed before the end of 2017 at which point I expect to be in a position to make a recommendation regarding Ireland's membership of CERN.

In the event of a positive assessment and recommendation, a Government decision would be required in order to progress membership of CERN.

Brexit Data

76. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31276/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzger-ald): The work of very many Business Units is impacted by Brexit and the Department as a whole has prioritised the Brexit challenges in its work plans for 2017 across all its Divisions.

A dedicated Brexit Unit was established in 2016 and is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs, Trade Policy and Safety and Chemicals Policy Division, to coordinate and represent the Departmental and Agencies response to Brexit and to support me in my position at the Cabinet

Committee on Brexit. The designated official, at Assistant Secretary level, is supported by 1 Principal, 2 Assistant Principals, 1 Higher Executive Officer and 1 Clerical Officer. Additional staffing resources are being recruited to support the Brexit Unit, and other areas of the Department impacted by Brexit in the immediate period ahead, on foot of a recently completed workforce planning exercise for the Department in respect of the period 2017-2019.

The full year salary costs for the Brexit Unit, including the additional staffing resources to be recruited, is estimated at approximately €570,000. In addition to this, funding is available to undertake appropriate research, and in light of the substantial programme of visits ongoing and planned at Ministerial and Official level to other capital cities as part of our outreach to our European partners, there will be associated travel and subsistence costs.

Census of Population Data

77. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation further to the publication of the census of population, the consideration which is given to the detail contained in the census in terms of policy response by her Department; the way in which it is used; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31403/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Census of Population is an important input to evidence-based policy analysis and advice in my Department, as it is across Government. My central focus is on ensuring we create the best environment to secure sustainable full employment and to deliver on the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to support an additional 200,000 at work by 2020. The Census data complements other essential CSO datasets relating to the labour market development in particular and the data collected by my own Department through its surveys of enterprises. These surveys include my Department's Annual Employment Survey and Annual Business Survey of Economic Impact of enterprises supported by Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, and the Higher Education R&D (HERD) survey and the Annual Science Budget.

Over the coming months the Census data will form an input to the review of Enterprise 2025 currently underway in my Department. The Census will also be an important input to the development of the annual Action plan for Jobs, our monitoring of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and an input to the work of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, to which my Department provides research and secretariat support. The Low Pay Commission also relies heavily on data

produced by the CSO, including census data and reports, in making its annual recommendation on the national minimum wage and other related matters.

IDA Data

78. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of new companies that the IDA has supported to locate in County Donegal; and the jobs created by these companies in each of the years 2002 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [31427/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzger-ald): IDA Ireland's official employment figures are drawn from an employment survey conducted by my Department on an annual basis. The table provides a breakdown of the total number of IDA Ireland supported companies in Co. Donegal from 2002 to 2016. Data for 2017 will not be available until early next year.

Total number of IDA supported companies in Co. Donegal & total number of jobs including new jobs created from 2002 to 2016.

| IDA Co.s Done- gal | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Number of Cos | 14 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 15 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 12 | 12 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 |
| Total Jobs | 2,873 | 2,494 | 2,473 | 2,395 | 1,690 | 1,768 | 1,764 | 1,817 | 1,847 | 2,101 | 2,223 | 2,382 | 2,607 | 2,918 | 3,039 |
| Jobs Cre- ated | 177 | 154 | 167 | 286 | 139 | 185 | 61 | 98 | 281 | 277 | 164 | 183 | 247 | 330 | 145 |
| Number of New Cos | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Job Initiatives

79. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to address the high levels employment deprivation in County Tipperary, specifically in areas of the north of the county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31432/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Regional Action Plans for Jobs are aimed at maximising the strengths and assets of each region, to support enterprise growth and job creation.

The key strength of the stakeholders like the Local Authorities, the educational bodies, the Enterprise Development Agencies and the private sector all working collaboratively to maximise opportunities, means that every county will benefit under this initiative.

Tipperary is covered by both the South East Action Plan for Jobs and the Mid-West Action Plan for Jobs. I am committed to working with the various agencies and stakeholders in the South East and Mid West, through the Regional APJ Implementation Committees, to ensure that the positive employment trends we have been seeing across all regions continue and that more jobs are ultimately created.

Numbers in employment in the Mid West region have increased by 9,300 since Q1 2015, when the Regional Action Plan project was launched. The unemployment rate has declined

from 10.2% to 6.8%. In the South East, 12,400 more people are in employment and the unemployment rate has decreased from 12.8% to 9.3% over the same period.

Tipperary is now home to 12 existing IDA Ireland clients who between them employ almost 3,370 people. In 2016, Enterprise Ireland-supported companies in Tipperary employed 5,352 people, a net gain on 290 on 2015. Client companies supported by the Tipperary Local Enterprise Office created 436 gross new jobs in 2016. Total employment among LEO Tipperary clients was 1,437 at the end of last year.

To further support enterprise development in all areas of the country my Department is providing additional funds through the agencies out to 2020. Additional funding of up to ϵ 60m is being rolled out by Enterprise Ireland over the next 4 years to support the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level. In addition, funding of ϵ 150m is being made available to the IDA to support its Regional Property Programme and drive job creation in the multi-national sector.

Departmental Staff Data

80. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the number of civil servants in her Department that have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in her Department that have requested transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31780/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzger-ald): The number of my Department's staff who currently have an application with the Department's HR Unit for a transfer to offices outside the Dublin region to date is set out in the table. This includes staff seeking to move from one of my Department's regional locations to another. Staff may apply for several locations at a time.

| Location | Current number of staff requesting a transfer to a location outside of County |
|-----------|---|
| | Dublin |
| Carlow | 7 |
| Kilkenny | 4 |
| Cork | 1 |
| Tipperary | 4 |
| Wexford | 1 |
| Laois | 5 |
| Kildare | 1 |
| Donegal | 1 |
| Wicklow | 1 |
| Kerry | 1 |
| Total | 26 |

There are currently no applications with the Department's HR Unit for staff requesting a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin.

81. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to avoid a hard border as a result of Brexit which would create an obstacle to ease of travel and business to Northern Ireland. [30567/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government's position in relation to the border with Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit is very clear. Continued freedom of movement, absence of an economic border, and protection of the Good Friday Agreement are key objectives for the Irish Government. The arrangements that will apply after Brexit will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the EU and UK. The Government is clear that any manifestation of an economic border would have very negative consequences. A key priority is to ensure the continued free flow of trade on the island and the need to avoid a hard border. Clearly in this regard the closer the trading relationship between the UK and EU is more generally the better.

I would point out that the guidelines for the EU 27 Article 50 negotiation framework specifically refer to the need to support and protect the achievements, benefits and commitments of the Peace Process. In this regard the guidelines recognise the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, outlining the need for flexible and imaginative solutions, including the aim of avoiding an economic border, while respecting the integrity of the Union legal order.

The Government has welcomed the EU's negotiating guidelines as reflecting Ireland's unique concerns and priorities. They express the EU's continued support for the Peace Process and the need to protect the Good Friday Agreement. They acknowledge the need for flexible and imaginative solutions to avoid an economic border on the island of Ireland. They agree to the recognition of existing bilateral agreements and arrangements between the UK and Ireland, which are compatible with EU law, such as the Common Travel Area. It is clear, however that the withdrawal of a Member State from the Union is a situation without any precedent, in either political or practical terms. That said we are looking at other border situations which may offer possible guidance on how we address the unique situation found on the island of Ireland.

Property Tax Assessments

82. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30794/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Local Property Tax (LPT) is a self-assessed tax, which places the onus on the property owner to calculate the tax due based on his/her calculation of the market value of the property.

A property owner who subsequently considers the 2013 self-assessed valuation to be too high can apply directly to Revenue's LPT Branch to have it amended downwards. The application must include supporting evidence setting out why the original valuation is thought to be excessive. The supporting evidence should include;

- copy of a professional valuation at 1 May 2013 or,
- information on property sales for comparable properties in the local area around 1 May 2013, for example from the Residential Property Price Register at www.propertypriceregister. ie or,
- details of advertised house prices for comparable properties in the area around 1 May 2013, for example from www.daft.ie or www.myhome.ie or,

- documented information on any house prices survey in the area reflecting values around 1 May 2013.

The person in question filed the statutory LPT return in 2013 confirming the value of the property to be in Valuation Band 4.

Revenue has advised me that the LPT team recently made direct contact with the person in question and advised them on the type of documentary evidence needed in support of a reduction in valuation. The documentary evidence has since been received on foot of which the valuation has been reduced to Valuation Band 2. The person has been advised of the reduction and is now considering their payment options in regard to the reduced liability.

Budget Submissions

83. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to a charity's (details supplied) 2018 pre-budget submission proposal to link tax incentives for landlords to conditionality such as greater as security of tenure, longer tenancy agreements and higher quality of accommodation; if he has investigated same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31134/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has received the charity's pre-budget submission, which includes, as one of six housing-related recommendations, a proposal to link tax incentives for landlords to conditions such as greater security of tenure, longer tenancy agreements and higher quality of accommodation. This proposal will be considered as part of my deliberations for Budget 2018.

As the Deputy may be aware, a working group was established in early 2017 to examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords (or rental accommodation providers) and to put forward options, where appropriate, for amendments to such treatment. This working group was established as part of the 'Strategy for the Rental Sector' which was published by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in December 2016. The working group is chaired by the Department of Finance and its membership consists of officials from the Department of Finance; the Revenue Commissioners; the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government; and the Residential Tenancies Board. As part of the group's work, a public consultation lasting for four weeks was conducted from March to April 2017 which received almost 70 written submissions from a wide range of interested parties, including individual landlords, representative bodies and charitable organisations.

The report of the working group is due to be presented to me by the end of July 2017, to allow for consideration of any of the options put forward, as part of my deliberations for Budget 2018.

The Deputy may also be aware that in order to improve the stability of housing supply to tenants in receipt of social housing supports a new relief was introduced in Finance Act 2015. The relief allows a full 100% mortgage interest deduction against rental income (increased from 75% in 2016 and from 80% in 2017) where a landlord undertakes, for a period of at least three years, to provide accommodation to such tenants and registers such undertakings with the Residential Tenancies Board within certain time limits. Further information on this relief is available in section 97 of the Revenue Commissioners – Notes for Guidance – Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 – Finance Act 2015 Edition – Part 4 Principal Provisions Relating to the Schedule D charge, which is available at: http://www.revenue.ie/ga/tax-professionals/documents/notes-for-guidance/tca/part04.pdf

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

84. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Finance if exceptions are made in respect of appearing in front of the board in hearing an appeals case in the case of appeals to the disabled drivers medical board of appeals; if a case can be reviewed via written evidence and correspondence; the circumstances in which this can occur; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31251/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, a Primary Medical Certificate is required to claim the tax reliefs provided under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme. 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 to receive a Primary Medical Certificate. An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal (DDMBA), which makes a new clinical determination in respect of the individual.

Hearings of the DDMBA are held on average twice a month at the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire, which has the facilities to cater for people with mobility impairing disabilities of the kind provided for under the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme. It is not possible to review a case via written evidence and correspondence as a physical examination of the person would be required.

The Medical Board of Appeal holds regional clinics as demand arises. I'm informed that one clinic per year, for the past five years, has been held in Cork City.

State Banking Sector

85. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will ensure that the reported €3.4 billion to be realised from the sale of shares in a bank (details supplied) will be spent on critically needed social housing, transport and water infrastructure and on measures to lessen the negative impacts of Brexit; if he and An Taoiseach have raised this with the EU Commission and Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30813/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The sale of shares in AIB held by the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund does not result in a beneficial impact to the General Government Balance under the European System of Accounts 2010. This is due to the fact that it is classified as a 'financial transaction' whereby it is essentially the exchange of one form of asset (shares, equities, loans) for another kind (cash). Consequently the sale of any shareholding in AIB does not count as general government revenue. Thus there will not be an increased capacity to spend on capital projects as a result of the sale of shares in AIB without affecting the general government balance.

While not improving the deficit, the cash proceeds arising from the sale of AIB shares, which have been transferred to the Exchequer, reduce the Exchequer borrowing requirement and result in lower general government net debt initially and gross debt in time. A lower level of debt is not only beneficial in terms of the fiscal sustainability of the State but will also result in reduced interest payments in future years. The strategy of reducing the national debt is consistent with the Government policy of repaying the borrowing previously undertaken to finance the recapitalisation of the banking sector during the financial crisis. As previously stated, it the Government's position that the proceeds from the sale of the State's shareholdings in Irish banks, including AIB, will be used to reduce the outstanding level of public debt.

I have previously acknowledged the need for increased public investment. The current Capital Plan sets a baseline from which this Government intends to increase investment in critical infrastructure, and in areas such as housing and health, as the Deputy has identified into the future. As outlined in the 2017 Estimates, gross voted capital expenditure will increase to €4.5 billion in 2017. This represents an increase of €325 million in comparison to the 2016 out-turn. By 2021 it is envisaged that Gross Voted Capital Expenditure will reach €7.3 billion, an increase of over 100 per cent in comparison to its level in 2014. These increases in investment over the coming years will be allocated to identified priorities on the basis of the outcome of the review of the Capital Plan currently under way.

I would also point out that it is not just because of the fiscal rules that the Government is using the proceeds to reduce debt - as the Taoiseach has stated, it is the right thing to do.

Finally, it should be further noted that the SGP also includes flexibilities that are designed to promote capital investment. For instance, within the expenditure benchmark, capital formation increases are smoothed over four years with the result that only one quarter of the increase in public investment must be funded in the first year from within the fiscal space. This provision, which means increases in capital spending for housing and other purposes can be front-loaded within the EU rules, has been utilised in Ireland's budgetary plans. With regard to Brexit and other external risks to the outlook, the best way to deal with such risks is through competitiveness oriented policies and prudent management of the public finances. That is what this Government will continue to do.

Banking Sector Data

86. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the name of the legal advisers, solicitors and barristers employed by a bank (details supplied) in respect of its appeal of a Financial Services Ombudsman ruling which was eventually withdrawn; the fees paid to each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30835/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information requested by the Deputy is not held in the Department of Finance. Officials have referred the question to the bank and have received the following response:

"Permanent TSB has a requirement for legal support and advice on an ongoing basis across different parts of its business. It manages some of this requirement through its in-house legal function, as well as engaging external solicitors and barristers where necessary. Except where required by law or regulation, and in line with how it manages its relationships with its other third party advisors, the bank does not disclose the identity of such firms or individuals engaged to work with the bank on specific issues or the terms of such work as this information is deemed commercially sensitive."

Tracker Mortgages Examination Data

87. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the fees paid to date by each bank and the Central Bank for services related to the tracker mortgage investigation, by service provider and bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30836/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Tracker Mortgage Examination Framework requires lenders to appoint an external independent party to oversee the conduct of their Examination. However, the Central Bank has advised that it is a

matter for individual firms to disclose these and any other costs incurred by them in respect of the Tracker Mortgage Examination.

In respect of the Central Bank, the Bank has advised that in order to supplement its resources it has appointed a panel of experts to provide professional expertise to support its assurance work at critical points in the Examination.

Firms were appointed by way of "call off" contracts under an existing Professional Services Framework Agreement. "Call off" contracts were awarded to: Ernst & Young, Grant Thornton and Oliver Wyman. As the assurance work on the Examination is ongoing and at different stages with lenders, the Bank is not in a position to provide costs at this point. However, the Bank will publish an aggregate figure (due to statutory confidentiality requirements, the Central Bank can, generally speaking, only disclose information in relation supervisory work in summary or aggregate form so that individual firms cannot be identified) for its third party professional services costs at the conclusion of the Tracker Examination. In addition, as signalled by Governor Philip Lane at the meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach on 4 April 2017, these costs will be charged back to the firms.

Tax Data

- 88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of approved retirement funds here in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30866/17]
- 89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the tax yield from approved retirement funds in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30867/17]
- 90. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of cases in which life assurance exit tax was applied in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30868/17]
- 91. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of life policies to which the 1% levy was applied in each of the years 2011 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30869/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 88 to 91, inclusive, together.

As regards Questions 88 and 89, Approved Retirement Funds (ARFs) are investment vehicles into which the proceeds of the pension savings of the self-employed, business owners and any individual with Defined Contribution pension arrangements may be invested at retirement, subject to conditions. Beneficial ownership of the assets in an ARF vests in the individual owner of the ARF and, among other conditions, the ARF must be managed by a Qualifying Fund Manager. The ARF option is an alternative to annuity purchase and essentially gives control over post-retirement income to those individuals who, generally, have borne the investment risk on their funds in the pension growth phase.

I am informed by Revenue that, as –

- there is no requirement in tax law on Qualifying Fund Managers to provide data of the kind requested in respect of approved retirement funds,

- there is no requirement in tax law on life assurance companies to provide information to Revenue in respect the number of cases on which Life Assurance Exit Tax (LAET) was applied, and
- there is no requirement in tax law for life companies to provide details of the number of policies subject to the 1% levy,

I am not in a position to provide the information requested.

Tax Collection

92. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the rationale for requiring life assurance policy holders to prepay part of their final tax liability by means of an anniversary tax every eight years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30870/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that under what is termed as "new basis" business, all life assurance policy holders are taxed on a gross roll-up basis. This means that the life assurance company is not subject to tax on its policy holder profits, but rather the policy holder is subject to exit tax on the happening of a chargeable event. A chargeable event will occur:

- on the maturity of the life policy;
- on the surrender in whole or in part of the rights conferred by the life policy;
- on the assignment in whole or in part of the life policy;
- on the ending of an eight year period beginning with the inception of the life policy and each subsequent eight year period beginning when the previous one ends.

This gross roll-up regime was first introduced in Finance Act 2000 to allow investment in such life policies to grow without the imposition of tax. The 8 year deemed disposal ensures that exit tax cannot be deferred indefinitely by the continual rolling over of a life assurance policy without it becoming chargeable to tax.

On maturity, full surrender or assignment of the life assurance policy following an eight year event, the tax paid on the deemed disposal is available for offset in the calculation of the final tax liability.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Data

93. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of the help-to-buy initiative; the number of households that have availed of it; the average and the median value of the grant given to each household; and the number of recipients in each county. [30947/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Help to Buy incentive aims to both assist those first-time buyers struggling to save for the deposit required to purchase a home, as well as incentivising additional construction activity for the provision of extra housing supply. At Budget time it was estimated that the Help to Buy incentive would cost €40 million per annum but €50 million in 2017 due to the backdating of the relief in respect of properties which became eligible for the scheme since 19 July 2016.

Revenue publishes regular updates on the HTB scheme on its website. The most recent

update to 29 June 2017 in respect of applications, both approved and pending, and claims made can be found at http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/htb.aspx

As of Thursday 29 June 2017 the value of HTB refunds verified and paid was €28.1 million, including €12.1 million in respect of retrospective claims (home purchases and self-builds in the period 19 July to 31 December 2016).

The number of applications received for the HTB scheme was 7,787, of which 5,038 have been approved. Some 2,519 claims have been made, of which 1,930 have been verified and paid. The average value of claims is \in 14,560. The median value of claims is \in 14,625.

The number of recipients by county is set out in Table 7 of Revenue's published statistics.

Tax Rebates

94. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Finance the status of a tax refund for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare. [30969/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that a refund of tax for 2016 was made by direct credit to the nominated bank account of the authorised agent of the person concerned on 16 February, 2017.

Tax Agreements

95. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Finance the status of any agreement reached with Taiwan regarding the avoidance of double taxation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30984/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is my policy to treat plans or negotiations for double taxation agreements as confidential until they are signed, at which point they are published on Revenue's website. This is a normal practice for most jurisdictions, which respects the confidential nature of the negotiation process.

Ireland, along with all EU partners, adheres to the "One China" policy and as a result does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. This does not, however, preclude the development of economic and trade relations. Ireland, together with our EU partners, sees the benefit of encouraging trade with Taiwan and will continue to explore all appropriate opportunities which arise.

Since Taiwan is not recognised as a State by Ireland we cannot enter into a legally enforceable agreement which would be governed by international law. However a number of other EU countries have negotiated commercial agreements with Taiwan along the lines of Double Taxation Agreements. Section 79 of Finance Act 2015 does make it possible to negotiate such an agreement with Taiwan.

While there has been contact with the Taiwanese authorities on potentially entering into such a commercial agreement, no negotiations have taken place with any representatives of Taiwan in relation to a potential agreement.

96. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer of increasing VAT on commercial construction to the standard rate. [30999/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that it is tentatively estimated the additional yield from changing the rate of VAT on commercial construction to the standard rate would be in the region of €240m.

As the information provided to Revenue on tax returns does not require traders to identify the yield generated from specific transactions or types of activities, this estimate involves a significant element of approximation.

NAMA Operations

97. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance the rationale to appoint a second auditor to NAMA with regard to the recent announcement by NAMA of the appointment of a company (details supplied) as statutory auditor; the advice sought regarding this decision, by both NAMA and his Department; if legal advice was sought from the Attorney General; if the decision is in breach of section 57(1) of the National Asset Management Agency Act 2009 regarding the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31156/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The pending implementation of the 2014 revised EU Audit Directive and Regulations underpinning the Deputy's question was first brought to the attention of my officials in the Department of Finance in respect of the potential impact for NAMA in May 2016 by officials within the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI) responsible for transposing this directive into Irish law. DJEI made contact with my Department and the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General ("C&AG") regarding the implementation of statutory audit obligations in the 2014 revised EU Audit Directive and Regulations prior to their transposition into Irish law via SI 312 of 2016 and the Companies Act 2014.

My Department engaged over a number of months with DJEI, the Office of the C&AG and NAMA on this matter. My Department also sought legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General regarding this Directive. The Directive requires that certain companies, including NAMA, must be audited by a Statutory Auditor within the meaning of the Directive. This audit requirement is separate from and in addition to the audit requirements set out in the NAMA Act which remain in effect. It was also confirmed that the C&AG was not a Statutory Auditor within the meaning of the Directive.

I understand that both NAMA and the Office of the C&AG each obtained separate legal advice which concurs with this position. Hence, the C&AG's audit of the statutory financial statements of the NAMA Group entities from the financial year ended 31 December 2016 onwards does not fulfil the requirements of the Directive.

I am advised that the C&AG believes that, at a minimum, a change in legislation would be required in order to become a 'statutory auditor'.

In this regard, cognisance would also need to be given to the particular features of the Constitution which safeguard the independence of the role.

As a consequence, the NAMA Group entities were required to appoint a Statutory Auditor to satisfy the Directors' obligations under Section 333 of the Companies Act 2014 for the year ended 31 December 2016 and all years thereafter. NAMA launched a tender for the services of

a statutory auditor and, arising from this, Mazars were appointed by the NAMA Board in May 2017. I am advised that the tender documentation for this appointment are publicly available on the e-tenders website, should the Deputy wish to review them in detail.

The appointment of a statutory auditor does not override, nor breach, the C&AG's obligation to audit NAMA and NAMA Group Entities for each year end in accordance with Section 57 of the NAMA Act. However, it does mean that there will be a dual audit of NAMA's accounts –by both its statutory auditor, Mazars, and separately by the C&AG.

In this regard, the Deputy will note that NAMA's tender document requests that tenderers "should seek to maximise audit efficiency for NAMA and in this regard consideration should be given to making use of the working papers of the C&AG (if available) and similarly the Statutory Auditor should consider the provision of their working papers to the C&AG for their audit".

I understand that NAMA and the C&AG have worked constructively together to address these changing audit requirements while remaining faithful to their respective obligations under various pieces of legislation.

Tax Compliance

- 98. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Finance further to the meeting with the Committee of Public Accounts and the commitment to deal expediently with a matter (details supplied), the progress to date; when he expects the committee to report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31195/17]
- 99. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Finance when a case (details supplied) will be heard; the reason the Revenue Commissioners are contesting the proposed test appellant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31196/17]
- 100. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners are objecting to persons taking the test case in respect of a matter (details supplied); if so, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31197/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 98 to 100, inclusive, together.

I am assuming that the reference to the meeting with the Public Accounts Committee is in fact the meeting on Wednesday 7 December 2016 with the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach where Revenue participants discussed matters pertaining to the issue with that committee. I am not aware of whether the Committee will report further on the matter.

Revenue is statutorily independent in administering the tax code and is also statutorily required to maintain taxpayer confidentiality. The Deputy will therefore understand that I cannot be appraised of the circumstances of any individual case.

I understand tax assessments were raised on individuals affected by this matter and that these are under appeal. The forum to have these appeals resolved is the Tax Appeals Commission (TAC), an independent body tasked with hearing tax appeals.

I am advised it is proposed by the TAC to take a test case. There is a provision in Section 949AN of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, which allows the TAC, where cases involve common or related issues, to have regard to a determination made by them in one case, to determine

other appeals without the necessity of holding a hearing for those other cases. It is a matter for the TAC to apply this provision. The timing of any appeal is also a matter for the TAC.

I am advised that agents acting on behalf of appellants have proposed a case they believe is suitable for application across all appellants. Revenue has expressed its view, on the request of the TAC, on the suitability of this proposed case as a representative case. The decision on whether to take the case as a representative case is one for the TAC. I am assured by Revenue that it remains committed to facilitating the proposal for a test case approach.

Central Bank of Ireland Staff

- 101. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the contact he has had with the Central Bank regarding its chronic staff shortages and its inability to fill 200 available positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31199/17]
- 102. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he has had or knowledge within his Department regarding the statements by the Central Bank on its inability to attract appropriate applications for job vacancies and the contention that it is deliberately excluding anybody that worked for over ten years in an Irish bank pre-crisis or anyone that worked on the bank inquiry and instead is promoting internally. [31200/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 102 together.

The Central Bank periodically has an informal exchange of views with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on the resourcing issues facing the public sector.

I am informed by the Central Bank that while recruitment for positions across the Bank is challenging, and turnover in certain areas, including in Financial Regulation, is higher than optimal, it is not correct to imply that these challenges are having an impact on the operation of the Bank.

The Governor of the Central Bank has previously indicated that where further resources are necessary due to an expanded universe of regulated and supervised firms, the Bank will increase staff numbers as necessary.

The Central Bank has the ability to effectively re-prioritise to meet any increased level of demand and complexity, but where required to, the Central Bank will increase staff numbers as necessary.

The Bank has filled 189 positions in the first half of 2017. Latest figures available show a net increase of 20 FTEs to the end of May 2017. In 2016 the Bank attracted over 10,000 applications for roles and filled over 500 positions.

The Central Bank is not aware of a contention that it is deliberately excluding anybody that worked for over ten years in an Irish bank pre crisis or anyone that worked on the banking inquiry, and in response to this would point to the fact that over 50% (880 FTEs) of the staff employed in the Bank today joined post 2010; a significant number of whom would have joined from a financial services background.

The Central Bank is an equal opportunities employer, committed to diversity and inclusion and there is no policy to exclude applicants with prior experience within the Irish banking system. Roles are filled on the basis of experience and skills as set out in the role profile and many

roles benefit from previous experience of working in the banking sector.

Credit Union Regulation

103. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the commitments in the programme for Government regarding the credit unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31255/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Commitments identified in the Programme for a Partnership Government relating to credit unions and their progress are as follows:

1. The rollout and extension of the Personal Microcredit Scheme, which is providing simple microloans to members and helping to combat the use of moneylenders.

The Personal Microcredit Scheme was commenced on a pilot basis in November 2015, involving 30 credit unions providing individual loans of between €100 and €2,000 with a maximum interest rate of 1% per month. The initiative is being led by the Department of Social Protection in conjunction with the Department of Finance and other interest groups. The It Makes Sense loan is designed to make short-term credit available on a low-cost basis to the people who need it most, and is designed specifically as an alternative to high-cost money-lenders.

As at 17 May 2017 there were 106 credit unions in 219 locations providing loans under the Personal Microcredit Scheme. Involvement in the scheme is voluntary and as such is a matter for individual credit unions themselves

2. Assisting credit unions in making successful applications to retain members' savings in excess of €100,000 (CP88), recognising the independence of the Registrar of Credit Unions.

The Central Bank implemented the Credit Union Act 1997 (Regulatory Requirements) Regulations 2016 (the Regulations) on 1 January 2016. It set out an individual member savings limit of €100,000. The Regulations also provided that credit unions could apply to the Central Bank to retain individual members' savings in excess of €100,000, which were held at commencement of the Regulations and that Credit unions with total assets in excess of €100m could apply to the Central Bank for approval to increase individual member savings in excess of €100,000.

The Central Bank consulted with the Department of Finance on the application process and accepted the Department's observations, making the application process less onerous. Separately, the Registrar met with the representative bodies to obtain their feedback on the application process.

The Central Bank developed application processes to facilitate credit unions in seeking the approvals as outlined above. As provided for in the Regulations, in order for approval to be granted an applicant credit union must demonstrate that the granting of such approval is consistent with the adequate protection of the savings of members and effective and proportionate having regard to the nature, scale and complexity of the credit union. The submission deadline for applications to retain savings in excess of &100,000 was 27 June 2016. The application form to increase savings in excess of &100,000 does not have a submission deadline and will be accepted on an ongoing basis.

Under the process, applications to retain individual members' savings in excess of €100,000, which were held at commencement of the Regulations, were assessed primarily by reference

to objective financial criteria related to the excess reserves and liquid assets held by the credit union. In addition, applicant credit unions were required to outline a rationale for seeking to retain such savings.

At commencement of the Regulations, there were 196 credit unions reporting on the Prudential Return (PR) that they held individual members' savings in excess of $\in 100,000$ and the total amount of such savings held was c. $\in 165$ million. Just over one third of these credit unions applied for permission to retain the individual members' savings in excess of $\in 100,000$. The Central Bank informs me that the majority of these applicants met the financial criteria (on reserves and liquidity levels set out in the application process) and have been approved to retain such savings.

For those credit unions not approved to retain individual member savings in excess of €100,000, transitional arrangements set out in the Regulations apply, meaning that all individual member savings in excess of €100,000 held by these credit unions had to be returned to individual members by 1 January 2017.

3. Asking the Central Bank of Ireland to instigate a review of the continued appropriateness of the savings limit within a year of the formation of the new Partnership Government.

The Central Bank committed to a review of the savings limit, three years from commencement of the regulations (1 January 2016). A letter issued to the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank from the Minister for Finance on 25 November 2016 requesting the Central Bank of Ireland to instigate a review of the continued appropriateness of the savings limit on credit union members.

4. Working with the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank to gradually lift current lending restrictions as appropriate, including for housing.

In February 2015 the Central Bank commenced a lending restriction review initiative, whereby credit unions that are subject to a lending restriction, but are satisfied that they have made the necessary improvements and have embedded these improvements in robust risk sensitive lending practices, could apply for a review of their lending restriction. The closing date for receipt of applications under this initiative was 30 September 2015. This review has reduced the number of credit unions with lending restrictions. Currently 60 credit unions, approximately 22% of credit unions by number, have a lending restriction compared with 52% of credit unions at the start of the review process. The Central Bank has informed the Department that there is ongoing engagement with credit unions to lift lending restrictions. The Department will continue to monitor the situation.

5. Credit unions' move towards more electronic and online services, including the rollout of debit cards and enhanced online banking services.

We continue to support credit union initiatives to develop services while protecting members' savings. In certain circumstances, the provision of new services must be approved by the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank prior to their introduction.

The Central Bank informs me that in October 2016, a number of credit unions were approved for a new service Members Personal Current Account Services (MPCAS) which provides for a current account and a range of services which includes payment instruments such as debit cards. Approval was granted under additional services provisions (sections 48 to 52) within the Credit Union Act 1997 (as amended). There has been strong interest in this service and the Central Bank is currently processing a significant number of applications, which are

at different stages of assessment with the majority currently at an advanced stage. Details and applications forms for the MPCAS service are available on the Central Bank website.

The Central Bank has also indicated that it is open to applications for alternative debit card proposals and recommends the MPCAS framework as a template for such alternative proposals.

Separately, an Implementation Group consisting of members from the four main credit union representative bodies, the Central Bank and a CUAC member, chaired by the Department of Finance was established earlier this year to implement all recommendations in CUAC's 2016 Report. This Implementation Group will review CUAC recommendations relating to business model development in credit unions.

6. Asking the Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) to conduct a review, and report by the end of June 2016, on the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Report of the Commission on Credit Unions.

In December 2015 the Minister for Finance invited the Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) to carry out a review of the Implementation of the Recommendations set out in the Report of the Commission on Credit Unions. The review was presented to the Minister on 29 June 2016 and is available on the Department's website. The Review of Implementation of the Recommendations in the Commission on Credit Unions Report made recommendations in a number of areas including: Tiered Regulation; Section 35; Consultation and Engagement; Governance; Restructuring; Business Model Development; and Additional Policy Matters. An Implementation Group has been established to oversee and monitor implementation of all recommendations.

As indicated above, an Implementation Group was established earlier this year to oversee, monitor and ensure implementation of all recommendations and has met five times to date.

Mortgage Interest Rates

104. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the commitments made in the confidence and supply arrangement on taking all necessary action to tackle high variable mortgage rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31256/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue of mortgage rates is a significant one for this Government. The Government has initiated a number of important and practical initiatives which have the potential to improve the position of mortgage holders, including variable rate mortgage holders. Firstly the Government wishes to maintain and promote the level of competition in the supply of mortgage finance. To that end, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) was asked to set out options to improve the degree of competition and consumer protection in the mortgage market. As the Deputy will be aware, the CCPC has recently produced its report and set out a number of short, medium and long term action points for consideration. My Department will now liaise closely with CCPC, the Central Bank and other relevant Departments/agencies as appropriate on these action points to further consider their practical potential to enhance competition.

Secondly, the Government considers that measures to encourage and promote a greater level of switching in the mortgage market would also boost the level of competition in the market for existing mortgages. This point was also recognised by the CCPC report and the Central Bank has also carried out work in this area. For example, last April the Central Bank published research on the experience of consumers in switching mortgage providers. That research found that many consumers who have switched had a positive experience. However, it also found that

lenders could do more to facilitate mortgage switching. Dedicated mortgage switching staff, the ability to better compare mortgage products, a less time consuming process and clarity around timelines were highlighted as potential stimulants to mortgage switching.

Following on from this research, the Central Bank will publish a consultation paper in Q3 2017 proposing additional measures to facilitate mortgage switching for those consumers minded to switch. Specific proposals to be explored will include:

- lenders providing greater clarity to consumers on the switching process itself, including as to timeframes and potential costs of switching;
 - the benefits of lenders having dedicated switching contact points;
- further disclosure rules at trigger points in the mortgage life cycle (e.g. end of a fixed interest-rate term); and
- the scope for increased co-operation amongst lenders during the mortgage switching process.

This will be an important development as previous Central Bank research had show that borrowers could make savings by switching their mortgage. It should be noted that there has been some downward adjustment in mortgage rates. Recently published Central Bank data on retail interest rates indicated that, in respect of new standard variable rate PDH mortgage business, rates had declined by 19 basis points to 3.38 per cent over the year to March 2017. Fixed rate PDH mortgage rates also declined, with rates fixed for 1-3 years falling by 26 basis points over the same period.

In overall terms, therefore, the Government is of the opinion that increased competition rather than administrative controls is the best way to ensure that retail lending rates are driven down in a sustainable way for the market as a whole and to that end it will continue to advance measures which encourage greater competition and switching in the mortgage market.

Credit Unions

105. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the commitments made in the confidence and supply arrangement to develop a strategy for the growth and development of the credit union sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31257/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Credit unions have a key role to play in providing access to credit and other important services in local communities throughout the country. The sector has undergone fundamental change since 2011, managing many complex and challenging issues. For example, following the establishment of the Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo), there have been 82 mergers involving 156 credit unions resulting in an overall reduction of credit unions from 406 at September 2011 to 277 now. Over the same period loan arrears have fallen from 18% to 9% and the number of credit unions with reserves less than 10% has fallen from 51 in September 2011 to 5 at September 2016. Average reserves now stand at 17%. Lending growth has recently returned with a 6% increase to €4.2 billion in the year to March 2017 which followed a large decrease from peak in 2008.

In December 2015 the Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) was invited to carry out a review of the Implementation of the Recommendations set out in the Report of the Commission on Credit Unions. The final report was published on 6 July 2016. This was a significant

report providing an in-depth analysis of the sector from a financial perspective and having met with a range of stakeholders also ensured a balanced report providing focused and effective recommendations.

The recommendations are provided under seven specific headings; tiered regulation, section 35, consultation and engagement with the Central Bank, governance, restructuring, business model development and additional matters.

An Implementation Group was established to oversee and monitor implementation of these recommendations, which will support Credit Unions in developing their business model. The Group consists of members from the four main credit union representative bodies: ILCU; CUDA; CUMA; and NSF as well as a CUAC member, a representative from the Central Bank and is chaired by the Department of Finance. It has met on five occasions since February 2017 and is focused on implementing all recommendations at the appropriate time.

CUAC's Report also fulfils one of the key credit union objectives as outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government which states that the Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) conduct a review on the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Report of the Commission on Credit Unions.

In addition my officials regularly engage with all key credit unions stakeholders in relation to credit union policy matters which are not part of the remit of the Implementation Group.

The Government recognises the important role of credit unions as a volunteer co-operative movement in this country. The Government's priorities remain the protection of members' savings, the financial stability of credit unions and the sector overall and it is determined to continue to support a strengthened and growing credit union movement.

Banking Sector Remuneration

- 106. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Finance if bonuses were paid to persons (details supplied) in a bank prior to the sale of 28.8% of its shares by the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31259/17]
- 107. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Finance if a bonus or dividend will be paid to a person (details supplied) following the sale of 28.8% of State share interest in the bank; if so, the amount; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31264/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 107 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the previous Government placed restrictions on various types of remuneration in the Irish banks that were recapitalised by the State and these restrictions remain in place.

Hence there cannot be any bonus, dividend or incentive payments for AIB's executives or staff linked to the IPO of AIB.

Brexit Data

108. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated

official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31273/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that the Assistant Secretary who heads the EU and International Division of my Department has been designated as the lead official in the Department for Brexit matters. A dedicated Brexit Unit within the EU and International Division was established in July 2016 to oversee and coordinate Brexit work across the entire Department and to act as a key liaison point, in particular with the Departments of the Taoiseach and of Foreign Affairs and Trade. There are currently four staff in the dedicated unit which is led at Principal Officer level. Also, an additional staff member has been assigned to the Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels specifically to deal with Brexit.

We have appointed lead Brexit coordinators at Principal Officer level across all divisions of the Department. The challenges which we face as a result of Brexit are mainstreamed across all divisions of my Department and this is reflected in business planning.

Brexit resourcing has been managed within the existing paybill allocation. My Department will continue to monitor the resources needed to respond to specific policy challenges on an ongoing basis.

Fuel Prices

109. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to issue guidelines to petrol and diesel retailers here to reduce the cost to the consumer in view of the fact that oil prices worldwide continue to plunge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31307/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The price of petrol and diesel sold at the garage forecourt is determined by a number of factors including taxation, the price of the raw material, the prevailing exchange rates as well as the fact the different wholesalers can enter into forward contracts at different rates for the purchase of oil.

There are two elements of tax in the final price of a litre of fuel, the excise rate and VAT. The excise rates (including the carbon charge) in Ireland on motor fuels are 58.8 cent per litre of petrol and 47.9 cent per litre of auto-diesel. These rates do not vary throughout the country and have not changed since 2012. The other component of tax is the VAT, which is applied at 23%.

The price of fuel on the forecourt is set by the individual retailer and would likely take into account the costs associated with the retail of the product such as those mentioned above together with the cost of having oil delivered.

Other than setting tax rates I have no function in this area. My advice to consumers is to shop around and if possible use price comparison websites to ensure they receive the best value for money.

Insurance Industry Regulation

110. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance the regulations that are in place for monitoring house insurance prices; his views on a matter (details supplied); if he will ensure that measures will be taken to prevent house insurance costs from rising; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31337/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 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 position 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. Consequently, I am not in a position to review individual cases nor to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in particular cases.

The Deputy will note that the Cost of Insurance Working Group looked at this issue in the context of its work on motor insurance and made a recommendation about the need for insurers to inform consumers of the reasons for large increases in quotations. Notwithstanding that this will apply only to motor insurance business, it may also have an impact on other lines of business.

With regard to the cost of home insurance, the Central Statistics Office reports on price movements in relation to insurance connected with dwellings as part of their Consumer Prices Monthly Series. According to the official data from the Central Statistics Office, the cost of insurance connected with dwellings has remained largely stable over the last five years increasing and decreasing at various times. At the beginning of this year it was 6.2% higher than it had been at the beginning of 2012. February 2017 saw increases month-on-month of 2.5% and this has been followed by three months without a price movement. Comparably, for the same period the cost of motor insurance was 48% higher in January 2017 than it had been in January 2012, and at times early last year had been close to 60% higher. There is also anecdotal evidence that the cost of employer liability insurance and public liability insurance has risen at a significantly higher rate than that of home insurance.

In conclusion, therefore, on the basis that there is a need to prioritise the implementation of the cost of insurance motor report and also complete the public liability and employer liability review, I do not propose to look at the issue of the cost of home insurance at this point in time within the context of the Cost of Insurance Working Group's work.

Nevertheless, my Department will continue to monitor the cost of home insurance as part of its general oversight of the insurance sector.

Employment Data

111. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the increase in poor condition and short-term contracts and general insecurities in modern employment are contributing factors in the increase in employment figures and the stagnation of the tax base; and his plans to tackle this situation. [31357/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): We are currently seeing very positive signs in the labour market. Total employment, which has passed the two million mark, is at its highest level since 2008.

Encouragingly, the labour market recovery remains broad based with gains recorded in all sectors and at all levels of occupational status last year. The composition of growth also remains strong driven by gains in full-time positions. In fact, according to the latest employment data released by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), annual increases in full-time employment

of 5.5 per cent were seen in the first quarter of 2017, while over the same time period, part-time employment fell by 3.4 per cent.

As part of the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) release, the CSO publishes a measurement of underemployment. The following criteria are used to derive underemployment:

- 1. Working part-time
- 2. Willing to work additional hours
- 3. Available to work additional hours

Using these criteria, the CSO data show that part-time underemployment has fallen by 6.4 per cent over the year to Q1 2017, representing less than 5 per cent of all employees while over three-quarters of people who work part-time do so by choice.

In parallel to these significant employment gains, unemployment continues to fall. The unemployment rate stood at 6.4 per cent in May, the lowest rate of unemployment since mid-2008. Crucially, the fall in unemployment is broad-based with substantial declines recorded in short-term, long-term and youth unemployment.

Both average hourly and average weekly earnings have also increased in the year to Q1 2017. Importantly, these increases are broad-based. In the first quarter of 2017, average hourly earnings increased in 9 of the 13 sectors reported by the CSO, year on year, while average weekly earnings increased in 11 of the 13 sectors.

The average number of hours worked over the same period also increased. Like earnings, the increase in the average number of hours worked is broad-based with increases in 9 of the 13 sectors. Importantly, the average number of hours worked increased in sectors such as the Accommodation and Food Services sector, which has a high concentration of part-time employment.

In relation to the tax base, I assume the Deputy is referring to income tax. Income tax has performed steadily in the first six months of 2017, up 3.1 per cent or \in 274 million on the same period last year. However, income tax receipts of \in 9,045 million were slightly behind profile, down 2.3 per cent or \in 214 million. This shortfall against target is across a range of income tax components.

Income tax encompasses a broad range of elements, some of which are not directly impacted by employment or wage developments. These include Deposit Interest Retention Tax, Life Assurance Exit Tax, Dividend Withholding Tax and Back Duty. Some of these components are having a drag on overall income tax receipts in the first half of 2017.

However, it is worth pointing out that the key component, i.e. income tax (PAYE), which accounts for around €13 billion or 65 per cent of total income tax receipts is broadly in line with profile at end-June. This is consistent with the increases in employment and earnings in the labour market which we have witnessed in the year to date.

Overall, the continued momentum in the labour market of late is underlined by broad-based, full-time employment gains coupled with significant reductions in short-term, long-term and youth unemployment. The solid performance of PAYE receipts in the year to date is indicative of these positive trends.

Tax Yield

112. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the rate of duty on tobacco in each of the past ten years; the duty collected for each of those years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31359/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that the rate of duty on tobacco products in each of the past ten years is provided in a table:

| Year | Cigarettes | Cigars | Roll your own tobacco | Other smoking tobacco |
|--------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2007 | €151.37 per 1000 cigarettes plus 17.78% of the retail price. | €217.388 per kilogram | €183.443 per kilogram | €150.815 per kilogram |
| 2008 | €160.57 per 1000 cigarettes plus 17.92% of the retail price. | €229.917 per kilogram | €194.016 per kilogram | €159.507 per kilogram |
| 2009 | €175.30 per 1000 cigarettes plus 18.28% of the retail price. | €250.729 per kilogram | €211.578 per kilogram | €173.946 per kilogram |
| 2009 (supp.) | €183.42 per 1000 cigarettes plus 18.25% of the retail price. | €261.066 per kilogram | €220.301 per kilogram | €181.117 per kilogram |
| 2010 | €183.42 per 1000 cigarettes plus 18.25% of the retail price. | €261.066 per kilogram | €220.301 per kilogram | €181.117 per kilogram |
| 2011 | €183.42 per 1000 cigarettes plus 18.25% of the retail price. | €261.066 per kilogram | €220.301 per kilogram | €181.117 per kilogram |
| 2012 | €192.44 per 1000 cigarettes plus 18.03% of the retail price.Rebalanced from 1st May 2012 to €233.11 per 1000 cigarettes plus 9.04% of the retail price, subject to a minimum of €268.14 | €271.337 per kilogram | €228.968 per kilogram | €188.243 per kilogram |
| 2013 | €237.69 per 1000 cigarettes plus 8.83% of the retail price, subject to a minimum of €268.14 | €275.342 per kilogram | €248.608 per kilogram | €191.022 per kilogram |
| 2014 | €241.83 per 1000 cigarettes plus 8.72% of the retail price subject to a minimum of €275.62 | €279.345 per kilogram | €252.222 per kilogram | €193.799 per kilogram |
| 2015 | €255.69 per 1000 cigarettes plus 8.85% of the retail price subject to a minimum of €289.98 | €295.350 per kilogram | €273.177 per kilogram | €204.902 per kilogram |

| Year | Cigarettes | Cigars | Roll your own | Other smoking |
|------|---------------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| | | | tobacco | tobacco |
| 2016 | €271.96 per 1000 ciga- | €315.359 per | €291.683 per | €218.783 per |
| | rettes plus 9.20% of the | kilogram | kilogram | kilogram |
| | retail price subject to a | | | |
| | minimum of €307.61 | | | |
| 2017 | €288.22 per 1000 ciga- | €335.368 per | €310.189 per | €232.664 per |
| | rettes plus 9.52% of the | kilogram | kilogram | kilogram |
| | retail price or a minimum | | | |
| | tax of €325.11 | | | |

The total duty collected from tobacco products for each of the last ten years is provided in a table:

| Year | Excise (€ millions) |
|------|---------------------|
| 2007 | €1,192 |
| 2008 | €1,171 |
| 2009 | €1,216 |
| 2010 | €1,160 |
| 2011 | €1,126 |
| 2012 | €1,072 |
| 2013 | €1,064 |
| 2014 | €984 |
| 2015 | €1,082 |
| 2016 | €1,098 |

The deputy may note Revenue publishes statistical information on the tax receipts collected and the volume of product released across a range of Excise commodities. This can be sourced using the following link: http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/excise/receipts-volume-and-proce/excise-receipts-commodity.aspx.

Tax Code

113. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the detail of the treatment of rental income from residential property situated here from a taxation point of view, including the rate of taxation that applies by different classes of recipients including private landlords domiciled and resident here, private landlords not resident here, Irish resident companies, non-Irish resident companies, partnerships, real estate investment trusts and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31424/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under section 18 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997, rental income earned by both Irish resident and non-Irish resident companies and individuals from a property situated in the State is taxable under Case V of Schedule D of the TCA 1997. This basis of taxation makes no distinction between rental income from property let for residential occupation and property let for commercial occupation.

While the same computational rules to calculate taxable rental income are generally applied to both individuals and companies, income earned by individuals from the letting of residential or commercial property situated in Ireland is taxable under self-assessment income tax, while rental income earned by companies is assessable for corporation tax.

Each property must have a separate tax computation in which the rental expenses for each property are deducted from the related rental income for the same property in order to arrive at a surplus (i.e. income greater than expenses) or a deficiency (i.e. expenses greater than income) of taxable rental income in respect of the property. The total of surpluses and deficiencies are then aggregated to arrive at Case V profits or gains arising in the year.

Rates of income tax

Rental income forms part of the landlord's total taxable income for the relevant tax year and is liable to tax at the individual's marginal rate of tax – the standard rate of 20% if total income is below the standard rate band and the higher rate of 40% if above. PRSI and USC are in general, also chargeable on rental income.

Rent-a-Room relief

Under the 'Rent a Room' scheme provided for in section 216A of the TCA 1997 an individual who lets a room (or rooms) in his or her sole or main residence as residential accommodation may be exempt from income tax, PRSI and USC in respect of income from the letting where the aggregate of the gross rents and any sums for meals or other services supplied in connection with the letting does not exceed the threshold for the year in question, which is €14,000 for 2017. Although the income is exempt it must be included in the individual's tax return for the year in question.

This relief does not apply to companies or partnerships.

Non-resident individuals

As noted above, non-resident individuals are liable to Irish tax in respect of rental income from Irish property. Where rents are paid directly to a non-resident individual, the tenant is obliged to deduct income tax at the standard rate from the payment, as per section 1041 of the TCA 1997. Credit can be claimed for the tax withheld on the income tax return of the landlord.

Partnerships

For the purposes of taxation each partner is regarded as individually carrying on a separate trade; this concept is referred to as the partner's "several trade" and each partner is liable to income tax on his/her share of the partnership profits or gains, including Case V rental profits.

Companies

A company, whether resident or non-resident, is chargeable to tax in respect of rental income arising in the State. Such rental income is chargeable at the higher 25% rate of corporation tax. If the company is a "close company" (that is, a company under the control of 5 or fewer participators or participators who are directors) it may also be liable to the 20% close company surcharge on undistributed estate and investment income if the rental profits are retained within the company.

REITs

Finance Act of 2013 introduced the regime for the operation of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) in Ireland. A REIT is a collective investment vehicle designed to hold properties in a tax neutral manner. The function of the REIT framework is to facilitate collective investment in rental property by removing a double layer of taxation which would otherwise apply on property investment via a corporate vehicle.

Rental profits arising in a REIT are exempt from corporation tax. However, profits from

any other activities are subject to corporation tax in the normal way. A REIT is subject to strict conditions including an annual requirement to distribute 85% of its property income by way of property income dividend. It must not be a "close company" and it must be a listed company.

Dividend Withholding Tax (DWT) at the standard rate is withheld on distributions to an individual from a REIT. An Irish resident individual is taxable on the distribution received at their marginal rate of income tax, plus USC and PRSI, with credit for the DWT suffered. The tax treatment of the distribution for a non-resident individual will depend on where the individual is resident, whether Ireland has a Double Taxation Agreement with that country, and what the terms of the Double Taxation Agreement are.

Working Group on the Tax and Fiscal Treatment of Rental Accommodation Providers

As the Deputy may be aware, a working group was established in early 2017 to examine and report on the tax treatment of landlords (or rental accommodation providers) and to put forward options, where appropriate, for amendments to such treatment. The establishment of this group was one of the commitments contained in the 'Strategy for the Rental Sector' which was published by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in December 2016. The working group is chaired by the Department of Finance and its membership consists of officials from the Department of Finance; the Revenue Commissioners; the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government; and the Residential Tenancies Board. As part of the group's work, a public consultation lasting for four weeks was conducted from March to April 2017 which received almost 70 written submissions from a wide range of interested parties, including individual landlords, representative bodies and charitable organisations. The report of the working group is due to be presented to me by the end of July 2017, to allow for consideration of any of the options put forward as part of my deliberations for Budget 2018.

Pyrite Issues

114. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the projected loss to the Exchequer per annum of the abolition of the rule within the relevant legislation that provides that home owners with pyrite damage below the significant damage certification threshold who have not been accepted into the pyrite remediation scheme cannot avail of the LPT pyrite exemption. [31486/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that statutory LPT return in 2013 did not require information in respect of pyrite damage below certification thresholds to be provided to Revenue and therefore the necessary data are not available to provide a basis for estimating the loss to the Exchequer from extending the pyrite exemption to such cases.

Exports Growth

115. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the report published by an organisation (details supplied); if his officials have examined the report; his policy proposals to address the issues identified in the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31490/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The report, 'A Future Tax Strategy to Grow Irish Indigenous Exports', commissioned by the Irish Tax Institute, has been examined

by my officials in the Department of Finance.

Among the concerns raised were that the R&D Tax Credit has a low take-up among SMEs and that there are barriers to the administration process. This was identified by a survey of SMEs for the report.

The central purpose of the R&D Tax Credit is to encourage companies to undertake high-value add R&D activity in Ireland, thereby supporting jobs and investment here. The principal benefit of the R&D Tax Credit is that it provides a tax credit at a 25%, entailing that for every €4 spent on qualifying R&D, a tax credit of €1 will be provided to the company.

I would note that the R&D tax credit is a standard measure available to all companies. However, I am cognisant that the administration process may be an issue for some smaller companies. In this regard, the Revenue Commissioners, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, have established an R&D discussion group which will look at the administrative burdens faced by those engaging with the R&D Tax Credit.

Furthermore, with a view to streamlining the audit of R&D claims for small businesses, the Revenue Commissioners have stated in a recent e-Brief that they will not challenge the claim under the "science test" in certain circumstances. The new practice will apply to small or micro businesses where:

- an IDA / Enterprise Ireland R&D grant has been approved in respect of the project;
- the credit claim in any year is no more than €50,000;
- the project is undertaken in a qualifying field of science or technology.

Mortgage Lending

116. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the practice by certain mortgage providers (details supplied) to only seek exemption from Central Bank mortgage lending guidelines for prospective buyers seeking an exemption of more than €40,000 greater than the standard loan-to-value or income ratio; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that this penalises families seeking minor and modest derogation from income and loan-to-value limited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31491/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that I, as Minister, have no direct function in the relationship between PTSB and its customers. Commercial decisions taken by the bank around mortgage lending exemptions are a matter for the board and management of the bank. Notwithstanding the fact that the State is a shareholder in PTSB, I must ensure that the bank is run on a commercial, cost effective and independent basis to protect the value of the bank as an asset to the State. A Relationship Framework has been specified that defines the nature of the relationship between the Minister and PTSB. This Framework, as published, can be found at:

http://www.finance.gov.ie/what-we-do/banking-financial-services/shareholding-manage-ment-unit/permanent-tsb/relationship

EU Meetings

117. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the ECOFIN

meeting on 16 June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31492/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): This Council, which took place in Luxembourg, was the last one under the Maltese Presidency and my first since my appointment as Minister for Finance.

The first item on the agenda was a proposal for amending the Council Directives dealing with a reduced VAT rate for electronically supplied publications (e-Publications). This proposal is part of a project to modernise the VAT regime of the European Union. It allows Member States to charge the same reduced rates of VAT to electronic publications as they would apply to non-electronic publications.

The second proposal dealt with the General Reverse Charge Mechanism and is essentially a measure to combat VAT fraud by making the customer responsible for the payment of the tax rather than the supplier as under the present system.

No agreement was reached on these two tax proposals and the matter will now fall to the Estonian Presidency to address.

Ministers also discussed a number of legislative proposals that dealt with strengthening the Banking Union and also dealt with risk-reduction measures. Two of the proposals – namely a draft directive on the ranking of unsecured debt instruments in insolvency proceedings (bank creditor hierarchy) and a draft regulation on transitional arrangements to phase in the regulatory capital impact of the IFRS 9 international accounting standard – were agreed by Minsters. This means that the Presidency can commence discussion on these draft proposals with the European Parliament as soon as the Parliament has approved its own negotiating stance.

The Council noted the progress made by working parties on the remaining four draft proposals. These are:

- 1. proposal for amending the existing regulations and Directives on bank capital requirements;
- 2. proposal for a directive amending the directive on bank recovery and resolution as regards the loss-absorbing and recapitalisation capacity of banks;
- 3. proposal for a regulation amending regulation 806/14 on the EU's single resolution mechanism as regards the loss-absorbing and recapitalisation capacity of banks;
 - 4. proposal for a regulation establishing a European deposit insurance scheme.

The first three proposals - issued by the Commission in November 2016 - are aimed at reducing risk in the financial system by making banks more resilient to external shocks. They are designed to incorporate into EU law standards agreed at the global level by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision and the Financial Stability Board. The final proposal sets out to establish an EU-level insurance scheme (European deposit insurance scheme) to strengthen the protection of bank deposits. Work will now continue at a technical level on these proposals.

Ministers were also debriefed on the state of play of current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

On the remaining portion of the agenda, Ministers were also informed on the state of play as regards:

1. work aimed at tackling high levels of non-performing loans in Europe;

- 2. the Midterm review of the Capital Markets Union action plan; and
- 3. progress made on the implementation of the action plan for strengthening the fight against terrorist financing.

The Council will return to the first two topics in July with a view to adopting draft Council conclusions.

The Council also held a discussion on the 2017 European Semester and the corresponding Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs). The Council approved the CSRs for onward transmission to the June European Council for endorsement with a view to final adoption at the July ECOFIN Council.

Finally, Ministers made decisions under the Stability and Growth Pact to abrogate the Excessive Deficit Procedures for Portugal and Croatia. Also, a recommendation was made to Romania to correct a significant deviation from the adjustment path towards its medium-term budgetary objective.

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme

118. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his Department's work on allocating additional resources for infrastructure investment in view of the Taoiseach's decision to abandon the 45% debt-to-GDP ratio; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31493/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The 45 per cent debt-to-GDP target is currently under review and an update will be provided in the Summer Economic Statement to be published in July.

Regarding infrastructure investment the Government has acknowledged the need for, and is conscious of the importance of, boosting the supply of critical infrastructure.

The current Capital Plan sets a baseline from which the Government intends to increase investment in critical infrastructure, including in areas such as housing and health.

As outlined in the 2017 Estimates, gross voted capital expenditure will increase to €4.5 billion in 2017. This represents an increase of €325 million in comparison to the 2016 outturn. By 2021 it is envisaged that Gross Voted Capital Expenditure will reach €7.3 billion, an increase of over 100 per cent in comparison to its level in 2014.

These increases in investment over the coming years will be allocated to identified priorities on the basis of the outcome of the review of the Capital Plan currently underway.

European Banking Sector

119. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the implications of the European Commission's approval of a €17 billion bailout for troubled Italian banks and the implementation of the banking recovery and resolution directive; the discussions that his Department has had with the European Commission concerning this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31494/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In November 2016, as a Risk Reduc-

tion Measures (RRM) package, the European Commission proposed amendments to the following key pieces of legislation:

- The Capital Requirements Regulation and Directive (CRR and CRD IV), which were adopted in 2013 and which provide the prudential requirements for institutions and rules on governance and supervision of institutions operating in Europe.
- The Bank Recovery and Resolution Directive and the Single Resolution Mechanism Regulation (BRRD and SRMR) which were adopted in 2014 and which set the rules on the recovery and resolution of failing institutions and establish the Single Resolution Mechanism, respectively.

These amendments aim to tackle remaining weaknesses by implementing some outstanding elements of the reform agenda, which are essential to ensuring the resilience of the banking sector.

The Council Working Party on Financial Services met 16 times during the Maltese Presidency to examine the RRM package and will continue its examination during the current Estonian Presidency.

In relation to the recent bailout of two Italian banks, I am informed by the Central Bank that on 23 June 2017, the Supervisory Board of the European Central Bank made a determination of 'Failing or Likely to Fail' (FOLTF) with respect to Veneto Banca and Banca Popolare di Vicenza, and duly informed the Single Resolution Board (SRB).

However, the Single Resolution Board (SRB) decided that resolution action was not warranted with respect to these two banks on the same day. This decision was based on the application of the public interest assessment (PIA), which concluded that neither of these banks provide critical functions, and that their failure is not expected to have significant adverse impact on financial stability.

As a result, the winding up of both banks is taking place under national insolvency proceedings launched by the Italian authorities. This is in line with the principles of the BRRD.

Outside the BRRD, EU rules foresee the possibility for governments to seek EU Commission approval for the use of national funds to facilitate liquidation by mitigating negative regional economic effects. In this case as the two aided banks will exit the market the EU Commission found that there should be no distortion of competition in European banking markets. Liquidation is largely a national competence and powers and procedures can vary by EU Member State.

Consequently, the Italian Government received approval from the EU Commission to provide support to facilitate the liquidation or these two banks, part of which involved the sale of certain assets to Intesa Sanpaolo. The measures enable the sale of parts of the two banks' activities to Intesa, including the transfer of employees. The measures will also enable the wind-down of the remaining liquidation entity, financed by loans provided by Intesa. The Italian State will grant the following measures:

- Cash injections of €4.78bn; and
- State guarantees of a maximum of €12bn, notably on Intesa's financing of the liquidation process. The State guarantees would be called upon if the liquidated estate were insufficient to pay back Intesa for its financing of the liquidation process.

In both banks, shareholders and junior creditors have fully contributed, reducing the costs

to the Italian Government, whilst depositors were protected.

State Banking Sector

120. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to sell additional stakes in a bank (details supplied); his further plans to fast-track the sale of the stake; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31495/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the State last week sold 25% of AIB's ordinary share capital at a price of €4.40 per share for consideration of almost €3 billion. The State also granted an additional over-allotment option over a further 3.75% of AIB's ordinary share capital as part of this transaction. Hence unless some of these shares are bought back in the market by our stabilisation agent in the period post floatation, the State will recoup around €3.4 billion from the IPO. This transaction was strongly supported by a broad range of international institutional investors with all of the top investors being categorised as longer term investors and sovereign wealth funds.

Following the AIB IPO the State's remaining shareholding in the bank is in a 'lock-up' period of 180 days. This is standard market practice. I would therefore expect no further sale of AIB shares in 2017. After this period elapses, officials in my Department will revert to monitoring the performance of the bank, its share price and equity markets more generally to determine the next sensible opportunity to realise value from our investment. It is important to point out that exiting our full investment in AIB in a measured way that maximises proceeds is likely to take a number of years but I am confident that we will recoup all the money that we invested in the bank over time.

Under the Programme for a Partnership Government any future sale of AIB shares contemplated before the end of 2018 would need to be approved by the Government.

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

121. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to help SMEs tackle the challenges they face in view of Brexit, in particular providing credit for SMEs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31496/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, there are already significant Government measures to support the financing needs of SMEs and these will be available to assist SMEs deal with the effects of Brexit. These include the Supporting SMEs Online Tool, the Credit Review Office, the SBCI, the Microenterprise Loan Fund, Local Enterprise Offices and the Credit Guarantee Scheme.

Government policy is focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources. In terms of monitoring the credit requirements for SMEs, officials from my Department collate and examine data from AIB and Bank of Ireland on a monthly basis, including data pertaining to the various sectors. Furthermore, my officials meet the banks on a quarterly basis to ensure an informed understanding of the wider SME bank lending environment which assists the development and implementation of policies aimed at ensuring SME access to finance and increased competition in the SME lending sector.

My Department also commissions biannual surveys to ascertain the demand for credit by

SMEs. This survey series, most recently conducted by Behaviour & Attitudes on behalf of my Department, is the most comprehensive survey of SME credit demand in Ireland, covering 1,500 respondents and involving over 6,000 direct telephone calls to SMEs. SMEs of all sizes trading in all sectors, excluding property development and speculative activities, are included. The survey covers demand for credit from both bank and non-bank sources.

I would draw the Deputy's attention to the most recently published Department of Finance SME Credit Demand Survey, covering the period October 2016 to March 2017 available on www.finance.gov.ie. The results of this survey show that, when pending applications are excluded, 88% of credit applications to banks were approved or partially approved. Working capital/cash flow requirements are now provided as the main reason for applying for bank finance with 31% stating this is why they requested bank finance. When asked about sources of finance for working capital, internal funds/retained earnings were the main finance source of working capital with 78% of working capital coming from this source (up 5%). The survey also showed that the number of businesses reporting a profit has increased for the fourth year in a row, and a higher proportion of SMEs than ever are pursuing a growth strategy.

The Government remains committed to the SME sector and sees it as the key engine of ongoing economic growth. I can assure the Deputy that my Department, working with other relevant Departments, Bodies and Agencies, is currently examining additional policy measures that may be required to assist SMEs deal with the impact of Brexit.

Credit Unions

122. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the actions his Department will take on foot of the CUAC report Viability and Irish Credit Unions on 19 May 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31497/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) carried out a survey of credit unions and also a viability study of credit unions, both of which were published on the Department of Finance website on 19 May 2016.

These were used to inform part of CUAC's work in reviewing the Implementation of the Recommendations set out in the Report of the Commission on Credit Unions which was published on the Department's website on 6 July 2016.

This Report provides an in-depth analysis of the sector from a financial perspective and CUAC also met with a range of stakeholders to ensure a balanced report providing focused and effective recommendations. Recommendations were provided under seven specific headings: tiered regulation, section 35, consultation and engagement with the Central Bank, governance, restructuring, business model development and additional matters.

An Implementation Group is now in place and has held six meetings to date. This group consists of members from credit union representative bodies ILCU, CUDA, CUMA and NSF; a CUAC representative; a Central Bank member and is chaired by the Department of Finance. Work is continuing on developing each of the recommendations for implementation at the appropriate time.

Banking Sector

123. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his engage-

ment with the public banking investigation being conducted by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31499/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government commits the Government to thoroughly investigating the Sparkassen model of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions in the context of the provision of finance to Irish SMEs. The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is the lead Department in respect of this commitment, with support from my Department.

As part of this commitment, a consultation process was undertaken. This process involved consultation with stakeholders and interested parties, including Sparkassen, Irish Rural Link and the Public Banking Forum of Ireland. Following the conclusion of this consultation process, a report is now being finalised by officials from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional and Rural Affairs assisted by officials from my Department.

The report will set out the Irish banking context as well as analysing the responses to the consultation on public banking and its applicability in Ireland. It will then set out the findings and conclusions of the investigation of the Sparkassen model of local public banking which will be used to inform policy considerations.

The Deputy may wish to note that there are already significant Government measures in place to support the financing needs of SMEs. As well as the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), there is the Supporting SMEs Online Tool, the Credit Guarantee Scheme, the Microenterprise Loan Fund, Local Enterprise Offices and the Credit Review Office.

Commercial Rates Impact

124. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the direct link between the valuations process and the commercial rates system; his plans to examine the impact this business tax has on local business conditions and cost-competitiveness. [31500/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The valuations process is a matter for the Minister for Justice and Equality and commercial rates are a matter for the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. As I do not have responsibility for either area, I am not in a position to comment on any link between the valuations process and commercial rates.

Property Tax Administration

125. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the cost associated with establishing the local property tax system, including the self-assessment valuation mechanism; and the annual cost associated with administering and collecting the local property tax. [31504/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the cost associated with establishing the Local Property Tax (including the arrears of Household Charge) and the ongoing annual costs are set out in the tables. The figures provided cover the full cost of the development, including the self assessment valuation mechanism, and the cost of administration of LPT for each year. It includes all pay and non-pay costs.

Also included is the amount of LPT collected each year.

Local Property Tax Costs 2012 - 2016

| | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|------------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Total Cost | €2.3m | €27.1m | €20.1m | €13.6m | €13.3m |

Local Property Tax Collected 2012 - 2016

| | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|-------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Total Yield | | €262m | €519m | €474m | €468m |

Tax Data

126. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the yield from the special domicile levy on high net worth persons; the number of persons subject to the levy; the number of non-residents paying the levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31506/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Domicile Levy was introduced in the 2010 Finance Act and is payable on or before 31 October in the year following the valuation date on a self-assessment basis. For example, the due date in respect of 2015 was 31 October 2016. The valuation date is 31 December each year.

The table sets out the number of persons who have filed Domicile Levy returns and the amount collected since commencement. The table excludes 2016, which is not due until 31 October 2017.

| Levy Year | No. of Persons | Amount Collected (€m) |
|-----------|----------------|-----------------------|
| 2010 | 32 | €3.43 |
| 2011 | 33 | €3.69 |
| 2012 | 24 | €2.44 |
| 2013 | 20 | €1.90 |
| 2014 | 13 | €2.02 |
| 2015 | 13 | €2.30 |

Tax Yield

127. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated loss of income to the Exchequer in respect of bogus self-employment which forces low-income workers to register as self-employed, causing a loss to the Exchequer in income tax, PRSI and USC; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31507/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that my predecessor Minister Noonan covered this matter in a reply provided to the House on the 18th May this year.

I am informed by Revenue that, as there are no statistics available to it in respect of the number of individuals who would come within the terms of the Deputy's question, it is not possible to provide the estimate sought.

However, Revenue continually monitors developments to ensure that its compliance programmes, including joint initiatives with the Department of Social Protection, are tailored to meet evolving risk areas. Revenue's focus is on protecting the various income streams to the Exchequer across all tax heads, including VAT, customs duties, income tax, USC and corpora-

tion tax. Revenue conducts a full range of interventions to combat tax evasion. These include risk management interventions, Revenue Audits and Investigations, in addition to site visits. This process is aided by Revenue's Risk Evaluation Analysis and Profiling ("REAP") system and other third party data sources.

Of particular interest in the context of the Deputy's question is that in 2016 Revenue carried out a comprehensive programme of site visits in the construction sector. This involved 2,126 site visits during which 11,699 interviews were undertaken. The programme resulted in 345 reclassifications from self-employed contractors to employees, 848 employee registrations and 84 employers registering to operate PAYE.

In addition, in the course of a range of Revenue outdoor activities outside of the construction sector during 2016, Revenue activity resulted in 184 re-classifications from self-employed to employees and 1,192 employee registrations.

As the Deputy is aware also, the consultation process on "the use of intermediary-type employment structures and self-employment arrangements and their impact on tax and PRSI" invited submissions from interested parties on possible measures to address the loss to the Exchequer that may arise under two sets of arrangements:

- where an individual, who would otherwise be an employee, establishes a company to provide his or her services, and
- where an individual, who is dependent on, and under the control of, a single employer in the same manner as an employee, is classified as a self-employed individual.

I understand that officials from my Department and the Department of Social Protection, together with Revenue, are currently in the final stages of completing a report on the consultation. As soon as the report on this process reaches me, and my colleague the Minister for Employment and Social Protection, we will consider its contents and then I expect we will publish it.

Stability and Growth Pact

128. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if progress has been made in the reform of EU fiscal rules in respect of allowing capital investment and the ongoing review of the capital plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31508/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the fiscal rules to which Ireland is subject have direct application through a number of EU regulations. Changes to these regulations would have to follow the normal EU approach starting with a proposal from the Commission before consideration by Member States and the European Parliament.

The issue of facilitating greater flexibility in the application of the fiscal rules has received significant focus at European level and framed discussions on the establishment of the structural and investment clauses, which were codified by the Commission in November 2015. Specifically these provisions allow for temporary deviations from the required structural budgetary adjustment, subject to strict conditions.

The harmonised methodology for calculating the economic cycle used in the implementation of the SGP remains an area with limitations within the fiscal rules. My Department has secured useful changes to this methodology over the years by consistently raising concerns and objections at European level. These changes have partially compensated for the reality that the harmonised methodology is not suitable for small open economies. My Department continues

to advocate for improvements in the harmonised methodology and will continue to engage constructively on this and other relevant technical issues.

The Government has repeatedly acknowledged the need for increased public investment. The current Capital Plan sets a baseline from which this Government intends to increase investment in critical infrastructure, and in areas such as housing and health, as the Deputy has identified into the future. As outlined in the 2017 Estimates, gross voted capital expenditure will increase to €4.5 billion in 2017. This represents an increase of €325 million in comparison to the 2016 outturn. By 2021 it is envisaged that Gross Voted Capital Expenditure will reach €7.29 billion, an increase of over 100 per cent in comparison to its level in 2014. These increases in investment over the coming years will be allocated to identified priorities on the basis of the outcome of the review of the Capital Plan currently underway.

It should be further noted that the SGP has a feature designed to promote capital investment in the expenditure benchmark. Capital formation increases are smoothed over four years with the result that only one quarter of the increase in public investment must be funded in the first year from within the fiscal space. This provision, which means increases in capital spending for housing and other purposes can be front-loaded within the EU rules, has been utilised in Ireland's budgetary plans.

To date, Ireland has not been eligible to apply for the use of the investment or structural reform clauses. While this remains the case in relation to the investment clause, Ireland is moving into a position where it could apply for use of the structural reform clause.

The Deputy should also be aware that any decision to increase capital expenditure over and above already planned levels would need to balance the danger of potentially over-heating in the economy with the need to address infrastructure priorities and risks such as Brexit. The rainy day fund is one measure announced by the government which would provide a prudent counter cyclical buffer to the economy. This is currently under review and further information will be provided in the Summer Economic Statement (SES) to be published in July.

Customs and Excise Controls

129. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the steps the Revenue Commissioners have taken to identify possible customs posts on the Border; the locations that have been examined for these posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31509/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government's position in relation to the border with Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit is very clear. Continued freedom of movement, absence of a "hard" border, and protection of the Good Friday Agreement are key objectives for the Irish Government. The arrangements that will apply after Brexit will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the EU and UK. The Government is clear that any manifestation of a hard border would have very negative consequences. A key priority is to ensure the continued free flow of trade on the island and the need to avoid a hard border. Clearly in this regard the closer the trading relationship between the UK and EU is more generally the better.

I would point out that the guidelines for the EU 27 Article 50 negotiation framework specifically refer to the need to support and protect the achievements, benefits and commitments of the Peace Process. In this regard the guidelines recognise the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, outlining the need for flexible and imaginative solutions, including the aim of avoiding a hard border, while respecting the integrity of the Union legal order.

The Government has welcomed the EU's negotiating guidelines as reflecting Ireland's unique concerns and priorities. They express the EU's continued support for the Peace Process and the need to protect the Good Friday Agreement. They acknowledge the need for flexible and imaginative solutions to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. They agree to the recognition of existing bilateral agreements and arrangements between the UK and Ireland, which are compatible with EU law, such as the Common Travel Area. It is clear, however, that the withdrawal of a Member State from the Union is a situation without any precedent, in either political or practical terms. That said, we are looking at other border situations which may offer possible guidance on how we address the unique situation found on the island of Ireland.

Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base Proposals

130. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he has had with his ECOFIN colleagues in view of the recent developments in respect of the common consolidated tax base; the steps he has taken in the interests of protecting the State's tax sovereignty; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31510/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The European Commission's proposal for a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB) was published in October 2016 and discussed at the November 2016 ECOFIN meeting where initial impressions of the proposal were exchanged. That meeting was attended by my predecessor Minister Noonan.

At the December 2016 ECOFIN, Council Conclusions were approved in respect of the Commission's wider package which included the CCCTB proposal but there was no specific discussion of the proposal at that meeting.

Since my appointment as Minister for Finance, I attended the June ECOFIN where CCCTB was not on the agenda and was not specifically discussed.

The CCCTB is a complex and detailed proposal and Member States need to analyse fully its potential impact on national tax systems. Member States have begun to discuss and debate the various aspects of the proposal in the relevant tax working parties. Ireland is engaging constructively in these discussions while continuing to assess whether it is in line with our long-term interests.

Member States maintain full sovereignty on tax matters and unanimity is required before any proposal can be agreed.

Insurance Costs

131. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the measures he plans to implement to deal with the escalating costs of insurance premiums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31511/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My predecessor as Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan T.D., established the Cost of Insurance Working Group in 2016 in consultation with the Central Bank and other Departments and Agencies.

The initial focus of the Working Group was the issue of rising motor insurance and its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, which are clearly set out in an Action Plan. 45 of these action points are due to be implemented by the

end of this year with the remainder scheduled for completion before the conclusion of 2018.

There is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress and the first such update was published in early May.

My Department will publish the second quarterly update shortly. This update will again show the progress to date on the overall implementation of the recommendations, with a particular focus on the 17 action points which are due for completion in the second quarter of 2017.

It should be noted that the most recent CSO data indicates that private car premiums have reduced by 8.5% year-on-year. I do, however, accept that while CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures only represent a broad average and that there are many people who are still seeing increases. I take the view that while the greater stability in pricing is a good thing, premiums are still at a very high level.

However, I do believe that the implementation of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance will make a difference to the pricing of insurance premiums over the next 18 months. I also believe that the Setanta judgment, by finding that MIBI is not liable to meet third party claims, removes a major uncertainty from industry, which I would expect to be reflected in pricing in the short to medium term.

Tax Data

- 132. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons with an annual income over €100,000. [31516/17]
- 133. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of self-employed persons that are subject to the 3% USC levy which is assessed on an individual basis on income over €100,000. [31517/17]
- 134. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated income that would be raised by increasing the self-employed levy on income over €100,000 of 3% to 10%, respectively. [31518/17]
- 135. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated income that would be raised from introducing a new USC levy on all income earners with individual income over €100,000 of 2% to 7%, respectively, to be applied in the same way in which USC is currently applied on an individual basis. [31519/17]
- 136. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons liable for PAYE that have employer PRSI applied on an individual basis on annual income of over €100,000. [31520/17]
- 137. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of abolishing the 3% USC surcharge on the self employed with income over €100,000. [31521/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 to 137, inclusive, together.

The personal tax system is comprised of two charges, income tax and USC, each of which has a different tax base. For the purposes of income tax, Revenue records incomes at tax unit level (married persons or civil partners who have elected or who have been deemed to have elected for joint assessment are counted as one tax unit) rather than at the individual level. However, using Income Tax returns information it is possible to identify the incomes of indi-

viduals used to assess USC liability, which is an individualised tax. On this basis, using information for the year 2015, the latest year for which data are available, 81,794 individuals had annual income for the purposes of USC of over €100,000.

As regards the 3% USC surcharge applicable to self-employed income in excess of €100,000, 12,299 persons were subject to the charge in 2015, the latest year for which data are available.

I am advised by Revenue that the estimated first and full year yields to the Exchequer of increasing the self-employed levy on income over $\[\in \] 100,000$ as set out by the Deputy are outlined in the table below. These estimates have been developed on the basis that the proposed levies would replace the existing 3% USC levy on self-employed income earners who earn in excess of $\[\in \] 100,000$.

| USC levy on self-employed with income in excess of €100,000 | First Year (Millions €) | Full Year (Millions €) |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 3% | No Change | No Change |
| 4% | 23 | 41 |
| 5% | 46 | 82 |
| 6% | 69 | 123 |
| 7% | 92 | 164 |
| 8% | 115 | 205 |
| 9% | 138 | 246 |
| 10% | 160 | 287 |

As regards the cost of abolishing the 3% USC surcharge on the self-employed with income over $\[\in \] 100,000, I$ am advised by Revenue that the estimated first and full year cost to the Exchequer of this measure is $\[\in \] 69$ million and $\[\in \] 123$ million respectively.

As regards introducing a new USC levy on all income earners with individual income over €100,000, the estimated first and full year yields to the Exchequer of introducing the measures as set out by the Deputy are outlined in the table below. These estimates are net yields derived on the basis that the proposed USC levies would replace the existing 3% levy on self-employed income earners who earn in excess of €100,000. The estimates therefore incorporate both the cost of abolishing the current 3% levy on self-employed income and the yield from introducing a new levy at the specified percentage on all income in excess of €100,000.

| USC levy on all individual income in excess of €100,000 | First Year (Millions €) | Full Year (Millions €) |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 2% | 84 | 79 |
| 3% | 160 | 180 |
| 4% | 236 | 280 |
| 5% | 312 | 381 |
| 6% | 388 | 482 |
| 7% | 465 | 583 |

In relation to the number of persons liable for PAYE that have employer PRSI applied on an individual basis on annual income of over €100,000, I would point out that PRSI is applied to earnings on a weekly basis and not by reference to cumulative annual income. I am informed by the Department of Social Protection that, in 2016, there were 197,902 employments which had a weekly income of over €1,923 in at least one week of the year. However, this does not

necessarily mean that annual income was over €100,000 for each one of these employments, as to reach this amount annually would require 52 weeks of employment at this income.

These above figures are estimates from the Revenue tax forecasting model using latest actual data for the year 2014, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are estimated by reference to projected 2017 incomes. They are provisional and may be revised.

Tax Data

138. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the sectoral breakdown of revenue returns in each of the years 2013 to 2016, including PAYE, corporate tax, self employment and those employed via RCT1s, in tabular form. [31551/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that a tax receipts by sector table is available on the Revenue Statistics website at: http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/receipts/receipts-sector.aspx.

This table provides the annual net receipts for PAYE, self employed Income Tax and Corporation Tax, as well other taxes, and is broken down across the various sectors for the years 2011 - 2016.

I am further informed by Revenue that RCT is a withholding tax that applies to certain payments by principal contractors to subcontractors in the construction, forestry and meat-processing industries and a sectoral breakdown is not available.

Departmental Staff Data

139. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Finance the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin to County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31778/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I wish to inform the Deputy that there are a number of ways for staff to apply for a transfer.

Staff can apply directly to the Department/Office they wish to move to or apply for a "Head to Head" transfer via their Union Magazine. My Department would not initially be aware of such applications made by a member of staff through their Union Magazine.

In relation to the Deputy's question, in 2015, three staff based in Dublin applied to be transferred to my Department's Tullamore Office. Of the three, one staff member has since transferred to my Department's Office in Tullamore and another member of staff transferred to the D/PER Payroll Shared Services Centre in Tullamore.

Also in 2015, two staff based in my Department's Tullamore Office applied to be transferred to the Department's Office in Dublin. Of the two, one staff member has since transferred to the D/PER Payroll Shared Services Centre in Tullamore.

There were no applications for transfer from staff in 2016 and 2017 to a location outside County Dublin or from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform conducted a pilot of a Service Wide Mobility Scheme in a limited number of locations earlier this year. It is hoped that Phase 1 of the Scheme will be launched some time in Q3 2017. My Department will then be aware of any transfer applications made through that forum for staff at Executive Officer and Clerical Officer level.

Departmental Staff Data

140. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the grades of persons working in the national shared services office; if these posts are permanent; if positions become vacant, if the persons will be replaced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30883/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The National Shared Services Office (NSSO) is established on an administrative basis within my Department. In the conduct of its business the NSSO employs staff at the following grades:

- Deputy Secretary
- Assistant Secretary
- Principal Officer
- Assistant Principal Officer
- Higher Executive Officer
- Executive Officer
- Clerical Officer

All of the above posts are permanent posts and positions are filled when they become vacant in line with business requirements and expenditure management guidelines. Recruitment to these posts is governed by the Public Service (Management and Recruitment) Act 2004. Under the Act, the method of appointment to a permanent Civil Service post is as a result of being successful in a competition run by the Public Appointments Service (PAS) or by another licence holder such as the head of a Department or Office. Selection processes are open to all eligible applicants who meet minimum entry criteria.

The NSSO also employs staff at Temporary Clerical Officer level. These posts are temporary and while in the main, vacancies in the Civil service are filled on a permanent basis, temporary vacancies arise from time to time to cover such absences as maternity leave or shorter working year. Temporary Clerical Officer (TCO) positions in the Civil Service are filled by an annual competition conducted by the PAS.

Decisions on the filling of posts, permanent or otherwise, in other public service bodies are a matter for the employing bodies in the context of their business needs.

Flood Relief Schemes Applications

141. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason for the delay in the OPW formally approving the lower Morrell river flood relief scheme and the funding of same in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30948/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Kildare County Council (KCC) is the Contracting Authority for the Lower Morrell River Flood Relief Scheme and the Council is managing and overseeing the necessary work to progress and deliver the scheme.

The OPW has now written formally to KCC confirming its approval to provide the necessary funding to the Council to bring the scheme to completion.

I am advised that the documentation required to submit the scheme for planning approval is almost finalised and it is expected that the scheme will be submitted for approval shortly.

Public Sector Pensions

142. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has given consideration to removing or extending the mandatory retirement age within the public service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31298/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): An Interdepartmental Working Group, chaired by my Department was established in 2016 to examine the issues arising from prevailing retirement ages for workers in both the public and private sectors, in the context of the current age of entitlement to the State Pension and the scheduled increases to the State Pension age in 2021 and 2028.

The Group, whose Report was agreed by Government last August, considered policy around retirement age in both the public and private sectors, examining implications arising from retirement ages now and in the future. The Group identified a set of framework principles to underpin policy in the area and made a number of recommendations assigned to Government Departments and Employer bodies for follow-up in that regard. A copy of the Report is available online at http://www.per.gov.ie/en/report-of-the-interdepartmental-group-on-fuller-working-lives.

On foot of one of the recommendations of the Report my Department, with Public Service employers, was tasked to review the current statutory and operational considerations giving rise to barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce up to and including the current age of entitlement to the Contributory State Pension. In the context of the review, which is well advanced, meetings were held with employers from all public service sectors, including the civil service, local authority and health sectors, supplemented by further interactions and discussions with the employers.

Future policy in this area will be considered by Government following the outcome of the review

Any change in the compulsory retirement ages for public servants would require primary legislation.

Public Expenditure Policy

143. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on the IMF projection that Ireland will have the lowest level of public spending to GDP ratio in the entire eurozone by 2021 with current policy trends; and his further views on whether such a low level of spending will have consequences for the future provision of public services and infrastructure. [31356/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are a number of issues affecting cross country comparisons of public expenditure both now and in the future:

- 1. Revisions to Ireland's GDP level for 2015, published by the CSO, highlight that the ratios based on public expenditure as a percentage of GDP must be interpreted with very significant caution.
- 2. Furthermore, given Ireland's relatively young population, adjusting for the demographic profile of the population also impacts on comparisons with other European countries. This is illustrated on page 14 of the Mid-Year Expenditure Report 2016 which shows adjusted public expenditure in Ireland in 2014 (as a % of GNI) being above the EU average when account is taken of defence and age-related expenditure.
- 3. Analysis of public spending on a per-capita basis can also provide a different perspective. A recent analysis by the Nevin Economic Research Institute found that Ireland ranks 10th amongst 11 high-income EU countries when public expenditure, excluding interest, is ranked on a per capita basis. This analysis placed Ireland's public expenditure per capita ahead of per-capita expenditure in the UK. A comparison based on expenditure as a percentage of GDP would place Ireland's spending below the UK.

Budget 2017 marked the third year in succession that gross voted expenditure has been increased. Over the period 2015 to 2017 gross voted expenditure has increased by an annual average of 3 per cent. The focus over the coming years must remain on sustainable increases that are affordable both now and in the future.

There is also a requirement to examine not only the amount of resources allocated towards expenditure but also the impact of this expenditure. In this fiscal context, the ongoing review and evaluation of existing programmes and expenditure, rather than targeting a certain expenditure to GDP ratio, can better support effective delivery of public services.

Debt Collection

144. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the details of measures to improve debt collection across Government; and the administrative costs associated with debt collection initiatives across Government, in tabular form. [31503/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In 2013 the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform commissioned a review of the management of debt across five areas: the HSE, Local Government, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and the Courts Service. Following a procurement exercise, BearingPoint were appointed to conduct the review.

The Debt Management Review was published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in July 2014. The review contained a number of cross-departmental recommendations such as data sharing, attachments to bank accounts/earnings, cross-sectoral sanctions and offsetting against state payments. A copy of this review is available on the Department's website.

Arising from the initial review, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform established a Debt Management Implementation Project Board to carry out a number of measures to improve levels of debt collection across the five in-scope bodies. This Project Board was chaired by Lorcan O'Connor, Director of the Insolvency Service of Ireland and was comprised of senior representatives from in-scope bodies and relevant Departments. The Department also

procured and contracted a Project Manager with significant expertise in the field of debt collection to administer this programme of work.

A detailed outline of the work of the Project Board is contained in the final report of the Debt Management Implementation Project. This document is also available on the Department's website.

The Project Board's final report sets out the significant progress that has been made since the publication of the initial Debt Management Review in 2014. Since the original Review was published, collections covering the periods of 2014 and 2015 increased by over €160m.

Improvement programmes introduced by the Debt Management Implementation Project Board (including qualitative and quantitative targets for 2016 - 2018) have been set for each of the in-scope public service bodies. If implemented successfully, the improvement programmes for 2016-2018, in tandem with improved economic conditions, are projected to contribute an additional $\[epsilon]$ 700m in collections for the exchequer.

Finally, in order to encourage consistency across the Public Service concerning how debt is managed, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform procured and published a best practice guide on debt management. The Department also provided Finance Officers across Government with a set of sample policies and procedures in relation to the management of debt.

The costs associated with this cross-Departmental programme of work are outlined in the following table:

| Programme Item: | Successful Tenderer: | Cost (including VAT and expenses): |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Review of Debt Manage- | BearingPoint | €135,514 |
| ment (published in July 2014) | | |
| Project Manager for the | BearingPoint | €220,147 |
| Debt Management Imple- | Bearing omt | 0220,117 |
| mentation Project | | |
| Best Practice Guide for | BearingPoint | €30,387 |
| the Management of Debt | | |
| in Public Service Bodies | | |
| (including a set of sample | | |
| policies and procedures) | | |

National Training Fund

145. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 369 of 20 June 2017, if it is possible to vary the rate employers pay in the national training levy to the proposed employer contribution mechanism according to the assumed benefit they derive from higher education training or alternatively to varying contributions by sector whereby employers in more high skilled sectors pay a higher contribution, which was not addressed in the original response. [30873/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue the Deputy raises regarding the use of differential rates was one of a number of issues raised in the recent consultation process that the Minister for Education and Skill and I held.

As I highlighted in my previous response to the Deputy, both Departments are now actively considering all of the issues raised as part of the consultation process including the specific mat-

ter referred to in the Deputy's question.

This consideration will include how to ensure greater employer engagement with the Fund and the types of programmes it funds. This will be to ensure that all sectors, including those who feel furthest removed from the benefits of the Fund, have the opportunity to engage with and benefit from the Fund.

It is also important that there is greater transparency on what and how the fund delivers on its core objectives - coupled with an administratively straightforward and transparent mechanism for funding the NTF, from both business and the State perspective.

National Training Fund

- 146. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 369 of 20 June 2017, if the National Training Fund Act 2000 was amended appropriately, if it would be possible to use a portion of the accumulated surplus and-or annual surplus of the NTF for capital funding in the further or higher education sectors. [30874/17]
- 147. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on whether it is justified to ask employers to contribute more to the NTF via the employers' levy in view of the fact that the fund already has such a large surplus which is not being used. [30876/17]
- 148. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 369 of 20 June 2017, if he will answer the original question which requested information on whether he has sought approval from EUROSTAT on whether it would be permissible under the fiscal rules to use the surplus from the National Training Fund levy for capital expenditure, which was not answered in the original response. [30877/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 to 148, inclusive, together.

The Fiscal Rules were not developed by Eurostat and they have no oversight on the assessment of compliance, therefore it is not necessary to consult with or seek approval from them. The assessment of compliance is undertaken by the European Commission (EC) in terms of the EU Fiscal Rules and by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC) in terms of the domestic Budgetary Rule.

The EC and IFAC use the Eurostat estimates of General Government Expenditure on the European system of accounts 2010 basis (ESA 2010) to assess the growth in expenditure year-on-year to determine whether Ireland complies with the spending growth limits set out by the Expenditure Benchmark. The operation of the Expenditure Benchmark is set out very clearly in the Vade Mecum of the Stability and Growth Pact, published by the European Commission.

As set out in the Vade Mecum, the only means by which to increase expenditure beyond the limits set out in the Expenditure Benchmark is through the introduction of a Discretionary Revenue Measure (DRM), which would cause revenues to permanently increase. The use of a fund surplus does not count as a DRM and cannot therefore be used to fund additional expenditure over and above the limits set out in the Expenditure Benchmark.

However, the introduction of an increased employer PRSI contribution to go directly towards the NTF would constitute a DRM, as this is a policy decision to permanently increase

revenue flows into the fund. The additional revenues raised by such a measure could then be used to fund additional NTF expenditure and provision of services.

Regarding the Deputy's question on the justification to ask employers to contribute more to the NTF while the Fund carries a significant surplus. Firstly, I would stress that the Fund, including its surplus, as set out in the legislation, can only be specifically used to raise skills of those in employment, to provide training to those who are wishing to acquire skills to take up employment or to provide information on the existing and future skills need of the economy.

Regarding using the NTF for capital expenditure; as previously indicated the implications of using the fund for any other purpose, including capital expenditure, requires consideration of whether the utilisation of the surplus would be in conformity with the Expenditure Benchmark rule since as set out above, use of the surplus would consume fiscal space. To increase expenditure from the NTF, as the Deputy suggested, requires a policy decision to permanently increase revenue flows into the fund - in this instance a proposed increase in the NTF levy. It is the additional revenues of this policy change that can then be used for future funding needs. The current surplus in the Fund does not represent additional revenues.

Public Sector Staff

149. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the implementation of the interdepartmental report on fuller working lives to review the public service workforce, particularly relating to the age of retirement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30882/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): On foot of one of the recommendations of the Report of the Interdepartmental Group on Fuller Working Lives, my Department, with Public Service employers, was tasked to review the current statutory and operational considerations giving rise to barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce up to and including the current and planned age of entitlement to the Contributory State Pension.

In the context of the review, which is well advanced, meetings were held with employers from all public service sectors, including the civil service, local authority and health sectors, supplemented by further interactions and discussions with the employers.

Future policy in this area will be considered by Government following the outcome of the review, at which time the report of the review will be published.

Any change in the compulsory retirement age for public servants will require primary legislation.

Departmental Staff Data

150. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin to County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30975/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department does not currently hold central information on the numbers on transfer lists. This informa-

tion, where available, is held by individual Departments only.

As you will be aware, Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan has a commitment to develop a mobility scheme within the Civil Service. Work on this scheme is ongoing with the Civil Service Management Board, Departments and staff interests.

We are currently developing Phase 1 of the scheme for the general service grades of CO – EO which we plan to launch later in the year. Phase 2 of the scheme will be developed following implementation of Phase 1 and will include the general service grades of HEO, AO and AP.

The scheme will be centralised and my Department will have the facility to report on numbers on lists per department and location following its successful launch.

In relation to staff within my own Department, the central Department has offices in Dublin and Tullamore. Information is not available on actual transfer applications outside of the Department as where staff apply for a transfer, these requests are usually made directly to the department/office which they are looking to transfer to.

My Department is also responsible for the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) and the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) and I have provided the information in relation to these organisations separately below, along with the response from the Office of Public Works

National Shared Services Office (NSSO) Staff

The NSSO Offices are located in Dublin, Renmore, Co Galway, Killarney, Co Kerry and Tullamore Co. Offaly. There have been no requests for lateral moves to Dublin from NSSO locations outside County Dublin.

Office of Government Procurement (OGP)

The OGP Offices are located in Dublin, Trim (Meath), Sligo, Cork and Limerick. The number of transfer requests are set out as follows.

| | Date | | | |
|---|------|------|------|--------|
| Requests | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | Totals |
| Requests | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | Totals |
| Transfer requests for NSSO locations outside Dublin | 5 | 13 | 1 | 19 |
| Transfer requests for OGP locations outside Dublin | 2 | 5 | 1 | 8 |
| Transfers Approved | | | | |
| Internal Transfers from Dublin to NSSO locations outside Dublin | 6 | 3 | 0 | 9 |
| Internal Transfers from Dublin to OGP locations outside Dublin | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |

Office of Public Works (OPW)

In relation to the Office of Public Works, one civil servant who is currently assigned to the Dublin Office has requested a transfer out of Dublin.

In addition, the number of State Industrial Employees who have requested a transfer to Dublin is 4 and the number requesting a transfer out of Dublin is 6.

Public Sector Pensions

151. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding the restoration of pension payments to public sector workers who had their pensions cut in the past number of years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30989/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) reduces the value of those public service pensions which have pre-PSPR values above specified thresholds. It does so in a progressively structured way which has a proportionately greater effect on higher value pensions.

A very significant part-unwinding of PSPR in three stages is taking place under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2015, with PSPR-affected pensioners getting pension increases via substantial restoration of the PSPR cuts on 1 January 2016, 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018.

On 1 January 2016 all pensions of up to at least \in 18,700 became exempt from PSPR; from 1 January 2017, all pensions of up to at least \in 26,000 are now exempt from PSPR, and from 1 January 2018 all pensions of up to at least \in 34,132 per year will be exempt from PSPR. Those pensioners not fully removed from the reach of PSPR by dint of these changes will, in the majority of cases, benefit by \in 1,680 per year from 2018. The cost of these changes is estimated at about \in 90 million on a full-year basis from 2018.

Community Sector High Level Forum

152. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a report on the work of the high level forum on the community and voluntary sector which is led by his Department; the names of those on the forum; the number of times the forum has met; and the specific issues the forum is currently working on. [31073/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Community Sector High Level Forum was reconvened in 2015 since when it has met four times. Previously approved meeting minutes are publicly available on my Department's website and contain the names of the participants on the Forum.

The Forum is tasked with providing for the exchange of views on a range of issues relating to the sector and is currently considering the specific matter of pension provision for Community Employment scheme supervisors. A detailed scoping exercise is currently underway on this matter and will be concluded later this year.

The position has always been that FÁS or the Department of Social Protection is not the employer and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme to employees of private companies even if those companies are, or were, reliant on State funding. In considering the matter, I must have regard to costs and the precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created.

Departmental Expenditure

153. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 394 of 20 June 2017, the amount spent by each Depart-

ment on courses at an institution (details supplied) for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31078/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have included a table provided by the Institute of Public Administration which sets out the amount spent by each government department on programmes at the Institute over the past five years.

The table does not take account of income derived from accredited programmes from certificate to doctorate level. These programmes come under the Post Entry Education Scheme where the fees are paid directly by the student to the IPA and a refund is received by the student from their own parent Department.

Each Department is responsible for the operation of the Post Entry Education Scheme in that Department. The information in respect of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is as set out in the second table.

| Department | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 YTD | Total |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| Agriculture | 33,811.00 | 6,782.00 | 6,640.00 | 45,536.55 | 810.00 | 93,579.55 |
| Arts | 8,110.00 | 34,379.27 | 10,386.25 | 68,672.53 | 9,990.00 | 131,538.05 |
| Children | 250.00 | 19,319.00 | 23,687.00 | 23,235.00 | 26,745.00 | 93,236.00 |
| Communications | 1,700.00 | 9,276.46 | 5,455.00 | 20,803.00 | 100.00 | 37,334.46 |
| Defence | 42,689.61 | 37,739.96 | 37,119.78 | 36,349.96 | 3,041.65 | 156,940.96 |
| Education | 20,590.00 | 24,219.62 | 3,095.00 | 49,786.84 | 25,004.74 | 122,696.20 |
| Finance | 16,407.17 | 25,555.13 | 10,686.72 | 26,988.50 | 4,680.00 | 84,317.52 |
| Foreign Affairs | 28,736.70 | 17,327.50 | 19,139.22 | 51,765.10 | 20,600.00 | 137,568.52 |
| Health | 11,927.50 | 22,870.00 | 18,095.00 | 65,640.00 | 27,510.00 | 146,042.50 |
| Housing | 57,759.60 | 92,921.65 | 73,535.52 | 169,157.31 | 24,327.50 | 417,701.58 |
| Jobs | 15,742.00 | 10,365.48 | 22,325.00 | 18,670.00 | 7,205.00 | 74,307.48 |
| Justice | 3,150.00 | 19,445.00 | 11,033.99 | 72,665.00 | 21,500.00 | 127,793.99 |
| Public Expenditure | 37,481.97 | 27,520.95 | 124,049.10 | 76,095.65 | 2,600.00 | 267,747.67 |
| Social Protection | 15,529.79 | 15,107.42 | 12,700.00 | 48,818.67 | 9,170.00 | 101,325.88 |
| Taoiseach | 0 | 3,570.00 | 3,295.00 | 1,750.00 | 5,450.00 | 14,065.00 |
| Transport | 2,785.00 | 24,890.00 | 22,470.00 | 19,407.44 | 12,625.18 | 82,177.62 |
| | | | | | | 2,088,372.98 |

Department of Public Expenditure & Reform

Post-Entry Education Spend - 2013-2017

| Academic Year | Educational Institute | Total |
|---------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 2013-2014 | IPA | €40,300.00 |
| 2014-2015 | IPA | €43,940.00 |
| 2015-2016 | IPA | €180,515.00 |
| 2016-2017 | IPA | €122,835.00 |

Brexit Data

154. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31278/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The head of my Department's Brexit/EU/North South Unit is responsible for coordinating Brexit issues in the Department. The Unit oversees Brexit work across the Department and acts as the contact point with the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade and other Government Departments. It is represented on the Inter-Departmental Group on Brexit and related groups, and supports me in my work on Brexit. Brexit issues are also addressed by staff in relevant areas across the Department. The cost of the Brexit/EU/North South Unit is met from within the Department's existing budget and is kept under review.

Appointments to State Boards

155. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of vacancies, including vacancies on boards and so on, advertised via the Public Appointments Service in 2015 and 2016 by Department and agency; the number of interviews held by the Public Appointments Service for each vacancy; the criteria for assessment in the event of interviews not proceeding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31329/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am assuming the deputy is referring to vacancies on State Board.

Guidelines on appointments to State Boards were issued in November 2014 and since then all vacancies on State Boards are advertised on the portal, www.stateboards.ie, operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Each vacancy sets out specific and detailed criteria and the PAS operate a transparent assessment system to evaluate all applications against these criteria. All Information Booklets are available in the archive section at www.stateboards.ie/stateboards/archive.htm.

Full details on the number of campaigns and vacancies on State Boards advertised since the introduction of the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards to date are available at www. stateboards.ie/stateboards/activitiesStatistics.htm.

The design of the assessment process in respect of any individual board vacancy may include all the usual and standard elements of assessment processes including formal interviews.

Over 2015 and 2016, some 122 campaigns were advertised and for 11 of those campaigns the Assessment Panels met with candidates.

The names of applicants deemed to meet the criteria are then forwarded to the Minister for

Special Educational Needs

156. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made on the commitment in the programme for a partnership Government to introduce a new in-school speech and language therapy service creating stronger linkages between parents, teachers and speech and language therapists (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30871/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Programme for a Partnership Government states that a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy will be established. It also contains a commitment to examine the adequacy of the present policies and provision, and their scope for improvement, particularly in relation to speech and language difficulties and early intervention.

As Speech and Language Therapists are currently employed by the Health Service Executive (HSE), officials at my Department are engaging with colleagues in the Department of Health and the HSE to review the existing level of Speech and language therapy provision and to conduct an audit of services nationally.

The review is being overseen by the Interdepartmental Cross Sectoral team which has a role to coordinate and integrate the provision of health and educational services.

At the Cross-Sectoral Team meeting of 24 May last, the HSE informed the group that it has reviewed the provision of Speech and Language Therapy services and that the report of the national group was completed at the end of March.

The report is currently being considered by the National Directors for Primary Care and for Social Care and it is expected that this report will be circulated as soon as possible thereafter.

The review of existing services will guide the implementation of the Programme for Government commitment.

Pending the development of any new speech and language therapy delivery model my Department continues to provide an extensive range of supports for pupils with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD), through the provision of special classes for pupils with SSLD in primary schools, and through additional Special Educational Needs teaching supports provided to all schools

National Training Fund

157. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the fact that in every year since its establishment except for 2012 and 2014 there was an annual surplus in the National Training Fund, including in years with very significant increases in unemployment and training needs of the population; his further views on whether the size of the accumulated surplus of the fund and the fact that it is not even used in times of high unemployment indicates that the fund is not being well managed and used appropriately to fund national training needs; and the rationale for having such a large surplus in the fund when it is not used during times of national employment crisis. [30875/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):

The amount collected through the National Training Fund levy has varied over the last number of years due to increases and more recently decreases in unemployment levels. Receipts went from a high of €413m in 2008 to €299m in 2012 and have increased to €364m in 2015 and €390m in 2016 reflecting the continued improvement in employment levels in recent years.

The accumulated surplus in the fund has been critical in maintaining expenditure levels, particularly in the provision of training for the unemployed, in the years when receipts were falling. It is considered prudent to continue to maintain an adequate surplus in the Fund to meet demand in future years and it should be noted that, while the current surplus of €232 million represents a very significant sum, it would only cover 9 months NTF expenditure at current levels. A total of €362 million has been available annually over the last number of years from the NTF for training for employed and unemployed people. In 2017, funding of €366 million will be provided for training activities from the NTF.

While the NTF does not form part of the Vote of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the allocation for each scheme is determined as part of the annual Estimates process. The NTF is included as an annex to the published Estimates of the Department and such funding is included in the overall expenditure ceiling for DES since 2011. This means that overall expenditure from the Fund cannot be increased, even where receipts increase, without a corresponding drop in voted expenditure. The surplus remains available for investment in education and training programmes to meet skills needs.

I am reviewing the allocation of funding to programmes in the Further Education and Training and Higher Education sectors as between NTF and Exchequer sources in terms both of the emphasis required on training for employment and training persons in employment and of satisfying the needs of enterprise to meet strategic skills requirements. One objective of this review is to direct NTF allocations in a manner that best reflects enterprise priorities as identified through the revised national skills architecture.

Student Grant Scheme Expenditure

- 158. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of increasing the non-adjacent maintenance grant to €4,025 for full-time students at undergraduate and postgraduate level, respectively. [30801/17]
- 159. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of increasing the adjacent maintenance grant to €2,215 for full-time students at undergraduate and postgraduate level, respectively. [30802/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 159 together.

Based on data for the 2015/16 grant scheme, the estimated cost of increasing the 100% maintenance grants by €1,000 would be €26.7m for adjacent students and €29.2m for non-adjacent students.

Extending the 100% maintenance grants to postgraduate students and increasing the current values by €1,000, is estimated to cost €2.6m for adjacent students and €5.1m for non-adjacent students.

Student Grant Scheme Expenditure

- 160. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of extending a non-adjacent maintenance grant to €4,025 to part-time students at undergraduate and postgraduate level, respectively. [30803/17]
- 161. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of extending the adjacent maintenance grant to €2,215 to part-time students at undergraduate and postgraduate level, respectively. [30804/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that the student grant scheme is not currently available to part-time students. As such, it is difficult to provide costings for this cohort of students.

However, based on enrolment data for part-time students provided by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the estimated cost of increasing the current value of the 100% adjacent and non-adjacent grants by $\[\in \]$ 1,000 and extending them to part-time undergraduate students, would be in the region of $\[\in \]$ 19m and $\[\in \]$ 20.6m per year respectively.

The estimated cost of increasing the current value of the 100% adjacent and non-adjacent grants by $\in 1,000$ and extending them to part-time postgraduate students, would be in the region of $\in 3.5$ m and $\in 3.8$ m respectively.

Apprenticeship Programmes

162. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide a breakdown of the €99 million allocation for apprenticeships in 2017; the outcomes of this expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30808/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): A budget allocation of \in 98.7 million has been made available for apprenticeship training in 2017. This is an increase of almost 42% on the 2016 spend of \in 69.6 million.

- €77.4 million has been allocated to SOLAS for both craft and new apprenticeships in the further education and training (FET) sector. The SOLAS allocation also funds training allowances for apprentices on craft trades during all off-the-job phases, including the time they spend in Institutes of Technology.
- €21.3 million has been made available to the HEA to fund the training costs of craft apprentices and new apprenticeships in the Institutes of Technology.

School Accommodation Provision

163. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for additional accommodation for a school (details supplied); the proposed timeframe for a decision on this application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30827/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to confirm to the Deputy that the school in question has submitted an application to my Department for capital funding for additional school accommodation. The application will be assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process has been completed.

The Deputy will be aware that my Department provided significant funding to the school in 2015 to construct four classrooms and the building project is now nearing comple-

tion. In addition, my Department approved grant to the school earlier this year to construct a Home Economics Room.

School Accommodation

164. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for additional accommodation by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30841/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, the school to which he refers submitted an application to my Department, for significant capital funding for improved school accommodation. The application was considered in the context of the very significant challenges facing my Department in prioritising available capital funding for essential mainstream classrooms to meet the demand for extra school places and in cases where additional teachers have been appointed. The school in question has not been sanctioned an additional teaching post and on that basis, my Department was not in a position to provide grant to the school. My Department wrote to the school authority last February explaining the position.

The delivery of new schools together with extension projects to meet future demand will be the main focus of the Department's budget for the coming years.

Schools Building Projects Status

165. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a school building project for a school (details supplied); if the grant has been confirmed in writing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30862/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that funding for the school to which is refers has been approved to provide 1 mainstream classroom with en-suite toilets and 1 WC for assisted users. As usual when funding for a building project is approved, this has been conveyed to the School Authority in writing.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

166. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if it is a constitutional right for a child to receive additional care and special support in a school with six children with learning difficulties. [30884/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the Constitution, the State provides for education and where the public good requires it, to provide other educational facilities or institutions rather than to provide education directly. The Education Act 1998, subject to the provisions of that Act, provides that there is made available to each person resident in the State a level and quality of education which is appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person.

My Department's policy is that children with special educational needs should be included in mainstream placements with additional supports provided, unless such a placement would not be in their best interests or in the interests of the children with whom they are to be educated, as is provided for under Section 2 of the Education of Persons with Special Needs Act 2004.

Students with special educational needs have access to a range of support services including additional teaching and/or care supports. Some children may be supported in mainstream with additional supports or in a special class attached to a mainstream school. Students in a special class have the option, where appropriate, of full/partial integration and interaction with other pupils. Other children may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school. In special schools and special classes, students are supported through lower pupil teacher ratios. My Department, therefore, provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools, which have enrolled pupils with special educational needs, in order to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled, s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through its network of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports as required. The NCSE operates within the Department's criteria in allocating such support, as set out in various Departmental circulars.

Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are provided to assist recognised schools to cater for pupils with disabilities, who have additional and significant care needs, in an educational context and where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in medical and other professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require additional adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at www. education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed. My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools, as a school based resource. The NCSE allocates a quantum of SNA support for each school annually, taking into account the care needs of all of the qualifying children enrolled in the school, and on the basis of the assessed care needs of all of the children concerned, rather than solely by reference to a pupil's disability categorisation.

The provision of a quantum of support to schools gives schools the autonomy and flexibility to manage their allocation of SNA support in order to utilise this support to the best possible effect. It allows schools to target support to those pupils who have the greatest degree of need at any given time, recognising that the level of need that a child may have may be variable over time. The school is in a position to use their educational experience and expertise to manage the level of support which has been allocated to them to provide for the care needs of identified children as and when those needs arise and to provide access to SNA support for all children who have been granted assess to support.

Where a school or parent wishes to appeal the SNA support allocation which has been made, they may do so through the NCSE appeal process, details of which are set out at www.ncse.ie.

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO and parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

From September 2017, a new Special Education Teaching allocation process will be introduced, replacing the generalised allocation process at primary and post primary school level for learning support and high incidence special educational needs, and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) allocation process which provided additional resource teaching sup-

ports to schools, to support pupils assessed as having Low Incidence disabilities.

The aim of this new model is to deliver better outcomes for children with special educational needs. Substantial research, analysis, consultation with service users and stakeholders, and piloting have gone in to the development of this model and all of the evidence points to the fact that this new system will deliver better outcomes for children.

No school will lose supports as a result of the implementation of the new model. In addition, no school will receive an allocation, for the support of pupils with complex needs, less than the allocation they received to support such pupils during the 2016/17 school year.

DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published and allocations based on the school profiles were issued to all schools on 7th March 2017. Details of the special education teaching allocations have also been published on the NCSE website.

Guidelines for schools on the organisation, deployment and use of their special education teachers to address the need of pupils with special educational needs have also now been published and are available on my Department's website.

The Guidelines will support schools to reflect on how they can review and manage their timetabling practices to ensure the timetable is sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all pupils in their school who have special educational needs. The Guidelines encourage schools to ensure they deploy their resources appropriately to meet the needs of all of the children in their school who require additional teaching support, including pupils with emerging needs, or new entrants.

The total profiled allocation which is being made to each school is designed to ensure that all schools have a set level of special education teaching support in order to provide additional teaching support for all pupils in their school, including those who may enrol in future, who have identified needs.

Pupils under the new allocation model will be identified by schools for additional teaching support in accordance with the Continuum of Support Guidelines, and the Guidelines which accompany the Circulars 0013/2017 and 0014/2017. Teachers and School Principals will use their professional judgement in applying the principles and practices set out in the Continuum of Support Guidelines: https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/National-Educational-Psychological-Service-NEPS-/neps_special_needs_guidelines.pdf.

In circumstances where a parent is dissatisfied as to the extent of additional support teaching time which has been allocated to their child from within a schools allocation, the normal course of action open to a parent would be to raise this matter with the school Principal in the first instance, and to request that additional teaching be provided to their child.

In the event that a parent raised an issue in relation to the allocation of additional support for their child with the school Principal, and remains dissatisfied with the manner in which the school Principal addressed their complaint, the next course of action open to the parent would be to raise this matter directly with the Board of Management of the School, who are the body which has responsibility for the management of the school.

Education and Training Boards Staff

167. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention

has been drawn to the case of a person (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30889/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The person referred to by the Deputy is, I understand an employee of Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board (WWETB).

ETBs are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate second-level schools, further education colleges, multi-faith community national schools and a range of adult and further education centres delivering education and training programmes. Each ETB is responsible for the management of their own HR functions to include administration of the relevant pension scheme.

In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, WWETB have informed my officials that the employee concerned was admitted to the relevant Education Sector Pension Scheme (SI 290 of 2015) from 1 September 2015. She recently entered into an agreement with WWETB, to purchase service prior to her admission to the pension scheme. This service will on the payment of the relevant contributions become reckonable for pension benefits on retirement. The arrangements for payment of contributions for that service, which I understand will be paid over a number of years, were agreed between the employee and the ETB. It is a matter for the employee concerned to engage with her employer WWETB on any issues arising from this agreement.

Schools Property

168. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when he will approve the sale of an old school building (details supplied) in County Dublin; if he will investigate this delay and take the necessary steps to ensure approval is forthcoming; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30910/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There is a charging lease in place on the property referred to by the Deputy which means that I have a vested interest in the property. I can confirm that my Department has received a request from the property owner to release my interest.

My Department has considered the above request. In principle, there is no objection to the request to use the property for community purposes. Officials in my Department will be in contact with the property owner to inform them of the steps which need to be taken in order to release my interest in the property.

National Training Fund

169. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the proposed Exchequer employer investment mechanism which would enable the NTF to be used to fund higher education institutions will require legislative amendment to the National Training Fund Act 2000. [30911/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Funding from the NTF is allocated by my Department with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, in accordance with the provisions of the National Training Fund

Act, 2000.

Section 7 of the National Training Fund Act, 2000 provides that payments may be made from the Fund in respect of schemes, which are established to:

- (a) raise the skills of those in employment;
- (b) provide training to those who wish to acquire skills to take up employment; or
- (c) provide information in relation to existing, or likely future, requirements for skills in the economy.

The proposed exchequer employer investment mechanism which would enable an increase in the National Training Fund Levy to be used to benefit Further Education and Training and Higher Education would require legislative amendment. The National Training Fund Levy is set at 7% in the National Training Fund Act 2000 and any increase in this rate would require an amendment to the legislation.

National Training Fund

170. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 528 of 20 June 2017, if under the National Training Fund Act 2000, the annual surplus not the accumulated surplus which was €54 million in 2016, can be used to fund education undertaken at higher education institutions. [30912/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): While the NTF does not form part of the Vote of my Department, the allocation for each scheme is determined as part of the annual Estimates process. The NTF is included as an annex to the published Estimates of my Department and such funding is included in the overall expenditure ceiling for the Department since 2011. This means that overall expenditure from the Fund cannot be increased, even where receipts increase, without a corresponding drop in voted expenditure.

The surplus in the NTF in 2016 cannot be used to fund education undertaken at higher education institutions without my Department's overall exchequer funding being reduced by a similar amount.

Education and Training Boards

171. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 559 of 20 June 2017, if he will answer the question and provide details of all funding to each ETB from 2014 to 2017 which is channelled through SOLAS from his Department (details supplied); and if his Department does not have access to this data, his views on whether this is acceptable. [30914/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Parliamentary Question No. 559 was interpreted in my Department as referring to funding provided directly by my Department to VEC/ETBs.

Data on the funding provided by SOLAS to ETBs for the period 2014 to date in 2017 follows:

| | 2017 to June 2017 | | 2016 2015 | |
|------------------------|-------------------|---------|-------------|---------|
| | Total | | Total Total | |
| | €'000 | €'000 | €'000 | €'000 |
| Cavan and Monaghan | 8,376 | 14,632 | 8,340 | 6,896 |
| City of Dublin | 40,162 | 79,752 | 82,017 | 85,963 |
| Cork | 25,404 | 50,592 | 49,018 | 51,938 |
| Donegal | 10,156 | 20,435 | 22,354 | 14,697 |
| Dublin & Dun Laoghaire | 30,984 | 65,681 | 64,302 | 68,916 |
| Galway & Roscommon | 16,206 | 32,230 | 32,947 | 24,798 |
| Kerry | 12,554 | 24,439 | 24,354 | 24,997 |
| Kildare & Wicklow | 14,583 | 26,667 | 20,263 | 17,107 |
| Kilkenny & Carlow | 8,692 | 14,230 | 7,363 | 7,408 |
| Laois & Offaly | 7,888 | 14,646 | 7,507 | 7,892 |
| Limerick & Clare | 25,451 | 49,934 | 53,944 | 34,751 |
| Longford & Westmeath | 11,890 | 22,655 | 34,520 | 24,360 |
| Louth & Meath | 14,895 | 29,684 | 28,354 | 23,161 |
| Mayo, Sligo & Leitrim | 15,308 | 30,585 | 27,848 | 20,782 |
| Tipperary | 8,498 | 13,567 | 8,221 | 6,987 |
| Waterford & Wexford | 23,139 | 48,503 | 56,025 | 38,111 |
| Total | 274,186 | 538,232 | 527,377 | 458,764 |

School Transport

172. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the school transport supports available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30937/17]

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 almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 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.

Under the terms of the school transport scheme for children with special educational needs children are eligible for transport where they:

- have special educational needs arising from a diagnosed disability in accordance with the designation of high and low incidence disability set out in Department of Education and Skill's (DES) Circular 02/05

and

- are attending the nearest recognised: mainstream school, special class/special school or a unit, that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs.

Eligibility is determined following consultation with the National Council for Special Education through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO).

My Department has not received an application for school transport for the child in question.

In this regard, the family should liaise with the School Authorities and the SENO, attached to the school, if they wish to make an application for the 2017/18 school year.

Capitation Grants

173. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the capitation levels per pupil to primary schools and to post primary schools; and the estimated cost of restoring capitation levels for both to pre 2010 levels. [30940/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Currently, the capitation grant is \in 170 per pupil at primary level and \in 296 per pupil at post-primary level.

The estimated cost of restoring capitation grants in primary and post-primary schools to pre 2010 levels is circa €35m.

I do recognise the need to improve capitation funding for primary schools having regard to the aforementioned reductions.

The Action Plan for Education outlines hundreds of actions to be implemented over the 3 year period 2016 to 2019 which include restoring capitation funding as resources permit.

Budget 2017 represents the start of a major programme of reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade.

In relation to capitation funding this commitment remains a priority for me to address during the lifetime of the Action Plan.

School Funding

174. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of equalising school funding between voluntary secondary schools and community and comprehensive secondary schools. [30942/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The funding arrangements in the Community & Comprehensive sector and the ETB sector are primarily based on budgets determined by the Department. The enrolment in the individual schools is the main driver of the level of these budgets.

The funding arrangements in the Voluntary Secondary School Sector are based on per capita grants provided by the Department. Some equalisation measures were introduced to rectify historical inconsistencies in the funding arrangements for this sector of post-primary schools. It is estimated that up to €21m has been provided in equalisation funding between 2001 and 2009.

The level of disparity in the funding arrangements between the three sectors would need to be revisited to determine what remains to be done on the equalisation agenda.

Schools Healthy Living Strategies

175. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to publish a strategy, plan or guidelines on the availability of foods high in fat, salt and sugars and on vending machines in secondary schools; and the guidelines at present to schools on the availability of such foods in vending machines in schools. [30943/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is active in the area of promotion of health and wellbeing in schools. The issue of promoting healthy eating is addressed in schools through subjects such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), and Home Economics as well as in Physical Education. The aim is to equip students with such skills and knowledge to enable them to make appropriate choices for healthy lifestyles. This informed approach will help to reduce the incidence of obesity in our young people. Many post-primary schools have a number of food outlets, including school shops and vending machines. My Department acknowledges that the sale of food and beverage products often represents a revenue stream for schools and it is not the intention to end this practice. Rather the intention is to ensure that there is a greater proportion of healthier alternatives to some of the less healthy products that are currently on offer for sale in schools. Boards of Management and Principals are encouraged to provide as far as possible that only healthy products are available for purchase on school premises.

Schools are strongly encouraged to have a formal healthy eating policy that has been developed in consultation with students and parents.

Guidelines are available to schools on Developing a healthy eating policy in Post-Primary Schools, which have been developed by the Department of Health and HSE. The healthy eating policy should outline how the school supports healthy eating practices through the promotion of healthy lunches and healthy snacks and other means.

My Department issued a circular to all post primary schools in September 2015 on the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles in Post Primary Schools (Circular number 0051/2015).

Schools Mental Health Strategies

176. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made on the national roll-out of the headstrong help seeking schools based substance misuse programme to all schools. [30944/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware my Department adopts a holistic and integrated approach to supporting the work of schools in promoting positive mental health and to supporting those with the broad range of problems, behavioural emotional and social.

The processes span the curriculum in schools, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support and pastoral care and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves other supports such as educational psychological services and guidance and counselling services, and the interface with other agencies, both nationally and locally. Schools also engage in a wide range of sport and cultural co-curricular activities which provide an important opportunity for students to experience success and personal growth.

Wellbeing Guidelines for Post-Primary and more recently for Primary Schools have been produced by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive. The guidelines are informed by consultation with key Education and Health partners and by the findings of current research. They provide practical guidance to schools

on how they can promote mental health and well-being in an integrated school-wide way and they also provide evidence-based advice on how to support young people who may be at risk of suicidal behaviour.

The Guidelines build on the significant work already taking place in schools, including through the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, the whole-school guidance plan, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) continuum of support model and the HSE, Health Promoting Schools Process. Information is also provided on how to access support from the SPHE Support Service and other external agencies and support services.

The Headstrong Help Seeking Schools Programme initiative is one of a range of external resources and initiatives that are available to assist, among others, schools in supporting various aspects of a positive mental health process. My Department is not in a position to endorse each individual initiative, and it is a matter for individual schools to determine which of these resources they choose to access. My Department's advice is that schools in the first instance should implement the guidelines document effectively and when considering collaborating with external agencies in doing work in the area of mental health promotion, schools should be particularly cognisant of my Department's circulars 0022/2010 and 0023/2010 which provide advice on best practice in this regard.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Schools Site Acquisitions

177. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board, KWETB, has concluded its examination of the options for the site for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30949/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that a range of issues relating to the opening of the school referred to by the Deputy are matters for discussion between Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and An Foras Pátrúnachta. My Department will continue to work closely with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and An Foras Pátrúnachta in relation to the provision of appropriate accommodation for the establishment of the school to which the Deputy refers.

Schools Building Projects

178. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the design team for a school (details supplied) has submitted the stage 2b submission including review arising from changes in public work contracts; if submitted, when his Department will complete its review and sanction the seeking of tenders for the new school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30950/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Board of Management is the client for the major building project at the school to which the Deputy refers all correspondence issues from the Design Team to the Board. The Department has not received the Stage 2(b) submission to date.

Upon completion of the review of the Stage 2(b), once submitted and subject to no further issues arising, the Department will revert to the school at that time regarding the further pro-

gression of the school building project.

Schools Building Projects Status

179. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received the tender documents and stage 2 (b) documentation for a school (details supplied); if not, if his Department will contact the design team to inquire as to the delay in submitting the documentation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30951/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm for the Deputy that the school and its design team have not yet submitted the report to my Department. My Department has contacted the Design Team Leader directly and has been informed that the design team QS is currently in the process of completing the Bill of Quantities and the Stage 2(b) cost plan. The stage 2(b) report will then be submitted by the Design Team to my Department for review.

Upon receipt and review of this outstanding documentation the Department will revert to the Board of Management with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

Schools Building Projects Status

180. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the stage 2(b) cost check for a school (details supplied) has been submitted to his Department for approval; if tender documents have been submitted for approval; when sanction to seek tenders will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30952/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has not yet received a Stage 2B submission for the project to which the Deputy refers.

As soon as the Stage 2b submission is received it will be reviewed. On completion of the review my Department will revert to the school authority with a timeframe to proceed to tender and construction.

Schools Building Projects Status

181. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a design team will be appointed for the required extension to a school (details supplied) further to the site visit undertaken by his Department to the school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30953/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which she refers was included in my Department's 6-Year Construction Programme. Following the site visit which has been undertaken, my Department will formulate a schedule of accommodation for the proposed project. My Department will be in further contact with the school when this element has been completed.

Schools Amalgamation

182. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if will review

a plan sent in by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30958/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the schools in question will amalgamate from 30 August 2017 and the Patron has been advised accordingly. The amalgamated school will continue to operate from the schools existing school buildings.

School Staff

183. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the approximate cost of restoring the staffing schedule for retaining and gaining a teacher that applied for schools pre-2012. [30968/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

Budget 2012 increased the appointment and retention ratios for small schools (i.e., schools with up to four classroom teachers). Improvements to the staffing of these schools were announced for the 2015/16 school year. These improvements are improved retention thresholds for the 2nd, 3rd and 4th classroom teacher and also the improved appointment and retention thresholds for one-teacher schools situated 8km or more from the nearest school of the same type of patronage and/or language of instruction.

In addition, Budget 2016 announced a 1 point improvement to the primary staffing schedule. The improved staffing schedule which is available on the Department website has been implemented for the 2016/17 school year.

Following a review of the staffing allocation for Small Primary Schools, Budget 2017 announced two adjustments in relation to one teacher schools. Where the school is the sole primary school on an island the school will be able to appoint a second teacher. In relation to single teacher schools generally with an enrolment of 15 or more pupils the school can apply to the staffing appeal board for a second post where the single teacher has children across 6 or more class groups. The detailed arrangements have been set out in the staffing schedule circular for the 2017/18 school year.

School Enrolments

184. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) can be granted a school place to attend a school. [30972/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area.

Parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the

pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, or in the case of an Educational Training Board (ETB) school to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. Further information on the Section 29 appeals process is available on the Department's website *www.education.ie*.

The Educational Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency (EWS) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The EWS can be contacted at 01-7718500.

Psychological Services

185. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a NEPS psychologist has been assigned to school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31036/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides an educational psychological service to schools through the direct assignment of a NEPS psychologist and in some cases through by providing schools access to the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA) where 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. SCPA is utilised, in the main, where as yet unfilled vacancies exist in NEPS staffing provision locally or where staffing resource is lost through extended leave (maternity, sick or carer's leave).

I have made enquiries in the matter and can inform the Deputy that following a NEPS psychologist will be assigned to the school in question for the beginning of the new academic year.

School Patronage

186. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he will ensure that no religious belief is favoured over other religious beliefs or none in his proposed reconfiguration of church controlled schools to education and training boards; if his attention has been drawn to the widespread concern over the lack of transparency of this process; if existing patrons will have a role in determining which patron will run a school once it is reconfigured; the way in which the wishes of parents are to be determined in this process; the way the level of demand for alternative patrons is to be assessed; the persons or groups that were consulted as part of this process; the way in which he plans to proceed; and the timeframe he is working to. [31039/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, following discussions on patronage divesting with education stakeholders and patron bodies in 2016, on the 30th January, 2017, I announced new plans aimed at providing more

multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment in this area. This will involve the Education and Training Boards in the initial phase, as the State's local education authorities, identifying areas where there is likely to be demand for greater diversity and they will work with pre-school services to establish evidence of this demand among the cohort of pre-school parents. There will then be discussions between individual ETBs and the existing patrons/landowners concerning the possible transfer of schools to accommodate this demonstrated demand for diversity.

Each ETB will prepare a report for my Department outlining the levels of demand within their functional areas and the responses of the existing patrons as to how this might be accommodated through the reconfiguration of existing school provision. In the subsequent and separate implementation phase, where the level of demand for multi-denominational schools is sufficient to justify transfer of a school from denominational to multi-denominational patronage, a process will commence to give effect to that. There will be a role for the existing patron/landowner in consulting with local community and school interests, including parents and taking into account proposals from different prospective multi-denominational patrons. It is envisaged that transfers will largely be by way of voluntary transfer of live schools by existing patrons.

This new process for supporting transfers of schools to multi-denominational patrons in response to the wishes of local families is based around principles of transparency and cooperation. Therefore, there will be a very substantial level of consultation of local communities in the process, both with the ETBs in the initial phase to establish evidence of demand by consulting pre-school parents and subsequently through the requirement for the existing patron to consult with local community and school interests in proposing to transfer patronage of an existing school to an alternative patron body. In that process, the existing patron will also take into account proposals from all prospective multi-denominational patrons that wish to be considered. In the final instance, an application for a formal transfer of patronage will have to be made by the existing patron under the Education Act 1989, which will require Ministerial approval.

It is important to acknowledge the voluntary nature of these transfers, given that the current patron is in most cases the owner of the land on which the school stands. My Department will develop protocols on patronage transfer with existing patrons to ensure that school and local communities and prospective patrons are fully consulted before a decision is made. I am confident that this process will respect the views of all parties - parents, local schools and communities and patrons.

While these new structures are being introduced, my Department will continue to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified, in 2017 and beyond. I would point out that the previous model of divestment yielded only a very limited number of schools for transfer to multi-denominational patrons (10 since 2013). I believe that the new schools reconfiguration for diversity process has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system with a target of reaching 400 multi-denominational and non-denominational schools by 2030. In addition to progressing the reconfiguration of existing school provision to provide greater choice to parents in areas of stable population, the Government is committed to ensuring that parental preferences will continue to be key to patronage decisions on new schools established in areas of demographic growth.

I look forward to working constructively with all education stakeholders and patron bodies in this important endeavour and I would ask all parties to put aside sectional or self interest in pursuing the national objective of providing greater diversity of school provision in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities.

4 July 2017

Broadband Service Provision

187. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and post-primary schools that lack broadband services, by county. [31044/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Through the Schools Broadband Access Programme, the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary, post-primary and special schools. All post-primary schools are provided with 100Mbp/s connectivity.

At primary level, some 98% of schools are included in the Schools Broadband Programme, with some 1,100 schools on download speeds of 30Mbps plus (the target set out in the National Broadband Plan) by the end of 2017. Under the current programme, the Department continually reviews the availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises, within the parameters of the programme and in compliance with procurement and contractual obligations.

The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment, sets out the Department's vision for embedding ICT in teaching learning and assessment in primary and post-primary schools. A key priority of the Strategy will be to address any broadband connectivity issues experienced by primary schools. An interdepartmental working group is considering this matter at present. In this regard, my Department will also collaborate with the Department of Communications Climate Action and Environment on this issue, having regard to the National Digital Strategy.

Broadband Service Provision

- 188. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and post-primary schools that have access to broadband service that is up to 30 Mbps by county. [31045/17]
- 189. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and post-primary schools that have access to a broadband service that is between 30 Mbps and 70 Mbps by county. [31046/17]
- 190. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and post primary schools that have access to a broadband service that is between 70 Mbps and 150 Mbps by county. [31047/17]
- 191. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and post-primary schools that have access to a broadband service that is between 150 Mbps and 360 Mbps by county. [31048/17]
- 192. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and post-primary schools that have access to a broadband service that is in excess of 360 Mbps by county. [31049/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 188 to 192, inclusive, together.

Through the Schools Broadband Access Programme, the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary, post-primary and special schools. The overall policy of my Department is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line

with technical solutions available in the market and within required financial parameters. All post-primary schools have high speed connectivity under the 100Mbp/s programme.

The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the breakdown of schools broadband connection speeds by county is being compiled currently and will be issued to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Schools Building Projects Status

193. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the new permanent building for a community college (details supplied) will open in September 2018 as planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31090/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage of the tender process. My Department has reviewed the Preliminary Tender Report and has authorised the Design Team to issue a Letter Of Intent to the preferred bidder and subject to no issues arising it is envisaged that the project will commence on site later this year. As the construction period will be 24 months, the project will be scheduled for completion in 2019.

Site Acquisitions

194. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the two temporary eight classroom schools at a location (details supplied) in Dublin 24 will not be used as temporary accommodation or as a permanent site for the proposed Educate Together 1,000 pupil post-primary school to serve the wider area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31091/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the temporary accommodation will not remain at the location to which the Deputy refers following delivery of the permanent accommodation at this property. It is not proposed to accommodate the post-primary school to which the Deputy refers at this location either on a temporary or permanent basis. The post-primary school will open as scheduled in September 2018 in suitable interim accommodation.

With regard to the post-primary school's permanent accommodation, a suitable site has been identified and the Department is working towards acquiring the site. Due to commercial sensitivities relating to site acquisitions generally I am not in a position to provide further details at this time

Apprenticeship Data

- 195. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons in apprenticeship programmes in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31092/17]
- 196. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the uptake in apprenticeship programmes since the Government assumed office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31093/17]

197. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the ratio of apprentices to third level students since the Government assumed office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31094/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 to 197, inclusive, together.

The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the number of persons in apprenticeship programmes from 2011 to date is set out in the table.

Since May 2016 there has been over 4,000 new apprentices registered on apprenticeship programmes.

The latest available data for higher education enrolments is for the 2015/2016 academic year in which there were over 215,000 students enrolled on both part-time and full-time programmes. Currently, there are over 11,000 apprentices in training on various phases of their apprenticeship.

Apprentice Population 2011 - 2017

| Population at end: | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 to date |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------------|
| Total | 8,328 | 6,223 | 5,711 | 6,913 | 8,317 | 10,315 | 11,273 |

State Examinations

198. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the funding arrangements to post-primary schools for the leaving certificate applied, LCA, programme; if schools that choose to organise the LCA programme can access funding in year one of the two year programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31102/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A grant in respect of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is paid annually to post-primary schools offering the programme in June of each year. It is paid to schools for the pupils enrolled in both year one and year two of the programme. The rate is epsilon151 per pupil in accordance with Circular letter 0029/2016 which can be accessed on my Department's website.

In addition to the funding provided, schools running the LCA programme receive an additional fixed allocation of 0.5 of a teaching post. There is no minimum number of LCA pupils required for schools to secure the additional teaching allocation from my Department.

The LCA is supported by a programme of professional development from the Professional Development Service for Teachers, including seminars, online content, evening workshops and the development of an active learning toolkit for all LCA co-ordinators. This programme of support will continue in 2017/2018.

The LCA programme is one of a number of options made available by my Department for Senior Cycle students which schools can choose from, based on the education needs and interests of their students.

It is the responsibility and choice of each individual school to decide to put in place the LCA programme, based on the educational needs and interests of their students. It is also for schools to decide on the admittance of a student to the programme, in their school. Schools are encouraged to provide maximum access to these options and to have clear procedures in place regarding how the available places are allocated to students.

My Department is committed to supporting this programme, which is appropriate for members of the student cohort whose needs, aptitudes and learning styles are not fully catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes (Leaving Cert Established and Leaving Cert Vocational Programme). That is why I have asked the NCCA to consider the LCA, as part of its review of Senior Cycle which commenced in 2017. This review will help to ensure that curriculum development continues to respond to the changing needs of learners, society and the economy.

Third Level Institutions Governance

199. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to reports in the media of audits into third level institutions that have revealed a range of governance issues, including additional payments to staff and non-compliance with procurement rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31109/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The media reports referred to by the Deputy raised a number of issues that are being taken very seriously by my Department and the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

During 2015, the HEA reviewed its approach to the oversight and governance of higher education institutions and built on existing governance and accountability infrastructure with improved and more transparent mechanisms. This included:

- more comprehensive annual governance reporting requirements,
- the introduction of signed financial memoranda between the HEA and HEIs setting out respective responsibilities,
 - new guidelines on timeliness of reporting,
 - regular reporting and liaison with the Office of the C&AG and
- a new accountability and risk mechanisms in place with the Department of Education and Skills.

This culminated in the establishment and communication of a new Governance Framework for the Higher Education System, which is available on the HEA website. The framework makes clear the current governance arrangements that are in place and clearly details the responsibilities of higher education institutions (HEIs) in this area.

In addition, a new programme of rolling reviews has been established to cover specific elements of governance. My Department agreed with the HEA that the first rolling review of governance compliance would be on procurement and this review was undertaken in 2016.

The HEA has also recently announced a rolling governance review of Intellectual Property policy implementation across HEIs.

These new measures complement the previous requirements that HEIs are required to observe, and in line with a desire to continually improve the governance and accountability structure in the sector, my Department and the HEA are considering whether any additional measures may be necessary to further strengthen governance in the future.

200. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the delays experienced in commencing the construction of the permanent buildings of a school (details supplied) and the fact that the 2018 first class needs to be accommodated off campus at a site in Broombridge; if his attention has been further drawn to the concerns parents have regarding the part of the school to be relocated off site and their fears that the school will not remain on the existing campus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31110/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has been liaising with the patron body of the school referred to by the Deputy with regard to additional accommodation required for September 2017.

As the Deputy may be aware, this is a developing school located in rented temporary accommodation in Rathborne, Dublin 15 which will require two additional classrooms for September 2017. Work is ongoing to provide additional prefab accommodation at this location as soon as possible.

In the interim, a number of options were explored with the patron body of the school. Following a Board of Management meeting in May, 2017 the preferred option of the school, supported by the patron body, was to temporarily accommodate two of the classes in the nearby Broombridge Educate Together NS, Bannow Road, Dublin 7 (which is in my ownership) as a short-term arrangement only, pending delivery of the additional prefab accommodation. Broombridge Educate Together NS is a new 16-classroom school which opened in its permanent accommodation only last year with most of its purpose-built rooms available for use.

Once the prefabs are installed, the classes temporarily located in Broombridge ETNS will move back to the existing rented accommodation in Rathborne, Dublin 15.

I wish to clarify for the Deputy that the current site of the school in Rathborne, Dublin 15 is a temporary site. A suitable permanent site for the school's permanent accommodation has been identified and discussions are ongoing with the landowner with a view to acquiring this site. Following this, the project for the new school building can progress into architectural planning.

School Curriculum

201. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress that his Department has made in securing funding and resources for introduction of coding to all primary schools by 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31111/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The NCCA is in the process of developing a new primary mathematics curriculum. Following my request to consider how children's computational, flexible and creative thinking skills might be developed through this new mathematics curriculum, and how coding might be integrated in the wider primary curriculum, the NCCA is reviewing curriculum policy and practice in other jurisdictions in terms of these areas of children's education at primary level.

Currently the PDST Technology in Education provide training for both primary and post primary teachers in ICT which includes 'Scratch' coding. 5,800 teachers received ICT training in 2016.

Furthermore, a large number of schools are running voluntary coding programmes through initiatives such as Coder Dojo (over 200 dojos in Ireland), Hour of Code where over 200 events

took place in Ireland and the annual computer programming olympiad held at Dublin City University.

Further resources in this area will be looked at in conjunction with the STEM Education policy statement and implementation plan, which I intend to finalise shortly.

Higher Education Authority Administration

202. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of vacancies on the Higher Education Authority board; the duration of these vacancies; the process by which these vacancies will be filled; the timeframe for this process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31112/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The HEA Board currently comprises a Chairperson and 12 ordinary members. This includes two members who were reappointed to the Board on 20 June 2017.

I am also inviting expressions of interest, through the Public Appointments Service, for a further two academic members. This application process is currently underway and the closing date for expressions of interest is 7 July 2017.

Once these positions are filled, the Board of the HEA will comprise a Chair and 7 academic and 7 non-academic members. This satisfies the minimum number of Board members statutorily provided for under the HEA Act, 1971.

I am satisfied that the Board of the HEA is functioning effectively. However, in general, I am in favour of keeping state boards as small as possible and I will be exploring the possibility of providing, through future legislation, for a reduced minimum size of the HEA Board.

Teachers' Remuneration

203. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary teachers on his Department's payroll who are paid a qualification allowance at the pass degree rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31113/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A Qualification Allowance in respect of a Pass Primary Degree is paid to 6,632 Primary schools teachers.

The current position regarding the payment of qualification allowances is outlined in Circular 8/2013 which can be accessed on my Department website.

Teacher Data

204. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of substitute teachers employed per school day, on average, in primary schools; if these positions are taken account of in planning for the supply of teachers; if his attention has been drawn to the acute shortage of teachers to fill substitute teacher positions; his plans to address this serious issue for schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31114/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The average number of substitute teachers employed on a daily basis in primary schools is approximately 3,600.

In overall terms, my Department has no evidence of a recent or current shortage of primary teachers. However, I am aware that some schools are experiencing difficulty in recruiting adequately qualified substitute teachers, and I am committed to examining all possible means of addressing this issue.

The final report of the Technical Working Group on teacher supply, 'Striking the Balance' was published on 9 June 2017. The report focusses on the development of a model of primary teacher supply, while outlining the work which will be required to establish a sustainable long term model of post primary teacher supply. In considering the model of teacher supply at primary level the report took account of many variables, including the number of additional teachers required to cover for teacher absences, such as illness, maternity leave, career break or secondment.

The report sets out an approach to planning the work necessary to develop a model for achieving a better balance between teacher supply and demand in the medium to long term.

Officials of my Department are now considering how the development of a model can be progressed, from within available resources. The necessary actions will include engagement with the HEA in order to ensure that the supply of teachers meets demand and there is the correct balance of teachers in each of the various subject areas at post primary level, as well as measures to address data requirements, particularly at post primary level.

The Deputy will be aware that, in conjunction with the publication of the report, I announced a number of measures to increase the pool of teachers available to schools, in particular to fill short term vacancies. These measures are to be considered over the coming period with a view to having in place, where appropriate, for the beginning of the 2017/18 school year. They include: ensuring, in as far as is possible, that as many retiring and retired teachers remain on the Teaching Council register; increasing the limits for employment for a teacher while on career break; bringing to the attention of schools that final year B. Ed. and Professional Masters in Education students may be employed in for periods of up to 5 consecutive days.

Third Level Staff

205. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all the recommendations of the Cush report in respect of fixed-term workers in third level colleges have been accepted and implemented by him; if not, the specific recommendations which remain outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31115/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Report of the Chair of the Expert Group on Fixed Term and Part-Time issues in Lecturing in Ireland was published in May 2016 and the Report contains a number of recommendations that will assist in addressing concerns raised about the level of part-time and fixed-term employment in lecturing in the third level sector. My Department issued directions to the sector on 4 July 2016 to implement the recommendations contained in the report in accordance with the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement and my understanding is that the Institutions are taking steps to do so.

My officials also wrote to the universities on 27 June 2017 requesting that an adjudication system be established to hear any disputes arising from the implementation of the Cush Report.

Commencement of Legislation

206. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are remaining sections of the Teaching Council (Amendment) Bill 2015 to be commenced; the timeframe for commencing such sections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31116/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015 is fully commenced. The remaining sections were commenced in November 2016.

Teaching Council of Ireland

207. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he will address concerns that the Teaching Council, in the absence of a statutory complaints procedure for use at school level, will be expected to address complaints that are better resolved at local level, and thus have less resources to deal with very serious complaints which may arise; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31117/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the concerns of the Teaching Council to which the Deputy refers.

Under the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 the Teaching Council is the body with statutory authority and responsibility for implementation of the Acts insofar as they relate to complaints against teachers.

Section 24 of the Education Act 1998 provides for school managerial authorities to address complaints made to them about teachers where disciplinary action is considered appropriate by school management. My Department's policy is that, in general, complaints about teachers should be made to the school and matters resolved in the first instance at a local level. This is also the Teaching Council's policy.

I am informed by the Council that, where a complaint has been referred to the Council's Investigating Committee and the Committee is satisfied it relates to a Fitness to Teach matter, the Committee will communicate with the school to ascertain whether procedures under Section 24 of the Education Act or any other relevant procedures are underway.

If Section 24 procedures are neither completed, underway nor contemplated the Committee will decide if there are good and sufficient reasons for considering the complaint. If there are not good and sufficient reasons the Committee will refuse to consider the complaint in accordance with section 42(5)(b) of the Teaching Council Acts and will indicate in its reasons that the refusal is based (in whole or in part) on the absence of Section 24 procedures having been exhausted.

As the Deputy will be aware the Programme for a Partnership Government provides that the Government will introduce a stronger complaints procedure and charter for parents.

On 5 December 2016, I published the General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2016. The Government have approved the draft outline of a new law, which will require every school to consult with parents and students, and publish and operate a Parent and Student Charter.

The draft Bill went to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills for pre-legislative scrutiny. Pre-legislative scrutiny began on 7 March with officials, NGOs and certain of the education partners, followed by a session on 21 March with some more of the education partners. The Committee recently held a further session with the remaining education partners on 30

May. It is expected that the Oireachtas Committee will publish a report after the completion of the pre-legislative scrutiny process.

The Fitness to Teach provisions of the Teaching Council Acts were commenced in July 2016 and the Teaching Council is still at the early stages of dealing with Fitness to Teach complaints. The Council is developing and refining its procedures in that regard and I will, where possible, support the Council in their effective implementation.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

208. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the primary and post-primary average class size figures for the State and for other EU member states; his plans to tackle large class size concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31118/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Budget 2016 provided for an improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools by 1 point, from 1 teacher for every 28 pupils to 1 teacher for every 27 pupils for the 2016/17 school year and it should be noted that the current staffing schedule of 27:1 for primary schools has restored it to the position it was at prior to the fiscal crisis.

The Programme for Government has a commitment to reduce class sizes at primary level and it is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government.

My focus in Budget 2017 was on obtaining additional funding to provide for demographic growth, and additional special education and school leadership resources for our schools.

Budget 2017 sets out the resources available for schools in the 2017/18 school year. This Budget represents the start of a major reinvestment in education, and the first phase of implementation of the Action Plan for Education, aimed at becoming the best education system in Europe within a decade. The budget provides for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post-primary schools in the coming school year. The 2017/18 school year will see a significant increase in teacher numbers (almost 4,700) in our schools compared to the 2015/16 school year.

The Statistics Section of my Department's website contains extensive data relating to schools, including information on class sizes and Statistical reports on EU averages.

Third Level Funding

209. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to deal with concerns regarding third level student support and the funding challenges for third level institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31119/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Higher education is a central part of our plan as a Government to support a strong economy and deliver a fair society. The package of measures I announced for the sector in last year's Budget reflects this priority.

I secured an initial investment of €36.5 million in the sector in this year's Budget and €160 million overall over the next three years. This is the first significant investment in the sector in 9 years. This will allow us for the first time to keep pace with demographic increases and also introduce targeted initiatives in priority areas, such as promoting access, skills, research and

flexible learning.

In addition, my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are currently considering a proposed Exchequer-Employer investment mechanism for higher education and further education and training. The proposal under consideration seeks to deliver up to an additional €200m per annum by 2020 through an increase in the National Training Fund levy.

Proposals to develop a more sustainable funding model for the higher education system are contained in the Cassells report that is currently being considered by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills. I referred the Cassells report to the Joint Committee in order to build political consensus around the most appropriate future funding model for higher education.

In addition, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) are currently reviewing the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM) in order to ensure that the means by which funding is allocated by the HEA to Higher Education Institutions is as efficient and effective as possible.

In relation to student supports, my Department is investing in a significant programme of supports in order to assist students from under-represented groups to participate in and complete higher education. In total my Department will invest approximately €450 million in access supports in the 2017/18 academic year. This will benefit approximately 80,000 disadvantaged students through the student grant scheme. Other measures include the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

Junior Cycle Reform

- 210. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on junior certificate syllabus, subject and assessment reforms and his key priorities in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31120/17]
- 214. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the roll-out of junior cycle reform process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31124/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to takes Questions Nos. 210 and 214 together.

The Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 is designed to provide students with learning opportunities that strike a better balance between learning knowledge and developing a wide range of skills and thinking abilities. It also gives schools greater flexibility to design programmes that are suited to the needs of their Junior Cycle students and to the particular context of the school.

Implementation of the Framework is proceeding and the new subject specifications for Business Studies and Science, along with English, have now been introduced to schools. The teachers involved are benefitting from extensive continuing professional development and are availing of professional time to support implementation. English was the first subject to be taken by students as part of the reformed Junior Cycle assessment arrangements and the examination in June was well received by both teachers and students. Business Studies and Science will be examined under the new arrangements in June 2019.

Phase 3 of the Framework will begin implementation in September 2017, with the introduction of new subject specifications in Irish, Visual Arts and Modern Languages, covering French, German, Spanish and Italian. The new curriculum area of Wellbeing will also be introduced at

that time.

Phase 4 will begin implementation in September 2018 with the introduction of Mathematics, Home Economics, History, Music and Geography, with the final phase 5 being implemented from September 2019. Phase 5 subjects will include Technology subjects, Religious Education, Jewish Studies and Classics.

Croke Park Agreement

211. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will extend the work recognised for Croke Park hours to teachers' voluntary extra curricular activities which benefit students, in view of teacher concerns regarding Croke Park hours and in recognition of teacher commitment to working beyond school hours to support students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31121/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Croke Park hours are part of wider productivity measures introduced under the Public Service Agreements that require all public servants to work additional time for no additional payment.

The Croke Park hours represent a real reform with significant benefits for parents and children. In schools, the Croke Park hours are additional hours worked by teachers (33 additional hours a year at post-primary and 36 hours at primary). They are a valuable resource within the school system which allow certain essential activities involving the entire teaching staff or groups of teachers to take place. These include staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings, school planning, subject planning and mandated Continuous Professional Development.

Before the Croke Park hours were introduced, these activities ate into tuition time. This meant that schools closed for full days or half days in order to carry them out, causing interruption to tuition and significant inconvenience for parents, as well as child care costs – particularly for primary parents.

It is important to note that many public servants committed significantly more hours than this under the public service agreements. Across the public services – education, health, local authorities, civil service etc. - the additional time being provided represents about 450,000 additional hours per annum or the equivalent of between 12,000 and 13,000 public service posts. That is a serious productivity benefit for the Exchequer. Replacing those hours would cost hundreds of millions of euro.

In response to concerns expressed by teacher trade unions regarding the use of the Croke Park hours, my Department agreed to carry out a review of their usage under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. This review, which also involves the school management bodies, is under way and will have regard to teacher professional judgement, system and school requirements and experience to date of best practice in the use of the hours.

The review provides for an up-front increase in the quantum of time allowed for planning and development work on other than a whole-school basis. The original Croke Park Agreement provided that all Croke Park hours would be worked on a whole-school basis. The Haddington Road Agreement provided that up to 5 of the hours could be worked on a less than whole-school basis (e.g. small groups of subject teachers). The recent agreement increased this maximum to 8 hours in September 2016 and increases it again to 10 hours in September 2017.

212. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether there is a clear pay disparity between teachers recruited before 1 January 2011 and those recruited thereafter; his further views on whether it is unacceptable to maintain such pay disparities; his plans to address pay equality issues beyond the steps already agreed in relation to restoration of a qualification allowance payment; the cost of restoring teachers recruited since 1 January 2011 to the previous payscale; the elements which make up this cost; the number of teachers affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31122/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As a consequence of the financial crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so as to stabilise the country's public finances. These included

- a 10% reduction in the salaries and allowances payable to all new entrants to public service recruitment grades with effect from 1 January 2011;
 - that such new entrants would start on the first point of the applicable salary scale; and
 - a cap on the overall level of qualification allowances that could be earned by teachers.

Subsequently in 2012, following the public service-wide allowances review, qualification allowances for new teachers were withdrawn. However, the Government partially compensated for this by deciding that new entrant teachers would henceforth commence on a new salary scale which had a starting point higher than the starting point of the old scale.

The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I have used this to negotiate substantial improvements in pay for new teachers. The agreements have, to date, restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for new teachers and deliver full equality at later points in the scale. This is substantial progress and strikes an equitable balance with other claims for funding on my Department, particularly needs such as enhanced service for children with special educational needs, for disadvantaged schools, for growing schools, for Higher Education and for apprenticeships.

As a result of these changes and taking into account the proposed pay measures under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, the starting salary of a new teacher (2012 entrant) from 1 October 2020 onwards will be $\[\in \]$ 37,692. The comparable starting salary for a pre-2011 entrant post-primary teacher from 1 October 2020 (i.e. if full equalisation to pre-2011 pay rates for teachers was achieved) would be $\[\in \]$ 43,879 and for a primary teacher would be $\[\in \]$ 41,511.

It must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants to the public service applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service. While I am not in a position to provide an estimate of the total cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrants in all areas of the public service to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements, I can say that in the case of education and training sector employees, the estimated current full year cost would be in the order of €85 million. Clearly, the cost across the entire public service would be substantially higher.

However there are other types of equality that we must also bear in mind, for example equality between public servants and people who work elsewhere or don't work at all. It would also not be equal or fair for us to do unaffordable deals with particular groups of public servants that mean that we do not have the money left in the public purse to provide increases in social welfare payments for vulnerable groups, tax reductions for people at work, or investments in improvements in public services that people rely on.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay is a cross sectorial issue, not just an issue for the

education sector. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

Accordingly, the recently concluded draft Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 includes a provision in relation to new entrants which states that an examination of the remaining salary scale issues in respect of post-January 2011 recruits at entry grades covered by parties to the Agreement will be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement.

School Patronage

213. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the location of all schools under religious patronage that he expects to be divested in 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31123/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Government is committed to progressing the development of a dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of twenty-first Century Ireland. The Programme for a Partnership Government reflects the Government's objective of strengthening parental choice and further expanding diversity in our school system. The desire of parents for diversity in education is primarily being pursued by increasing the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030.

The Deputy will be aware that on 30 January, 2017, I announced new plans aimed at providing more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment in this area.

This will involve the Education and Training Boards in the initial phase, as the State's local education authorities, identifying areas where there is likely to be demand for greater diversity and they will work with pre-school services to establish evidence of this demand among the cohort of pre-school parents. There will then be discussions between individual ETBs and the existing patrons/landowners concerning the possible transfer of schools to accommodate this demonstrated demand for diversity. My Department is currently working with the Education and Training Board sector and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to develop the process for the identification of demand for diversity at pre-school level.

Each ETB will then prepare a report for the Department outlining the levels of demand within their functional areas and the responses of the existing patrons as to how this might be accommodated through the reconfiguration of existing school provision. The location of these schools is therefore unlikely to become available until after the reports have been submitted.

In the subsequent implementation phase, where the level of demand for multidenominational schools is sufficient to justify transfer of a school from denominational to multi-denominational patronage, a process will commence to give effect to that. There will be a role for the existing patron/landowner in consulting with local community and school interests and taking into account proposals from different prospective multi-denominational patrons. It is envisaged that transfers will largely be by way of voluntary transfer of live schools by existing patrons.

While these new structures are being introduced, my Department will continue to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified, in 2017 and beyond.

In addition to progressing the reconfiguration of existing school provision to provide greater choice to parents in areas of stable population, the Government is committed to ensuring that parental preferences will continue to be key to patronage decisions on new schools established in areas of demographic growth.

Question No. 214 answered with Question No. 210.

Schools Property

215. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the suggestions by a union (details supplied) that related capital investment will be necessary if the programme for Government commitment on having schools available for childcare services can be successfully implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31125/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The provision of funding for childcare services is a matter for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Draft guidelines on the use of school buildings out of hours are currently being prepared and will be made available further to consultation with relevant school authorities and trustees. In general, school authorities have a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to how their premises are managed and utilised at local level. The use of school facilities must be approved by the school authority.

In 2005, my Department issued a circular to Trustees, Boards of Management and Principals of Primary and Voluntary Secondary Schools (Circular Letter Prim 16/05) to encourage Trustees and Boards of Management to make their facilities available where possible for community, education and recreation purposes. This circular recognises that the decision ultimately lies with the relevant Board or Trustees and that the first priority at all times should be the interest of the school, its teachers and pupils.

An interdepartmental group with senior officials from both my Department and from DCYA finalised an Action Plan for School age Childcare which was published in early March 2017. Under the plan, capital funding of €3m is being made available by DCYA to support increased capacity for the provision of school age childcare and for improving the quality of the service provided by existing school age childcare services. A Working Group has also been established by DCYA to develop a comprehensive set of quality standards for school age childcare. The first meeting of the Working Group took place on 17 May 2017. The Action Plan is available on https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/Action-Plan-On-School-Age-Childcare.pdf.

Education and Training Provision

216. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he plans to progress the three areas in the education sector that he has identified as his core priority areas of focus in the sector including helping children with special needs, supporting schools and building a stronger bridge between education and the workplace; the reason he has prioritised these three areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31126/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Last September, I launched the first ever Action Plan for Education, covering the period 2016-2019. The central vision of the Plan is that the Irish Education and Training System should become the best in Europe over

the next decade. The Plan's high-level goals are based on the five policy areas which I believe will help us to achieve this ambition. The goals are:

- 1. Improve the learning experience and the success of learners
- 2. Improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs
 - 3. Help those delivering education services to continuously improve
 - 4. Build stronger bridges between education and wider community
 - 5. Improve national planning and support services

The basic aim of this Government is to sustain our economic progress and use it to build a fair and compassionate society. Education is the best means of delivering a fairer society, breaking down cycles of disadvantage and ensuring that all our people, in particular those with special educational needs, are able to participate in that progress and fulfil their potential. Excellent and innovative education and training are the pivot around which personal fulfilment, a fair society and a successful nation should revolve. It is central to sustaining economic success and in converting economic success into building a strong community. Having the best education and training service in Europe will allow us to provide better opportunities for more people from disadvantaged groups, as well as ensuring that we create more sustainable well-paying jobs.

Our approach to special education has undergone a huge transformation with a growing proportion of children with special educational needs being educated with their peers in mainstream schools. The participation and progress of learners with special educational needs across the whole education system remains a key focus with an emphasis on improving whole-school and whole system approaches. The Action Plan 2017 sets out a range of measures which will be undertaken during this year. These include allocating teachers to schools under the new allocation model to support children with special educational needs, publishing the outcomes of a comprehensive review of the SNA scheme, and consult with partners on the implementation of sections of the EPSEN Act and on the provision of services to children with Down Syndrome.

Quality of provision is the cornerstone to the success of the education and training system. We recognise the fundamental roles that leaders, teachers and support staff play and we want to strengthen the system's capacity to continuously improve and to deliver the highest quality education and training services for learners. The Action Plan 2017 details actions which will ensure that leadership, management, quality frameworks, teaching methods, and initial and continuing training are all operating to the highest standards across the continuum of education and training provision. These actions include expanding the range of supports available through the Centre for School Leadership, providing dedicated professional support to teachers to support the implementation of curricular and policy change, and developing and introducing a new postgraduate qualification for aspiring school leaders. Work is also under way on developing a model of supply of both primary and post-primary teachers, following the launch of a report on the subject last month. In the medium- to long- term, this will support schools through helping to match teacher supply with demand.

To become an innovation leader and to build a strong talent base, we as a nation must effectively engage with enterprise. We must work to address identified skills needs in critical areas, and recognise the shifting global economic and political climate in which services are delivered and jobs are created. Successful enterprise engagement is the foundation of much of the planned activity detailed in the Action Plan 2017. This includes driving the growth of

traineeships and apprenticeships, ensuring the relevance of work placements and work-based projects, and increasing the diversity of opportunity in learning beyond school. To advance this agenda, together with Minister Halligan, I recently launched the National Skills Council and the Regional Skills Fora. The Council's members are from senior levels within the public and private sectors, and they will oversee research, advise on the prioritisation of identified skills needs and on addressing those needs, and have a key role in promoting and reporting on the responses of education and training providers to the identified needs. The nine Regional Skills Fora will provide a cohesive education-led structure for employers and the further and higher education system to work together in addressing the skills needs of their regions, help employers to better understand and access the full range of services available across the system, enhance links between education and training providers in planning and delivering programmes, reduce duplication and inform national funding decisions.

Recently, Minister Halligan and I also announced the provision of over 6,400 free higher education places under Springboard+ 2017. This programme is specifically aimed at getting people back to work in areas of identified skills needs. To that end, courses will be available in the following areas:

- 1. ICT
- 2. Manufacturing which includes the Biopharma/Med tech sector
- 3. Entrepreneurship,
- 4. Hospitality
- 5. Financial Services

There will also be some courses in Marketing (including digital marketing), specialist management courses (Food Business, Aviation and Technology Management), Animation and specialist Construction related courses.

In order to ensure that progress is made in all of these areas, updated annual Action Plans will be published each year, detailing the actions that will be implemented during that year. As part of this process, actions will be monitored against published timelines and progress reports will be published on a quarterly basis. Recently, the 2016 End of Year Review and the 2017 Quarter 1 Progress Report were published. They are both available on the Department's website (www.education.ie), with full details of the actions already achieved in these three important areas.

Technological Universities

217. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the Technological Universities Bill2015; the timeframe for it to return to Dáil Éireann; his planned changes to the draft legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31127/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I intend bringing proposals to Government shortly seeking approval for the drafting of amendments to the Technological Universities Bill 2015 arising from the consultation process with stakeholders. I will bring the Bill back before the Houses as soon as is practicable following the drafting and approval of these amendments.

English Language Training Organisations

218. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his legislative proposals to establish a learner protection fund for students of English language schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31128/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I published the General Scheme of a Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Bill on 15 May 2017, following approval by Government. The General Scheme provides for the protection of enrolled learners through the establishment of a Learner Protection Fund.

This Learner Protection Fund will provide the type of learner protection that was initially envisaged in 2012, when the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act was enacted.

The objective is to prioritise 'academic bonding' which will enable students to complete their programme of study in the event that their provider ceases to deliver the programme, rather than 'financial bonding'.

Financial bonding provides for the refund of fees to students in the event of a programme ceasing to be delivered. While the recovery of fees is beneficial to students, the more important priority is to support learners to complete their academic programme.

It is the intention that all providers of education and training engaging with the National Framework of Qualifications, with the exception of public bodies, will pay an annual charge to the Learner Protection Fund. The Fund will be managed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland and will be used to support students to complete their studies in the event of a programme being terminated by a provider before completion.

The proposal to introduce the Learner Protection Fund has been generally welcomed by education and training providers.

The General Scheme of the Bill has now been referred to the relevant Oireachtas Committee for pre-legislative scrutiny.

School Textbooks

- 219. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his officials are examining a charity's (details supplied) proposal in its 2018 pre-budget submission to tackle the cost of schoolbooks for families and students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31131/17]
- 220. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his officials have examined the proposal by a charity (details supplied) in its 2018 pre-budget submission to increase funding of the book rental scheme by \in 15 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31144/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions No. 219 and 220 together.

My Department is aware of the proposal outlined in the 2018 pre budget submission referred to by the Deputy.

At the outset, I wish to make clear that I strongly support any measures that can be put in

place to reduce costs for parents.

School book rental schemes have an important role to play in reducing the cost of school books for parents. My Department supports the operation of book rental schemes through the funding provided under its school books grant scheme. Under this scheme, my Department provides funding of €16 million annually to all recognised primary and post-primary schools in the free education scheme. The arrangements in relation to this scheme are set out in Circular 0046/2013 which is published on my Department's website at http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0046_2013.pdf.

In addition, €15.7 million seed capital was provided over three years to support the establishment of book rental schemes in primary schools.

One of the actions as part of the Action Plan for Education is to strengthen the focus on reducing school costs for parents by increasing the financial support for book rental schemes, in order to reduce/eliminate school book costs for parents as resources permit.

It was not possible to provide additional funding in Budget 2017 in relation to book rental schemes due to the many competing demands for the available funding. This commitment remains a priority for me to address as soon as possible during the lifetime of the Action Plan. However, it is important to note that there are limited funds available in Budget 2018 to meet a wide range of needs across all areas of Government.

Furthermore, my Department has published a circular to school authorities and ETBs regarding measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the costs which include the provision of a book rental scheme. The circular can be accessed on my Department's website at http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0032 2017.pdf.

Student Assistance Fund

221. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to expand eligibility to the student fund for those with disabilities, the student assistance fund and a maintenance grant for part time students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31145/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-19 contains more than 30 actions that are intended to make higher education more representative of wider society. One of five goals in the plan is to assess the impact of current initiatives to support equity of access in Higher Education Institutions. These include the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) and the Student Assistance Fund (SAF), both of which are managed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of my Department.

Reviews of the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities were commissioned by the HEA. The Review of the Student Assistance Fund was published in September 2016. The recommendations in the Review are being implemented by the HEA in consultation with the DES. A Steering Group has been set up to support this process. The review of the Fund for Students with Disabilities is due to be published shortly.

The potential for reviewing options for existing access funding initiatives to part-time studies in higher education could only be considered in the context of the overall priorities and financial resources for access to higher education, and in the wider higher education funding context.

An additional €8.5million was announced in Budget 2017 for access measures to promote participation by under-represented groups in higher education.

- Measures to encourage HEIs to engage directly with disadvantaged communities in order to attract more disadvantaged students (€2.5)
- Reinstatement of maintenance grants for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students (€4m)
 - Measures to facilitate more lone parents to access higher education (€1m)
 - A new 1916 bursary scheme (€1m)

Postgraduate grants have been re-introduced in the Student Grant Scheme for the 2017/18 academic year for the most disadvantaged students.

Schools Amalgamation

222. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will grant an additional funding request made to the capital appraisals unit from a school (details supplied) to assist with the associated cost of the recent amalgamation process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31157/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has approved funding to the school in question and the school has been advised accordingly.

Teacher Recruitment

223. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the criteria for a person (details supplied) who wants to apply for a teaching post in a primary school but who trained for secondary teaching; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31198/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a matter for the individual school authority, subject to procedures agreed under Section 24 of the Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012).

In accordance with Department Circular 31/2011, schools are required to employ registered teachers with qualifications appropriate to the sector and suitable to the post for which they are employed and that unemployed teachers should be offered employment in preference to those who have retired.

Schools Refurbishment

224. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider an appeal made by a school (details supplied) regarding the need to redevelop classrooms not fit for purpose; his views on the concerns of the school community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31207/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy

that my Department received an application from the school in question for significant funding to facilitate major reconfiguration works within the school building. My Department recently visited the school and met with the principal. The principal was advised that my Department will be in further contact with the school when the matter has been considered further.

Schools Building Projects Status

225. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for a building programme by a school (details supplied); his views on the urgency of the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31208/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

My Department is aware of the school's accommodation needs and will be liaising with the school in the context of progressing the architectural planning process for the project.

Brexit Data

226. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31271/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the direction of my Department's Management Board, the EU/International Unit under the leadership of a Deputy Secretary General is working with Departmental Divisions and Agencies on analysing and prioritising issues in preparation for the negotiation phase. Between December and January the Unit oversaw extensive engagement that I and Minister of State John Halligan TD had with the education sector in the form of four Brexit consultation fora for the higher, further education and training; and primary and post-primary education sectors. This was supplemented by a joint Skills Brexit stakeholder consultation on 3 July 2017 at which both I and Minister of State for Higher Education Mary Mitchell O'Connor participated.

The EU/International Unit has also supported my engagement at political and institutional level on our Brexit agenda. I have met counterparts Peter Weir and Simon Hamilton of the NI Executive, and most recently met with the UK's Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening. Meetings were also held with the Minister of State for Exiting the EU, David Jones, the UK's Opposition Spokesperson on Brexit, Keir Starmer, as well as members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Irish in Britain. Meetings have also taken place with Ministers from other EU Member States and with representatives of the EU Commission including Commissioner Navracsics.

The EU/International Unit of my Department has been given overall responsibility for coordinating our response to Brexit. This Unit has been prioritising Brexit work to date and will keep staffing requirements under constant review.

In discharging its Brexit-related functions, the EU/International Unit participates in the Inter-Departmental Senior Officials Group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, which coordinates the whole-of-Government response to the outcome of the UK referendum, and

supports the Cabinet Committee on Brexit. This is further underpinned by the Unit's active engagement with other Departments in Brexit Workgroups on the Economy and Trade; the Common Travel Area; and European Union Programmes - three of the six sectoral workgroups established to provide key sectoral or thematic advices to the Cabinet Committee and Government. The Unit also chairs the Education and Research Subgroup under the Economy and Trade strand of co-ordination. The Subgroup includes relevant areas within the Department and relevant Agencies of the Department and other Departments/Agencies.

As specific issues on the negotiations agenda emerge, the Department will ensure timely, focused inputs from the relevant policy areas and external stakeholders, through appropriate consultative mechanisms.

Significant additional resource requirements are not envisaged for the negotiation phase, but for those that will arise, it is anticipated that costs arising can be provided for from within existing Departmental budgets.

Student Grant Scheme Reform

227. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 111 of 25 May 2017, the status of his Department's review of the student grant scheme; when the review is expected to be completed; if the circumstances outlined in his reply are considered in the review of the special rate criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31299/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The current system of student support is underpinned by the Student Support Act 2011. The review of the Act has commenced and it is anticipated that it will be completed in early 2018. As previously advised, all relevant issues, including an examination of the qualifying criteria for the special rate of grant, will be considered as part of this review.

With regard to the Student Grant Scheme, the Deputy will be aware that the 2017 scheme and regulations were published in late March. It is anticipated that the 2018 scheme and regulations will be published in spring 2018.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

228. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools in County Louth that have ASD units on site; the number of schools that are without an ASD unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31302/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

This policy has been informed by published research, including the Report of the Task Force on Autism (2001), the Evaluation of Educational Provision for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (2006) and National Council for Special Education (NCSE) policy advice on

Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016).

The NCSE policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016) found that Students are generally well supported in schools with appropriate curriculum; extensive teacher and SNA supports; improving range of educational placements supported by improved accommodation and equipment; improved teacher knowledge and understanding and a generally good standard of provision at primary and post primary levels.

The NCSE policy advice notes that International Research findings suggest that most students with ASD should be considered for inclusion in mainstream education with their peers, where inclusion is well-planned and well-resourced.

It follows therefore that, where they are able, students should be given every opportunity to participate in mainstream settings and only be enrolled/retained in special class and/or special school settings where their levels of need warrent this.

Almost 18,000 students in schools have been diagnosed with autism. My Department invests over €300m annually in providing additional resources specifically to support students with autism in schools enabling:

- 63% of students to attend mainstream schools
- 26% to attend special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and
- 11% to attend special schools.

The NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), in consultation with the relevant education partners, is responsible for the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

While it is not always possible to ensure that a special class placement will be available in the child's local school, the NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand.

Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1,152 across the country now, of which 887 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes.

The NCSE intends to establish an additional 145 ASD Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year increasing the number of ASD Special Classes to 1,032.

With regard to Co. Louth there are currently 4 Primary schools and 3 Post Primary schools operating 2 ASD Early Intervention Special Classes, 13 ASD primary Special Classes and 4 ASD post-primary Special Classes. There are 71 primary schools and 18 post-primary schools in Co. Louth.

This NCSE will open 6 new ASD Special Classes in Co. Louth for the 2017/18 school year. As a result there will be 3 ASD Early Intervention Special Classes, 18 ASD primary Special Classes and 4 ASD post-primary Special Classes available in Co. Louth for the forthcoming school year.

The NCSE has informed my Department that they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand in Co. Louth.

My Department will continue to support the NCSE in opening special classes in areas where there is an identified need.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

229. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the provisions in place to increase the number of classrooms in national schools for children with special educational needs especially children with ASD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31326/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

This policy has been informed by published research, including the Report of the Task Force on Autism (2001), the Evaluation of Educational Provision for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (2006) and National Council for Special Education (NCSE) policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016). The NCSE policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016) found that Students are generally well supported in schools with appropriate curriculum; extensive teacher and SNA supports; improving range of educational placements supported by improved accommodation and equipment; improved teacher knowledge and understanding and a generally good standard of provision at primary and post primary levels.

The NCSE policy advice notes that International Research findings suggest that most students with ASD should be considered for inclusion in mainstream education with their peers, where inclusion is well-planned and well-resourced.

It follows therefore that, where they are able, students should be given every opportunity to participate in mainstream settings and only be enrolled/retained in special class and/or special school settings where their levels of need warrent this.

Almost 18,000 students in schools have been diagnosed with autism. My Department invests over €300m annually in providing additional resources specifically to support students with autism in schools enabling:

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The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

While it is not always possible to ensure that a special class placement will be available in the child's local school, the NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that there are sufficient ASD special class placements to meet existing demand.

Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to 1,152 across the country now, of which 887 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes.

The NCSE will establish an additional 145 ASD Special Classes for the 2017/18 school year increasing the number of ASD Special Classes to 1,032.

My Department will continue to support the NCSE in opening special classes in areas where there is an identified need.

School Enrolments

230. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to help meet the need for primary school places in Swords, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31334/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, there are 13 primary schools serving the Swords area. My Department has been in direct contact with a number of these schools in respect of their junior infant capacity. In that regard it is understood that two schools in the area have junior places available should parents wish to avail of them for September 2017.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is important that school size is monitored and that a balance is preserved among all schools in school planning areas to ensure that one school is not expanding at the expense of another school.

My Department is monitoring the enrolment position in the Swords area closely. While the situation may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice, the Deputy will appreciate that my Department's main responsibility is to ensure that the existing schools in the area can, between them, cater for the demand for Junior Infant places in September 2017.

School Services Staff

231. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the redundancy and pension scenarios for employees of a school employed directly by a board of management, for example, school secretaries, caretakers and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31355/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of Clerical Officers and Caretakers in primary and secondary schools. Staff employed on these schemes are paid directly by my Department and are not paid via grant funding. The 1978 and 1979 schemes are being phased out and have been super-

seded by a more extensive capitation grant scheme.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme now receive capitation grant assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services. Capitation related grants are issued to the majority of primary and post-primary schools to employ such staff. Within the capitation grant schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the capitation grant funding to employ a secretary or caretaker, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department therefore does not have any role in determining the pay and conditions under which they are engaged. These are matters to be agreed between the staff concerned and the school authorities. My Department has no plans to develop an alternative scheme for schools to employ secretaries or caretakers separate to the current system of capitation grant assistance.

Notwithstanding the above, in 2015 my Department agreed to engage with the union side in relation to the pay of school secretaries and caretakers who are employed using grant funding and to enter an arbitration process. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for school secretaries and caretakers comprehended by the terms of the arbitration process and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 for such staff be phased in over the period 2016 to 2019. My Department has recently published circular letter 0025/2017 for voluntary secondary schools and circular letter 0026/2017 for primary schools, setting out the application of the second phase increases of the Arbitrator's recommendations. The circulars are available at:

Circular 0025/2017: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0025_2017.pdf

Circular 0026/2017: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0026 2017.pdf

The increases recommended by the Arbitrator are binding and must be applied by all schools who employ staff to whom the Arbitrators recommendation applies. The circulars issued by my Department set out the revised rates of grant funding for schools and an application process whereby schools can apply for additional funding in order to enable them to pay the revised rates set out in the circulars.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

232. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a SUSI student grant application made by a person (details supplied). [31365/17]

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

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

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are respond-

ing to email queries within a matter of days.

School Staff

233. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the basis on which a primary school may appeal the mainstream teacher allocations for the 2017-18 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31372/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teachers to primary schools is published annually on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

Staffing arrangements for the 2017/18 school year are set out in circular 0017/2017 which is available on my Departments website.

The staffing arrangements include an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The staffing process includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Primary Staffing Appeals Board.

Student Grant Scheme Administration

234. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 553 of 20 June 2017, his views on whether it would be fairer for SUSI to either pursue all overpayments or none at all rather than pick and choose which students should be liable for an overpayment (details supplied). [31398/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As previously advised, where overpayments occur, SUSI treats the overpayment as a debt to the Exchequer and seeks to ensure that all such payments are recovered from the student. This approach is consistent with the general policy and principle regarding the recovery of debt, as set out in the Student Support Act 2011, and is applied to all overpayments.

When an overpayment is identified, SUSI will write to the student to inform him/her of the decision to vary the grant amount and to advise that recovery (repayment) of the overpayment will be necessary. A further letter will then issue to formally advise of the overpayment amount and to request repayment. This letter includes a Grant Repayment Option Form which requests details of the preferred repayment option.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Applicants may also appeal against decisions made by SUSI in relation to overpayments.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by an appeals officer in SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/ her case, an appeal may be submitted to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe. Such appeals can be made by the appellant on line via www.student-grantappeals.ie

4 July 2017

Schools Administration

235. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the assessment which is carried out in respect of class sizes, school accommodation and other educational resources following the publication of the census of population; when such an assessment takes place, the way in which it is progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31401/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department uses data from the Census combined with information from the Primary and Post Primary Pupil Databases to develop projections of full time enrolment at primary and post-primary level. My Department uses also CSO data as one of the key data sources used in the DEIS identification process.

The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts in primary and post primary schools is published annually on my Department's website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The Staffing Schedule includes the provision where schools experiencing rapid increases in enrolment can apply for additional permanent mainstream posts on developing grounds. The staffing process includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. This process includes a provision in which schools that are not gaining an additional teaching post under the developing schools criterion can submit an appeal to the independent Appeals Board. This appeal criterion is targeted at those schools that make a significant contribution to the provision of school places and so assist the response to demographic growth within their area.

My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Special Educational Needs Staff

236. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when special needs assistants will be allocated to primary schools for the incoming school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31408/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are provided to assist recognised schools to cater for pupils with disabilities, who have additional and significant care needs, in an educational context and where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in medical and other professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require additional adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annu-

ally taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014, which is available on my Department's website at *www.edu-cation.ie*, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed. My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

The level of SNA support allocated to schools can change from year to year, as students with care needs leave the school, as new students with care needs enrol, or as students develop more independent living skills as they get older and their care needs diminish over time.

All schools were asked to apply for SNA support for the 2017/18 school year by 6th April 2017. The NCSE continues to process applications for access to SNA support which are received after the April deadline. Such applications will be processed in the order in which the applications are received. Schools will be advised shortly of their SNA allocations for the 2017/18 school year.

Where a school wishes to appeal the SNA support allocation which has been made to them, they may do so through the NCSE appeal process, details of which are set out at www.ncse.ie.

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO and parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Schools Building Projects Status

237. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the need for the new building for a school (details supplied) to be prioritised as a matter of urgency; the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31430/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Stage 2(b) Detailed Design Report was recently submitted to my Department by the Board of Management and its Design Team. Following receipt of that submission, my Department authorised the Board of Management to instruct its Design Team to commence the pre-qualification process for the assessment of suitably qualified contractors to which the project can be tendered. This authorisation was granted by my Department in order to expedite the tender process for this project by running the pre-qualification in tandem with the finalisation of Stage 2(b). The Design Team has commenced this process and the closing date for the e-tenders advertisement was 19 June 2017. The Design Team has informed my Department that it expects to complete its assessment of the pre-qualification submissions in the coming weeks and will then submit its report on the shortlist of contractors to my Department.

Following examination of the Stage 2(b) Report, it became apparent that the submission was incomplete and some additional items which should have been included in the original submission, were requested by my Department. A revised submission has been received which is currently under review. Upon completion of the review of the revised 2(b) submission my Department will immediately revert to the school with a timeframe to proceed to tender and construction stage.

The Stage 2(b) submission is an extremely vital part in the design process and is the final stage prior to the seeking of tenders for the construction of the school building.

4 July 2017

Schools Building Projects Status

238. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding approving a new school building for a school (details supplied) since he last met with school management and teaching staff on the matter; the timeframe for the project delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31526/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Design Team appointment for the major building project referred to by the Deputy has recently been completed and the project has now entered early architectural planning / design stages.

My Department has authorised the Design Team to commence Stage 1 of architectural planning as per the Department's Design Team Procedures 2012. Stage 1 is the initial sketch design stage and includes an analysis of all the constraints of the site, developing a preferred option and ensuring that that preferred option is the most optimum for the delivery of the project brief.

The project is included in the Departments six year Construction Programme and is scheduled therein for construction in 2019 - 2021.

Schools Building Projects Status

239. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding approving a new school building for a school (details supplied) since he last met the school authorities, management and staff on the matter; the timeframe for the project delivery in view of the fact that the new building is urgently required for the school due to school numbers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31527/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Design Team for the school building project to which the Deputy refers is finalising the Stage 2(b) - Detailed Design submission which will then be submitted to the Department for review. Following receipt and consideration of that report my Department will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project at that time.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

240. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding approving the school extension and improvement plan for a school (details supplied) since he last met teaching staff and school management; the timeframe for delivering this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31528/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): An amended Emergency Works Scheme application consistent with the terms and conditions of that Scheme is awaited from the school to which the Deputy refers. My Department has arranged to provide technical assistance to the school with this application which will be dealt with as quickly as possible when received.

The school must apply separately under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme for an extension project. The school is aware of this position.

241. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of civil servants in his Department that have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in his Department that have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31777/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department does not hold a record of staff who apply for transfers to other Departments/ Locations. Staff apply to the relevant Department either directly or via the Central Applications Facility (CAF) which is managed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

Brexit Negotiations

242. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Government will negotiate a special dispensation on the tariffs on exports to the United Kingdom as part of the Brexit negotiations in view of the additional responsibilities that the State will encounter as the only European Union country with a border with the United Kingdom. [30566/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 2 May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the EU-UK negotiations, which began formally on 19 June, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position.

Following on from this publication, the Government is currently preparing a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectoral challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, especially through the government's All-Island Civic Dialogue process, and will be important in informing Ireland's domestic response as well as our approach to the EU-UK negotiations.

Accounting for 17% of Ireland's total exports, the UK is one of our most important trading partners. The potential impacts of Brexit are therefore profound, with specific sectors such as agrifood particularly challenged. The Government has consistently made it clear that Ireland wishes to achieve the closest possible trading relationship with the UK. This is that a number of our EU partners also share, as does the UK itself.

Future tariff arrangements will be a key focus, as will the need to minimise any burdens of customs or transit costs. Our hope is that a largely or wholly tariff-free arrangement will be possible.

In the longer term, we are also conscious of the risk posed by potential regulatory divergence between the UK and EU standards and another priority will be to ensure that the future agreement or agreements on the EU's future relationship with the UK ensure a level playing field.

In its contacts with the EU Taskforce and EU partners, the Government has consistently stressed the unique impacts that the UK's withdrawal will have on Ireland. In this context, the strong acknowledgement in the EU's negotiating directives of the need to also "address issues arising from Ireland's unique geographic situation, including transit of goods (to and from Ireland via the United Kingdom)" in the first phase of negotiations is most welcome.

The Government has made it equally clear that Ireland's overall economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued membership of the Single Market and the Customs Union. As an EU Member State, and in line with our EU rights and obligations, Ireland will be negotiating as part of the EU27 with the UK on the future EU-UK relationship, including with regard to trade and customs arrangements.

Ireland fully supports the phased approach that has been adopted by the EU, which foresees that discussions on the future EU-UK relationship will get underway as soon as sufficient progress has been made on the EU's key priorities under the withdrawal process – notably citizens' rights, the UK's financial settlement and border issues, including in relation to Ireland.

My immediate focus – and that of my Government colleagues – will therefore be on working with our EU partners to ensure the negotiations continue in a positive and constructive manner with a view to ensuring that swift progress can be made on the withdrawal issues. This will be vital in ensuring that the parallel discussions on the future EU-UK relationship, including in relation to trade, can begin as soon as possible.

United Nations

243. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on Ireland's position with regard to the proposed United Nations Parliamentary Assembly, UNPA; the stage the movement is at to create an UNPA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30880/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland is steadfastly committed to the United Nations and the principles and values of the UN Charter.

As a strong supporter of the UN, Ireland continues to advocate, through a range of fora, for reform of the UN's structures and systems to ensure that it is better equipped to respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century. In the context of this wider engagement on UN reform, proposals which aim to improve the effectiveness of the UN and the contribution it makes to global governance are of interest.

I have noted in this regard proposals for the establishment of a UN Parliamentary Assembly. Ireland remains open-minded about the concept of such an assembly. I believe that any proposals in this direction should provide added value to the multilateral system and have broad support among UN membership.

As the concept of a UN Parliamentary Assembly develops, we will consider how Ireland can best engage on this proposal and others in the area of UN reform.

Good Friday Agreement

244. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans for a White Paper on the challenges that will have to be addressed before a referendum on a united Ireland is held; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30898/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements is a priority for my Department and indeed the Government as a whole. In this context, we are of course also guided by the aspiration contained in Article 3 of the Constitution as amended by the people in 1998.

The principle of consent and the possibility of change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland is a fundamental part of the Good Friday Agreement, endorsed by the people of this island North and South. The trigger for a referendum in this jurisdiction is connected with the calling of a border poll, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, in Northern Ireland. This occurs when the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland considers it likely that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland. At present, the Government does not believe it likely that such a border poll in Northern Ireland in the near future would result in constitutional change. In these circumstances such a poll might only increase uncertainty and division at an already difficult and sensitive time.

In the absence of any prospect of a referendum in the near future, the Government has no immediate plans for a white paper on this issue. My immediate priority is to secure the future of the devolved power-sharing institutions, which are at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement. I am currently representing the Government at the ongoing talks process in Belfast to support the formation of an Executive and the implementation of commitments from previous agreements.

In the event of a future referendum within the consent provisions of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government would of course make all necessary preparations in accordance with the terms of the Constitution and the principles and procedures of the Agreement.

There are of course aspects of this constitutional issue which relate to my Department's ongoing work. In the context of Brexit, the Government has made clear its determination to ensure respect for all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement, including those relating to a possible change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, regardless of the UK's status within the EU.

As a result of intensive political and diplomatic engagement by the Government, our EU partners are fully aware and supportive of the importance of respecting the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and protecting the gains of the peace process. On 29 April, the European Council adopted Guidelines for the EU-UK negotiations which include a strong acknowledgment of the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland and explicitly recognize the importance of preserving the achievements, benefits and commitments of the Good Friday Agreement. This is further strengthened by the statement agreed by the European Council on the same day, acknowledging that the Good Friday Agreement provides for an agreed mechanism whereby a united Ireland may be brought about and that, in accordance with international law, the entire territory of such a united Ireland would thus be part of the European Union.

Foreign Policy

245. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the most recent development in relations between the USA and Cuba following the statement from President Trump; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30899/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the recent statement by President Trump on certain planned changes to United States policy towards Cuba. The full details will become clearer when new regulations relating to the changes are published. However I note the commitment to maintain diplomatic relations and continue operating the US embassy in Havana.

Ireland has consistently made clear that it supports the ending of the US embargo on Cuba. In October 2016, as in previous years, Ireland joined all other European Union Member States in voting in favour of the annual Cuban resolution at the UN General Assembly in New York, calling for an end to the embargo.

I look forward to continued positive developments in the Ireland-Cuba bilateral relationship on foot of the recent successful visit of President Higgins to the island, during which a Memorandum of Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Cuba and the Government of Ireland was signed. I am also encouraged by recent good progress in EU-Cuba relations, including the signature in December 2016 of the EU-Cuba Political Development and Cooperation Agreement.

Northern Ireland

- 246. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the negotiations on the Northern Assembly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30900/17]
- 259. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on recent discussions on forming the Northern Ireland Assembly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31253/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 246 and 259 together.

I am currently representing the Government at the ongoing talks process in Belfast to support the formation of an Executive. Significant progress has been made in the talks, although a number of key issues remain to be resolved. Notwithstanding the challenge of the remaining issues to be resolved, I believe that an agreement can be reached – an agreement that would allow a power-sharing Executive to be formed on a sustainable basis. All parties are committed to the successful operation of all of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement and everyone agrees that devolution is the best way to deliver for all of the people of Northern Ireland.

We will spare no effort to fulfil the Government's duty as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement and this includes working to ensure the effective operation of its institutions. We will continue to work to this end with the British Government to support and facilitate the parties in their efforts to reach agreement.

Human Rights

247. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made at EU and international level to prevent the persecution of Christians; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30902/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is regarded as a fundamental and universal right for every human being, provided for under Article 18 of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.

Freedom of religion and belief is one of the priorities of Ireland's international engagement on human rights. At the United Nations General Assembly Ireland consistently condemns all forms of persecution, intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. We also raise our concerns at the Universal Periodic Review, a unique peer mechanism of the Human Rights Council under which the human rights records of all UN Member States are reviewed. At the most recent session, which took place in May this year, we raised the issue of the harassment, intimidation and persecution of religious and other minorities in Indonesia.

Last month, at the 35th session of the Human Rights Council, Ireland strongly condemned all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, irrespective of where they occur or who the victims are. We also expressed our deep concern at the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East region and Eritrea. Ireland consistently supports the EU-led resolutions on freedom of religion or belief at the UN, most recently at the UN General Assembly in November 2016 and during the 34th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2017. The EU is a strong supporter of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council.

During the Irish Presidency in 2013, Ireland played a key role in the development and adoption of the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The Guidelines provide a framework for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief in the EU's external human rights policy and reaffirm the EU's determination to promote freedom of religion or belief as a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere.

In 2015 Ireland pressed for the inclusion of a reference to the promotion of freedom of religion or belief in the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019. In May 2016, on the basis of a European Parliament resolution, the EU established the role of Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion and belief outside the EU. The mandate aims to address the growing restrictions on religious freedom internationally. In May 2017, the Commission extended the mandate of the special envoy for an additional year.

Irish Prisoners Abroad

248. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken with his counterpart in Egypt regarding the continuous cancellations of a court case in regard to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31022/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I identified this citizen's case as an absolute priority when I was appointed to my new role, and I am determined to do everything I can to ensure that he is back in Ireland as soon as possible.

The Taoiseach and I have met in recent days with senior officials, including Ireland's Ambassador to Egypt, to discuss this case, and we have received comprehensive briefing on all of the aspects involved.

The first Ambassador of a foreign country with whom I met following my appointment was the Ambassador of Egypt, Soha Gendi. I made very clear to the Ambassador the priority that I attach to our citizen's rights and welfare, and I underlined my strong determination to see early progress towards a resolution of this matter.

I will be continuing to look at the case in detail and engaging with key relevant parties, including representatives of the Egyptian Government. I have asked my officials to arrange an early contact with the Foreign Minister of Egypt, Sameh Shoukry, and efforts to prepare and arrange this are being pursued with the authorities in Cairo.

A further hearing in the court case is taking place today and our Embassy team is attending

at the court to observe the proceedings. I have instructed my officials to provide me with a detailed report on the outcome of that hearing and an assessment on the status of the trial process.

Syrian Conflict

249. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the situation in Syria; the recent efforts made by the EU to resolve this conflict; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31025/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The situation in Syria continues to be a matter of grave concern. 13.5 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria including 6.3 million internally displaced people, 1.5 million are living under siege conditions which gives rise to serious protection concerns, and a further 5 million Syrian refugees have fled to neighbouring countries and the wider region.

The search for a peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict remains a top foreign policy priority for Ireland and the EU. EU Foreign Ministers discussed the situation in Syria at their April Council meeting.

They adopted a new EU Strategy for Syria which sets out the EU's main lines of action in Syria including continued support for and direct assistance to the UN-brokered talks in Geneva, the next round of which is due to resume on 10 July. This includes, in particular, an EU-led initiative, in coordination with the UN, to develop political dialogue with key actors from the region to identify common ground for the end-state in Syria and the conditions for the reconciliation and reconstruction process. Named the EU Syria Peace Process Support Initiative, it aims to develop a concrete platform to support the peace process and ceasefire, strengthen the opposition parties and civil society, and support for the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Syria to include civil society in his work through the Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Advisory Board.

It also includes support for transitional justice initiatives to help ensure accountability for war crimes, human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law and restrictive measures against Syrian individuals and entities supporting the regime as long as the repression of civilians continues. The sanctions currently in place include notably an oil embargo, restrictions on certain investments, a freeze of the assets of the Syrian central bank within the EU, export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression as well as on equipment and technology for monitoring or interception of internet or telephone communications. In addition, over 200 persons and 70 entities are targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze over the violent repression against the civilian population in Syria. In March, the EU added four high-ranking Syrian military officials to the sanctions list for their role in the use of chemical weapons against civilians. The EU keeps the sanctions regime under constant review and will expand and adjust it as appropriate.

The EU and its Member States are also playing a leading role in the humanitarian response to the crisis. More than €9.4 billion has already been mobilised for humanitarian, stabilisation and resilience assistance to support Syrians inside the country and in neighbouring countries, making the EU the largest single donor to the effort. At the Brussels conference in April 2017 which was co-hosted by the EU, a further €3.7 billion for 2017 was pledged by the EU and its Member States, representing nearly 67% of the pledges.

Ireland fully supports the EU assistance to the UN-led peace talks in Geneva, the EU's focus on justice and accountability, and the EU sanctions regime. We have also made a significant

contribution to the humanitarian effort. Since 2012, Ireland has contributed €78.6 million to the humanitarian effort in response to the conflict in Syria. This is Irish Aid's largest response to a single crisis in recent years. At the Syria conference in Brussels in March, Ireland pledged to provide at least €25 million in humanitarian assistance to the region during 2017. €11.1 million of this pledge has already been fulfilled so far this year. Through our annual contributions to EU Institutions, Ireland also supports the EU's humanitarian response to the Syria crisis, from which €445 million was contributed in 2016.

EU Issues

250. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the situation in Hungary; the efforts being made at EU level to address issues such as the curtailment of the media and violations of democratic norms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31026/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The European Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

The foundations of the Rule of Law process are contained in the Treaties and these foundations have been strengthened successively with the establishment of the EU Rule of Law Framework in 2014.

The current situation in Hungary was extensively discussed in a debate in the European Parliament on 26 April last, at which time both Prime Minister Orbán and First Vice-President of the European Commission Timmermans made extensive contributions to the debate.

Fundamental values and the rule of law are a shared EU interest and call for a common approach. Ireland is supportive of the approach being taken by the European Commission in relation to developments in Hungary. The Hungarian government has consistently made clear its willingness to engage with the Commission and I look forward to the outcome of that process. It would be premature to come to conclusions before then.

Conflict Resolution

251. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; the efforts being made to bring peace to the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31027/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I am extremely concerned about the current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The crisis in the Kasai regions has reached an exceptional level in security, humanitarian and human rights terms. In a recent statement, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights condemned the appalling human rights abuses and called for an international investigation into the situation.

Ireland expressed concern at the UN Human Rights Council in June about the Kasai regions, in particular in relation to reports of the recruitment of children by militias and excessive use of force by state services against civilians. Ireland also co-sponsored a resolution calling on the High Commissioner to appoint a team of international experts to investigate alleged human rights violations, and violations of international humanitarian law. We also remain concerned

about ongoing violence and human rights violations in eastern DRC.

In parallel, the political situation caused by the blockage in implementing the inclusive political agreement of 31 December 2016 is also cause for serious concern. EU Foreign Ministers adopted Conclusions in March calling for the full implementation of the agreement as the only way to establish the necessary institutional legitimacy to manage the transition and facilitate credible and democratic elections.

In May, the Foreign Affairs Council adopted restrictive measures against nine individuals who hold positions of responsibility in the State administration and in the DRC security forces. They join the seven people on whom the EU imposed sanctions in December 2016 in response to the obstruction of the electoral process and related human rights violations.

The mandate of the UN's Stabilisation Mission in DRC (MONUSCO) was renewed in March, with a specific focus on implementing the 31 December political agreement. Four Irish Defence Forces personnel are currently serving with the Mission.

Ireland has a clear focus on forgotten crises in our humanitarian response and has maintained consistent humanitarian support to the DRC. In May, we provided an additional €3 million to the UN-managed Humanitarian Fund for the country. This 2017 allocation brings our total humanitarian assistance to DRC since 2012 to over €32 million.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

252. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the recent efforts that have been made to address the situation of the undocumented Irish in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31028/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government's objectives regarding our undocumented citizens in the United States remain constant, namely: to achieve relief for the undocumented and facilitate greater pathways for legal migration to the United States.

In pursuit of these objectives the Government and Ireland's diplomatic representatives in the US systematically avail of all opportunities to raise immigration, including the prospects for immigration reform, and the situation of the undocumented in the United States, with members of the Administration and Congressional representatives.

In mid-March, the former Taoiseach, Mr. Enda Kenny, TD, used the opportunity of his meetings with President Trump, Vice-President Pence, Speaker Ryan, and other senior US leaders during the St. Patrick's Day engagements in Washington DC to raise immigration-related issues and to convey the continuing importance which we attach to them.

The Taoiseach spoke by phone to President Trump on the afternoon of Tuesday 27 June. During their brief conversation the Taoiseach raised a number of issues including the situation of the up to 50,000 undocumented Irish in the US. The Taoiseach looks forward to having an opportunity to discuss this, and other matters, with President Trump in more detail in due course.

I am aware of the understandable concerns among members of the Irish community in the U.S., in light of recent developments under the new Administration.

The Department has therefore funded the provision of factual legal advice, for information

purposes, for undocumented Irish citizens in the U.S., which has been disseminated among Irish immigration centers in the United States and is available online. In addition, in advance of the recent Global Irish Civic Forum in Dublin, Minister Joe McHugh hosted a discussion in Iveagh House, with relevant stakeholders, on the issue of our undocumented citizens in the US.

Our Embassy in Washington DC is in close and ongoing contact with the U.S. authorities and has reported that, to date this year, the number of deportations of Irish citizens from the United State has not increased compared to recent years. While this is reassuring, it does not assuage the concerns of our undocumented citizens caused by the recent measures taken by the US Administration and their reporting in the media.

Accordingly, in May the Government announced an additional € 50,000 funding from the Government's Emigrant Support Programme budget for the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers, which provides advice and vital services to our citizens in the US.

The issues of immigration reform and the welfare of undocumented Irish citizen in the US are a central element of the work of Ireland's diplomatic representatives in the US. Our Embassy in Washington DC and our six Consulates across the United States work with Irish immigration centers on a daily basis in providing support to Irish citizens.

I can assure the Deputy of the Government's continued commitment to pursuing these matters on behalf of our citizens in the US.

EU Migration Crisis

253. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the recent efforts being made at EU and international level to address the migration crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31029/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The migration crisis has been one of the greatest challenges facing the EU for the past two years. Migration has featured on the agenda of almost every European Council in the same period, including the recent June European Council.

The EU has responded to the crisis by adopting a range of measures to deal with this mass movement of people. These have included engaging with countries of origin and transit to address the root causes of migration including through the Migration Partnership Framework; agreeing a plan to relocate migrants from Italy and Greece across the Union; the launching of Operation Sophia to disrupt people smuggling in the Mediterranean; and substantial financial assistance to countries hosting large numbers of migrants. EU Heads of State and Government concluded a landmark migration deal with Turkey in March 2016, which has resulted in a very substantial reduction in the number of migrants risking their lives at sea to enter the EU from Turkey.

In the past year or so the migration focus has shifted from Turkey to the so-called Central Mediterranean Route, with more than 70,000 migrants crossing from Libya to Italy so far this year. In March 2017, EU leaders issued the Malta Declaration, which sets out the EU's commitment to assist Libya, with a strong focus on capacity building.

The June European Council made clear that continuing migratory flows on the Central Mediterranean route leading to an ongoing loss of life remains an issue of urgent concern. It agreed that the EU and its member states had to step up coordination and delivery on all the elements contained in the Malta Declaration, the Partnership Framework and the Joint Valletta

Action Plan, underpinned by sufficient financial resources. Training and equipping the Libyan Coast Guard is a key component of the EU approach and the Council agreed that it should be speeded up. Cooperation with countries of origin and transit is to be reinforced in order to stem the migratory pressure on Libya's and other neighbouring countries' land borders. The European Council underlined in this context the importance of supporting the G5 Sahel Joint force (recently established to address the threat of terrorism, as well as the serious challenges posed by transnational organized crime in the region and made up of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger). There, as elsewhere, the disruption of the business models of human smugglers and traffickers remains a key objective, including by better controlling the trade in equipment used by them.

At the international level, last September's UN Summit in New York on large movements of migrants and refugees marked an important step in the global response to the crisis. The Summit resulted in the unanimous adoption of a Declaration, which was brokered by Ireland, and which contains a commitment to reach agreement in 2018 on Global Compacts on both migration and refugees. Work on both Compacts is already underway and a number of other processes are also feeding into this work, such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development which held its Summit meeting in Berlin just last week.

Of course, the ongoing work of specialised agencies with mandates relating to refugees and migrants, notably UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), as well as others, constitutes an essential element of the international response.

Humanitarian Aid Provision

254. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the situation in South Sudan; the efforts being made to bring an end to the civil war and to address the emerging famine in the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31030/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I share the grave concern at the protracted political and humanitarian crisis in South Sudan. Since the outbreak of violence in South Sudan in 2013, the population of the country have suffered death and injury, the destruction of livelihoods and widespread human rights abuses, in particular serious gender based violence against women and children. Ireland has repeatedly condemned the violence and continues to support the efforts of international and regional partners to find an inclusive political solution to the conflict.

At the EU level, Ireland supported Council Conclusions adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council in December 2016 which called on all parties to end violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. At the UN level, Ireland condemned the continuing violence at Human Rights Council in March 2017, and called for an immediate end to the conflict.

We also continue to support the efforts of international and regional actors such as the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the African Union, and the United Nations, including the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), to bring an immediate end to the conflict. The recent IGAD Summit held on 12 June was a welcome engagement of regional neighbours in renewing efforts to seek peace in South Sudan.

Ireland is providing substantial humanitarian assistance to the South Sudan crisis, for work in the country and to assist South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries. Since 2012, we have provided some €48 million for victims of the crisis. To date in 2017, we have provided

€9.2 million to our UN and NGO partners working on the ground to address the humanitarian needs, and in particular to address issues relating to food insecurity. We will continue to monitor this ongoing crisis closely and to provide additional life-saving humanitarian assistance to those most in need.

Irish Prisoners Abroad

255. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the difference in approach that the Government is taking following the Taoiseach's comments in regard to a person (details supplied); his proposed changes in approach in securing the release of the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31097/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I identified this citizen's case as an absolute priority when I was appointed to my new role, and I am determined to do everything I can to ensure that he is back in Ireland as soon as possible.

The Taoiseach and I have met in recent days with senior officials, including Ireland's Ambassador to Egypt, to discuss this case, and we have received comprehensive briefing on all of the aspects involved.

The first Ambassador of a foreign country with whom I met following my appointment was the Ambassador of Egypt, Soha Gendi. I made very clear to the Ambassador the priority that I attach to our citizen's rights and welfare, and I underlined my strong determination to see early progress towards a resolution of this matter.

I will be continuing to look at the case in detail and engaging with key relevant parties, including representatives of the Egyptian Government.

A further hearing in the court case is taking place today and our Embassy team is attending at the court to observe the proceedings. I have instructed my officials to provide me with a detailed report on the outcome of that hearing and an assessment on the status of the trial process.

Our strategy on this case is under active and continuous review and it has been and will continue to be refined and developed based on my Department's very considerable experience and expertise in the consular field, on consultations with other governments and on legal analysis and advice. My Department also has regular consultation with this citizen's family, his lawyers in Ireland and Egypt and experts from civil society and NGOs. If any Deputy feels that they have any information or ideas to contribute that may help to hasten progress on the case, I would be happy to hear from them.

Human Rights

256. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 650 of 2 May 2017, if he will provide an update on the efforts of the Government to raise the detention of LGBT persons in Chechnya on both a bilateral and multilateral level; if concerns have been raised with the Russian embassy in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31237/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government continues to closely follow developments in relation to widespread reports of a campaign of persecution against members of the LGBTI community in Chechnya. As I mentioned in my reply to Parliamentary Question 157 of 11 May 2017, senior officials of my Department met

the Russian Ambassador on 5 May to convey the grave concerns of the Government, and of the Irish public, at these reports. During the meeting, my officials urged the Russian authorities to fully investigate these allegations, to ensure that any such persecution is ended immediately, to provide all affected persons with the assistance they require, and to ensure the safety of activists and journalists investigating the reports of abuse in Chechnya.

At the Council of Europe Ministerial Meeting in Nicosia on 19 May, Ireland expressed serious concerns at reports of gross human rights violations against gay men in Chechnya. These concerns were reiterated at a meeting of Council of Europe Ministers' Deputies on 31 May.

On 15 June, at the 35th session of the Human Rights Council, Ireland took the opportunity of its national statement to again highlight and strongly condemn the reported extra-judicial killings of LGBTI persons in Chechnya and the targeting of the LGBTI community there. In this statement, we again called on the Russian Federation to take steps to end the climate of impunity which allows these crimes to take place and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

North-South Ministerial Council

257. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the North-South Ministerial Council. [30193/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) has played a key role in developing consultation, cooperation, and action on the island of Ireland on matters of mutual interest and within the competence of the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. My Department works closely with the Department of the Taoiseach in regard to NSMC matters and the Taoiseach co-chairs the NSMC Plenary meetings with the Northern Ireland First Minister and deputy First Minister.

However, in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive and specifically a First and deputy First Minister the North South Ministerial Council cannot meet.

As the formal means for bilateral discussions between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, the NSMC has a crucial role to play in the Brexit discussions and the negotiations ahead. The most recent NSMC Plenary meetings on 4 July 2016 in Dublin Castle and on 18 November 2016 in Armagh saw the Government and the Executive agree on a number of important common principles for dealing with Brexit on an all-island basis, scoping out the sectoral implications of Brexit for Ireland, North and South, and agreeing to work together to optimise North-South planning in the phases preceding and following Brexit. It was agreed that this work would be taken forward through continuing bilateral discussions within the NSMC at sectoral level, as well as through a high-level working group comprising senior officials from the Government and from the Northern Ireland Executive Office.

At the Plenary meeting of the NSMC on 18 November 2016 in Armagh the Council considered an update by a group of Senior Officials from relevant Departments, North and South, on the progress being made on implementing the commitments set out in Section E of the Fresh Start Agreement, to provide support and funding for North-South infrastructure projects. The review is ongoing and a further report will be presented at a future Plenary meeting. The Senior Officials have since met in February 2017 and again in early June to consider progress on all of the Section E commitments.

The Council also received an update in relation to the North West Gateway Initiative. Ministers welcomed the establishment by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership which will aim to work with

central government North and South to ensure the North West region can reach its full potential.

The NSMC Plenary meeting was advised that Derry City and Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council had finalised the necessary arrangements for oversight and delivery of the North West Strategic Growth Plan and the associated €5m North West Development Fund which was established under the Fresh Start Agreement. I am pleased that the Irish Government has played a leading role in this regard − contributing €2.5 million to the Fund. The Inaugural meeting of the North West Strategic Partnership was subsequently held on 7 December 2016 and attended by senior officials from Departments, North and South, and I welcome that the second meeting of the Partnership was held last week.

The Government remains engaged with the political parties in Northern Ireland. I am hopeful that meetings of the North South Ministerial Council will soon recommence to enable further important engagement on progressing all-island cooperation in general and in particular addressing the challenges of Brexit.

Good Friday Agreement

258. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and outstanding issues regarding same. [30196/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government's firm position is that the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent Agreements must be implemented in full, and this is reflected in the Programme for Partnership Government. The Agreements, and the principles and values underpinning them, are at the core of the Government's approach to peace, reconciliation and prosperity on this island. I am currently representing the Government at the ongoing talks' process in Belfast to support the formation of an Executive. I believe that an agreement is within reach – an agreement that would allow a power-sharing Executive to be formed on a sustainable basis. All parties are committed to the successful operation of all of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement and everyone agrees that devolution is the best way to deliver for all of the people of Northern Ireland.

In terms of outstanding commitments, respect for linguistic diversity and the Irish language are important elements of the Good Friday Agreement. An Irish Language Act in Northern Ireland, to be enacted by the British Government, was provided for in the St Andrews Agreement in 2006. While to date there had been no agreement within the Executive to take this, now devolved, matter forward it is one of the issues currently under discussion at the talks in Belfast. In that context I have made clear the Government's continued and clear support for a statutory basis for the Irish Language in Northern Ireland, as envisaged under the St Andrews Agreement.

As reflected in the Programme for Partnership Government, the Government remains supportive of and continues to advocate for the advancement of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Indeed, the continued value of a Bill of Rights in the context of Brexit was one of the themes which emerged from the All Island Civic Dialogue sectoral on Human Rights under the Good Friday Agreement which took place in February.

A North South Consultative Forum is a further important outstanding element envisaged under the Good Friday Agreement. In 2008, the then Government sent proposals for such a Forum to the Northern Ireland Executive, but there has been no substantive response. Between 2009 and 2011, three consultative conferences were hosted in Dublin to support the establishment

of the Forum. While the issue remains on the agenda of the North South Ministerial Council, the Northern Ireland Executive has not been able to give its assent to the establishment of the Forum.

The Government views as a solemn responsibility our role and mandate as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement. We will spare no effort to fulfil our duty as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement and this includes working to ensure the effective operation of its institutions and the implementation of outstanding commitments. We will continue to work to this end with the British Government to support and facilitate the parties in their efforts to reach agreement in the current talks process in Belfast.

Question No. 259 answered with Question No. 246.

Brexit Data

260. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31274/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Additional capabilities and resources have been assigned across my Department to address issues arising from the complex process of the UK exit from the EU. At Headquarters the key Divisions are the European Union Division and the Ireland, UK and Americas (IUKA) Division. Both divisions are headed at Second Secretary General level and both have been assigned additional resources. The European Union Division contains a dedicated team focused exclusively on the EU-UK negotiations, led by a senior officer at Counsellor level. Within the IUKA Division, there is a Brexit-specific policy co-ordination function in place and there are teams focused on Northern Ireland and on wider British-Irish Relations; their duties include Brexit related issues.

Many business units of the Department at its headquarters in Dublin are involved as part of the strategic response to the UK exit and staff numbers have been augmented, for example in the Legal Division, the Trade Division and the Policy Planning Unit. Ireland's Permanent Representation to the European Union in Brussels will also play a key role. Resources for the Permanent Representation have therefore been reinforced along with increased resources for our Embassies in Berlin, Paris and London.

It is clear that these exit negotiations will be complex and intensive. To support the negotiation process, my Department received an additional €3.2 million as part of the 2017 allocation. This facilitated the transfer back to my Department from the Department of the Taoiseach of 14 staff to a new, enlarged European Union Division.

The Department has also allocated an additional budget of €2 million. This budget will be used to increase the number of staff assigned to the management and support of the negotiations and to increase the level of support provided to our colleagues across all Government Departments and agencies.

The measures my Department put in place to manage the initial phase of our response to the UK decision to leave the EU remain under review. The Department may require additional staff resources if it is deemed necessary to further augment our level of support across Government and across our network.

Middle East Issues

261. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise the question of the curtailment of supply of electricity to Gaza with the Israeli authorities that as the primary actor are adding to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza as a result of years of restrictions imposed by the Israeli Government. [31344/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Israel is not the primary actor in this dispute over electricity supplies to Gaza, which is principally one between the Palestinian Authority and the de facto Hamas authorities in Gaza, who still control the Strip. For some years Hamas has charged customers in Gaza for electricity supplied from Israel, but refused to pass these revenues to the Palestinian Authority, which pays Israel to supply the electricity. No government can be expected to tolerate this situation indefinitely.

The Palestinian Authority has decided to reduce the amount of electricity it pays Israel to supply to Gaza, and the reduction of supply by Israel to Gaza, which commenced on 19 June, is a consequence of that.

Notwithstanding the basis for the problem, the humanitarian consequences for Gaza are potentially very severe. The consequences not just for household supply, but for pumping of water and sewage, and supplies to hospitals, schools and other utilities, are obvious. Mains electricity supply was already averaging only four hours per day following the shutdown in April of the only power plant in Gaza due to a dispute between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas over fuel supplies.

Some additional power is being provided to key facilities by generators, but these are not designed to run full time and fuel is in any case short. In recent days however, it is reported that the power plant in Gaza has been able to resume operations with fuel supplied by Egypt, thus allowing for an increase in supply to users. It is not clear at this time how sustainable this arrangement is likely to be.

I repeat the call of my predecessor for all sides who have a part in this issue – the Palestinian Authority, Hamas and Israel – to act promptly and realistically to resolve this dispute, in the interests of the people of Gaza. Ultimately, full responsibility for electricity supply and billing in Gaza should be in the hands of the Palestinian Authority.

I hope to visit the region later this month for initial meetings with local leaders. While my primary focus on that occasion will be on the need to revitalise the overall peace process, I would expect also to be raising the problems of Gaza, both this particular issue of power supply, and the wider ongoing problems caused by the excessive Israeli restrictions on the territory.

Departmental Staff Data

262. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31779/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): My Department facilitates a range of formal and informal mobility options for staff. These include head-to-head arrangements and the Senior Public Service Mobility Scheme (including Principal Officer mo-

bility). Staff can also take part in the Civil Service Wide Mobility Scheme.

There are no current internal transfer requests for officers from my Department to transfer from our offices in Cork or Limerick to our offices in Dublin. Nor are there any current internal transfer requests for officers from my Department to transfer from our offices in Dublin to our offices in Cork or Limerick.

It is not possible to be wholly accurate with regard to the total number of staff that apply for transfer to another Government Department as my Department may not be aware of the application unless or until it is successful.

Court Accommodation Provision

263. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timescale for the delivery of additional accommodation at a building (details supplied) in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30919/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the Circuit Court already sits on a regular basis in the courthouse in Nenagh and current sittings will not be impacted by the additional office accommodation being provided in Nenagh Courthouse.

A contract has now been awarded for the necessary works that are scheduled to commence in August 2017 and it is anticipated that this will be completed by the end of that month. Once the works have been completed, consideration will be given to the transaction of Circuit Court business that will be undertaken in the office in Nenagh.

Garda Expenditure

264. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 133 of 4 April 2017, the expenditure by An Garda Síochána on media training and consultancy services with a company (details supplied) and other providers for April, May, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the sections and rank of personnel that availed of the same for the dates provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30785/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána and, as Minister, I have no direct role in relation to these matters.

I will request the Garda Commissioner to supply the specific information directly to the Deputy.

Courts Service Administration

265. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason there are significant delays being experienced in the family district courts at the moment; and the next available court dates in the various courts. [30790/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is 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 emergency applications such as protection orders and interim barring orders are prioritised. Such applications are usually granted, where the Court so decides, on the date the application is made to the Court. Therefore, there are no delays in dealing with these applications.

The Courts Service has also informed me that delays in the hearing of cases can occur for a number of reasons, many of which are outside the control of the Courts and the Courts Service, for example, the unavailability of a witness or vital evidence, delays in the furnishing of reports or because the parties and/or legal practitioners are not ready to proceed on allocated dates. This gives rise to adjournments which can have a major impact on the time taken to complete the hearing of a case and on the number of cases which can be disposed of in a court sitting.

In 2015 the Government introduced a range of new legislation in the family law area. These developments required the Courts Service to provide additional courts facilities, particularly in Dublin, for the hearing of family law and child care applications. In 2016 the Courts Service, following consultation with the President of the District Court, reconstituted the way District Court work was arranged to facilitate the provision of additional courtrooms for the transaction of family law business. Overall the number of courtrooms dedicated to District Court family law in Dublin has increased from 5 to 7 since October 2016. As a result waiting times in Dublin District Court family law have improved to the extent that hearings are now available within 5 weeks for private family law proceedings.

The Courts Service has advised that the waiting times for family law in the District Court are collated on a Court office basis rather than on an individual court basis and that the current waiting times are as follows:

District Court Family Law - Waiting Times in weeks - June 2017

| - | Family Law | Family Law |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Office | Domestic Violence Applications | Maintenance/ Guardianship Ap- |
| | (1) | plications (2) |
| Athlone | Next sitting | Next sitting |
| Ballina | Next sitting | Next sitting |
| Bray | 1-3 | 3-6 |
| Carlow | 12 | 12 |
| Carrick on Shannon | Next sitting | Next sitting |
| Castlebar | Next sitting | 6 |
| Cavan | Next sitting | 10-12 |
| Clonakilty | 2-4 | 2-4 |
| Clonmel | 2-5 | 4-12 |
| Cork | 12 | 12 |
| Donegal | Next sitting | Next sitting |

| - | Family Law | Family Law |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Dublin | 5 | 5 |
| Dundalk | Next sitting | 3-4 |
| Ennis | Next sitting | 4 |
| Galway | 4 | 4-8 |
| Kilkenny | 2-4 | 4-8 |
| Letterkenny | Next sitting | 13 |
| Limerick | 9 | 10 |
| Longford | 1 | 4 |
| Loughrea | Next sitting | 4 |
| Mallow | Next sitting | Next sitting |
| Monaghan | Next sitting | Next sitting |
| Mullingar | Next sitting | 4 |
| Naas | 2-4 | 12-14 |
| Nenagh | 2-4 | 11 |
| Portlaoise | Next sitting | 8-10 |
| Roscommon | Next sitting | Next sitting |
| Sligo | Next sitting | Next sitting |
| Tralee | 4 | 4 |
| Trim | 6-9 | 6-9 |
| Tullamore | Next sitting | 12 |
| Waterford | 8 | 12 |
| Wexford | Next sitting | 6-8 |
| Youghal | Next sitting | Next sitting |

- (1) Time in weeks from receipt of application to listing for hearing in domestic violence matters
- (2) Time in weeks from receipt of application to listing for hearing for other family law applications.

Garda Operations

266. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 73 of 25 of May 2017, if this report will be made available; the outcomes of that presentation in the way in which An Garda Síochána is planning to increase the numbers of summons served; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30817/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Further to the Deputy's parliamentary question No. 73 of 25 May 2017, the Deputy is already aware that the Criminal Justice Fixed Charge Processing System (FCPS) Working Group is monitoring a Garda review of summons service and has included this Garda review in the Working Group's Work Programme, which oversees a number of priority items for implementation in the context of the FCPS. It was intended that An Garda Síochána would make a presentation on its summons service review process at a meeting of the Working Group scheduled for 14 June 2017, however this meeting was subsequently rescheduled, as a number of Working Group members were unable to attend the proposed 14 June meeting on account of other commitments. The Working Group meeting has been rescheduled for tomorrow, 5 July 2017, and An Garda Síochána will

provide an update on its review of summons service at this meeting.

With the completion of the short- and medium-term goals relating to the review, the focus of the Garda authorities is now on the long-term goals, which include reviewing the legislation to allow for different methods of service, such as reviewing the possibility of outsourcing summons service in conjunction with the postal codification of addresses which took place in 2015, and considering e-summons service as part of the future vision of summons service.

Garda Data

- 267. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of complaints or reports made to An Garda Síochána regarding rickshaws and rickshaw drivers in 2015, 2016, and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30818/17]
- 268. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of incidents An Garda Síochána have attended following reports or complaints regarding rickshaws and rickshaw drivers in 2015, 2016, and to date in 2017, by county and types of incidents and outcomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30819/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 267 and 268 together.

Rickshaws are essentially bicycles and I am informed by the Garda authorities that incidents involving rickshaws are currently recorded on the Garda PULSE system under the vehicle type 'bicycle'. As such, to collate the specific information requested by the Deputy would require An Garda Síochána to manually review all incidents under the vehicle type 'bicycle' in order to identify those incidents involving rickshaws, which would involve a disproportionate use of Garda time and resources.

Immigration Status

269. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to regularise the residency status in the case of persons (details supplied); the documents received to date; if documentation is outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30823/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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), the persons concerned have not submitted written representations.

The position in the State of the persons concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. If any representations are submitted, they will be considered before a final decision is 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.

Garda Station Closures

270. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the garda stations closed in counties Carlow and Kilkenny in 2012 and 2013 are included in the six stations examined for reopening under the pilot programme report which was due to be furnished by the Garda Commissioner to his epartment by the end of May 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30824/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Síochána District and Station Rationalisation Programme gave rise to the closure of some 139 Garda stations, including Garda stations in counties Carlow and Kilkenny, in 2012 and 2013, following the completion by An Garda Síochána of a comprehensive review of its district and station network. That review was undertaken with the objective of identifying opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within the organisation. I have been advised by the Garda authorities that the closures have allowed front line Garda to be managed and deployed with greater mobility, greater flexibility and in a more focused fashion, particularly with regard to targeted police operations.

The Programme for Government commits the Government to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. A cornerstone of this commitment is the Government 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. Revisiting the decisions made to close Garda stations is also part of that commitment.

In this context, the Government on 24 June 2016 authorised the then Minister to request the Garda Commissioner, while fully cognisant of her statutory functions, to identify 6 stations for reopening on a pilot basis to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order.

On 13 June 2017, the Government considered the second interim report of the Garda Commissioner in relation to the exercise. The Commissioner has indicated that, amongst other things, she is likely, subject to further analysis, to recommend the reopening of Leighlinbridge station in her final report.

Following any decision to reopen the former station, the Garda authorities will work closely with the Office of Public Works in relation to any necessary preparatory works required to progress the reopening.

Deportation Orders Data

271. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if situations have arisen here whereby a person or persons that may have been suspected or charged with having links to a specific organisation would have used human rights laws preventing them from being deported (details supplied). [30846/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The statutory criteria which must be considered in relation to a decision to make a deportation order under section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 include national security and public policy, the character and

conduct of the person concerned and the common good. In determining whether to make a deportation order, in addition to the factors set out in Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999, I must also consider all relevant constitutional and international human rights arising, including those enshrined in the Refugee Convention, the UN Convention Against Torture and the European Charter of Human Rights. The question of not returning a person to a place where certain fundamental rights would be breached (or non refoulement as it is commonly referred to) is fully considered in every case when deciding whether or not to make a deportation order. This involves consideration of whether returning the person would result in the life or freedom of that person being threatened on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or whether the person would be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The process leading to deportation is extensive with many avenues of appeal, including judicial review in the High Court, open to persons subject to deportation orders. Where persons have been identified as a threat to national security by An Garda Síochána it remains open to me as Minister to make deportation orders against such persons, and my predecessor as Minister has done so in the past.

Garda Reserve

- 272. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Reserves in Dublin in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the number of Garda Reserves on duty since the formation of the government in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30857/17]
- 273. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda Reserves that have been recruited since the formation of the government; the number that have left the force; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30858/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 272 and 273 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who 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.

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. This plan is progressing well. This year, 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. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

The strength of the Garda Reserve on 30 April 2016 and 31 May 2017 (the latest date for which figures are readily available) was 883 and 638 respectively.

It is regrettable that there has been a substantial reduction in the strength of the Reserve in recent years from a peak of 1,164 in 2013. The fall-off arises from a range of factors, not least the lifting in 2014 of the moratorium on recruitment of trainee Gardaí which has affected

Reserve numbers in two ways - firstly some 200 serving Reserves have successfully applied to become trainee Gardaí, and secondly, resources in both An Garda Síochána and in the Public Appointment Service have been focused on delivering an accelerated programme of recruitment of full time members of An Garda Síochána. I am sure that the Deputy will agree, notwithstanding the very valuable contribution of Reserve members throughout the country, that it was the right decision, with finite resources, to prioritise the running of recruitment campaigns to replenish the full-time ranks of An Garda Síochána over the last three years. With the plan to reach 15,000 Garda members well on track it was possible for the Commissioner and the Public Appointments Service to undertake a new recruitment campaign for Garda Reserves. That is now in train and will, allowing for the selection process and necessary training of successful candidates, facilitate a start to be made on strengthening of the Reserve across every Garda Division, in the coming years.

For ease of reference, I have provided as supplied by the Commissioner, the detailed information requested by the Deputy in relation the Garda Reserve strength in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) from 2010 to 31 May 2017 (the latest date for which figures are readily available).

| DMR Garda Reserve Strength 2010-2017* | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| 2010 | 240 |
| 2011 | 275 |
| 2012 | 300 |
| 2013 | 343 |
| 2014 | 343 |
| 2015 | 287 |
| 2016 | 208 |
| 2017* | 190 |

^{*} As of 31 May 2017

Fines Data

274. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will authorise an independent audit of the prison system relative to the methodology used to calculate fines and warrants for prisoners that served time in prison and were being released on payment of the fine imposed; the number of prisoners that were overcharged in the past due to the wrong calculation being made; the amount of overpayment; if the overpayments will be refunded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30865/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Prison Service (IPS) that in 2016, 8,439 persons were committed to prison arising from non-payment of fines. For operational and capacity reasons, each person committed to prison for non-payment of fines is considered for temporary release (TR) in line with the Criminal Justice Act 1960, as amended. Factors considered in relation to this TR include the nature of the crime giving rise to the committal, the person's criminal history (if any) and the accommodation capacity of individual prisons on the day.

For approximately 30 years prior to its cessation in 2010, it was a practice that persons committed to prison for non-payment of a fine could be released early upon payment of a portion of that fine. Broadly speaking, the matter of who was recommended to the Minister for temporary release in these circumstances was subject to the discretion of the Governor concerned and on

the particular circumstances of the case. There was no standard approach to the operation of the system. The legislative basis relied upon for this was the Criminal Justice Act 1951, which allowed the Minister to mitigate punitive elements of a sentence handed down by the Courts. In 2010, the Irish Prison Service ended the practice of the granting of TR based on the payment or part payment of a fine imposed by the Courts based solely on the individual discretion of the prison Governor concerned.

Since 2010, persons sentenced to prison for non-payment of fines have had a number of options open to them, viz: (i) pay the fine in full; (ii) serve the sentence in full; (iii) be granted release only when the fine has been paid in full, through a combination of part payment of the fine and serving of the sentence imposed or (iv) be granted TR for operational reasons as outlined earlier - for example accommodation capacity in the prison.

In relation to option (iii), the IPS has standardised the system whereby a prisoner can be released early through a combination of part serving of the sentence and payment of a portion of the fine. The system is now estate-wide, automated and based on a standardised sliding scale. For example, setting aside the issue of remission, in circumstances where two days into a four-day sentence a prisoner seeks to pay a fine, he will be advised that as 50% of the sentence has been served, only 50% of the fine remains to be paid. The 'sliding scale' methodology used to determine how much of a fine can be considered 'paid' when a portion of the sentence has been served operates uniformly throughout the entire prison system and dispenses with the element of individual governor discretion practised prior to 2010. All monies collected as a result of fines paid by prisoners is lodged into an Imprest Account, is properly accounted for and then transferred to the Courts Service. In 2016 the amount involved was €29,864.72.

Needless to say. the extent of the original fine imposed is entirely a matter for the Courts and cannot be altered by the IPS. The IPS informs me that it is not aware that any prisoner or exprisoner is seeking a refund on the basis that the amount they paid on the sliding scale system explained above exceeded the fine determined by a Court. The issue of refunds therefore does not arise.

The IPS advise that, regardless of the fact that no-one has sought a refund, it has no information itself that any prisoner was overcharged on the system described above. This could only be definitively established if the individual file of every prisoner ever committed to prison on a fine was manually checked to establish the amount of the fine imposed, the portion paid and the length of sentence served, in order to check whether any calculation error had ever occurred. For obvious reasons, this is impractical.

Due to the large volume of fines cases committed to prison on a yearly basis, any audit of the system would be a significant undertaking. With the lack of any specific evidence that persons were overcharged, I do not believe that an independent audit of the system is justified at this time.

Finally, I should mention that since the commencement of the Fines (Payment and Recovery) 2014 Act on 11 January 2016, where fines remain unpaid by the due date, the fined persons must be notified to return to court to enable the Judge to impose whatever sanction the court considers appropriate in default of payment. The options available to the Judge are as follows: attachment of earnings; recovery order; community service; or, if none of these options are appropriate, imprisonment.

Visa Applications

275. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a decision will be made on the application for a visitors visa by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30881/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the visa application referred to was refused by the Visa Office in Dublin on 28 June 2017. The decision was communicated to the applicant who was advised that an appeal may be submitted within two months of the date of the visa refusal. If an appeal is to be made, the applicant should bear in mind the refusal reasons communicated and be in a position to address them.

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 Administrative Costs

- 276. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will confirm the wording of the directive stating that from 1 January 2017 bills from An Garda Síochána to persons and families of persons suffering serious injury due to road traffic collisions would be capped at €1,000 and families bereaved due to fatal road traffic collisions would be waived for copies of road traffic collision documentation; if all garda divisions are implementing this directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30936/17]
- 277. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a directive was sent by Garda HQ to all Garda districts and superintendents informing them of the waiver of fees for copies of road traffic collision documentation for bereaved families from 1 January 2017; the date that the directive was sent out by Garda HQ; the wording of that directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30939/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 276 and 277 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Commissioner is the accounting officer for the Garda Síochána Vote. I understand, however, that persons involved in road traffic collisions, their legal advisers or insurers or other interested parties may, on written request, be supplied with an abstract of the Garda report in respect of the collision, copies of statements of witnesses and sketches or maps of the scene. Abstracts and statements are not normally supplied until any criminal proceedings are concluded and, in the case of fatal traffic collisions, until the inquest concerning the death has been completed by the Coroner.

I understand that the fees charged are generally designed to recoup administrative costs incurred in the preparation and processing of requests for abstracts and statements and that they are kept under ongoing review. I have, however, been informed by the Garda authorities that, following discussions and consultation with victim support groups and other agencies, the following arrangements apply with effect from 1 January 2017 and in respect of applications received after that date:

- fees in respect of fatal road traffic collisions will be waived (one copy per applicant);

- fees in respect of road traffic collisions resulting in serious injury will be capped at €1,000 (one copy per applicant);
- in circumstances where the investigation of a road traffic collision remains ongoing and criminal proceedings are being contemplated or have already been initiated, or in circumstances where an Inquest has not been completed by the Coroner, abstracts will not be supplied. However, a reduced or amended abstract form containing 'appropriate information' as provided for in section 106(4) of the Road Traffic Act 1961, as amended, will be provided free-of-charge;
- the following fees will be payable in respect of applications in respect of road traffic collisions resulting in material damage:

| Item | Fee |
|--|------|
| Collision Reports | |
| Forensic Collision Report – Full Report | €400 |
| Rough Data – Per Page | €40 |
| Copy of Scale Plan – Other than that as provided as part of full report | €50 |
| Copy of Vehicle Examination Report(Unless provided as part of full report) | €70 |
| Photographs | |
| From Digital Camera (per disc) | €30 |
| A4 Index Sheet | €20 |
| Photographs (1st Photograph) | €25 |
| Each Subsequent photograph | €5 |
| Abstract of Report | €60 |
| Copy of Statement | €40 |

I have been informed that an instruction in this regard has now been issued by the Garda authorities and that arrangements will be put in place for appropriate refunds to be made in respect of applications received since 1 January 2017.

Garda Strength

278. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 52 of 23 May 2017, the number of active gardaí stationed at Edgeworthstown garda station in the Roscommon-Longford district (details supplied); if this reduced number is considered safe or satisfactory by the Garda Commissioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30974/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who 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 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. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly. In addition, as you will appreciate, in order to deliver an effective policing service, it is essential that Garda

management have the flexibility to deploy Garda resources to meet operational policing needs and address critical issues as they arise. For this reason, the number of Garda available in any one Garda Station on a particular day is subject to the operational requirements of the overall Division

The Edgeworthstown Garda Station forms part of the Granard District and Roscommon/Longford Division. I have been informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Division on the 31 May 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 303, of which 47 members were assigned to Granard District and 11 to Edgeworthstown Station. There are also 9 Garda Reserves and 28 Civilians attached to the Roscommon/Longford Division.

I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,000 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 5 of whom were assigned to the Roscommon/Longford Division. I am also informed that another 200 trainee Garda will attest this Thursday 6 July and that a further four hundred are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across the organisation, including the Roscommon/Longford Division.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will see an increase in Garda visibility in our communities.

Garda Resources

279. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will examine the issue of inadequate Garda numbers and Garda resources in County Wicklow; his plans to increase Garda numbers and Garda resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30988/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who 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 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 by the Commissioner that the personnel strength of the Wicklow

Division on 31 May 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 342 comprising 296 Gardaí, 22 Reserves and 24 civilians. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised 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 to 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.

This plan is progressing apace. This year, 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. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,000 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 13 of whom have been assigned to the Wicklow Division. I am also informed that another 200 trainee Garda will attest this Thursday 6 July and that a further four hundred are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Wicklow Division in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will see an increase in Garda visibility in our communities.

Garda Strength

280. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in each Garda station in County Meath in 2016 and to date in 2017. [31011/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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 have been advised by the Commissioner that as of the 31 May 2017, the latest date for which figures are available, the strength of the Meath Division was 294. There were also 17 Garda Reserves and 27 civilians attached to the Meath 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, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised 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. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

This plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,000 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 31 of whom were assigned to the Meath Division. I am also informed that another 200 trainee Garda will attest this Thursday 6 July and that a further four hundred are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources she needs to allow her to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division including the Meath Division in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Deputy will be aware of the significant resources that have been made available to An Garda Síochána under the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021. In particular, some €205 million in additional funding for Garda ICT and €46 million for new Garda vehicles has been allocated over the lifetime of the plan. This investment will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I have no doubt that these new resources now coming on stream will see an increase in Garda visibility in our communities.

For the Deputy's information, I have set out in tabular form the strength of the Meath Division by station in December 2016 and as of 31 May 2017, the latest date for which figures are currently available from the Commissioner.

| Meath Division Strength 2016 -31 May 2017 | | | |
|---|----------------|------|------|
| DISTRICT | STATION | 2016 | 2017 |
| ASHBOURNE | ASHBOURNE | 47 | 46 |
| | DULEEK | 5 | 5 |
| | DUNBOYNE | 17 | 16 |
| | DUNSHAUGHLIN | 17 | 23 |
| | LAYTOWN | 20 | 21 |
| | TOTAL: | 106 | 111 |
| KELLS | BAILE ÁTHA BUÍ | 5 | 5 |
| | KELLS | 36 | 33 |
| | OLDCASTLE | 3 | 3 |
| | TOTAL: | 44 | 41 |

| Meath Division Strength 2016 -31 May 2017 | | | |
|---|-------------|-----|-----|
| NAVAN | NAVAN | 86 | 90 |
| | NOBBER | 3 | 3 |
| | SLANE | 4 | 4 |
| | TOTAL: | 93 | 97 |
| TRIM | BALLIVOR | 2 | 2 |
| | ENFIELD | 3 | 3 |
| | LONGWOOD | 2 | 2 |
| | SUMMERHILL | 2 | 2 |
| | TRIM | 34 | 36 |
| | TOTAL: | 43 | 45 |
| MEATH TOTAL: | 16 STATIONS | 286 | 294 |

Refugee Data

281. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the place finders service that was promised to assist programme refugees find private rented accommodation has been established; and if so, if he will allow the 399 persons with a form of status that reside in State provided accommodation to access the place finders service in order to find private rented accommodation. [31050/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): Persons who have been invited to the State either as programme refugees under the resettlement programme or as relocated persons under the EU burden sharing programme, do not avail of a place finders service. Instead the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) liaises with local authorities and the Irish Red Cross, which organisations identify appropriate dwellings for those in the resettlement and relocated cohorts.

In relation to the 399 persons who arrived in Ireland of their own accord and claimed asylum here, who have been granted leave to remain and who continue to reside in State provided accommodation, there is no dedicated place finder service but a number of measures have been put in place to have the same intention and result.

Following on from the McMahon report, the Department of Justice and Equality developed a guide to independent living for persons with status to provide practical assistance for them. The guide is available in all centres and on the RIA website (www.ria.gov.ie) in a number of different languages. This was published in parallel with information sessions coordinated by the Citizens Information Bureau in accommodation centres which gave an opportunity for such persons to seek assistance and clarification on the services provided. The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA), its centre managers, the Community Welfare Service (by way of provision of Rent Allowance), Citizens Information and those City and County Councils operating the Housing Assistance Payments link with such persons in accessing the appropriate supports and services, including in respect of sourcing and securing private accommodation.

Following a call for proposals under the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund, a number of charities and NGOs have been successful in applying for funding for projects with the specific aim of providing assistance to those transiting from state provided accommodation to permanent homes in the community. I am confident that it will prove of great assistance and benefit to all concerned.

Once some form of status is granted, residents cease to be ordinarily entitled to the accom-

modation supports provided through RIA. Notwithstanding this fact, we have always continued to provide such persons with continued accommodation until they secure their own private accommodation. We are particularly mindful of the reality of the housing situation in the State and the pressures on the Community Welfare Service in respect of Rent Supplement or the City and County Councils in respect of Housing Assistance Payments and Housing Lists. That said, the provision of housing for persons coming out of the protection process has been incorporated in the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Refugee Data

282. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 855 of 20 June 2017, the number of adults and children that are part of the group of 399 persons with a form of status that reside in State provided accommodation. [31052/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As I set out in Parliamentary Question 855 of 20 June 2017, there are 399 persons residing in State provided accommodation with some form of permission to remain in the State. Of those 399 persons, 247 are adults and 152 are children.

Garda Reorganisation

283. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the implementation of community policing teams as outlined in the An Garda Síochána modernisation and renewal programme 2016 to 2021; the estimated full year cost of such teams; the number and location of such teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31054/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Last July, the Government approved a Five Year Reform and High Level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána which combines the Government's response to the Garda Inspectorate report 'Changing Policing in Ireland' and the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government aimed at increasing the visibility, effectiveness and responsiveness of An Garda Síochána. The Government agreed that the Garda Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme (MRP) 2016-2021 would be the vehicle for implementation of the Inspectorate recommendations aimed at the Garda organisation. In support of this plan, Budget 2017 provided funding to continue to expand the number of Gardaí towards 15,000, to double the Reserve to 2,000 and to double the number of civilians to 4,000 by 2021. In addition, the plan is supported by substantial capital investment of some €310 million in critical ICT infrastructure, the fleet and other Garda facilities.

Robust independent oversight is essential to ensuring that the pursuit of the reform programme is relentless over the next 5 years. To ensure that this is case, the 240 agreed recommendations of 'Changing Policing in Ireland' have been referred to the Policing Authority to monitor and assess their implementation by An Garda Síochána and to report progress to me on a quarterly basis. The first two progress reports from the Authority, received in January and April, have been published on my Department's website.

It is the most ambitious programme of reform ever embarked on by the organisation and due to the scale of the programme, a phased planning approach is essential. In this regard the Commissioner has advised that some initiatives will be implemented in the short to medium term, while others will require a number of years to implement fully.

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 MRP 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. Under this "Community Policing Framework" initiative it is envisaged that Community Policing teams comprising of Gardaí from a range of areas will be established. These teams will work with local communities to prevent and detect crime in their locality. In addition, each Community Team will be supported by a Community Safety Forum. The Community Safety Fora which will comprise of local Gardaí, members of the public and community groups will promote crime prevention strategies. This clear and consistent approach to community policing will ensure a better service and enhanced community safety.

In terms of progress on this important initiative I am informed by the Commissioner that a draft Community Policing Strategy which outlines the manner in which CPTs and Community Safety Fora will be established has been completed and is subject to internal review before being approved by the Executive for implementation.

Garda Reorganisation

284. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the reform of the computer crime investigation unit as outlined in the An Garda Síochána modernisation and renewal programme 2016 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31055/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Last July, the Government approved a Five Year Reform and High Level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána which combines the Government's response to the Garda Inspectorate report 'Changing Policing in Ireland' and the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government aimed at increasing the visibility, effectiveness and responsiveness of An Garda Síochána. The Government agreed that the Garda Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme (MRP) 2016-2021 would be the vehicle for implementation of the Inspectorate recommendations aimed at the Garda organisation. In support of this plan, Budget 2017 provided funding to continue to expand the number of Gardaí towards 15,000, to double the Reserve to 2,000 and to double the number of civilians to 4,000 by 2021. In addition, the plan is supported by substantial capital investment of some €310 million in critical ICT infrastructure, the fleet and other Garda facilities.

Robust independent oversight is essential to ensuring that the pursuit of the reform programme is relentless over the next 5 years. To ensure that this is case, the 240 agreed recommendations of 'Changing Policing in Ireland' have been referred to the Policing Authority to monitor and assess their implementation by An Garda Síochána and to report progress to me on a quarterly basis. The first two progress reports from the Authority, received in January and April, have been published on my Department's website.

It is the most ambitious programme of reform ever embarked on by the organisation and due to the scale of the programme, a phased planning approach is essential. In this regard the Commissioner has advised that some initiatives will be implemented in the short to medium term, while others will require a number of years to implement fully.

In relation to the area of cyber crime the MRP provides for the review and restructuring of the Computer Crime Investigation Unit, originally a unit under the auspices of the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation. The aim of the initiative is to establish a dedicated cyber crime bureau to ensure An Garda Síochána has the capacity and capabilities to deal with cyber crime and cyber security. I am informed that the Garda Cyber Crime Bureau (GCCB) was established on 1 September 2016 under the direction of the Detective Chief Superintendent, Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and Assistant Commissioner, Special Crime Operations. The GCCB is headed up by a Detective Superintendent who was appointed in August 2016. The GCCB has responsibility for the forensic examination of all seized computer media, international liaison with regard to cyber matters and the investigation of cyber crime matters including banking and financial crimes, and child pornography and exploitation. The allocation of further resources to the GCCB including Garda members, specialist professional staff and support staff, is in train to support the further development of the GCCB.

In addition, I am informed that the roll-out continues on a phased basis of regional triage units, which have been established in two regions to date - the Southern and South-Eastern Regions. The triage model provides a tiered response and capability for computer forensic services on a regional basis, utilising locally-based and trained first-responders and cyber triage specialists. The triage model also reduces demands on the GCCB, while remaining under the supervision of the Detective Superintendent of the Bureau. The triage units currently in place are subject of review to inform and establish best practices and processes for the establishment of further such units in other regions.

Garda Reorganisation

285. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the establishment of a national crime prevention centre as outlined in the An Garda Síochána modernisation and renewal programme 2016 to 2021; the estimated full year cost of such a centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31056/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Last July, the Government approved a Five Year Reform and High Level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána which combines the Government's response to the Garda Inspectorate report 'Changing Policing in Ireland' and the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government aimed at increasing the visibility, effectiveness and responsiveness of An Garda Síochána. The Government agreed that the Garda Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme (MRP) 2016-2021 would be the vehicle for implementation of the Inspectorate recommendations aimed at the Garda organisation. In support of this plan, Budget 2017 provided funding to continue to expand the number of Gardaí towards 15,000, to double the Reserve to 2,000 and to double the number of civilians to 4,000 by 2021. In addition, the plan is supported by substantial capital investment of some €310 million in critical ICT infrastructure, the fleet and other Garda facilities

Robust independent oversight is essential to ensuring that the pursuit of the reform programme is relentless over the next 5 years. To ensure that this is case, the 240 agreed recommendations of 'Changing Policing in Ireland' have been referred to the Policing Authority to monitor and assess their implementation by An Garda Síochána and to report progress to me on a quarterly basis. The first two progress reports from the Authority, received in January and April, have been published on my Department's website.

The MRP includes more than 80 initiatives and 135 projects at present of which 24 have been completed with a significant number in progress. The MRP is the most ambitious programme of reform ever embarked on by the organisation. Due to the scale of the programme, a phased planning approach is essential. In this regard the Commissioner has advised that some

initiatives will be implemented in the short to medium term, while others will require a number of years to implement fully. The establishment of a National Crime Prevention Centre to research and distribute best practice on crime prevention throughout the organisation while part of the Programme is not due to be progressed this year but will be progressed in a later phase of the programme.

Garda Reorganisation

286. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the establishment of an economic crime bureau centre as outlined in the An Garda Síochána modernisation and renewal programme 2016 to 2021; the estimated full year cost of such a centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31057/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Last July, the Government approved a Five Year Reform and High Level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána which combines the Government's response to the Garda Inspectorate report 'Changing Policing in Ireland' and the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government aimed at increasing the visibility, effectiveness and responsiveness of An Garda Síochána. The Government agreed that the Garda Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme (MRP) 2016-2021 would be the vehicle for implementation of the Inspectorate recommendations aimed at the Garda organisation. In support of this plan, Budget 2017 provided funding to continue to expand the number of Gardaí towards 15,000, to double the Reserve to 2,000 and to double the number of civilians to 4,000 by 2021. In addition, the plan is supported by substantial capital investment of some €310 million in critical ICT infrastructure, the fleet and other Garda facilities.

Robust independent oversight is essential to ensuring that the pursuit of the reform programme is relentless over the next 5 years. To ensure that this is case, the 240 agreed recommendations of 'Changing Policing in Ireland' have been referred to the Policing Authority to monitor and assess their implementation by An Garda Síochána and to report progress to me on a quarterly basis. The first two progress reports from the Authority, received in January and April, have been published on my Department's website.

It is the most ambitious programme of reform ever embarked on by the organisation and due to the scale of the programme, a phased planning approach is essential. In this regard the Commissioner has advised that some initiatives will be implemented in the short to medium term, while others will require a number of years to implement fully.

In relation to the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (formerly the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation), I am informed that this was established on 1 September 2016.

The Bureau has dedicated expert staff, including professional forensic accountants, to address white collar and other fraud and economic crimes, and includes the restructured Garda Cyber Crime Bureau, the Money-laundering Investigation Unit and a new Foreign Bribery and Corruption Unit.

I am informed that Garda management within the Bureau are working with local Garda management, at District and Divisional levels, to ensure the necessary tools and training are provided to enable and empower District and Divisional resources to investigate cases of economic crime at that level, with advice and guidance available from within the Bureau. The Bureau is now also placing a greater emphasis on ensuring that economic crime of lesser amounts that are currently reported to the Bureau are assessed and transmitted to District Officers for

investigation, with more complex cases, routinely involving significant amounts, being investigated by the Bureau. The additional staff including forensic accountants assigned to the Bureau has facilitated the Bureau in providing greater expertise and assistance to Divisional and District personnel in "following the money" when investigating organised criminality in order to identify the proceeds of crime.

In addition, I understand new software has been developed and provided to the Financial Intelligence Unit in order to process Suspicious Transaction Reports (STR) provided, pursuant to relevant legislation, by 'designated persons', including financial institutions and certain professions. The software was developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and provides the benefit of secure transactions; a reduction in administration costs; the ability to monitor reports, analyse and assess crime trends being reported through the STR process.

Senior management continue to review the needs of the Bureau to enable it to fully realise to the aims of the MRP and to ensure that An Garda Síochána maximises it capability to investigate emerging forms of economic crime.

It is not possible, at this stage of development, to estimate the total costs associated with the complete roll-out of the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau.

Garda Reorganisation

287. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the establishment of a road policing unit as outlined in the An Garda Síochána modernisation and renewal programme 2016 to 2021; the estimated full year cost of such a unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31058/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Last July, the Government approved a Five Year Reform and High Level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána which combines the Government's response to the Garda Inspectorate report 'Changing Policing in Ireland' and the commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government aimed at increasing the visibility, effectiveness and responsiveness of An Garda Síochána. The Government agreed that the Garda Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme (MRP) 2016-2021 would be the vehicle for implementation of the Inspectorate recommendations aimed at the Garda organisation. In support of this plan, Budget 2017 provided funding to continue to expand the number of Gardaí towards 15,000, to double the Reserve to 2,000 and to double the number of civilians to 4,000 by 2021. In addition, the plan is supported by substantial capital investment of some €310 million in critical ICT infrastructure, the fleet and other Garda facilities.

Robust independent oversight is essential to ensuring that the pursuit of the reform programme is relentless over the next 5 years. To ensure that this is case, the 240 agreed recommendations of 'Changing Policing in Ireland' have been referred to the Policing Authority to monitor and assess their implementation by An Garda Síochána and to report progress to me on a quarterly basis. The first two progress reports from the Authority, received in January and April, have been published on my Department's website.

The Programme places considerable emphasise on roads policing including the redevelopment of the Garda Traffic Corps as Garda Roads Policing Units with wider roads policing functions. The intention is that working with non-traffic personnel, the units will seek to deprive criminals the use of the road network through high visibility policing and intelligence-led enforcement operations. This redevelopment initiative is ongoing. The Policing Plan for 2017 includes a commitment to incrementally increase the resources allocated to Roads Policing Units by 10% across all regions by the end of the year. I understand that the Assistant Commissioner with responsibility for Roads Policing is currently assessing the capacity of Divisions and Districts to identify and target areas where An Garda Síochána could accelerate the deployment of personnel to traffic in 2017. The filling of any vacancies identified will be conducted on a structured basis and will be further enhanced with the recently renewed recruitment campaigns to An Garda Síochána.

Garda Resources

288. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of automatic number plate recognition units in operation; the cost per unit in tabular form; his plans for its expansion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31059/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be appreciate, the detailed allocation of Garda resources, including the procurement of ICT products and services, is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, and I as Minister, have no role in the matter.

I have, however, been informed by the Garda authorities that Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology was introduced into An Garda Síochána in 2008 and is fitted in official Garda vehicles which are allocated around the country and used on a daily basis to assist in the prevention and detection of crime, particularly on our roads network. I understand that there are currently some 99 Garda vehicles fitted with ANPR, 89 of which are in the Garda Traffic Corps and that this number can vary on a daily basis having regard to operational requirements.

It costs approximately €6000 to purchase and fit an ANPR system to a vehicle and I am informed that the capacity and capabilities of the technology are kept under regular review by senior Garda Management.

The Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016 – 2021 for An Garda Síochána has identified a number of areas for expansion of ANPR including:

- increasing the number of ANPR units deployed;
- the addition of more 'watch-lists' in order to remove a greater number of dangerous drivers and defective vehicles from the roads;
- examining the introduction of fixed ANPR sites at strategic locations across the roads network, in addition to using portable ANPR units while patrolling;
- working with the National Roads Authority, Port Authorities, Local Authorities and private car park operators in order to access data from their ANPR systems, as well as CCTV systems operating on the motorway network.

Community Policing

289. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of late night leagues operated by An Garda Síochána in 2016; the cost of the league; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31060/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to this matter and I will contact the Deputy directly when the report is to hand.

Prisoner Transfers

290. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if Irish citizens imprisoned in Northern Ireland can seek transfer to prisons here in order to be closer to their families; if not, the reason for this situation; the work being undertaken by his department to address issues within the transfer system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31265/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): On 12 July, 2016, the Supreme Court dismissed the State's appeal in the case known as 'O'Farrell, McDonald, Rafferty -v- The Governor of Portlaoise Prison'. The case concerns an appeal taken by the State against a judgement of the High Court ordering the release of the three named prisoners who had been transferred to Ireland from the UK where they had been sentenced, under the provisions of the Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners Acts, 1995 -1997.

The judgement is detailed and has implications for the continuance in its present form of the process operated by the Irish Prison Service for transferring prisoners from other States including Northern Ireland to Ireland. The practical effect of this judgement and whether it will necessitate legislative and/or administrative changes is being examined by officials of the Irish Prison Service and my Department in consultation with Attorney General. Pending legal clarity on these issues, applications by prisoners from other States, including Northern Ireland, for transfer to Ireland cannot be processed to a conclusion at present. I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that all applicants and officials in the appropriate sentencing states are being informed of this position. Given the complex nature of the review being undertaken, it is not possible at this stage to indicate a time frame for its conclusion

Brexit Data

291. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a senior official is designated with responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31277/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The International Policy Division within my Department has been assigned responsibility for coordinating the Department's work as it relates to matters concerning UK withdrawal from the EU. The Division is headed-up by an Assistant Secretary and comprises a team in Dublin and a team based in the Permanent Representation of Ireland to the EU in Brussels, currently consisting of twelve Officers. This figure includes an additional post to the Permanent Representation to support the Brussels based aspects of the forthcoming negotiations which was filled on 3 July 2017.

Complementing this, six senior officers from each of the key areas in the Department (who are in turn supported by relevant staff) have been selected to make up a cross Divisional working group to focus on the key negotiating issues.

The possibility that additional staffing resources may be required to work on Brexit related issues has been flagged in the Department's Workforce Plan. This is being kept under review

and weekly progress updates are provided to the Department's Management Board on the analysis and preparations underway. Costs incurred are being met from the Department's overall budget, and those related specifically to Brexit cannot be readily extracted from overall ongoing work in the Department.

Garda Transport Provision

292. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda cars that were scrapped in 2016 due to the fact that they exceeded 300,000 km mileage and or exceeded ten years of age. [31288/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the management and distribution of Garda resources and I, as Minister, have no role in the matter.

I have asked the Commissioner for the specific information requested by the Deputy and, when it is to hand, I will inform him accordingly.

Legal Services Regulation

293. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the monopoly that a college (details supplied) has on the training and accreditation of barristers; and his plans to open this up to competition. [31338/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 contains a series of new measures that will review the area of legal professional education including in terms of who provides it, who has access to it, and what professional qualifications may apply. These combine annual reporting obligations with the undertaking of a more comprehensive review of this area that will be open to all stake-holders including, on the delivery side, universities and other third-level providers of legal professional education.

The relevant provisions of section 13(2) of the 2015 Act, as commenced under S.I. No. 383 of 2016, provide that the Legal Services Regulatory Authority may, and where required by the Act, shall, keep under review and make recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality in respect of the admission requirements of the legal professions, that is to say both barristers and solicitors, under their respective bodies and the availability and quality of such education and training. This will also take into account the curriculum arrangements for the provision of clinical legal education and the teaching of legal ethics, negotiation skills, alternative dispute resolution and advocacy and the methods by which, and the persons by whom, such education and training is provided. It will also review the policies of the Law Society in relation to the admission of persons as solicitors in the State and those of the Bar Council and the Honorable Society of the King's Inns in relation to persons entitled to practice as barristers.

Under section 33 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015, when commenced, the Legal Services Regulatory Authority will also report, within four months of the end of each financial year, on admissions to the legal professions. This report shall specify the number of persons admitted to each of the legal professions during the given year. It will also contain an assessment as to whether or not, having regard for the demand for the services of practising solicitors and barristers and the need to ensure an adequate standard of education and training for persons admitted to practice, the number of persons so admitted in that year is consistent with the public interest in ensuring the availability of such services at a reasonable cost. A copy of this report

will be laid, by the Minister, before each House of the Oireachtas and will be published and sent by the Regulatory Authority to each of the legal professional bodies concerned.

In addition to this annual reporting cycle, the Legal Services Regulatory Authority has been given the specific task of preparing, with the support of a public consultation process, a comprehensive report in relation to the education and training (including on-going training) arrangements in the State for legal practitioners, including the manner in which such education and training is provided. This report is to be provided to the Minister within two years of the Authority's establishment day, 1 October 2016. Under the detailed parameters set out in section 34 of the 2015 Act as commenced under S.I. No. 383 of 2016, it will contain "a review of the existing arrangements relating to the education and training of legal practitioners" and make such recommendations as considered appropriate in relation to the arrangements that, in the opinion of the Authority, should be in place for the provision of such education and training. This is also to include "the accreditation of bodies to provide such education and training and the reforms or amendments, whether administrative or legislative, that are required to facilitate those arrangements".

In addition, Section 34 (3) (c) of the 2015 Act lays out the specific areas of recommendation that are to be dealt with under this review process. These are to include, among other matters, the appropriate standards of education and training for legal professional qualifications; arrangements necessary to monitor those standards; the scope and content of the curriculum for the courses concerned; standards required for the award of legal professional qualifications, and, arrangements that would facilitate the minimisation of duplication and consequent expense incurred in the taking of overlapping examinations in legal subjects.

Garda Reports

294. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 48 of 18 May 2017, if he has received the promised report from the Garda authorities on this matter; if so, the conclusions of this report; the steps his Department and An Garda Síochána will take on foot of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31340/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the CSO postponed the release of the latest Quarterly Recorded Crime Statistics, which was due on 28 June 2017. I am advised that this postponement arose because the ongoing Garda review is not yet complete and, therefore, it was not possible to conduct the normal CSO data verification process in advance of the publication of new crime statistics.

I note that these issues are under close scrutiny by the Policing Authority, and that the Garda authorities have undertaken to provide further information to the Authority, as well as the CSO. I also expect to receive further updates from the Garda authorities as this work is progressed. Given the Policing Authority's important oversight role, which this Government established, I am sure the Deputy will agree that it is entirely appropriate that this matter is the subject of careful examination and inquiry by the Authority.

We must bear in mind that issues with the consistent recording of crime data are not unique to this jurisdiction, and I am assured that there is continuing close engagement by the CSO with An Garda Síochána in relation to this matter and to support the ongoing improvements to our official crime statistics generally. The CSO has already carried out two detailed reviews of crime data quality, in 2015 and 2016, and I understand that further general reviews of crime data quality are planned. The CSO's work provides an important measure of re-assurance to support

ongoing work to enhance the quality of the official crime statistics.

As previously outlined to the Deputy, the CSO also chaired an Expert Group on Crime Statistics which has considered a number of the Garda Inspectorate's recommendations on crime statistics, including in relation to the crime counting rules. I am advised that the Expert Group has prepared a report, and I expect this will be published in the coming weeks.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

- 295. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 88 to 91, inclusive, of 24 May 2017, the number of these collisions that involved just the garda car and other vehicles; the number of vehicles which involved a pedestrian or cyclist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31361/17]
- 296. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 88 to 91, inclusive, of 24 May 2017, if any of the gardaí involved in these collisions received compensation as a result of the road traffic collision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31362/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 295 and 296 together.

I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matters raised by the Deputy and will contact him directly once this is to hand.

Garda Reserve

297. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 859 to 861, inclusive, on 20 June 2017, the amount which was allocated in 2017 to deliver on recruitment; the amount allocated to the recruitment of 300 Garda reserves, 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31404/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that the total Net Vote for An Garda Síochána in 2017, which represents the funding being made available to the Garda Vote minus estimated receipts under Appropriations-in-Aid, is €1.506 billion. This represents an increase of 4.6% when compared to the final net outturn figure of €1.440 billion for 2016. This increase is mainly due to an additional provision in the Garda Pay Subhead to address the Garda Pay Deal under the Lansdowne Road Agreement as well as the recruitment of 800 new Gardaí, some 500 new civilian staff and some 300 Reserve members in 2017.

I would refer the Deputy to the post-reply correspondence in respect of Parliamentary Questions No. 858, 862 and 866 of 3 July 2017, wherein I indicated that the full first year payroll cost of recruiting 800 new Gardaí, 500 new civilian staff and 300 Reserve is estimated at €14,863,029, €21,500,000 and €690,000 respectively.

The high proportion of resources allocated to the Garda Vote underlines this Government's commitment 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. Key to achieving this goal is the Government's decision 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.

Census of Population Data

298. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the policy response which is triggered within his Department further to the publication of the census of population; the sections of his Department involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31405/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware the full set of Census reports have not yet been published and this will happen on an ongoing basis during the rest of 2017. Some of these forthcoming reports will have direct relevance for policy issues under the remit of my Department such as integration, ethnicity and equality. The Census is a rich data set and all relevant units within my Department, particularly the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) unit, utilise it as a valuable source of data for analysis on a range of issues. It is the practise of my Department to make best use of all available sources of sound evidence and data to shape policy in line with best practice.

Visa Agreements

299. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason citizens from Peru are not entitled to a 90-day visa on arrival (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31434/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The requirements for which countries are visa required to come to Ireland are kept under regular review in consultation with my colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Government is pursuing a strategy of greater co-ordination and co-operation on visa issues with the United Kingdom (UK) in the context of the Common Travel Area (CTA). This is exemplified by the operation of the British Irish Visa Scheme in China and India which allows for travel to and around Ireland and the UK on a single visa. As part of this greater co-operation, the matter of alignment of those States whose citizens are visa required is also being kept under review. The greater the extent of alignment between the two jurisdictions, the greater the opportunity to increase the numbers of tourism and business visits to the CTA. At present, both Ireland and the UK require all citizens of Peru to be in possession of a visa for travel to their jurisdiction and any proposals for change will need to be considered in this context.

I might also add that visitors to Ireland, whether visa required or not, must on arrival at a port of entry receive permission to enter the State from an immigration officer. Visitors who intend to stay in Ireland for more than 90 days must also register with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service for permission to reside in Ireland.

Valuation Office

- 300. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the allocated budget for the Valuation Office's pilot scheme under which an external partner is contracted to carry out the revaluations of Carlow and Kilkenny local authority areas. [31532/17]
 - 301. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the allocated budget

for the Valuation Office's occupier-assisted valuation approach pilot scheme for revaluing businesses in the Laois local authority area. [31533/17]

- 302. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to evaluate the performance of the revaluation pilots conducted by the external partner and by occupier-assisted valuation; the timeframe for same; and if other local authority areas have already been identified for either of these approaches including those subject to a second revaluation. [31534/17]
- 303. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for subsequent revaluations after the conclusion of Reval 2017; the annual schedule; the local authority areas yet to undergo revaluation; and the areas due for a revaluation for a second time covering each of the years 2018 to 2021, respectively, in tabular form. [31535/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 300 to 303, inclusive, together.

The Commissioner of Valuation has responsibility under the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 to maintain a valuation list for each Local Authority, of all commercial properties in that Local Authority area, which is used to calculate the rates due from individual ratepayers. The Commissioner is independent in the performance of his functions and the statute does not accord me, as Minister for Justice and Equality, any role in this regard. Revaluation is a process where all rateable properties in a Local Authority area are valued periodically by reference to a single valuation date. Following the first revaluation, subsequent revaluations of each rating authority area are then carried out on a cyclical basis no sooner than five years and no later than ten years after the first revaluation (Section 25 of the Valuation Act 2001).

The revaluation provisions in the Valuation Acts 2001 - 2015 provide for the revaluation of all rateable property within a rating authority area so as to reflect changes in value due to economic factors, differential movements in property values or other external factors such as changes in the business environment or infrastructural changes in the vicinity of a property. The Valuation Office is currently engaged in a national revaluation programme, the immediate objective of which is to ensure that the first revaluation of all rating authority areas in over 150 years is conducted across the country, as soon as possible, and on a phased basis. Revaluation is an important instrument in redressing historical anomalies in relation to commercial rates. The general outcome of revaluations finalised to date by the Valuation Office has been that about 60% of ratepayers have had their liability for rates reduced following a revaluation and about 40% had an increase, a pattern which is most welcome and is expected to be replicated elsewhere as the programme advances.

The national revaluation programme currently underway is the first general revaluation of all commercial property in the State since the middle of the 19th century, involving the valuation of some 150,000 commercial rateable properties. Completing the first revaluation and getting properties in every local authority area onto the 5-10 year cycle of revaluations provided for in the legislation represents a sea-change for the rateable valuation system. All rateable properties in the Dublin, Waterford and Limerick local authority areas are now re-valued. In addition, 13 public utilities representing some of the largest ratepayers in the State have been revalued on a global basis. This represents approximately 57% of the national rateable valuation base in monetary value terms or 33% in numerical terms. Significant progress is being made and the programme has established a momentum which is now being built upon as the current phase of work known as "REVAL 2017" is nearing a conclusion and which covers the following nine counties - Longford, Leitrim, Roscommon, Westmeath, Kildare, Offaly, Sligo, Carlow and Kilkenny. A second revaluation of the commercial properties in the South Dublin

county council area is also underway.

The Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015 which came into effect on 8 June 2015 has as its primary purpose, the acceleration of the national revaluation programme and it contains a number of measures in this regard. The Act provided for the Commissioner to conduct a revaluation with the assistance of the occupiers of property using elements of self-assessment. This provision – known as "Occupier Assisted Valuation" - is one of the express provisions intended to assist the acceleration of the national revaluation programme. I understand that the Commissioner intends running a pilot project involving the revaluation of the approximately 2,280 commercial properties in County Laois rating authority area using "Occupier Assisted Valuation". The Valuation Office has conducted the necessary statutory consultations with the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and with Laois County Council and is now embarking on development of appropriate technical and statutory systems of valuation to underpin the pilot project and allow for its initiation later this year. Draft regulations are currently under preparation which when finalised will give effect to these new procedures set out in the 2015 Act.

The Occupier Assisted participative approach also involves the development and implementation of extensive information and communications technology facilities. The provision of a wide range of on-line supports will be essential to the success of the pilot project, including use of video and audio technology to assist ratepayers in carrying out their elements of the process. There will be extensive engagement with the ratepayers through an information campaign which will be undertaken to ensure maximum participation during the pilot. Accordingly, at this stage the Commissioner cannot be precise about the date on which he will sign the statutory Valuation Order to formally commence the revaluation in County Laois. However, I am informed that he expects to do so later this year. Following the signing of the order, the Valuation Office intends to undertake a publicity and information campaign during which each individual ratepayer will be written to informing them of the commencement of the project and requesting information in relation to their property. There will also be a programme of engagement with the various trade bodies and representative associations with the purpose of keeping them abreast of developments. Regarding the allocated budget for the County Laois pilot, the costs for development work on information and communication technology and on-line supports and ancillary work are estimated to be in the region of €60,000.

Similarly, the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015 included an amendment which enables the Valuation Office to enter into contractual arrangements with external parties to outsource work in order to augment the in-house capacity of the Office. This is another of the provisions intended to assist the acceleration of the national revaluation programme. During the early months of 2016, the Office conducted an extensive procurement exercise, conducted in accordance with EU Public Procurement requirements, which resulted in an award of contract to CBRE, Connaught House, Burlington Road, Dublin 4 to carry out the revaluation of the Carlow County Council and Kilkenny County Council rating authority areas on its behalf. This contractual work is still underway in these two counties and the new valuations will be published in September 2018. It is anticipated that appeals from these valuations will continue into 2018. The total value of the contract awarded for this pilot project, as advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union is €1.945 Million (excl. VAT).

Regarding plans to evaluate the performance of the revaluation pilots conducted by the external partner in Carlow/Kilkenny and by the occupier assisted valuation method in Laois, the position is that because of the independence of the Commissioner under the valuation legislation, I, as Minister, have no direct role in reviewing the work done as part of the revaluation programme, whether by direct assessment, external partners or by using the occupier-assisted method of valuation. I am informed by the Commissioner that such performance evaluations

are undertaken as a matter of course following the completion of a revaluation project and evaluations of this nature will be conducted by the Commissioner and his senior officers following the conclusion of the pilots in Laois and in Carlow/Kilkenny. It is intended that a review of the Carlow-Kilkenny pilot project will be conducted during the first quarter of 2018, in accordance with the Valuation Office's published Strategic Plan. The timeframe for an evaluation of the County Laois pilot has not been determined as the project is currently at the advanced planning stage with the substantive work due to commence later this year following the signing of the valuation order which will signal the formal commencement of the project. I have been informed that there are no plans at present to extend the pilot projects to other revaluations, pending the reviews outlined above.

Following the conclusion of the current phase of revaluation programme, i.e. REVAL 2017, attention will turn to the next two phases of the programme. I understand that the Commissioner intends to include seven rating authority areas in the next phase – known as REVAL 2019 - which will formally commence later in 2017 and will culminate in 2019 with the publication of a new valuation list for these areas. The next and final phase of the programme - REVAL 2021 - will include 8 rating authority areas and will conclude in 2021 with the publication of new valuation lists for these areas. The local authorities to undergo revaluation in each of these two phases are indicated in the following table:

| REVAL 2019Rating Authority | REVAL 2021Rating Authority |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Cavan CountyLouth CountyMeath County- | Cork CityCork CountyClare CountyDone- |
| Monaghan CountyTipperary CountyWex- | gal CountyGalway CityGalway CountyKer- |
| ford CountyWicklow County | ry CountyMayo County |

Subsequent revaluations of each rating authority area following the first revaluation are carried out on a cyclical basis no sooner than five years and no later than ten years after the first revaluation (Section 25 of the Valuation Act 2001). The position in relation to second revaluations is contained in the following table.

| Local Authorities to undergo a 2nd revaluation in the period 2018 to 2021 | | |
|---|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Rating Authority | 1st Revaluation Completion Date | 2nd Revaluation Completion Date |
| Fingal County Council | 31 December 2009 | 31 December 2019 |
| Dun Laoghaire- Rathdown | 31 December 2010 | 31 December 2020 |

Departmental Staff Data

304. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31781/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not keep lists in relation to officers seeking a transfer to other Departments or agencies outside of Dublin. Officers interested in applying for such transfers are directed to the Human Resources Division in the relevant Department to express their interest. Similarly, my Department does not keep lists for staff wishing to move from a regional location into County Dublin.

In relation to staff members from my Department who have requested a move to one of our regional offices outside of Dublin, the information requested by the Deputy for the years 2015 to date can be found in the table below.

Finally, the Deputy may be aware that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is currently working on a Civil Service Wide Mobility Scheme that will allow staff to apply centrally for a transfer to another Department or agency. The scheme is one of a number of arrangements that fulfil the requirements of Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan which calls for mobility opportunities for staff across geographic, organisational and sectoral boundaries.

| Year applied for | Number |
|------------------|--------|
| 2015 | 3 |
| 2016 | 5 |
| 2017 | 5 |

Archaeological Sites

305. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if an archaeological assessment has been undertaken in Bantry Bay recently; if not, if one is planned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30798/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Numerous underwater surveys and assessments have been undertaken by various parties in Bantry Bay in recent years. This year my Department's National Monuments Service has provided advice on locations of archaeological interest within areas in which it is proposed to undertake commercial activity. I am advised that, as the proposal will not have any impact on any known archaeological feature, site or object, no further assessment is planned by my Department in respect of it.

Early Childhood Care and Education

- 306. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the funding that has been allocated for 2017 to increase the provision of Irish language naíonraí in line with the recommendations proposed by the policy on Gaeltacht education 2017 to 2022. [31002/17]
- 307. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the funding that has been allocated for 2017 to increase the provision of training of qualified child care workers in the Irish language in line with the recommendations proposed by the polcy on Gaeltacht education 2017 to 2022. [31003/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 306 and 307 together.

I have been informed by Údarás na Gaeltachta that its subsidiary, Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta (CNNG), provides administration, support and training services for early childhood education and care services which include naíonraí, crèches, breakfast clubs, afterschool services and parent and toddler groups in the Gaeltacht areas. CNNG currently manages 74 early-years services (Naíonraí) throughout the Gaeltacht, providing early-years education to over 1,000 children. Údarás na Gaeltachta approved funding of €535,000 for CNNG's operations in 2017.

In anticipation of the increase in the provision of Irish language naíonraí (as proposed by the Policy on Gaeltacht Education), Údarás na Gaeltachta recently approved funding to Muintearas Teo to provide a Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education through Irish in the Connemara Gaeltacht. Enquiries are also underway to assess the requirement for providing the same course in the other Gaeltacht regions based on demand. Údarás na Gaeltachta has also approved a pilot scheme aimed at supporting the upskilling of those already employed in the early-years education sector in the Gaeltacht.

The Policy on Gaeltacht Education sets out a number of objectives aimed at supporting services at present operating through the medium of English in the Gaeltacht to move towards an Irish-medium model and also aims to increase the availability of Irish language naíonraí.

In the interest of completeness, I should also mention that in addition to the aforementioned assistance provided to the early years sector in the Gaeltacht, my own Department has sanctioned funding to eight early years childcare facilities in the Gaeltacht through Scéim Seirbhísí Réamhscoile agus Iarscoile. This scheme, which was established for a trial period of 3 years in March 2014, provides assistance to qualifying Gaeltacht-based Family Support Centres and certain Gaeltacht pre-school services which operate through Irish, in order to support the provision of language acquisition and enrichment activities aimed at young Gaeltacht households.

Departmental Titles

308. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she will consider retaining the word Gaeltacht in the title of her Department when the reorganisation of her Department occurs. [31035/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The title of my Department remains the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs pending the making of a Government Order to change the title. This will be done once the reconfiguration of my Department is complete, as is normal procedure.

Local Authority Funding

- 309. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the commitment of additional funding made in relation to a project (details supplied) in County Cork remains; if her Department has engaged with Cork City Council on the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31328/17]
- 312. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has received costings regarding a project (details supplied) from a local authority. [30854/17]
- 314. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if she has received costings for a project (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30976/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 309, 312 and 314 together.

The Cork Event Centre is a project being developed and managed by Cork City Council. My Department allocated €12 million to the City Council towards the cost of the Centre. This allocation is subject to a Service Level Agreement with the City Council to ensure compliance

with all relevant requirements in relation to major capital projects.

My Department recently received further correspondence from Cork City Council indicating that the overall project costs has risen from €65m up to between €67m and €73m. However, the Council and contractor have not yet finalised the full cost due to design changes required to provide full multi-functionality for the centre. My Department is continuing to liaise with Cork City Council who have been asked to provide additional information on the cost increases. Once furnished my Department will consider the matter further.

National Monuments

310. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the names and positions of those who attended a meeting between the National Monuments Service and officials of Tipperary County Council on 13 June 2017; the location in which the meeting was held; the duration of the meeting; the items on the agenda; the correspondence and documents that were provided to attendees; if she will provide a copy of the minutes of the meeting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31388/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): A Senior Archaeologist and an Architectural Heritage Officer from my Department attended a meeting with Tipperary County Council officials on the date in question. The meeting related to traffic management issues on Ardfinnan Bridge which is a recorded monument. The meeting was in the nature of a pre-planning consultation and was at the Council's request. The only document furnished was one drawn up by the Council's consulting engineer regarding potential options.

As all the arrangements for the meeting were made locally, and as the meeting was in the nature of a pre-planning consultation, further information should be sought in the first instance from the Council itself.

National Monuments

311. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the date on which it is proposed to transfer responsibility for 14 to 17 Moore Street from her Department to the OPW; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30844/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Office of Public Works has statutory responsibility under the National Monuments Acts for the maintenance and management of national monuments in the ownership of the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Following completion of the essential preservation and protection works approved by the High Court, basic day to day care and maintenance of the buildings has now also been taken over by OPW.

Question No. 312 answered with Question No. 309.

Film Industry

313. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if the board of Screen Training Ireland is certified to deliver accredited train-

ing; and if it has been quality assured by Quality and Qualifications Ireland. [30973/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Irish Film Board is the national development agency for the Irish film, television and animation industry. Screen Training Ireland is part of the Irish Film Board and is a national training and development resource specifically created for Ireland's audiovisual industry. Screen Training Ireland works with national and internationally recognised industry professionals to identify, design and deliver training in Ireland. Training programmes are offered to enhance expertise in Film, Television, Animation and interactive screen content. Screen Training Ireland continually evaluates industry growth to identify future skills needs and professional development for a growing industry. Screen Training Ireland courses are developed in consultation with industry professionals across all disciplines, and tutors are industry practitioners working at the cutting edge of the industry.

Like many training providers, Screen Training Ireland partners with providers that have accreditation arrangements with awarding bodies recognised on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). For example, Screen Training Ireland is developing two career traineeships for the film industry in collaboration with SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards. These traineeships will be certified by the appropriate awarding body and will offer structured work-based training to new entrants.

The Irish Film Board and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland jointly commissioned a report on the skills needs of the audiovisual industry in Ireland. This report is being finalised and will make recommendations for the industry's training needs into the future. My Department will consider recommendations contained in the report, in consultation with the Irish Film Board

Further details Screen Ireland's range of courses as well as international training can be accessed on its website at the following link:

https://www.screentrainingireland.ie/training-courses/upcoming-courses/.

Question No. 314 answered with Question No. 309.

Wildlife Conservation

315. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the recorded numbers of golden eagle, white-tailed eagle and red kite birds, respectively, since their reintroduction here; the costs involved with the reintroduction of each bird; the other additional ongoing costs involved; the recorded nest sites or geographical spread in the State for each of the birds; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31042/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Since 2000, my Department, through its National Parks and Wildlife Service, has been providing funding and logistical support to the Golden Eagle Trust for reintroduction projects of the Golden Eagle, the White-tailed Eagle and the Red Kite. Between 2001 and 2012, 63 Golden Eagles were released in Glenveagh National Park, Donegal.

Between 2007 and 2011, a total of 100 White-tailed Eagle were released in Killarney National Park, Kerry and during the same period 160 young Red Kites were released near Avoca, Wicklow and two locations in north Co. Dublin. At present, there are 5 territorial pairs of

golden eagles, 85 territorial pairs of Red Kites and 10 territorial pairs of White-tailed Eagles being monitored.

The Golden Eagles are the most difficult species to re-introduce, and fledged 12 wild bred chicks between 2007 and 2016; the red kites have fledged 192 chicks since 2010; and the white tailed eagles have fledged 14 chicks in the wild since 2013. It is hoped that chicks of each species currently being monitored will fledge successfully this year. Poisoning has hampered the success of the eagle projects and continues to be a threat.

The geographical distribution of the reintroduced birds differs for the three species involved. Golden Eagles have only been recorded as breeding in County Donegal though, in 2016, there has been some nesting activity recorded in Northern Ireland. Individuals have been recorded as far afield as Co. Kerry and Scotland. White-tailed Eagles have bred in County Kerry, where they were first reintroduced, and also in counties Clare, Cork and Galway. A young territorial pair of White-tailed Eagles has also been recorded this year in County Longford. The Red Kites have bred mostly in Wicklow, but also in counties Dublin, Meath and Wexford. There are now territorial eagles in each of the four provinces and the red kite has established a strong presence along several areas on the eastern seaboard.

Clare County Council reported that, in 2015, over 10,000 visitors came to view the pair of nesting white-tailed eagles in east Clare bringing important tourism revenue to the area. The eagles have been of great interest to visitors coming to Glenveagh and Killarney National Parks. This highlights that not only is there an intrinsic value in restoring, preserving and protecting our native species but that there exists a valuable opportunity for local businesses to benefit from biodiversity projects.

My Department is compiling figures on the funds provided to the Golden Eagle Trust and will send them to the Deputy in accordance with the timelines set out in Standing Orders.

Brexit Data

316. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31267/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As I advised the House in my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 267 and 268 of 5 April 2017, a Working Group, chaired at Assistant Secretary level and composed of officials from across the Department was established last year to deal with Brexit issues. This Working Group is supported by the Department's Corporate Governance and Coordination Unit which is also responsible for managing those issues relating to Brexit that fall within my Department's remit.

The Department also has a full time dedicated attaché assigned to Ireland's Permanent Representation in Brussels. This officer is a member of the Department's Working Group and is also fully involved in the preparations by Ireland's diplomatic team in Brussels.

These arrangements are being kept under review and will be enhanced as required.

317. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 975 of 20 June 2017, the authority under which the review referred to is being instituted; the level of funding that will be required for the review; the Department or body's budget from which it will come; the organisations which will be consulted and-or have a direct say in the review; when the review will be completed and its recommendations acted upon and implemented; the person or body to which the review group will report; and the person or body that has the authority to make recommendations and decisions arising from the review. [31325/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In my reply to Questions No 975 and 976 of 20 June, I indicated that a major review of the derogations is scheduled for 2018, and this will take account of all relevant factors, including perceived threats, distribution and population data available on various bird species. The review will include a public/stakeholder consultation element and all interested parties will be afforded the opportunity to input into the Review. Any costs relating to the review will be funded from within the Department's resources. I expect that the review will be completed in a time frame to allow for any relevant recommendations to be considered by me as part of the renewal of the declarations on 1 May 2018.

Departmental Functions

318. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the functions that will be transferred to the Department of community and rural affairs; the areas in which those functions currently lie; if responsibility and budgets for the RSS scheme will transfer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31360/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In his speech to Dáil Éireann on 14 June 2017, An Taoiseach announced the establishment of a new Department of State for Community and Rural Affairs, to be led by Minister Michael Ring.

The functions to transfer from my Department to the new Department will be outlined in a Transfer of Functions Order which is being prepared at present. Functions will also transfer to the new Department from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

In relation to the Rural Social Scheme I am advised Deputy that responsibility for this scheme resides currently with the Department of Social Protection.

Commemorative Events

319. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs her plans to provide either a permanent or temporary exhibition space within State-funded museums in Dublin as part of the State commemoration of the Great Famine. [31396/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee, I am responsible for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to commemorate the Great Irish Famine. In carrying out these functions, my main focus is to ensure that the victims of the Irish Famine are respectfully and appropriately remembered and also to raise awareness of current food se-

curity issues worldwide.

The Great Famine is marked each year at formal commemorations in Ireland and abroad. This year's National Famine Commemoration will take place on Saturday, 30th September 2017 at the Famine Warhouse 1848 in Ballingarry, County Tipperary.

In relation to the reference to plans to provide either a permanent or temporary exhibition space within State funded museums in Dublin as part of the State commemoration of the Great Famine, the Deputy will appreciate that decisions in relation to any such displays would be operational matters for the relevant cultural institutions or other entities concerned.

The Deputy will, of course, be aware that there are many local museums and other entities around the country that display material relating to the Famine period, the Irish National Famine Museum at Strokestown Park, Co Roscommon, being an excellent example.

Census of Population

320. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the consideration which is given to the details of the census of population within her Department; the sections of her Department involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31406/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Population statistics from census reports inform a range of activities within my Department, both formally and informally. Generally, population statistics can assist in the development of policies and schemes in terms of overall guidance while reports and studies using census data might also, on occasion, be of particular relevance to individual projects.

Census data is of particular relevance in those areas listed in the following table:

| Language Planning | Use is made of census data relating to the Irish | | | |
|-------------------|---|--|--|--|
| | language insofar as it relates to Gaeltacht Language | | | |
| | Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish | | | |
| | Language Networks as defined under the Gaeltacht | | | |
| | Act 2012 . This quantitative data is being used as | | | |
| | a key indicator in determining how best to support | | | |
| | the language in the context of language plans being | | | |
| | developed for implementation at community level | | | |
| | under the language planning process. In order to | | | |
| | facilitate the usage and disseminations of such data, | | | |
| | the Department, in co-operation with the CSO has | | | |
| | developed a language planning map viewer . This is | | | |
| | accessed via the Department's website and presents, | | | |
| | inter alia, Irish language data from Census 2011 for | | | |
| | the language planning areas. 2016 Irish language | | | |
| | census data will be provided on the map viewer, on publication of this data by the CSO in late July. | | | |
| CL (P | | | | |
| CLÁR | CLÁR, and the geographical area of coverage of the | | | |
| | scheme, is related to levels of depopulation over a | | | |
| | period of time and is based on the census data for | | | |
| | 1926 and 2002 i.e. the criteria for the scheme are | | | |
| | based on levels of depopulation between those years. It is intended to review the areas of coverage of the | | | |
| | scheme later this year when the detailed census data | | | |
| | for 2016 is available. | | | |
| | 101 2010 is available. | | | |

| Language Planning | Use is made of census data relating to the Irish language insofar as it relates to Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks as defined under the Gaeltacht Act 2012. This quantitative data is being used as a key indicator in determining how best to support the language in the context of language plans being developed for implementation at community level under the language planning process. In order to facilitate the usage and disseminations of such data, the Department, in co-operation with the CSO has developed a language planning map viewer. This is accessed via the Department's website and presents, inter alia, Irish language data from Census 2011 for the language planning areas. 2016 Irish language |
|-------------------|---|
| | inter alia, Irish language data from Census 2011 for the language planning areas. 2016 Irish language census data will be provided on the map viewer, on publication of this data by the CSO in late July. |
| LEADER | Information from the CSO and the census is used in policy decisions impacting on the LEADER programme e.g. in the resource allocation model used for the distribution of LEADER Funds. |

CLÁR Programme

321. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the projects for counties Cavan and Monaghan which will be funded under the CLÁR programme in 2017. [31429/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched on 31 March 2017 and will provide funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. Funding is available this year under four separate Measures:

Measure 1: Support for School and Community Safety Measures.

Measure 2: Play Areas.

Measure 3: Targeted Community Infrastructure.

Measure 4: First Responder Supports.

Applications under Measures 1, 2 and 3 were submitted through the Local Authorities, while Measure 4 was targeted at voluntary organisations involved in emergency rescue or first-response efforts. The closing date for applications under the 2017 CLÁR programme was 5 May 2017 and over 500 applications were received across the four measures.

Successful projects were announced over the last few weeks, with a total of just under €7 million allocated to approximately 230 projects across the four Measures.

Details of the approved projects, including those in counties Cavan and Monaghan, are available at http://www.ahrrga.gov.ie/rural/rural-development/clar-2016/.

Arts Council Grants

322. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of Aosdána members that applied for cnuas funding in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and that were then refused a cnuas; and the reason for these refusals. [31558/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Aosdána is an initiative established by the Arts Council in 1981 to honour creative artists who have made a significant contribution to the arts in Ireland. There are currently some 250 members of Aosdána. Individual members of Aosdána can qualify for a means-tested payment known as the Cnuas if they are resident in Ireland, are full-time practising artists and if their income is below the threshold for qualification. Details of Aosdána membership including the names of members who receive funding are published every year in the Arts Council's Annual Report and on the Aosdána website at www.aosdana.ie.

Operation of the scheme is the responsibility of the Arts Council and my Department has no role in relation to it.

Departmental Staff Data

323. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs the number of civil servants in her Department that have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in her Department that have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31773/17]

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that, since the establishment of my Department in 2016 and to date in 2017 no civil servants in my Department have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin. In 2016 one civil servant requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin.

HSE Staff Data

324. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of HSE employees that are not members of recognised unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30787/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Delays

325. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the continued reason for the delay in treatment for a person (details supplied). [30789/17]

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 Data

326. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons that presented for mental health or psychiatric services to HSE facilities in County Clare in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of these that had been referred by a general practitioner; and the number of these that were self-referrals. [30791/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Mental Health Services

327. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the general admission and treatment policies at Ennis acute psychiatric unit. [30792/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

328. **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. [30793/17]

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.

National Treatment Purchase Fund

329. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if all resources allocated in 2016 to the National Treatment Purchase Fund, NTPF, to tackle waiting lists was spent; if resources for tackling endoscopy waiting lists was spent; if not, the reason therefor; the detail of such underspend; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30805/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) was established on a statutory basis in 2004 and previously arranged for the provision of hospital treatment to classes of persons determined by the Minister. This function was suspended after 2011.

From 2012, the NTPF's role has focussed on: the maintenance, audit and quality assurance of waiting lists; pricing under the Nursing Home Support Scheme; and supporting the HSE in the delivery of a number of waiting list initiatives.

In 2016 the only waiting list initiative delivered by the NTPF was the Endoscopy Initiative which was funded from the NTPF's full budget allocation of €5m for 2016. The purpose of this initiative was that no patient would be waiting more than 12 months for an endoscopy procedure by the end of December 2016. The NTPF has advised that approximately €1.7m was spent on procedures in 2016 and a further €185,852 in 2017 so far.

The NTPF Endoscopy Initiative for 2016 resulted in only 11 patients waiting for an endoscopy procedure for over 12 months at the end of the December, from 5,701 in June. This represents a 99.4% reduction in the number of patients waiting over 12 months for a routine endoscopy.

Health Services Staff Training

330. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the cost of providing 20 extra training places for child psychologists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30810/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

331. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons under 18 years of age in CHO area 9 waiting between zero to three months, three to six months, six to nine months, nine to 12 months and over 12 months for orthodontic treatment; the steps being taken to deal with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30811/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Help Service Provision

332. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if home help will be made available for a person (details supplied). [30828/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Home Help Service

333. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for home help by county; the average waiting time; and the longest times for waiting in each county. [30829/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Waiting Lists

334. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30839/17]

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 National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014,* has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

335. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting time for a spinal bed in the National Rehabilitation Hospital; if waiting times have been affected adversely by the closure of beds in the hospital in April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30840/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

336. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment at the National Rehabilitation Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30842/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

4 July 2017

Hospitals Expenditure

337. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the amount being spent by the Ireland East hospital group on private ambulance operators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30843/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medical Card Applications

338. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue to a person (details supplied). [30855/17]

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.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

339. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the reason losec in a pre mixed liquid form is not covered under the drug payment scheme; his plans to list the drug under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30860/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

General Register Office

340. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment for persons (details supplied) will be arranged for a marriage interview. [30878/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Civil Registration Service is operated by the Health Service Executive on behalf of the General Register Office under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection. I have referred your question to the Health Service Executive to address the specific issues raised. The HSE will reply directly to you.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Appeals

341. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appeal which has been submitted regarding a fair deal scheme application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30885/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Consultant Recruitment

342. **Deputy Brid Smith** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 400 of 30 May 2017, if there will be a children's consultant ophthalmologist available at the children's hospital group (details supplied). [30886/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the Deputy's question concerning paediatric ophthalmology patients, I have asked the HSE to respond directly regarding the arrangements in place to provide on-going care for these patients.

Hospital Appointments Status

343. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite an ophthalmology appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30888/17]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

344. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 1020 and 1021 of 20 June 2017, the details of the targets set by his Department for the provision of these assessments. [30891/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

345. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 1224 to 1226, inclusive, and 1241 of 20 June 2017, the timeframe for the publication of the independent report on the nursing home support scheme. [30892/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) is a system of financial support for those in need of long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their income and assets while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

The legislation underpinning the Nursing Homes Support Scheme requires each private nursing home to negotiate and agree a price for long-term residential care services with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) should they wish to be an approved nursing home for the purposes of the Scheme. The NTPF has statutory independence in the performance of its function, and negotiates with each nursing home on an individual basis. The NTPF may examine the records and accounts of nursing homes as part of the process with the objective of setting a fair price which delivers value for money to the individual and the State. In negotiating with nursing homes, the NTPF has regard to:

- Costs reasonably and prudently incurred by the nursing home and evidence of value for money;
 - Price(s) previously charged;
 - Local market price; and
- Budgetary constraints and the obligation on the State to use available resources in the most beneficial, effective and efficient manner to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public.

When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. A number of issues have been identified for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanisms by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee the review of the pricing system for private long-term residential care facilities. This Steering Committee is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and the NTPF, and work in this area is ongoing and well advanced. This pricing review is a significant element of the overall Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, and as such it is important that sufficient time is given to the review to ensure that all relevant aspects of the current pricing mechanism can be considered and examined fully.

Public Health Policy

346. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide alcohol consumption statistics here and across EU member states since 2005, including those from the World Health Organization; if he will cite the source of each in tabular form; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [30901/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The data requested by the Deputy is provided in the table.

Ireland's level and pattern of harmful drinking has a huge impact on our nation's physical and mental health. We cannot reduce alcohol harm in Ireland without reducing alcohol consumption, particularly among those who drink the most. Although consumption in Ireland declined between 2007 and 2013, it remains too high. Indeed, provisional figures from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners indicate that our consumption levels increased in 2016 to 11.46 litres per capita.

The Public Health Alcohol Bill aims to reduce per capita average consumption in Ireland to a level of 9.1 litres of pure alcohol.

Average consumption (litres of pure alcohol) per adult (aged 15 and over)

| COUN- TRY/ RE- GION | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Austria | 12.4 | 12.4 | 12.5 | 12 | 11.3 | 12.1 | 12 | 12.3 | 11.8 | 12.3 | | |
| Bel- gium | 12.3 | 11 | 10.3 | 10.5 | 10.1 | 10.2 | 10.1 | 10.1 | 11.8 | 12.6 | | |
| Bul- garia | 10.5 | 10.4 | 10.9 | 11 | 10.9 | 10.8 | 10.7 | 11 | 12.1 | 12 | | |
| Croatia | 11.6 | 11.8 | 12.6 | 12.1 | 12.2 | 12.1 | 12.2 | 11.5 | 12.4 | 12.1 | | |
| Cyprus | 11.4 | 11.5 | 11.6 | 12 | 10.8 | 11.3 | 10.7 | 10.6 | 9 | | | |
| Czechia | 13.2 | 13 | 13.4 | 13.3 | 13.2 | 12.7 | 12.4 | 12.7 | 12.4 | 12.7 | | |
| Den- mark | 11.3 | 11 | 11 | 10.7 | 10.1 | 10.3 | 10.5 | 9.3 | 9.5 | 9.6 | | |
| Estonia | 13.1 | 13.4 | 14.7 | 14.2 | 11.9 | 11.4 | 11.6 | | | | | |
| Finland | 9.9 | 10.2 | 10.4 | 10.3 | 10 | 9.7 | 9.8 | 9.2 | 9 | 8.8 | | |
| France | 12.2 | 12.4 | 12.2 | 11.9 | 11.8 | 11.7 | 11.8 | 11.5 | 11.1 | 11.5 | | |
| Ger- many | 11.7 | 11.8 | 11.5 | 11.4 | 11.2 | 11.2 | 11.2 | 11.2 | 10.9 | 11 | | |
| Greece | 9.9 | 9.4 | 9.7 | 9.5 | 9.1 | 9 | 8 | 8.2 | 7.5 | 7.5 | | |
| Hun- gary | 12.9 | 13.2 | 12.6 | 11.6 | 11.5 | 10.8 | 11.5 | 11.3 | 10.9 | | | |
| Ireland | 13.3 | 13.4 | 13.6 | 12.7 | 11.4 | 11.9 | 11.7 | 11.5 | 10.5 | 10.8 | 10.9 | 11.5 |
| Italy | 8.7 | 8.4 | 8.4 | 8 | 7.3 | 7 | 7 | 7.5 | 7.3 | 7.6 | | |
| Latvia | 9.9 | 10.4 | 12.1 | 11.8 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 10.1 | 10.2 | 10.4 | | | |
| Lithu- ania | 12.3 | 12.7 | 13.4 | 13.3 | 12.4 | 12.9 | 12.7 | 15.1 | 15 | 15.2 | | |
| Luxem- bourg | 11.8 | 12 | 11.8 | 11.5 | 11.4 | 11.4 | 11.5 | 11.3 | 11 | 11.1 | | |
| Malta | 6.4 | 8.8 | 7.5 | 7.1 | 7.4 | 7.9 | 6.9 | 7.7 | 8.6 | 8.5 | | |
| Nether- lands | 9.7 | 9.8 | 9.5 | 9.6 | 9.2 | 9.3 | 9 | 9.1 | 8.7 | | | |
| Poland | 9.5 | 10.4 | 10.9 | 11.4 | 10.7 | 10.6 | 10.9 | 10.8 | 11.6 | 10.7 | | |
| Portu- gal | 13.3 | 13.1 | 12.6 | 12.3 | 12 | 12.3 | 11.9 | 12 | 10 | 9.9 | | |
| Roma- nia | 7.7 | 8.5 | 10.6 | 11.9 | 10.4 | 9 | 9.1 | 9.6 | 9.6 | | | |
| Slova- kia | 10.8 | 10.3 | 10.6 | 11.4 | 10.6 | 10.1 | 10.2 | 10.1 | 9.9 | 10.6 | | |
| Slove- nia | 11.1 | 12.3 | 11 | 10.9 | 10.5 | 10.3 | 10.6 | 10.9 | 9.5 | 10.5 | | |
| Spain | 11.9 | 11.9 | 11.1 | 10.2 | 10 | 9.8 | 9.6 | 9.3 | 9.3 | | | |

| Sweden | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 7.3 | 7.2 | 7.4 | 7.4 | 7.3 | 7.3 | | |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--|
| United King- dom | 12.1 | 11.6 | 11.8 | 11.5 | 10.8 | 10.9 | 10.7 | 10.4 | 10.3 | 10.4 | 10.7 | |
| EU MEM- BERS | 11 | 11 | 11 | 10.8 | 10.4 | 10.3 | 10.3 | 10.2 | 10.1 | 10.2 | | |

Source: World Health Organization (Ireland values for 2015 and 2016 included from Revenue and CSO figures).

http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main-euro.A1025?lang=en&showonly=GISAH.

Health Care Professionals

347. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of official trainees comprising intern, CST and HST schemes within the health system that are employed and working in a private hospital and clinics as part of their training scheme, by private hospital and clinic in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30920/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Staff Data

- 348. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultants working in every CHO across the State that are on the Medical Council's specialist register by CHO and area of speciality; the number that do not hold specialist division registration, that do not meet required qualification requirements and that are not on the Medical Council's specialist register, including consultants appointed prior to March 2008 that did not have to meet that requirement on appointment but are operating as consultants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30921/17]
- 349. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultants working in every hospital across the State that are on the Medical Council's specialist register; the number that do not hold specialist division registration, do not meet required qualification requirements and that are not on the Medical Council's specialist register including consultants appointed prior to March 2008 that did not have to meet that requirement on appointment but are operating as consultants, by hospital and area of speciality, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30922/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 348 and 349 together.

I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

350. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment. [30925/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

vice 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.

Alcohol Advertising

351. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if he will publish the findings of the report commissioned by his Department and undertaken by a company (details supplied) on alcohol labelling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30928/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The research report on the labelling of alcohol products, referred to by the Deputy, has not been published. The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill provides for the furnishing of information to consumers on alcohol. The aim is to ensure that consumers are provided with access to health information on alcohol products regardless of the manner of purchase e.g. in a shop, in a pub, or on-line. The legislation provides that labelling of alcohol products will have a three-year lead in time after commencement. The legislation provides that the Minister may prescribe the form and the details provided in the labelling of alcohol products. The research report will be utilised by the Minister in developing the necessary regulations and at that stage the research report can be published.

Health Services Funding

- 352. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of section 39 agencies in receipt of annual State funding in excess of €100,000; and the cumulative total of this funding. [30932/17]
- 353. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of section 39 agencies in receipt of annual State funding that is less €100,000; and the cumulative total of this funding. [30933/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 352 and 353 together.

I have asked the Health Service Executive to compile the necessary information and forward it to the Deputy.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

354. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the action being taken to clear the backlog of those that are waiting a number of years for orthodontic treatment. [30934/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been re-

ferred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists

355. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the reason changes were implemented in a hospital (details supplied); the reason the waiting time for persons has been extended for two weeks when in the past persons were seen within a ten day maximum period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30935/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Disabilities Assessments

356. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for an assessment of need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30946/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

357. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive an appointment for a procedure at Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30957/17]

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 National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014,* has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Psychological Assessments Waiting Times

358. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children currently waiting to be seen by a HSE psychology service school-age team by local health area in tabular form; and the number waiting less than three months, three to six months, six to 12 months, 12 to 24 months and more than 24 months. [30959/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Provision

359. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if service users are consulted on the delivery of local mental health services; if so, if this feedback is applied to improve the delivery and provision of those services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30960/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Expenditure

360. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the budget and delivery for mental health services in 2017; if all mental health budgets provided for in 2015 and 2016 were spent; his plans for this budget in 2018 in view of ongoing concerns regarding the lack of resources for this sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30961/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The overall gross non-capital mental health budget for 2017 is €853.1 million. Budget 2017 made allowance for an additional €35 million for services to be initiated in 2017. Key priorities to be addressed in the HSE's 2017 Service Plan include youth mental health, further improvement to child & adolescent (CAMHS) 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 €9.5 million in mental health associated with increased pay rates, bringing the total budget to over €850 million.

The Mental Health Budgets for 2015 and 2016 were €791.8 million and €826.6 million respectively. According to the HSE's Mental Health Division's Operational Plan 2017, €787.28 million was spent in 2015, while in 2016, a provisional amount of €824.7 million was spent.

Key priorities being addressed in the HSE's 2017 Service Plan will continue to be prioritised in 2018.

Mental Health Services Funding

361. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the additional resources being provided in the provision of mental health services in HSE area 9 during 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30962/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Disabilities Assessments

362. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health when an assessment of need will be carried out for a person (details supplied); if his Department can expedite this assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30963/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

363. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons travelling for a service (details supplied); the time persons are waiting for their initial consultation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30971/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Vaccination Programme

364. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the shortage of the BCG vaccine here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30977/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is currently a worldwide shortage of BCG vaccine. The vaccine has not been available in Ireland since the end of April 2015. Consequently, BCG vaccination clinics in HSE Clinics and Maternity hospitals have been postponed.

There is only one licensed supplier of BCG vaccine to Ireland. The manufacturer has had difficulties in the production of the BCG vaccine. Since this problem became apparent, the HSE National Immunisation Office has been in regular contact with the manufacturer to ascertain when the vaccine might be available. The HSE also asked the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), which licenses and regulates all human medicines in Ireland, to source an alternate supplier of the BCG vaccine. Efforts have been made to find a company who can provide the vaccine for use in Ireland which satisfies all the HPRA requirements on safety and

efficacy but no suitable alternative BCG product has been found.

The supplier has indicated that supplies of the vaccine are not expected to be delivered into Ireland until early 2018. When there is confirmation of the date of new supply, the HSE will be guided by the recommendations of the National Immunisation Advisory Committee on its administration.

Hospital Staff Data

365. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Question No. 210 of 24 May 2017, the hospitals in which the 128 doctors working as consultants but not on the Medical Council's specialist register are operating; the specialties that they are covering; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30990/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Medicinal Products Data

- 366. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the medicines that his Department has approved but are not in a position to purchase as a result of a lack of funding; the number of persons these medicines would benefit; the illnesses for which they are prescribed; the reason these medicines have not yet been purchased; the funding issues associated with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30991/17]
- 434. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if the timelines in the IPHA agreement regarding the reimbursement process for new medicines are being met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31352/17]
- 435. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of medicines that have been submitted for reimbursement to the HSE that are now exceeding timelines as set out in the IPHA agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31353/17]
- 436. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the number of medicines that have been referred by the HSE leadership team to his Department for reimbursement approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31354/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 366 and 434 to 436, inclusive, together.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has statutory responsibility for decisions on the pricing and reimbursement of medicines in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The 2013 Act specifies the criteria to be applied in the making of decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

Part 4 of the 2013 Act provides, inter alia, for the establishment and maintenance of a "Reimbursement List" for the purposes of section 59 of the Health Act 1970.

Section 18 of the 2013 Act allows a supplier of an item to apply to the HSE requesting the HSE to add the item to the Reimbursement List.

In considering an application, the HSE will also have regard to Part 1 and Part 3 of Schedule 3 of the 2013 Act.

Section 19(4) of the 2013 Act prohibits the HSE from making a relevant decision under section 18 "except in accordance with the criteria specified in Schedule 3". Schedule 3 sets out nine general criteria, of which one is the resources available to the Executive.

Under the 2016 Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines, in a situation where the HSE wishes to reimburse a medicine but cannot do so from within existing resources, it may inform my Department of its decision in this respect. The Minister for Health may, as he deems appropriate, bring a Memorandum to Government in relation to the funding implications and requesting consideration of same.

Prior to the introduction of the Framework Agreement one treatment, Ibrutinib, was referred to my Department in 2016.

In line with the Framework Agreement and since its introduction in July 2016, the HSE has referred ten treatments to my Department for consideration, one of which was Orkambi (including Kalydeco).

Following consideration by my Department and Government of the funding implications, the HSE decided, in line with the 2013 Act to reimburse Ibrutinib and Orkambi (including Kalydeco).

The funding implications of the other nine treatments are currently under consideration by my Department. These are outlined in Table 1.

| Product | Brand | Indication |
|------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Vismodegib | Erivedge | Basal Cell Carcinoma |
| Vortioxetine | Brintellix | Depression |
| Sacubitril / Valsartan | Entresto | Heart Failure |
| Olaparib | Lynparza | Ovarian Cancer |
| Obinutuzumab | Gazyvaro | Follicular Lymphoma |
| Vedolizumab | Entyvio | Crohns & Ulcerative Colitis |
| Nivolumab | Opdivo | Renal Cell Carcinoma |
| Nivolumab | Opdivo | Hodgkins Lymphoma |
| Apremilast | Otezla | Psoriasis & Psoriatic Ar- |
| | | thrithis |

Table 1: Treatments referred to the Department of Health

Each of these treatments were referred to my Department because the HSE decided to support the reimbursement application but considered that this could not be funded from within its current budgetary envelope and also taking account of the cumulative costs over a 5 year period. The HSE advise that the cumulative cost over 5 years of these treatments is approximately €120 million.

It should be noted that the final decision in relation to the reimbursement of all medicines remains the statutory responsibility of the HSE.

The National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) conducts health technological assessments on behalf of the HSE, a summary of which are available on the NCPE website www. ncpe.ie. These assessments include details of the estimated patient numbers and costs associ-

ated with each of these treatments.

As outlined in the IPHA agreement, and in line with the 2013 Act, 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.

While the HSE strives to reach a decision regarding drug approval in as timely a manner as possible and within the 180 days, because of the significant monies involved, there is an onus on the HSE to ensure that the best price is achieved as these commitments often feature multi million euro investments on an ongoing basis. The achievement of more successful price negotiations also allows for further drugs to be approved within the finite budget available.

I have asked the HSE to refer directly to the Deputy in relation to the timelines for the individual medicines.

Brexit Issues

367. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the provisions being made by his Department to preserve and protect access to shared facilities in Northern Ireland for persons here and vice versa in view of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30992/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government has made clear that Northern Ireland is one of its main priorities in relation to Brexit. This includes protecting all the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement, maintaining EU support for the Peace Process, having an invisible border on the island and supporting continued North-South co-operation.

The acknowledgement of Ireland's unique circumstances by both the EU and the UK has been the result of a major Government campaign of engagement with EU partners and the EU institutions to ensure our specific concerns were fully recognised. Our ongoing engagement with EU partners has shown that there is good understanding of our unique concerns, notably regarding the Peace Process and the Common Travel Area (CTA) and reciprocal rights.

Both the Irish and British Governments have indicated their intention to maintain the CTA after the UK withdraws from the EU. The CTA pre-dates Ireland and the UK joining the EU and is not dependent on EU membership. The CTA is particularly important in the context of the Northern Ireland Peace Process and relations on the island of Ireland. It facilitates the vast numbers of people who commute across the border and to and from Great Britain for work, business, trade, education, family, health or other reasons.

There is close cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland in the area of health. This cooperation occurs both within the framework of our common EU membership and on a bilateral basis, including at service-to-service level. A key priority of the Department of Health in addressing the implications of Brexit is to ensure continuity of health services and to preserve and protect current co-operation arrangements on a cross-border, all-island and Ireland-UK basis. This is being pursued on both a bilateral and EU-wide basis as appropriate. Of course, Ireland will be part of the EU27 team and looks forward to working with our fellow Member States in delivering the best possible result for Ireland and for the EU.

My Department and its agencies have been conducting detailed analysis on the potential impacts of Brexit. Ensuring continuity in cross-border health services has been identified as a priority and forms part of wider contingency planning being undertaken to address the implications of Brexit in the area of health. I would like to assure the Deputy that I am fully committed to preserving and protecting cross-border health co-operation and access to shared services.

Cancer Research

368. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the provisions being made by his Department to protect the work of the All-Ireland Cooperative Oncology Research Group group in view of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30993/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cancer Trials Ireland (formerly the All-Ireland Cooperative Oncology Research Group) conducts cancer clinical trials in Irish hospitals and currently has over 150 trials in progress. While the vast majority of these trials are carried out in Cancer Trials Research Units in the Republic of Ireland, some trials have participation from research units in the UK, France and Denmark.

The terms of a UK exit from the EU are unknown at this stage as negotiations between EU Member States and the United Kingdom commence. In the short-term, cancer clinical trials are not impacted by uncertainties over Brexit.

The Health Research Board, who part fund Cancer Trials Ireland, is planning an interim review of Cancer Trials Ireland in 2018. This will look at the Irish and international context within which Cancer Trials Ireland can sustain and further develop its portfolio. The potential impacts of Brexit will be considered as part of that review.

Services for People with Disabilities

369. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health further to Question No. 239 of 24 May 2017, if he will clarify the respective role of the HSE and of the service provider in the allocation of residential places when they become available; if places are offered based on a person's position on the waiting list; if the personal circumstances of each case are considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31004/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

National Treatment Purchase Fund Eligibility

370. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can recoup expenses incurred for their child's dental treatment under the National Treatment

Purchase Fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31018/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2017 allocated €20 million to the NTPF, rising to €55 million in 2018.

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. These plans have been published and their implementation is ongoing. The Inpatient / Daycase and Outpatient Plans focus on reducing the number of patients waiting 15 months or more for inpatient and daycase treatment or for an outpatient appointment by the end of October. The Scoliosis Action Plan aims to ensure that no patient who requires scoliosis surgery will be waiting more than four months for surgery by the end of 2017.

In addition, the NTPF is currently rolling out its Daycase Waiting List Initiative focused on those waiting longest for daycase treatment, with a view to ensuring that in excess of 2,000 patients waiting more than 18 months for a daycase procedure will have received an offer of an appointment for their procedure by the end of June. The NTPF has advised that to date over 2900 patients files have been transferred to private hospitals under this Initiative, over 800 patients have accepted an offer of treatment in a private hospital and that 278 patients have received their procedure.

It is not envisaged that the Waiting List initiatives implemented by the NTPF and the HSE under its Waiting List Action Plans will include dental treatment carried out in dental clinics.

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

371. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31034/17]

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.

Fire Safety

372. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if the external cladding used on Grenfell Tower has been used on health services buildings or hospitals; if cladding on such buildings is being urgently checked; if cladding on Beaumont Hospital is composed of safe materials; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31061/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

373. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost of recruiting an additional 285 midwives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31062/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Health Services Staff Recruitment

374. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost of recruiting an additional 30 dental surgeons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31063/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Mental Health Services Staff

375. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost of completing the recruitment required for the full implementation of A Vision for Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31064/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): A Vision For Change, our national Mental Health Policy, was introduced in 2006. Among its recommendations were that approximately 10,650 Mental Health Whole Time Equivalents were required to fully implement the policy.

This figure was based on Ireland's then population of 3.917 million, as indicated in the 2002 census. The population of Ireland today, based on the most recent confirmed Census figures in 2016, is 4.7 million. Taking into account this demographic change, the required number of Mental Health Whole Time Equivalents is now 12,760.

According to the HSE, as of April 2017, there are 9,815 Mental Health Whole Time Equivalents. In addition, there are 300 being recruited and over 700 posts in development from Programme For Government funding. This brings the total to 10,815, a gap of 1,945. Using an average figure of €66,000 per Whole Time Equivalent, the additional funding required to fill the gap is €128 million.

Since 2012, €140 million in additional funding has been allocated to the Mental Health

services. This has increased the total Mental Health Budget from €711 million in 2012 to over €850 million today.

Medical Card Applications

376. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in processing a medical card application for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31066/17]

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.

Home Care Packages

377. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Health if the agreed home care package can be appealed for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31069/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Services

378. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a matter (details supplied); if he will intervene and increase the time being provided to persons from counties Cavan and Monaghan attending Drogheda; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31075/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

379. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the status of a matter relating to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31076/17]

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 National Waiting List Management Policy, A standardised approach to managing sched-

uled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Patient Safety

380. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a statutory duty of candour which will place a legal obligation on medical professionals to disclose negligence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31077/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department is committed to a set of patient safety reforms which are being led by the newly established National Patient Safety Office. One of these reforms will see legislation brought forward which will support a culture of open disclosure within the health services. This builds on the current HSE policy which has been in place since 2013, under which all employees, including medical staff, are required to disclose and report incidents in line with the HSE's Safety Incident Management Policy. Provisions to support open disclosure to patients have been included in the Department of Justice and Equality's Civil Liability (Amendment) Bill 2017. As the Deputy may be aware, this Bill is currently making its way through the Oireachtas, and was considered at Committee stage on 30 June last.

Creating a culture of open disclosure and learning from the things that go wrong is the bedrock of making systems safer. Open Disclosure is defined as 'an open consistent approach to communicating with patients and their families when things go wrong in healthcare. This includes expressing regret for what has happened, keeping the patient informed, providing feedback on investigations and the steps taken to prevent a recurrence of the adverse event'.

We all know that when error or harm is experienced by a patient, the trust and confidence of that patient and their family are compromised. That is why honest, open disclosure and communication, which demonstrate empathy and sensitivity, are so essential. The intent of the legislation currently under consideration is to provide certain legal protections for healthcare staff for open disclosure. This will give further support to those staff in their communications with patients and family members if an adverse event occurs. The Ethical Code of Practice set out by the Medical Council also makes clear the responsibilities of doctors in relation to open disclosure, to support and promote a culture of candour, within which open disclosure can take place.

Reporting of adverse events is also part of a strong patient safety culture. The Department of Health and the HSE are working to strengthen the reporting of incidents when they occur, to ensure that the needs of patients who have been affected are catered for and to allow for the system as a whole to learn from the particular episode. The Health Information and Patient Safety Bill, which is at an advanced stage, will contain provisions on mandatory reporting of a prescribed list of very significant adverse events in the public and private healthcare sector.

The open disclosure provisions form part of a number of initiatives to improve the management of patient safety incidents. HIQA and the Mental Health Commission have recently finalised new Standards on the Conduct of Reviews of Patient Safety Incidents which expand on the National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare. This set of standards along with the

mandatory reporting of serious reportable events provided for in the Health Information and Patient Safety Bill and the provisions intended for open disclosure will provide a comprehensive patient-centred approach to preventing, managing and learning from incidents.

Organ Donation

381. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the proposed opt-out system for organ donation which he stated in early May 2017 was to be brought before Cabinet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31083/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to seek Government approval to prepare the General Scheme of a Human Tissue Bill in advance of the summer recess. This Bill will include proposals for the introduction of an opt out system for organ donation.

Health Services Staff Remuneration

382. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his views on the lack of progress on paying staff money owed following the interim public sector deal for staff working in all the State's section 39 agencies inclusive of the country's main hospices; if he or his officials have corresponded with or met the Minister for Finance regarding same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31100/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As previously advised, under section 39 of the Health Act 2004, the HSE has in place Service Level Agreements with voluntary providers which set out the level of service to be provided for the grant to the individual organisation. Any individuals employed by these section 39 organisations are not HSE employees and therefore, the HSE has no role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff. As the staff of these Section 39 organisations are not public servants, they were not subject to the FEMPI legislation which imposed pay reductions or the provisions of the subsequent Public Service Agreements which provide for pay restoration.

It is a matter for Section 39 organisations to negotiate salaries with their staff as part of their employment relationship and within the overall funding available for the delivery of agreed services.

Patient Deaths

383. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in counties Waterford, Wexford, Carlow, Kilkenny and Tipperary that have died from cardiac arrest while in transit to hospitals in Cork or Dublin in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31104/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy. However, the Deputy may wish to note that pronouncement of death is not within the scope of practice of paramedic staff. Thus an ambulance crew will continue to attempt resuscitation until such time as the patient arrives at the receiving hospital.

- 384. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the procedure in place if a person that lives in the south-east presents to their local or regional hospital with an emergency cardiac condition outside of the PPCI hours available in the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31105/17]
- 385. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the cardiac services available at University Hospital Waterford on a 24-hour, seven-days- a-week basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31106/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 384 and 385 together.

The cardiology department at University Hospital Waterford (UHW) provides a wide range of non-invasive and invasive cardiac services, including ECG, coronary angiography and coronary angioplasty and stenting procedures. 24/7 consultant medical emergency cover is provided for all patients, including cardiology patients, at UHW. The out of hours consultant medical cover is provided on a rota basis and includes consultant general physicians and consultant cardiologists. Patients in the South East have access to out-of-hours Primary PCI services at Cork University Hospital or St James's Hospital, Dublin. Alternatively, thrombolysis can be performed at the nearest Emergency Department.

Following a targeted initiative, there has been a significant improvement in waiting times for cardiology procedures at UHW; the most recent data from the National Treatment Purchase Fund, which is for May 2017, indicates that a total of 296 patients were waiting for a cardiology inpatient or daycase procedure, with 189 of these waiting less than three months. In his review of cardiology services at UHW, Dr Niall Herity recommended additional investment to increase capacity at the hospital. An additional &0.5m funding was provided to the hospital to enable it to provide two additional cardiac catheterisation laboratory (cath lab) sessions per week, equivalent to a 20% expansion in operating hours. A tender was issued in June for the provision of a temporary mobile cath lab which will contribute, on an interim basis, to the further reduction in elective cardiology waiting lists at UHW.

Patient Deaths

386. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if data exists on the number of persons in the south-east that have died from cardiac arrest in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31107/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The CSO has provided the following data regarding the number of deaths caused by Acute Myocardial Infarction (International Classification of Diseases (ICD) code I21) for counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford and Waterford for 2007 to 2016:

| Year | Carlow | Kilkenny | Wexford | Waterford | Total |
|------|--------|----------|---------|-----------|-------|
| 2007 | 29 | 62 | 92 | 58 | 241 |
| 2008 | 35 | 64 | 104 | 57 | 260 |
| 2009 | 36 | 37 | 92 | 58 | 223 |
| 2010 | 33 | 60 | 86 | 61 | 240 |
| 2011 | 29 | 49 | 98 | 49 | 225 |
| 2012 | 47 | 60 | 79 | 39 | 225 |
| 2013 | 26 | 42 | 96 | 44 | 208 |

| Year | Carlow | Kilkenny | Wexford | Waterford | Total |
|-------|--------|----------|---------|-----------|-------|
| 2014 | 28 | 28 | 70 | 38 | 164 |
| 2015* | 33 | 48 | 83 | 39 | 203 |
| 2016* | 26 | 27 | 77 | 37 | 167 |

^{*} Data for 2015 and 2016 is by year of registration and as such could still be subject to change. Data for all other years is by year of occurrence.

This Department does not yet have data for 2017.

Hospital Services

387. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the clinical pathway for persons in the south-east with cardiac complications up to and including PPCI treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31108/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Acute Coronary Syndromes (ACS) are myocardial infarction (heart attack) and unstable angina. Heart attacks may be ST elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) or Non ST elevation myocardial infarction (NSTEMI). In general, hospitals will carry out a number of investigations and procedures to determine if there is a confirmed ACS and the extent of the ACS, and to treat the symptoms and/or the syndrome/disease. STEMI diagnosis can also be done pre-hospital via a 12 lead ECG machine with ECGs transmitted to a hospital for interpretation and/or via interpretation by trained paramedics.

The main investigation is the electrocardiogram (ECG). ECGs are particularly useful in determining those patients with ST segment elevation that will benefit from early reperfusion either by primary percutaneous coronary intervention (PPCI) or by the administering of thrombolysis. PPCI is recognised internationally as the preferred treatment of STEMI in terms of morbidity and mortality outcomes. Where PPCI cannot be delivered within an acceptable time-frame, thrombolysis is recommended with early transfer to a PPCI centre for angiography.

Maternity Services Provision

388. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if proper and sufficient additional resources have been provided to University Hospital Kerry to ensure the machine provides a second scan to all expectant mothers in view of the recent donation of a second foetal assessment ultrasound machine to the obstetrics unit at University Hospital Kerry; if all women now registered with the unit are now offered a second scan at 20 weeks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31155/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Maternity Strategy is very clear that all women must have equal access to standardised ultrasound services. The Strategy will be implemented on a phased basis and this work will be led by the HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme. Indeed, the issue of anomaly scanning is a priority issue for the Programme and, accordingly, it will develop clinical guidance regarding routine detailed scans at 20 weeks. In the meantime, the Programme will continue to work with the six Hospital Groups to assist in increasing access to anomaly scans for those units with limited availability.

One of the current challenges to increase access to anomaly scans is the recruitment of ultrasonographers who are skilled in using these machines. In this context, it is expected that the establishment of Maternity Networks across Hospital Groups will assist in developing a sustainable model that ensures that all women within each Hospital Group can access anomaly scans.

In relation to the specific query regarding University Hospital Kerry, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

HSE Complaints Procedures

389. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 170 and 171 of 26 January 2017, if he will confirm the person is not on recent leave but has been on illness benefit since October 2015; if he will confirm the person never worked for a community service (details supplied) as suggested in the parliamentary question reply; if he will instruct the HSE to engage fully with the person's legal adviser in view of the fact the information provided by the HSE is not accurate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31158/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the HSE has responsibility for operational issues which includes the determination of the terms and conditions of employment for its employees. The Health Act 2004 (as amended) also disallows the Minister for Health to get involved in individual cases.

However, I have forwarded your question to the HSE and asked them to respond to you directly on the matter.

Hospital Appointments Status

390. **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. [31159/17]

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.

Dental Services Provision

391. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding dentures for a person (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31160/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Services

392. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason cardiac rehabilitation services at Letterkenny University Hospital have been suspended; the date on which the service was withdrawn; when the service will be restored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31166/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Services

393. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the interim measures in place for service users, including existing programme participants and new referrals, whilst the cardiac rehabilitation unit at Letterkenny University Hospital is closed; the way in which the medical needs of the service users are being met and accommodated during this service disruption; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31167/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Equipment

394. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the date on which his attention was drawn to equipment failure having occurred at the cardiac rehabilitation unit at Letterkenny University Hospital leading to the closure of the facility; if a formal request from the hospital for additional resources and-or supports to replace and-or repair equipment at the unit has been received; if so, the date this request was received; if additional supports have been sanctioned; if so, the date this formal approval was given; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31168/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Services

395. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the way in which service users of the cardiac rehabilitation unit at Letterkenny University Hospital were formally notified that the service had been suspended; the date such correspondence issued to service users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31169/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

396. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite the ophthalmology assessment and cataract procedure for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [31201/17]

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.

Health Services Provision

397. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with a campaign and patient advocacy group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31203/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): If the group submits a meeting request to my office, it will be considered in line with normal procedures.

Health Services Provision

398. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made to advance the publication of a report into future service provision at Lifford Community Hospital in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31204/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Ambulance Service Provision

399. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that a second ambulance is provided for the Killarney area in view of information (details supplied) received from the HSE and the fact that almost 40% of calls made from the Killarney area were dealt with by external ambulances and with the decision to remove the Millstreet daytime ambulance which will further impact on the Killarney service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31206/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Delays

400. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting four years to see a urology specialist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31210/17]

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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Provision

401. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will assist in having a person (details supplied) transferred to a suitable facility for rehabilitation purposes. [31211/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Electronic Cigarettes

402. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the regulations in place for approving vaping products; the time it takes to approve a product for sale here; and the stages it goes through for approval. [31236/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Tobacco Products Directive 2014/40/EU ('the Directive') was transposed into Irish law by the European Union (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco and Related Products) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 271 of 2016). These Regulations were subsequently amended by the European Union (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco and Related Products) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 252 of 2017) in order to transpose EU Commission Implementing Act related to the Directive. In addition certain sections of the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Act 2015 transposed in part Articles 13 and 14 of the Directive.

In line with the Directive, the Regulations provide that manufacturers and importers of electronic cigarettes and refill containers must notify the Health Service Executive, the competent authority, 6 months prior to placing products on the market.

The notifications, which are submitted through an EU common entry gateway, must include information on the manufacturer and/or importer, ingredients used and emissions, nicotine dose and uptake, the production process and a declaration that the manufacturer and/or importer takes full responsibility for the quality and safety of the product under normal use. Manufacturers and importers of electronic cigarettes and refill containers must also report annually on sales volumes, consumer preferences and trends.

The competent authority does not approve the products for sale. It is a matter for each manufacturer or importer to ensure that his/her products comply with the relevant provisions of the Regulations.

Mental Health Services Provision

403. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health the number of children await-

ing the allocation of an appointment time from CAMHS, child and adolescent mental health service, by age group (details supplied) and by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31250/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Disease Management

404. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the diagnostic facilities available to public patients to test for Lyme disease; his plans to make it more freely available; if his Department is examining this issue; if the Chief Medical Officer has issued guidelines regarding adequate tests being available; if he is satisfied that public patients are receiving adequate access to diagnostics; his views regarding tests being carried out abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31254/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borreliosis) is an infection caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium called Borrelia burgdorferi. It is transmitted to humans by bites from ticks infected with the bacteria. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) of the HSE has extensive information concerning Lyme disease on its website www.hpsc.ie/a-z/vectorborne/lymedisease/.

Lyme borelliosis was made been statutorily notifiable in Ireland by the Infectious Diseases (Amendment Regulations) Regulations 2011 (S.I. no 452 of 2011). The notifiable entity is Lyme neuroborreliosis, the more severe neurological form of Lyme borelliosis. The HPSC of the HSE collects and collates surveillance data on notifiable infectious diseases. The number of annual neuroborreliosis notifications over the last few years is as follows:

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- 2012 - 08 cases;

- 2013 - 13 cases;

- 2014 - 18 cases;

- 2015 - 12 cases;

- 2016 - 21 cases (provisional).
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The Scientific Advisory Committee of the HPSC, the Infectious Diseases Society of Ireland, the Irish Society of Clinical Microbiologists, the Irish Institute of Clinical Neuroscience and the Irish College of General Practitioners agreed a Consensus Statement on the Clinical Management of Lyme Borreliosis, which endorsed the previously referenced, internationally recognised set of guidelines (those of the IDSA) to Medical Practitioners to ensure a standardised approach to the diagnosis and management of Lyme disease in Ireland.

Lyme disease is diagnosed by medical history and physical examination. The infection is confirmed by blood tests which look for antibodies produced by an infected person's body in response to the infection. These normally take several weeks to develop and may not be present in the early stages of the disease. The standard approach to Lyme diagnostics is a two-stage approach and involves using a sensitive enzyme immunoassay (EIA) as an initial, screening step. Screening EIAs can be insufficiently specific, giving false-positive reactions in the presence of other similar bacteria, and certain other viral infections, including glandular fever. In addition, blood samples from patients with autoimmune disorders and other inflammatory con-

ditions can also lead to false-positive results. Samples giving positive or equivocal results in screening tests are further investigated in a second-stage immunoblot (Western blot) tests. Use of immunoblot testing greatly increases specificity. Using this two stage approach will give a great degree of certainty around the diagnosis of Lyme. All clinical (and other) laboratories in Ireland must undergo continuous quality assurance to ensure that the quality of the diagnostics they provide is maintained at the highest international level for human diagnostics.

In Ireland, treatment by most clinicians is based on that laid out in evidence-based guidelines for the management of patients with Lyme disease, human granulocytic anaplasmosis (formerly known as human granulocytic ehrlichiosis), and babesiosis published by the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) in 2006. Lyme disease can be very successfully treated using common antibiotics. These antibiotics are effective at clearing the rash and helping to prevent the development of complications. Antibiotics are generally given for up to three weeks. If complications develop, intravenous antibiotics may be considered.

The Scientific Advisory Committee of the HPSC has established a Lyme Borreliosis Sub-Committee, the aim of which is to develop strategies to undertake primary prevention in order to minimise the harm caused by Lyme Borreliosis in Ireland. In addition to staff from the HPSC, the membership of the Sub-Committee includes specialists in Public Health Medicine, Consultants in Infectious Diseases, Clinical Microbiology, Occupational Health an Entomologist from the Parks and Wildlife Service, a representative from the Local Government Management Agency, an Environmental Health Officer and, very importantly, a representative from Tick Talk Ireland, the primary Support Group for Lyme disease in Ireland. The Sub-Committee first met on 6 May 2015 and it is expected to report in 2017.

There is significant support and extensive information for health professionals and the public on the HPSC website. These supports include a fact sheet on tick borne diseases, including Lyme Disease. This fact sheet gives information on clinical features, the disease, transmission routes, prevention measures, diagnosis, and management and treatment. There is also an erythema migrans (EM) diagnostic tool to aid health professionals in the diagnosis of EM, which is frequently the earliest clinical manifestation of Lyme borreliosis. Information for the public includes:

- Lyme Disease Frequently Asked Questions;
- Laboratory testing for Lyme Disease: FAQs for general public;
- Lyme Disease Illustrations; and
- CDC's instructions on how to remove a tick.

Testing for Lyme borrelliosis is currently undertaken in most of the larger hospitals in Ireland. As testing and treatment for Lyme borreliosis is widely available in Ireland there is no requirement for people to travel to other EU Member States to access these services.

Brexit Staff

405. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31275/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy Secretary General, Policy and

Strategy Division, and the Assistant Secretary, R&D and Health Analytics Division, are the lead officials in my Department for planning and co-ordination on Brexit matters. The Department of Health participates fully in the Senior Officials Group on EU Affairs, the Interdepartmental Group on EU/UK Affairs, and its workgroups established to support the Cabinet Committee on Brexit.

The Department established a Management Board Subcommittee on Brexit in advance of the UK referendum, to examine the implications of a decision to leave the EU. The Subcommittee is chaired at senior level and made up of representatives from across the Department, as well as from the HSE, which is represented at National Director level. The Subcommittee reports to the Management Board on Brexit. In addition to the Management Board Subcommittee, an Interdepartmental/Interagency Group, chaired by the Assistant Secretary of the Primary Care Division, has been established to prepare a bid for the relocation of the European Medicines Agency on foot of a Government Decision at the end of October 2016.

Brexit raises many issues across a wide range of areas that need to be addressed. Work on each specific issue will be led by the line Units with policy responsibility. Units have built up the necessary expertise and contacts with their UK and EU counterparts over time to enable them to examine and address the implications of Brexit in their area. In this way, work on Brexit-related issues is being mainstreamed throughout the Department.

Within my Department, International and Research Policy Unit provides a coordinating function in relation to Brexit just as it does for other international matters and North-South cooperation. The Department has a full-time EU health attaché stationed in the Permanent Representation in Brussels, who is in regular contact with International and Research Policy Unit and other Units throughout the Department. Resources allocated to Brexit in my Department are kept under ongoing review.

Health Services Provision

- 406. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if recognition and support will be given to a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31290/17]
- 407. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish a national support phone service for a group (details supplied) to ensure it has access to an independent confidential and listening service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31291/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 406 and 407 together.

I am advised that many of the individuals for whom support is sought by the Group to which the Deputy refers have been awarded Health Amendment Act (HAA) Cards. Holders of HAA Cards have access to a very broad range of entitlements, including GP services, home nursing, home support (cleaning, childcare etc.), hospital services, treatment and appliances, pharmacy, physiotherapy, chiropody/podiatry, counselling and ophthalmic services, dental treatment and complementary therapies.

The National Hepatitis C Co-ordinator in the HSE is in ongoing communication with representatives of this Group.

Assistance has been provided to this Group as follows:

- facilitation of meetings involving the group and the National Hepatitis C Co-ordinator;

- use of HSE meeting rooms; and
- use of HSE printing, photocopying, postage and stationery facilities.

Blood Products Contamination

- 408. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the date by which he will amend the statutory instrument regarding membership of the consultative council on hepatitis C to allow for women who have been infected with hepatitis C through the contaminated blood product anti-d immunoglobulin to be represented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31292/17]
- 409. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the date by which he will advertise the vacant positions on the consultative council on hepatitis C to be filled by a group (details supplied); his views on whether the exclusion of the largest infected group among those recognised as State infected to appointments made to the consultative council on hepatitis C is unfair and undemocratic; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31293/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 408 and 409 together.

My Department is currently progressing the amendment of section 5 of S.I. No. 339 of 1996 - The Consultative Council on Hepatitis C (Establishment) Order, 1996. This amendment will provide for the Consultative Council to include representation of those who contracted Hepatitis C through the administration of Anti-D Immunoglobulin in the State. Officials of my Department are working with the Office of the Attorney General in this regard.

General Practitioner Contracts

410. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has provisions in place to encourage Irish graduate doctors to remain and work in rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31294/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware that there are difficulties in filling some medical positions in rural locations, encompassing hospital and some GP posts.

In July 2013, the Minister for Health established a Working Group to make high-level recommendations relating to training and career pathways for doctors. The Group noted current challenges in respect of staffing of particular consultant-level posts and the onerous out-of-hours commitment and demanding rotas in some smaller hospitals. The Group considered that the reconfiguration of services in the context of the Hospital Groups provided an opportunity to address this issue. The establishment of Hospital Groups is a key enabler for reorganisation of services across hospitals. Significant progress has been made in the implementation of Hospital Groups, with more co-ordinated approaches to the planning and delivery of services across all the hospitals within a Group. Hospitals are now working together to support each other, providing a stronger role for smaller hospitals in delivering less complex care and ensuring that patients who require true emergency or complex planned care are managed safely in larger hospitals. The potential for improved workforce organisation, as part of addressing the staffing challenges in some hospitals, is a key aspect of the continued development of Hospital Groups.

The Government is committed to the continued development of GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services, especially in remote rural

areas and also in disadvantaged urban areas, and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future. I want to ensure that existing GP services are retained and that general practice remains an attractive career option for newly qualified GPs. Several efforts to increase the number of practising GPs have been undertaken in recent years. These include increases in the number of GP training places, which have risen from 120 places in 2009 to 171 places being formally accepted for the 2017 training intake as of 13 June, representing an increase of 43% in the last 8 years. Changes have been made to the entry provisions to the GMS scheme to facilitate more flexible/shared GMS contracts, and to the retirement provisions for GPs under the GMS scheme.

An enhanced supports package for rural GP practices was also introduced in May 2016. The new Rural Practice Support Framework includes improved qualifying criteria for rural support and an increase in the financial allowance from €16,216 to €20,000 per annum. Over 300 GPs now benefit from rural practice supports under this Framework. This is a significant increase on the 167 GPs who received the Rural Practice Allowance prior to the introduction of the new Framework last year. In addition, the GP contracts review process which is currently underway will seek to arrive at contractual arrangements which will ensure that general practice is an attractive, fulfilling and rewarding career option into the future.

General Practitioner Services Provision

411. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to replace the 11 general practitioners who will be retiring in west Limerick over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31295/17]

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 for direct reply.

General Practitioner Contracts

412. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to review the contracts of GMS general practitioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31296/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The development of primary care is central to the Government's objective to deliver a high-quality, integrated and cost effective health service. The Programme for Government commits to a decisive shift within the health service towards primary care in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country. The development of a new, modernised contract for the provision of general practitioner services will be a key element in facilitating this process.

The aim is to develop a contract which will facilitate the shift within the health service away from hospital services towards an integrated primary care service in order to deliver better care close to home in communities across the country. I want to see a new contract which has a population health focus, providing in particular for health promotion and disease prevention and for the structured ongoing care of chronic conditions. A new contract should be flexible and be able to respond to the changing nature of the GP workforce. It should also include provisions in relation to service quality and standards, performance, accountability and transparency. I think this will be key in making general practice a more attractive career.

Since 2015, negotiations have resulted in a number of service developments including the provision of free GP care to under 6's and over 70's, the introduction of a Diabetes Cycle of

Care for adult GMS patients with Type 2 Diabetes and enhanced supports for rural GPs. The next phase of discussions on a new GP contract is under way. The discussions taking place are wide ranging and ambitious in their scope. While there will be challenges for all parties involved, I am hopeful that with the goodwill and cooperation of all parties, significant progress can be made in these discussions in the months ahead.

Hospital Waiting Lists

413. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite surgery for a person (details supplied); his plans to address a situation regarding the lack of beds in the intensive care unit at St. James's Hospital for cardiology patients; and his further plans to open up private hospitals to public patients to help address the waiting lists for cardiology surgery at the hospital [31301/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of the Government's key priorities. It is for this reason that €20 million was allocated to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), rising to €55 million in 2018. In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient services. These plans have been published and their implementation is ongoing.

The Inpatient/Daycase and Outpatient Plans focus on reducing the number of patients waiting 15 months or more for inpatient and daycase treatment or for an outpatient appointment by the end of October. Under these plans over 14,700 patients have come off Inpatient/ Daycase waiting lists, and over 51,000 patients have come off the Outpatient waiting list, and 148 scoliosis surgeries have taken place. The Department of Health will continue to work with the HSE and the NTPF to ensure the best use of public hospital capacity and the private hospital system to meet the needs of patients waiting for Inpatient, Daycase and Outpatient Services.

Regarding capacity at St James's Hospital, all proposals to extend intensive care facilities will need to be considered in the context of competing priorities in the 2018 Estimates process.

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 about access to surgery for an individual patient, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Nursing Staff Recruitment

414. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a nurse for a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; if funds have been sanctioned for this resource; if not, if he will request the HSE to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31308/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government,

which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

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

Hospitals Capital Programme

415. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of the next phase of the Naas hospital development plan with particular reference to the endoscopy unit and the Lakeview unit; the extent to which the expenditure in question will ensure the adequacy of the services required at Naas General Hospital and its catchment area including the full utilisation of theatre space and bed requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31310/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I can confirm that the Department has forwarded its submission under the mid-term review of the capital programme to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The submission is based on the projected funding requirement arising from exiting commitments, strategies, demand led service needs and commitments contained in the Programme for Partnership Government. At this stage in the process it is not proposed to specify the individual project details contained in the Department's submission.

As with all healthcare projects, including this project, further investment in hospitals must be considered within the overall acute hospital sector infrastructure programme, the prioritised needs of the hospital groups and within the overall capital envelope available to the health service. The HSE will continue to apply the available funding for infrastructure development in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs, having regard to the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place.

Health Services Provision

416. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times surgeries have been cancelled or have been disrupted or stopped due to a lack of equipment or equipment failure for each year since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31311/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services Provision

417. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times surgeries have been cancelled or have been disrupted or stopped due to a lack of theatre staff in each year since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31312/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

418. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times an on duty ambulance, rapid response vehicle or intermediate care vehicle has been involved in an accident while on duty in each year since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31313/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Ambulance Service Data

419. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times an on duty ambulance, rapid response vehicle or intermediate care vehicle has experienced mechanical difficulties while on duty including ambulance, rapid response vehicle or intermediate care vehicle that are on duty but cannot leave their starting location due to mechanical difficulties and had to be removed from duty as a result in each year since 2010; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31314/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Ambulance Service Data

420. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances, rapid response vehicles and intermediate care vehicles that have been fitted with internal fire extinguishers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31315/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Ambulance Service Data

421. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances, rapid response vehicles and intermediate care vehicles that have been fitted with satellite navigation systems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31316/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medical Treatment Complaints

422. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of times a doctor not on the Medical Council's specialist register and who does not hold specialist division registration and, therefore, does not meet required qualification requirements including consultants appointed prior to March 2008 who did not have to meet that requirement on appointment but are operating as consultants have had a complaint lodged with the Medical Council regarding their performance; the nature of the complaint; the outcome of the complaint; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31317/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Accident and Emergency Departments Staff

423. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if consideration is being given to producing guidelines for staff in accident and emergency departments for dealing with persons with narcolepsy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31318/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Disease Classification

424. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to categorise coeliac disease to bring it under his Department's health and well-being area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31319/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Coeliac Disease is a clinical condition characterised by gastrointestinal symptoms and in children sometimes by failure to grow normally. It is caused by a reaction to gluten which is found in wheat, barley and rye.

The diagnosis is usually made in a hospital setting and involves a combination of blood antibody tests and intestinal biopsies. The condition may make it difficult to absorb nutrients, minerals and fat soluble vitamins. The management of Coeliac Disease involves lifelong gluten-free diet, which leads to recovery of the intestine, improves symptoms and reduces complications. Dietician input will help to determine which foods contain gluten as well as in providing a balanced diet which is required for health and well-being.

HSE Funding

425. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if there are alternative funding sources, domestic or European, for an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31320/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Food

426. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which gluten-free foods available in public hospitals are available to persons suffering from coeliac disease when in hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31321/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Nursing Staff Data

427. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the results of the framework for safe nurse staffing and skill mix, which has been operating on a pilot basis in six hospital wards; if it has had an affect in retaining nurses and reducing agency staff; if so, the figures for same;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31322/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The pilot results demonstrate the impact and outcomes from implementation of the framework for safe nurse staffing and skill mix. In all wards, that received amended staffing, there was a reduction in the proportion of nursing hours provided by agency staff. The reductions ranged from 4.3% to 19.5%. Intention to leave was also measured during the pilot, which revealed an overall reduction in intention to leave by 6%, demonstrating a positive trend.

The Minister recently announced the extension of the pilot to a further ten wards, therefore further data akin to that outlined above, will be collected across these additional wards.

Hospital Appointments Status

428. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for hip revision surgery for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31327/17]

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.

Medical Card Applications

429. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made on discretionary medical grounds on a medical card application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31332/17]

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.

Ambulance Service Response Times

430. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health further to Question No. 616 of 7 March 2017, the average response time for the ambulance service for calls from the Killarney area by month in each of the years 2014 to 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31335/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Ambulance Service

431. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the aeromedical services available to persons in the south east; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31341/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Community First Responders Network

432. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of community first-responder schemes in place in the south east to treat cardiac patients; the way in which the scheme works; the service they provide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31342/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Ambulance Service Data

433. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if data exist on waiting times for ambulance services across the south east from 2014 to date in 2017; the range of waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31343/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Questions No. 434 to 436, inclusive, answered with Question No. 366.

Housing Adaptation Grant

437. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health if there is provision in the granting of adaptation grants for persons with disabilities under SI 104 of 2014 for exceptions to be made to the maximum grant available in circumstances in which the household cannot make up the difference between the maximum grant available and the costs of much-needed adaptation of a home for a disabled child; and if there is another scheme available to persons in these circumstances that might bridge the difference. [31364/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The matter raised by the Deputy regarding home adaptation grants falls within the remit of my colleague, Mr. Eoghan Murphy T.D., Minister for Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, and I have asked that Department to reply directly to the Deputy in that regard.

As the Deputy's question concerning Health Service Executive (HSE) supports available for people who require home adaptations relates to service matters, I have arranged for that element of the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Data

- 438. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of doctors and nurses specifically dealing with spinal fusion procedures for children who are currently operating in hospitals throughout the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31367/17]
- 439. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of doctors and nurses specifically dealing with spinal fusion procedures for children in each of the years 2008 to 2016, and to date in 2017, including lost staff and new hires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31368/17]
- 440. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of doctors and nurses specifically dealing with spinal fusion procedures for children whom it is intended to recruit in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31369/17]
- 441. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children currently waiting for spinal fusion procedures; the time they have been waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31370/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 438 to 441, inclusive, together.

In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Procedures

442. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) cannot be guaranteed when a procedure will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31371/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

HSE Staff

443. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of staffing at an office (details supplied); his plans to increase staff at this location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31376/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Hospitals Building Programme

444. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of works planned for a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31377/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Emergency Department in Cavan has been performing well and is not currently a site of concern.

The RCSI Hospital Group has identified the need for development of the resuscitation area in Cavan Emergency Department. Any future investment in Cavan General Hospital must be considered within the overall acute hospital infrastructure programme, the prioritised needs of the hospital groups and within the overall capital envelope available to the health service.

The HSE will continue to apply the available funding for infrastructure development in the most cost effective way possible to meet current and future needs, having regard to the level of commitments and costs to completion already in place. My Department is working with the Health Service Executive and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to conduct a mid-term review of the capital programme.

The Department of Health and the HSE are also currently engaged in a process to commence winter planning for this year and to drive key improvement measures aimed at reducing trolleys and improving the patient experience in our EDs.

Hospital Services

445. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to upgrade or expand services at a hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31378/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A key part of the Government's plan for our healthcare system is the most significant reform of our hospital service since the foundation of the State - the establishment of hospital groups operating as single cohesive units with their own governance and management. Hospital Groups enable a better configuration of hospital services with benefits relating to safety, quality, access, cost and sustainable medical staffing and every hospital in the group, large and small, statutory and voluntary, will play a vital role within the Group. Hospitals working together in a Group will be able to support each other, providing a stronger role for smaller hospitals in delivering less complex care, and ensuring that those who require emergency or complex planned care are managed safely in larger hospitals.

The Smaller Hospitals Framework focuses in particular on the future role of smaller hospitals and outlines the wide range of services that can be provided within these smaller hospitals. It also outlines the potential to expand the services delivered in smaller hospitals.

As a Model 2 hospital, Monaghan does not have a 24/7 Emergency Department or critical care unit. However, in line with the Framework, Monaghan Hospital has a Minor Injuries Unit located on site.

I am committed to securing and further developing the role of our smaller hospitals with the expansion of services delivered in these hospitals, especially in services such as day surgery; ambulatory care; medical services and diagnostics.

The Programme for Partnership Government commits to a review of Medical Assessment Units, Urgent Care Centres and Minor Injuries Units, including the Unit at Monaghan Hospital. Work on this review is progressing in 2017.

Ambulance Service Data

446. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulances on duty during the day and at night to facilitate counties Cavan and Monaghan in tabular form; the depot they are based at; and his plans to increase the provision of emergency ambulance cover in counties Cavan and Monaghan. [31379/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Ambulance Service Data

447. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the ambulance waiting times, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31380/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

448. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for orthodontic treatment for the north east, including counties Cavan and Monaghan similar to those outlined (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31381/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Census of Population Data

449. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the consideration which is given to the publication of the census in respect to the delivery of services; the way in which demographic data features in planning at various levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31402/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Census data provides information on demographic change, disability and general health which serve as an important input into the analysis of evidence based policy decisions undertaken by this Department.

Census data is also a vital component of international health analysis carried out by this Department on an ongoing basis in conjunction with the OECD, DG Santé, Eurostat and the WHO.

A current illustration of the importance of census data to health analysis and evidence based policy decisions is the collaborative research programme undertaken by this Department with the ESRI to develop a medium term projection model of healthcare demand and expenditure. A key building block of this model is demographic projection of the size and structure of the population. Work is currently in train to develop population projections by gender and single year of age for each year, up to 2030, where assumptions can be altered to examine alternative scenarios (e.g., fertility, migration, life expectancy, health status) , and the impact on future health and social care demand by sector.

This Department has also commissioned a review of the current health capacity incorporating acute hospitals, primary care and social care sectors to be completed this year. Census and population projection data will act as key inputs into this process and will be fundamental to the Department's assessment of future health service capacity requirements.

Census of Population Publication

450. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the consideration which is given by the HSE to the publication of the census of population; the sections that are considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31410/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This is a matter for the Health Service Executive and they will respond to the Deputy directly.

Mental Health Services Data

451. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health the number of child psychologists available to children and adolescents in the south east within the public health system; the average waiting time for access to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31411/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Data

452. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health the number of child psychotherapists available to children and adolescents in the south east within the public health system; the average waiting time for access to same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31412/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Stroke Care

453. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the clinical staffing for stroke in Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar; the therapy staffing for stroke in the hospital for physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, dieticians, medical social work and psychology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31413/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Stroke Care

454. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the availability of early supported discharge for rehabilitation in Midland Regional Hospital, Mullingar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31414/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Stroke Care

455. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the findings of The Burden of Stroke in Europe Report (details supplied); his plans to put in place a multi-year plan regarding the service and staff deficits in stroke services here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31415/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I am aware of The Burden of Stroke in Europe Report launched on 11 May, 2017 by Stroke Alliance for Europe. The Deputy will be aware that the *Changing Cardiovascular Health; National Cardiovascular Health Policy* which covers the period 2010 - 2019 deals with all aspects of cardiovascular health including stroke.

As the Deputy's question in the main deals with service matters, I am referring it to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Stroke Care

456. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if he will meet with an organisation (details supplied) that has requested a meeting on stroke services here in view of findings of The Burden of Stroke in Europe research; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31416/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): A meeting is being arranged with the Irish Heart Foundation.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

- 457. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to funding being reduced to allow for the provision of wigs for cancer sufferers and persons with alopecia in a HSE area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31417/17]
- 458. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he or his Department officials were consulted before there was a reduction made to the funding available for wigs for medical card holders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31418/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 457 and 458 together.

I became aware through media reports on 30 June of the HSE's intention to introduce revised arrangements for the provision of supports to patients who are being or have been treated for cancer and other illnesses. I understand that the HSE's objective was to develop more equitable arrangements for the provision of post-mastectomy products, wigs and hairpieces and to extend these supports to a broader cohort of patients. Neither my Department nor I were involved or consulted in the course of this process. At my request, the HSE has deferred introduction of the proposed changes. I have asked the Executive to re-examine the matter with a view to devising a plan which will achieve an equitable outcome but not lessen the level of provision for patients who are already coping with serious illness. The HSE has confirmed that the *status quo* will operate pending further consideration of the matter, including discussions with my Department.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

459. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the various rates that the HSE allows for grants to provide wigs for persons who have cancer or suffer from alopecia; the rea-

son for the variances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31419/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Community Care

460. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff employed in the Maynooth community care unit by role; the vacancies that exist; if there is a commitment to fill those vacancies; if the method of recruitment is being reconsidered; if staff numbers are impacting on the full use of the unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31421/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

Community Care Provision

461. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds in the Maynooth community care unit; the number of beds being used in the unit; the number of beds available for respite; the number of beds being used for respite care; if the unit is in compliance with HIQA standards; if not, the way in which he plans to address this; the timeframe for same; if the HSE is fully committed to retaining the unit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31422/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Services for People with Disabilities

462. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Cork will have an assessment of need carried out under the Disability Act 2005; the position of the person on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31431/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services

463. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his views on the suitability

of congregated settings for those with mental health challenges; the number of service users in such settings; the locations of such settings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31433/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Home Care Packages Provision

464. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health if a full review of the home care package being delivered via an approved care provider to a person (details supplied) could be carried out as a priority; if consideration will be given to an immediate transfer to a different home care agency with a commitment to delivering the service it is being paid to provide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31438/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Assisted Human Reproduction

465. **Deputy Josepha Madigan** asked the Minister for Health the financial support available for those seeking to undergo IVF treatment; and his plans to expand existing support [31440/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): IVF treatment is not currently provided by the Irish public health service, however, there is some support available in that patients who access IVF treatment privately may claim tax relief on the costs involved under the tax relief for medical expenses scheme. In addition, a defined list of fertility medicines needed for fertility treatment is covered under the High Tech Scheme administered by the HSE. Medicines covered by the High Tech Scheme must be prescribed by a consultant/specialist and approved by the HSE 'High Tech Liaison Officers'. The cost of the medicines is then covered, as appropriate, under the Medical Card or Drugs Payment Scheme.

In February 2016, the Health Research Board (HRB) was engaged to conduct a comprehensive review of international public funding models for assisted human reproduction (AHR). The completed HRB evidence review was published simultaneously on the Department of Health's and the HRB's websites on Wednesday 15 March 2017.

This evidence review examines the public funding mechanisms for AHR in different countries. The review looks at the associated costs and benefits for the funder, provider and patient, the criteria for accessing the public funded service and the basis for these criteria in different jurisdictions.

The review does not indicate a recommendation or preference for a specific funding model; rather it outlines the pros and cons of such funding models, the different aspects of models in different jurisdictions, as well as the different rationales underpinning such funding models.

The HRB evidence review will be analysed by officials in my Department in the context of considering policy options for a potential public funding model for AHR treatment. It should be noted that, any funding model that might ultimately be introduced would need to operate within the broader regulatory framework relating to AHR.

Work on the General Scheme of an AHR Bill is well-advanced in my Department and I consider this and the development of policy on public funding for AHR treatment to be a priority for 2017.

Hospital Appointments Status

466. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied) in County Clare [31487/17]

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 National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014,* has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medicinal Products Availability

467. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the uncertainty of supply of the drug Respreeza that is critical to the continued treatment of those alpha 1 sufferers who have been in receipt of the therapy; the steps he will take to remove doubt or fear regarding continuity of supply; the steps taken and commitment to date in 2017 to ensure access to Respreeza for those persons not in receipt of the drug; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31489/17]

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.

The HSE has considered the issue of reimbursement of Respreeza for maintenance treatment of emphysema in adults with documented severe alpha1-proteinase inhibitor deficiency.

The HSE has decided not to support reimbursement of the medicine.

The HSE in such instances is required under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013 to issue a notice of proposal to the applicant company setting out that it is minded to not reimburse this medicine and the reasons why.

The company is entitled to make written representations and must be provided with at least 28 days in which to do so. The HSE is required to consider carefully any written representations it receives from the applicant company.

The notice period for applicant company representations has recently ended and the HSE is

now considering the representations received from the applicant company. The HSE has also met with the company to fully understand its representations.

A final decision by the HSE can only be made after the representations received under the 2013 Health Act processes have been carefully considered.

Hospital Staff

468. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if the new emergency department at University Hospital Limerick will be allocated additional new staff; if not, if this will affect the operation of the new emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31512/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Staff

- 469. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the delay in the new sarcoma specialist starting in their role at St. Vincent's University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31513/17]
- 470. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the name of the new sarcoma specialist selected for appointment at St. Vincent's University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31514/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 469 and 470 together.

The recruitment of an additional post of consultant medical oncologist with a special interest in sarcoma, based in St. Vincent's University Hospital, was prioritised to facilitate further development of the service there. St Vincent's University Hospital is responsible for the recruitment process and the announcement of the successful candidate. The Department has been advised that, following interviews for the post, a successful candidate has been identified and an appointment will be made in due course. In the interim, patients requiring treatment for sarcoma cancer will continue to receive high quality care at St Vincent's Hospital with care being managed by one of the hospital's full-time oncologists.

Question No. 470 answered with Question No. 469.

Health Services Data

471. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of sarcoma surgeries carried out in each of the years 2010 to 2016, and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31515/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This question relates service delivery matters and as such is a matter for the HSE.

- 472. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is possible to provide 24-7 primary percutaneous coronary intervention, PPCI, at University Hospital Waterford with a single catheterisation laboratory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31522/17]
- 473. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health his plans to rule out ceasing primary percutaneous coronary intervention, PCI, services at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31523/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 472 and 473 together.

The Programme for Government committed to the development of a second cath lab at University Hospital Waterford (UHW), subject to a favourable recommendation from an independent clinical review. This independent clinical review was completed by Dr. Niall Herity, one of the foremost cardiologists on these islands and a doctor of international repute. Dr Herity concluded that the needs of the effective UHW catchment population could be accommodated from a single cath lab. However, he recommended investment to enhance cardiac services at the hospital to address waiting times and to provide improved access for patients. Accordingly, an additional €500,000 has been allocated to the hospital for 2017 to provide two additional cath lab sessions per week. This entails an additional eight hours provision per week or a 20% expansion in operating hours. It is expected that this capacity will facilitate the provision of an increased volume of scheduled cardiology care at the hospital. I have asked the HSE to maximise the benefit for patients from that funding, in respect of both additional sessions at the existing cath lab and the temporary use of a mobile cath lab for a specific period. The mobile cath lab is currently being procured in line with the normal HSE procurement process.

Dr. Herity further recommended that the UHW cath lab should operate as an elective lab which provides all specialised cardiac services except interventional treatment for patients who are having heart attacks (PPCI), and that the current 9 to 5 provision of these services should cease in order to allow the hospital to focus on the much larger volume of planned cath lab work. This is because highly specialised services such as primary PCI need to be carried out in a small number of hospitals where the volume of patients supports the provision of a safe service.

However, as Minister for Health, I want to be sure that any service changes that are implemented will result in improved services for patients. Therefore, I have asked my Department to address the implications of Dr. Herity's recommendations by undertaking a national review of all PPCI services, with the aim of ensuring that as many patients as possible have access, on a 24/7 basis, to safe and sustainable emergency interventions following a heart attack.

Question No. 473 answered with Question No. 472.

Health Insurance Levy

474. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if the Government levy imposed on health insurance policies means the charge accounts for more than a third of the cost of annual premiums for some persons, such as a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31531/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The voluntary health insurance system in Ireland operates on the basis of community rating, whereby everyone pays the same price for the same product, and is supported by a Risk Equalisation Scheme which aims to keep health

insurance more affordable for older and less healthy citizens.

The Risk Equalisation Scheme works by spreading the cost of insuring older and sicker people across the market, through the imposition of a stamp duty levy on every health insurance contract issued. These levies are paid into a fund, out of which risk equalisation credits are paid to insurers in order to reduce some of the additional costs they incur when insuring older, less healthy members.

Recommendations are made each year by the independent Health Insurance Authority regarding the appropriate level for risk equalisation credits. The risk equalisation scheme is self-funding and exchequer neutral, neither a cost nor a benefit to the State.

Medical Card Applications

475. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a person (details supplied) applied to renew a medical card in 2016; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that when the person contacted the medical card registration office to make a complaint regarding the delay in the application being processed the person was requested to resubmit information which was previously submitted; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that when the person submitted the requested information, the person was advised that the application would be speedily processed; when the application will be processed; when a medical card will issue to the person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31559/17]

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

Departmental Staff Data

476. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health the number of civil servants in his Department that have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in his Department that have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31822/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department does not currently have a transfer list.

As you will be aware, Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan has a commitment to develop a mobility scheme within the Civil Service. Work on this scheme is ongoing with the Civil Service Management Board, Departments and staff interests.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is currently developing Phase 1 of the scheme for the general service grades of CO - EO which they plan to launch later in the year. Phase 2 of the scheme will be developed following implementation of Phase 1 and will include the general service grades of HEO, AO and AP.

The scheme will be centralised and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will

have the facility to report on numbers on lists per department and location following its successful launch.

Organic Farming Scheme Payments

477. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will issue to a person (details supplied) regarding an application for a 2016 organics payment. [30845/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was subject to an on-farm inspection which resulted in a 5% cross compliance penalty on his Organic Farming Scheme payment. Payment due to the person concerned less the appropriate penalty will issue shortly.

Coillte Teoranta

478. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proportion of expenditure that is invested in the public amenities of the various public parks managed by Coillte; if there are publically available strategic plans regarding the management of these resources and amenities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30904/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of their forest estate, are the responsibility of the company.

The matter was raised with Coillte who advise that the company invests more than €2.6 million per annum in the recreation service it provides. This includes the management and maintenance of considerable infrastructure including 12 forest parks, 270 recreation sites and more than 3,000kms of waymarked trails, which are accessible by the public free of charge and I am advised that this cost is fully funded by Coillte.

I understand that the economic activity arising from use of state-owned facilities by visitors accrues to local and largely rural economies. The main beneficiaries are those businesses that provide services to support the visitors (for example local retailers, hire and guiding services) and not to the providers of this infrastructure.

Coillte further advise that the company, along with four of the other main public landowners, have developed an Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters (ORP) to highlight the need to develop, manage and maintain infrastructure for public recreation. The ORP quantifies that €1.5 billion per annum of visitor spending accrues as a result of the provision of recreation infrastructure by public landowners. Coillte and the other public landowners will publish the ORP in the coming weeks.

The strategic plans for each of Coillte's Business Area Units which detail recreational facilities and plans are located on their website at http://www.coillte.ie/about-us/media/publications/

Trade Agreements

479. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

discussions he has had with his EU counterparts and the European Commission to ensure that beef is not included in a potential Mercosur deal with South American countries in view of the fact that the United States Department of Agriculture, USDA, has banned fresh Brazilian beef, which clearly would likewise fail the appropriate EU standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31194/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I and my officials have been very active in highlighting the potentially very damaging impact of a Mercosur deal on the European agriculture sector, and on the beef sector in particular.

At political level, I have raised the issue with my Member State colleagues and with Commissioners Hogan and Malmström, both within the Council of Agriculture Ministers and in written form

These efforts have been reinforced at official level through similar contacts with Member States and the Commission, particularly through the Special Committee on Agriculture and the Trade Policy Committee.

At the recent Agri Fish Council of Ministers meeting in June, Ireland, along with a number of other Member States, has requested that negotiations should not proceed any further until the Agriculture Council is given the opportunity to assess the balance between offers and commitments

I also continue to monitor the situation closely in co-operation with my Government colleagues, particularly the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, who leads the Government's approach in relation to trade matters.

While the Commission responded to the strong lobbying by Ireland and others by excluding a beef Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ) from the offers exchanged with Mercosur on 11 May 2016, there is a need for continued vigilance in relation to the conduct of these trade negotiations. We are also insisting that the timing and content of any beef TRQ offer is handled appropriately, and in a manner that safeguards the interests of the Irish and European beef sector in particular.

This must also take into account the findings of the Commission's recent cumulative impact assessment, which strongly reinforce Ireland's position in relation to beef. They are also a very effective reminder of the need for great caution in our approach to the issue of beef TRQs.

Of course the recent issues with Brazilian beef exports have been worrying. However, I would point out that the Commission was quick to react as soon as the practices uncovered in Brazil came to light. Its actions in seeking immediate suspension of certification for the establishments responsible, together with the rejection of consignments en route to the EU from those establishments, were appropriate and effective. I also welcome the harmonised approach being taken to the more intensified checks that are now being carried out on product from Brazil at EU Border Inspection Posts, and in which Ireland is playing a full part.

It is vitally important that meat and meat products being exported from any country to the EU fully comply with EU standards, and that there are robust and reliable systems in place to ensure that this is the case. We cannot tolerate a situation in which EU requirements are flouted, given the potential risks for food safety and consumer health.

These events demonstrate that we must remain vigilant at all times. I believe that we must therefore continue to keep this situation under ongoing review, and be ready to take additional measures if the circumstances demand it.

GLAS Appeals

480. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an appeal regarding GLAS by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31205/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Agriculture Appeals Office has confirmed that the person named lodged an appeal in relation to the Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS). When all of the facts of the case have been fully considered a comprehensive decision letter will issue. It is hoped that the decision will be finalised shortly.

Brexit Data

481. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31266/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following the UK referendum in June 2016, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine established a dedicated Brexit Unit within its EU and International Trade Division. This Unit now forms part of a newly-formed Brexit and International Trade Division and reports to a full-time Head of Division at Principal Officer level, who in turn reports to an Assistant Secretary General deeply engaged in Brexit issues.

The Unit co-ordinates the on-going analysis, consultation and engagement activities being undertaken by a large number of administrative, technical and veterinary staff, through an internal Brexit Response Committee comprised of 16 people drawn from the wide range of Divisions affected by Brexit (including, for example, Meat and Milk Policy, Animal Health and Welfare, Food Industry Development, Economics and Planning, and Seafood Policy and Development). It also feeds into the whole-of-Government co-ordination being undertaken by the Department of the Taoiseach.

The staff and administrative costs associated with the activities of the unit are paid from the Department's Administrative Budget as required.

My Department will continue to assess resource requirements on an ongoing basis as the Brexit process evolves. However the reality is that the co-ordination of responses to Brexit involves a significant number of staff across a range of divisions dealing with sectors and issues potentially impacted by Brexit.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

482. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 22 of June 2017, if a projection has been carried out by his Department in relation to emissions reduction from the agricultural sector in 2020, 2030 and 2050; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31303/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The long-term ambition for the sector is to move towards an approach to carbon neutrality which does not

compromise capacity for sustainable food production. This effectively means that agricultural emissions are balanced by increasing carbon-sequestration, reducing emissions from the land sector, increasing fossil fuel and energy intensive materials displacement. However, further elaboration of the concept of carbon neutrality and how it will be achieved over time is required.

The 2012 Teagasc Marginal Abatement Cost Curve identified 1.1 Mt CO2 abatement potential by 2020.

Agriculture accounts for about 33% of national emissions. This figure reflects the importance of agriculture to the Irish economy, the significance of an efficient grass based livestock industry and Ireland's lack of heavy industry.

The most recent EPA figues indicate that agriculture emissions are 5.5% below 1990 figures. This overall reduction in emissions from agriculture has also been influenced by measures such as the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme, Agriculture Environmental Options Scheme, Green Low Carbon Agri Environmental Scheme, Organic Scheme, supports for manure management in line with the EU Nitrates Directive, and through development of renewable energy resources. It is also of note that improvements in sustainable intensification, such as improved fertiliser use and grassland management, have occurred alongside the afforestation of 300,000 hectares of agricultural land since 1990, which has helped to maintain agricultural output.

Over the period 2021 to 2030, afforestation since 1990 (i.e. all new forests planted since 1990 and up to 2020) will remove an estimated net 4.5 million tonnes of CO2 from the atmosphere per annum based on the current method of accounting in EU Decision 529/2013.

As the Deputy will be aware from my previous reply, my Department and its agencies have been strongly focussed on improving the efficiency of Irish farming which is fundamental to reducing emissions.

Current analysis suggests that the emissions intensity per kcal of food output in 2013 is reduced approximately 14% relative to 2005 and early estimates project that the BAU 2030 emission intensity will be a quarter below the emission intensity in 2005. Further, early estimates of agriculture with additional measures is approximately 35% below 2005, although absolute emissions remain reasonably stable.

It is also worth noting that we are one of a small number of EU countries to have elected to report on grassland and cropland management activities for the 2nd commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (KP) (2013-2020) so we are endeavouring to improve our understanding of the drivers of emissions from these activities with a view to developing policies and measures to reducing the source of these emissions. This will allow Ireland to take advantage of any sequestration benefits that may be allowed in the future from these activities.

GLAS Administration

483. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will allow an extension of time for persons that have been unable to plant native hedging as part of their GLAS measures due to a shortage of native hedging plants with horticultural suppliers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31323/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Hedgerow planting was an available action under tranche 1 of the GLAS scheme and due to the fact that the delivery target for the entire programming period to 2020 was exceeded in the first tranche, this action was suspended for tranche 2 & 3 applications.

Accordingly, the situation whereby an extension to the date for the completion of this action is required could only apply in respect of GLAS 1 participants whose contract start date was 1 October 2015. For these participants the action was required to have been completed by 31 March 2017. This deadline has not been extended and there are no plans to do so.

Marine Institute

484. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the Marine Institute plans to recommence the blue fin tuna tag and release scientific scheme off County Donegal; the results to date; his views on the possibility of applying for a quota to allow the development of a recreational fishery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31324/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): With regard to the tag and release Bluefin Tuna scientific research project, my Department made funds available to the Marine Institute, with the support of the European Commission, to actively engage in developing Ireland's involvement in the ICCAT (International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas) Atlantic wide research programme for bluefin tuna.

Intensive preparations in September by the Marine Institute (MI), Stanford University (SU), University of Exeter (UoE) and Acadia University (AU) allowed the Irish Bluefin Tagging Programme to commence off the Co. Donegal coast in the second week of October 2016. The first tagging surveys took place between 9 and 12 October, with the second phase taking place between 22 and 26 October and 28 October and 1 November.

Preliminary reporting from the Marine Institute indicates that the tagging operations were successful with 16 Wildlife Computers MinPAT tags deployed. The data transmitted by these tags gives scientists information about the location of BFT and will help the partners involved in the project to construct migratory patterns using light, temperature and depth data. A number of the tags are continuing to transmit data that will be useful in the broader context of the IC-CAT scientific research to assess the abundance and distribution of blue fin tuna in the waters off the Irish coast. In that context I have asked the Marine Institute to expand the tagging programme for 2017 and this is currently in the planning phase.

In future, it may prove possible to extend the scope of this project and I am committed to actively pursuing any opportunity to improve the scientific knowledge base for the stock of bluefin tuna in the waters off Ireland. I am hopeful that the gathering of such information could help build a case that might allow for an angling catch and release fishery in the future.

Any such proposal would have to be based on a scientific assessment from the Marine Institute and would also need to be developed in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Inland Fisheries Ireland who have responsibility for recreational fishing. Any such case will require the support of the EU Commission and approval of ICCAT.

The current legal situation is that a recreational angling fishery in Ireland for bluefin tuna, even on a catch and release basis, is not possible in the absence of a national bluefin tuna quota. We do not have such a quota and it is extremely unlikely that we could obtain one in the short term as it would involve reducing the share of the Total Allowable Catch of those EU Member States that do have quota and for whom bluefin is an important commercial fishery.

A small bluefin by-catch quota is available to Ireland for use in our Northern Albacore Tuna fishery and Celtic Sea herring fishery. This bycatch quota is also available to other Member

States of the European Union without national quotas for bluefin tuna. Under the TAC & Quota Regulation, it is specifically prohibited to utilize this by-catch quota for recreational and/or sport fisheries, even in the context of a catch and release programme.

GLAS Payments

485. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31333/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

The person named has requested that the length of new hedgerow to be planted which the applicant committed to delivering in his application be reduced and this has resulted in the delay in issuing payment. My Department is actively working to resolve the issue with a view to further processing the application for payment at the earliest opportunity.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

- 486. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to put forward at EU level the need to protect the CAP budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31524/17]
- 487. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the discussions he has had with the EU agriculture and budget Commissioners regarding the need to protect CAP funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31525/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 486 and 487 together.

The CAP budget is an issue of enormous importance to Ireland and the European agri-food sector. It accounts for some 37% of the overall EU budget.

The recent "Reflections Paper on the future of the EU Finances" by the European Budget Commissioner outlines the demands on the EU budget post 2020 against the background of the potential impact of the UK's exit from the European Union. Other spending priorities may include areas such as migration, security, defence and development co-operation. The reflection paper points to the need to ensure that European Union budget adds value. That is a principle to which Ireland can subscribe.

The CAP is a policy which has adapted over time to the needs of citizens and contributes to development in rural areas, employment creation, environmental sustainability and the provision of safe food that meets the high standards that EU consumers have come to expect. It also plays a central role in delivering the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth sought under the Europe 2020 strategy. It is important that the CAP continues to evolve in a way that supports the achievements of European priorities, particularly in the context of securing a strong CAP budget for the post-2020 period. This can only be achieved by reinforcing the relevance and effectiveness of the policy in helping to achieve broader societal goals.

For now, it is worth noting that the amount of CAP funding per Member State for pillar 1, direct payments, and pillar 2, rural development, is fixed until 2020 in Regulations of the Coun-

cil and European Parliament. Any change to these figures will require a co-decided amendment to these Regulations.

While formal discussions on the Multi Annual Financial Framework have not yet commenced, Ireland supports the retention of a strong and well funded CAP and its position on this matter has been articulated at official and political level and is well understood in other member States and in the Commission. I will be working hard with my European counterparts to ensure that the CAP budget post 2020 provides a solid and effective foundation for the development of the sector into the future, when discussions do commence. In addition officials in my Department are also working closely with the Department of Finance on the next MFF.

Horse Sport Ireland

488. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take following the publication of a report (details supplied) on an organisation. [31552/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The report by Indecon International Consultants, 'Review of Certain Matters relating to Horse Sport Ireland' was published by my Department on 27 June 2017. The report will first be examined by Horse Sport Ireland and will be discussed by its board and management at their next board meeting, which I understand is scheduled for 18 July. My Department, following this meeting, will work closely with Horse Sport Ireland on the implementation of the recommendations.

GLAS Payments

489. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1 and GLAS 2 that have received the 15% of their total 2016 payment, by county, in tabular form; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 15% portion of the 2016 payment; the number of GLAS recipients that have yet to receive this portion of the payment, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31553/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The processing of GLAS 2016 balancing payments which represents 15% of the total 2016 payment due is due to commence soon. When the first processing run has been completed the details requested by the deputy will be available.

Nitrates Usage

490. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he is considering to aid farmers with respect to slurry spreading and meeting EU nitrates responsibilities; and if persons that use splash plates for spreading will continue to be able to use this equipment following the national clean air strategy consultation by Government. [31554/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At the outset, it is important to note that the lead on the National Clean Air Strategy is the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. The public consultation has now concluded and that Department will conduct a thorough examination of all submissions received

as part of its consultation phase.

Within this context, the document which was drafted to inform the public consultation identified a number of issues in relation to air quality and emission sources. It recognised that the spreading of slurry can, depending on the timing of the application and the weather conditions, result in nitrogen loss from slurry to the atmosphere through ammonia volatilisation.

No decision has been taken on a total ban on splash plates. My Department will continue to liaise closely with colleagues in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment on this matter.

On foot of farmer demand to improve the utilisation of slurry as a fertiliser, my Department is assisting farmers under TAMS in the purchase of Low Emission Slurry Spreading equipment where to date 539 applications have been received for trailing shoe, 394 applications for the dribble bar and 14 applications for shallow injection. Overall across all low emissions technologies over 1,058 applications have been received which is above expectations. There are no splash plate systems being grant-aided. In addition more than 4,750 farmers have applied under the GLAS scheme to apply slurry using low emission equipment.

This is being driven by farmers themselves wanting to maximise the value of the slurry on their own farms, rather than as a regulatory requirement. Recently, the Association of Farm and Forestry Contractors of Ireland also identified their support for this technology.

However, I fully understand that this technology is not suitable for all farms.

TAMS Eligibility

491. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is grant aid for renewable micro generation on farms under TAMS 2. [31555/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Grant aid for renewable micro generation is available to the Pig and Poultry Sectors under the Pigs and Poultry Investment measure under TAMS II. The electricity produced must be used on the farm. It is not permitted to export electricity to the national grid.

Beef Industry

492. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether there is sufficient competition in the meat processing and beef sector here in view of reports of the proposed merger of two companies (details supplied) and a recent announcement; and the impact this will this have on the price the primary producer receives for livestock. [31556/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am acutely aware of the importance of competition in the beef sector. It is critically important to have a robust and transparent legal basis for the evaluation of proposals for mergers and acquisitions.

There is a well established infrastructure, at EU level, and at National level through the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, for the oversight of competition issues and for dealing with allegations of anti-competitive practices or the abuse of a dominant market position. I understand that the merger referred to by the Deputy will be evaluated by the appropriate authorities.

As for the price of Irish beef, this is determined by a wide variety of factors, including global demand and supply, currency rates, the extent of competition from other countries, weather conditions. At present the price of Irish cattle for slaughter exceeds the EU 15 average.

Departmental Staff Data

493. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31772/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Due to the diverse range of staff employed by my Department, a number of different transfer arrangements/ agreements are in place for these various grade streams. Given the variety of these arrangements there is no single list of staff requesting transfer to any location.

As you will be aware, Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan has a commitment to develop a mobility scheme within the Civil Service. Work on this scheme is ongoing with the Civil Service Management Board, Departments and staff interests. The scheme will be centralised and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will have the facility to report on numbers on lists per department and location following its successful launch.

Warmer Homes Scheme Eligibility

- 494. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the research and consultation on minimum energy standards in the private rented sector will be published as outlined in the strategy to combat energy poverty 2016 to 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31139/17]
- 507. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has studied a charity's (details supplied) proposal in its pre-budget submission to extend the warmer homes scheme to landlords who make their property available for at least three years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31137/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 494 and 507 together.

I am committed to increasing energy efficiency activity in the rented sector. People living in rented accommodation are twice as likely to live in a home that is E, F or G rated on the Building Energy Rating (BER) scale. Households living in relatively energy inefficient properties spend €160-€419 per annum more on energy than households in a home rated with a BER of B. This leaves those living in rented accommodation more vulnerable to energy poverty.

That is why the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty commits to piloting an initiative to allow landlords participating in the Local Authority led Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) schemes to receive free energy efficiency upgrades.

My officials are currently working with Local Authorities to agree the terms and conditions for this pilot. This would be trialled initially with a small number of Local Authorities and the findings from this would inform consideration of a wider roll-out.

Regarding minimum energy efficiency standards for rented properties, the Government is considering such regulations as the typical residential tenancy in Ireland is short and hence tenants do not tend to invest significant sums in the property they are living in. At the same time, landlords under-invest in energy efficiency works as the tenants are the ones who benefit from the consequent energy bill savings and in a constrained rental market there appears to be little value placed on the energy efficiency of a rented property. These diverging incentives mean that energy efficiency investment is much lower in the private rented sector than among homeowners, even though Government grant schemes such as the Better Energy Homes scheme are open to landlords.

My Department has worked with external consultants to examine the impact of introducing minimum energy efficiency standards to counteract this market failure but this must be balanced against the impact such regulations would have on the price and availability of rented properties.

With the publication of the 2017 Census, my Department is working to update the research findings and incorporate this new data. By the autumn I intend to present the findings of this updated research to a seminar of tenant and landlord interest groups, with a view to publishing the research shortly thereafter and engaging in a full public consultation.

Better Energy Homes Scheme

495. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost based on 2016 figures of increasing each grant value under the better energy homeowner grants to twice their value; and the estimated cost of increasing the solar heating grant to five times its value. [30830/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Better Energy Homes Scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department. The scheme supports private homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their home. Fixed grants are provided towards the cost of a range of measures including attic insulation, wall insulation, heating system upgrades, solar thermal panels and accompanying Building Energy Rating (BER).

The measures currently offered were selected as the best balance that could be achieved between the resources available to the scheme, the number of homes that can receive support and the energy savings that can delivered. In short, the measures supported are those that can deliver the most energy savings at the lowest cost to the highest number of people.

The following table shows the cash impact if the level of each grant under the Better Energy Homes scheme (excluding the BER) were doubled and demand for grants was identical to that experienced in 2016. However, it must be noted that it is not simply a case of multiplying the 2016 allocation. Doubling the grants available would likely result in a significant increase in demand for grants, which would mean that it would be likely that the Exchequer resources devoted to the programme would also have to increase quite significantly to cope with this increased demand.

Broadly speaking the grants available are set at around 30-35% of the projected cost of each measure. Doubling grant levels would certainly increase demand for grants but would result in a lower return of energy savings for each euro of Government investment and would thus represent poorer value for money for taxpayers.

Quintupling the grant level for solar heating would result in a grant that covers more than

150% of the cost of installing a solar heating system. In other words, anyone who installed a solar heating system would receive a net benefit of approximately €2,000. This would be effective at promoting deployment of solar heating but again would not represent good value for money for the taxpayer and would place a considerable stress on the construction industry as they would have to adapt to what would likely be a very high spike in demand.

| Measure | Number of Grants Paid (Excluding BER) | Value of Grants Paid 2016 (€) | Value of Grants Paid If Average Grant Doubled (€) |
|---|---|-------------------------------|---|
| Roof Insulation | 5,279 | 1,595,393 | 3,190,785 |
| Cavity | 4,573 | 1,406,562 | 2,813,124 |
| Dry-Lining Insulation | 733 | 1,396,364 | 2,792,728 |
| External Insulation | 1,274 | 4,736,443 | 9,472,886 |
| H.E Gas Boiler with Heating Control Upgrade | 4,516 | 3,306,150 | 6,612,300 |
| H.E Oil Boiler with Heating Control Upgrade | 1,390 | 1,069,850 | 2,139,700 |
| Heating Controls Upgrade Only | 1,286 | 835,180 | 1,670,361 |
| Solar Heating | 1,588 | 1,980,500 | 3,961,000 |
| Total | 20,639 | 16,326,442 | 32,652,884 |

Better Energy Homes Scheme

496. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of introducing a domestic grant to cover a minimum one third of the cost of purchase of micro-scale wind generation, CHP, biomass boiler and air source heat pump in tabular form. [30831/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Better Energy Homes Scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department. The scheme supports private homeowners who wish to improve the energy performance of their home. Fixed grants are provided towards the cost of a range of measures including attic insulation, wall insulation, heating system upgrades, solar thermal panels and accompanying Building Energy Rating (BER).

The measures currently offered were selected as the best balance that could be achieved between the resources available to the scheme, the number of homes that can receive support and the energy savings that can delivered. In short, the measures supported are those that can deliver the most energy savings at the lowest cost to the highest number of people.

Nevertheless as we move towards deeper renovation of homes, as will be necessary to meet our 2020 and 2030 climate and energy goals, other measures could become cost effective. My Department and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) are now testing out the channels for carrying out deeper renovation in homes across the country to inform future policy. That is why support for a much broader range of technologies is made available through the Better Energy Communities scheme, the recently announced Deep Retrofit pilot scheme and the Warmth & Well-being scheme.

In specific response to the Deputy's question, the cost of introducing a grant for a set percentage of the price of renewable technologies is impossible to estimate without conducting a comprehensive market survey of technology prices and considering likely demand scenarios for the introduction of such grants. No such assessment has been undertaken by my Department.

I can inform the Deputy that I have requested SEAI to undertake a review of technologies for consideration in home energy grant schemes. The results of this review will inform any future measures that may be offered. However, Government support for energy efficiency will continue to prioritise those measures which are cost effective to deliver and will always seek as the highest priority to reduce energy demand in the first instance.

In the electricity sector the primary support mechanisms for renewable electricity are the Renewable Electricity Feed-in-Tariff schemes, paid for electricity exported into the national grid. Micro-generation is not currently supported under any of these schemes.

My Department is currently developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The design of the new scheme includes an extensive independent economic appraisal. This economic appraisal involves comparing the cost of supporting a range of technologies – including micro-generation of various technologies, to ensure that the new scheme delivers value for money for energy users whilst also delivering on the energy pillars of sustainability and security of supply. A public consultation on key design elements of the new support scheme will be published shortly.

Electric Vehicle Grants

497. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost for 2018, based on 2016 figures, of increasing the electric vehicle grant scheme by $\[\in \] 2,000 \]$ and $\[\in \] 5,000 \]$ respectively, in tabular form. [30832/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Electric Vehicle Grant Scheme provides grant aid of up to €5,000 towards the purchase of a new full battery EV (BEV) or Plugin Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEV). The scheme, which will be kept under review, is continuing this year and an allocation of €5 million has been provided in my Department's Vote for this purpose. These grants are in addition to the VRT reliefs of up to €5,000 that also apply to EVs. Budget 2017 extended VRT reliefs on PHEVs to end 2018 and on BEVs to end 2021.

In 2016, the purchase of 638 EVs was supported under the EV Grant Scheme at a cost of over €3 million. The average amount of grant paid was €4,763 per vehicle.

It is estimated that increasing each grant by $\[\in \] 2,000$ per vehicle would cost an extra $\[\in \] 1.276$ million. While increasing each grant by $\[\in \] 5,000$ would add an estimated $\[\in \] 3.19$ million euro to the total spend under the scheme.

The actual cost in 2016 along with the projected cost of the two outlined scenarios is set out in the following table:

| Year | No. of EVs sup- | Amount in | Additional grant | Additional grant |
|------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| | ported | Grant Aid paid | of €2000 per EV | of €5000 per EV |
| | | (Actual) | (Est.) | (Est.) |
| 2016 | 638 | €3,038,800 | €4,314,800 | €6,228,800 |

So far in 2017, almost €2.2 million has been spent to support the purchase of 456 new electric vehicles. My Department expects a broadly similar number of Electric Vehicles to be grant aided for the remainder of the year.

The trend over the past three years has been for increasing numbers of new EVs on our roads compared to the previous years and, with a greater choice of models on the market allied to the extension of the VRT reliefs, I would expect that trend to continue.

Energy Efficiency

498. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to direct the SEAI to expand its deep retrofit pilot programme in order that persons can apply directly to the SEAI without going through their local authority or community group; his further plans to extend the budget of the scheme in view of the benefits it creates regarding energy efficiency; if he will consider increasing the thresholds relating to the amount the SEAI can pay for each project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30837/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The deep retrofit pilot scheme, operated by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland on behalf of my Department, aims to help us understand how best we can persuade people to invest in the deep retrofit of their homes and what solutions we need to put in place to make it easy for them to do so.

To be eligible for support a home must be upgraded to at least an A3 standard on the Building Energy Rating scale and upgrade their heating system to a renewable energy alternative. Meeting this specification will be challenging but the lessons learned will play a crucial role in determining how the State can effectively support homeowners who want to upgrade their homes to this standard on a wider basis.

Undertaking a retrofit on this scale is a complex, demanding task and householders without any background or experience in energy issues would find it extremely difficult to undertake such an upgrade without support. SEAI is not resourced to provide this degree of engagement to individual homeowners. Therefore, requiring a counter-agent to co-ordinate and act on behalf of a householder ensures that a source of expert support and advice on deep retrofit is available to them throughout the upgrade process. As the Deep Retrofit scheme develops and as undertaking these deep retrofits becomes more commonplace it may be that the need for this advice and support requirement is lessened and it may be appropriate to widen the eligibility to include individual homeowners. This matter will be kept under review by my Department and SEAI.

With regard to the rate of subvention, I believe that the current rates, 50% for homeowners and 95% for those in energy poverty, are appropriate. This rate of subvention is considerably higher than the average grant paid under the Better Energy Homes scheme and reflects the reality that the scheme is trying to build and develop a market for deep retrofit in Ireland. However, increasing the average support level above these levels would push it into a rate that is not sustainable in the long run, which in turn introduces regulatory uncertainty for scheme co-ordinators and contractors and would not represent good value for money for the taxpayers who are funding the scheme.

€5 million has been allocated to the scheme for 2017. It is my intention that the deep retrofit scheme will run for several years and will test a variety of new and innovative ways of promoting deeper retrofits. These learnings will then be incorporated into the design of future

nationwide support schemes. The budget for the programme will be reviewed by my Department on an annual basis and will reflect the anticipated level of demand for the scheme and the resources available to support energy efficiency support schemes generally. As I noted in my speech to the recent SEAI conference on deep retrofit, the future of this scheme is in the hands of counter-party's, be they Local Authorities, community groups or private ventures. I have made funds available for the scheme, the SEAI has published the scheme's principles and now we need to persuade homeowners to make the commitment to undertake deep retrofits.

National Broadband Plan

- 499. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for fibre optic broadband at Tullycross, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30856/17]
- 502. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there is a plan in place for broadband in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30982/17]
- 503. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will expedite the roll-out of fibre broadband to an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31041/17]
- 509. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for the roll-out of at least 30 Mb broadband speeds to a location (details supplied) in County Donegal as part of the national broadband plan; if such areas with poor or no broadband coverage will be prioritised during the roll-out phase as part of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31235/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 499, 502, 503 and 509 together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan will provide high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that to date approximately 1.4 million or 61% of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second and this footprint is expanding.

In April, eir signed a agreement with me committing them to follow through on their commercial plans to provide new high speed broadband infrastructure to 300,000 premises in rural areas. eir has committed to doing this work over a 90 week period with an average of 500 premises passed per day. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie. The decision by eir to invest in infrastructure to deploy high speed broadband services to an additional 300,000 premises in rural Ireland was taken by eir on commercial grounds. Neither I nor the Department have a statutory authority to direct eir in this regard.

Quarterly updates on progress of the eir 300,000 roll-out will be published on the Departments website. The Q1 figures have been verified by my Department and the eir roll-out is in line with the Commitment Agreement.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www. broadband.gov.ie. This map finalises the State Intervention Area for the procurement process and is an important milestone in the procurement process. The Map shows the extent of the

State Intervention area and also the areas targeted for commercial services.

- The BLUE areas represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,
- The AMBER areas on the High Speed Broadband Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of the current procurement process.

The map shows that 21% of Tullycross in the townland of Gorteenannaglogh, Co Galway and the Eircode in Co Donegal referred to by the Deputy falls within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the NBP. The remaining 79% of the townland of Gorteenannaglogh, Co Galway including the company referred to by the Deputy in Co Cavan falls within eir's plans to deliver rural high speed broadband between now and end 2018 (Light BLUE on map). Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/. Individuals can themselves check whether their premises is in a BLUE or an AMBER area by accessing the High Speed Broadband Map and entering their Eircode at www.broadband.gov.ie.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network within the State Intervention Area. The State Intervention network will be a wholesale network and retail service providers will be able to use the network to provide enhanced broadband services to their customers.

The procurement process is being intensively managed, to ensure an outcome that delivers a future-proofed network that serves homes and businesses across Ireland, for at least 25 years. The three bidders have indicated that they are proposing a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution. A fibre-to-the-home solution means that householders and businesses may get speeds not just of 30 Megabits per second but much higher, potentially up to 1000 Megabits per second.

With the finalisation of the map and following extensive dialogue with bidders, the procurement is progressing to the next stage. On 20 June 2017 my Department wrote to the three bidders in the NBP procurement process inviting them to submit their "Detailed Solutions" by 26 September 2017. The "Detailed Solutions" stage is the last stage of the procurement process before Final Tenders.

The timeframe for the procurement continues to be dependent on a range of factors including the complexities that may be encountered by the procurement team and bidders, during the procurement process. During the Department's extensive stakeholder consultations in 2015, telecommunications service providers indicated a 3-5 year timeline to roll out a network of the scale envisaged under the NBP, once contracts are in place.

The Department will engage with winning bidder(s) on the best roll-out strategy, in order to target areas of particularly poor service, business needs and/or high demand.

The rate of demand for data services has increased exponentially in the last four years and this presents a continuing challenge for telecommunication operators, regulators and policy makers both in Ireland and internationally. Recognising this challenge, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Task force. In July 2016, I established the Task Force together with Minister Humphreys to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile phone coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers, prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention. The report of the Task Force was published in December and is available on both Departments' websites.

In producing this report, the Task Force worked with Departments, local authorities, Com-

Reg, State agencies, the telecoms industry and other key stakeholders. The report contains 40 actions that will alleviate some of the telecommunications deficits across Ireland and the implementation programme on mobile phone and broadband access identifies 19 of these actions as areas where immediate and direct action by Departments and State agencies can ensure accelerated benefits to consumers.

In order to maintain momentum created by the Task Force, I established an Implementation Group to drive and monitor the implementation of the actions, bringing together all key stakeholders identified in the Task Force report with responsibility for delivery. This group will be formally reporting every 90 days on progress made on all actions. I published the first such quarterly progress report on 13 June 2017, which is available on my Department's website at http://www.dccae.gov.ie/documents/Taskforce%20Q1%20Progress%20Report.pdf and which shows that considerable progress has been made, particularly in relation to the implementation of actions identified for Q1 2017.

The work of the Task Force will also assist local authorities in preparing for the roll-out of the new NBP network once contracts are in place.

In addition, following regulations which I signed last year, ComReg recently announced the results of its auction for the 3.6 GHz radio spectrum band, which means an 86% increase in spectrum capacity to meet the growing demand for mobile and wireless broadband services across rural and urban areas. The Regulator has awarded 15 year licences for the rights of use in this band which will provide a degree of stability and create future investment certainty. Spectrum was also awarded in lots covering 9 urban and rural regions across the country.

In my Department's Estimates for 2017, I have secured an €8 million provision for RTE to allow it to free up the 700 MHz spectrum band. ComReg in turn will make plans to allocate this spectrum to provide for significantly enhanced mobile coverage. The 700 MHz band is particularly suited to rural environments where the signal can travel long distances.

These initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services across Ireland and particularly in rural Ireland.

Renewable Energy Generation Targets

- 500. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his Department's objectives for the roll-out of solar farms in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30916/17]
- 501. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his Department's targets regarding the provision of energy through solar power to the national grid; the number of applications to join the national grid from potential supplies of solar power in County Tipperary from solar farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30923/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 500 and 501 together.

The 2009 EU Renewable Energy Directive sets Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy requirements from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy. Good progress has been made to date, but the target remains challenging, particularly in light of economic growth and a growing demand for

energy. Latest figures by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) indicate that over 27% of our electricity came from renewable sources in 2016. This progress, while welcome, will need to accelerate in pace in the coming years.

The 2016 Programme for Government and 2015 Energy White Paper recognise that solar has the potential to provide a community dividend, thereby also enhancing citizen participation in Ireland's energy future and it is increasingly recognised that Solar PV has the potential to contribute to meeting Ireland's renewable energy and climate change objectives.

My Department is currently developing a proposed new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030. The design of the new scheme is underway, and includes an extensive independent economic appraisal. This appraisal involves comparing the cost of supporting Solar Photovoltaics (PV) - both rooftop and ground mounted, offshore wind, onshore wind and a range of other commercial renewable technologies, to ensure that the new scheme delivers value for money for energy users whilst also delivering on the energy pillars of sustainability and security of supply. The assessment also includes analysis of the optimum financial support mechanisms for renewable technologies, in line with the 2014 EU State Aid Guidelines.

My Department will publish shortly a final public consultation on the design principles of the new RESS. Following the outcome of this public consultation, and before any new scheme is introduced, it will need to secure Government approval and state aid clearance from the European Commission. Subject to this, it is expected that the new scheme will become operational in 2018.

I am fully aware of the level of interest in the solar PV sector in Ireland. I am advised that nationally there have been over 600 applications, amounting to about 4,290 Megawatts of solar capacity, seeking a connection to the electricity grid in the last 24 months. Within Tipperary, there have been 41 solar grid connection applications to date, with a combined capacity of 284 MW.

Notwithstanding the level of solar applicants seeking connection to the grid, my stated position is that while solar has a role to play in Ireland's energy future, we cannot have a situation where a new support scheme leads to a disproportionate increase in people's electricity bills through the Public Service Obligation levy. In designing the new RESS, the cost implications for people and businesses will, therefore be a high priority and I will ensure that the new scheme is designed in a cost efficient manner.

Questions Nos. 502 and 503 answered with Question No. 499.

Renewable Energy Incentives

504. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the consultation process has concluded on the renewable heating incentive; the timeframe from conclusion to implementation for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31043/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The introduction of a Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) is a commitment in the Programme for Government. The aim of the RHI is to build on the progress already made in the renewable heating sector and to help reach Ireland's 12% target by 2020. Provisional data indicates that 6.6% of heat demand was derived from renewable sources in 2016.

My Department has undertaken a detailed economic assessment on the design and cost of the RHI for the industrial/commercial sector in Ireland. This assessment included a range of renewable energy technologies and focused on large commercial and industrial heat users in the non-Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS).

The final public consultation process on the design and implementation of the new RHI closed in March 2017, and 119 submissions were reviewed by my Department. All submissions to the RHI public consultation are now published on the Department's website at: www.dccae. ie. The findings from this public consultation are being used to help inform final decisions in relation to the scheme. At this stage, the overall costs, technologies to be supported and design of a scheme are still under consideration and will require Government decision and State aid clearance from the European Commission.

National Clean Air Strategy

505. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the impact of noise pollution and air pollution in view of the expansion of the M50 from four lanes to six or eight lanes; and the impact on persons living adjacent to the motorway in the areas of Edmondstown, Stocking Lane, Knocklyon, Ballycullen, Firhouse and Templeogue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31095/17]

506. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the ameliorative measures in place to combat the significant noise and air pollution being experienced by persons in the Stocking Lane, Scholarstown, Knocklyon, Ballycullen, Edmondstown and Templeogue areas, in view of the fact that the M50 is almost at full capacity for the first time since it expanded to six and eight lanes a number of years ago; the way in which he plans to direct the relevant agencies to implement measures to reduce the impact of both air and noise pollution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31096/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 505 and 506 together.

Emissions from transport, including particulate emissions, can have a detrimental impact on both human health and environmental ecosystems. Inhalation of Particulate Matter (PM) can increase respiratory morbidity (including exacerbation of existing conditions such as asthma) as well as contributing to cardiovascular disease.

My Department has commenced work on the first ever National Clean Air Strategy which will provide an overarching strategic policy framework within which clean air policies can be formulated and given effect in a manner consistent with national, EU and international policy considerations and priorities. The Clean Air Strategy will address priority air pollutants in Ireland, including vehicle emissions, in an integrated manner. A public consultation on the strategy closed at the end of April and all submissions are currently being assessed. I hope to have the Strategy finalised by the end of this year.

In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has undertaken a review of the current state of air quality monitoring and information provision in Ireland. The outcome of this review was a decision to develop a new air quality monitoring programme which aims to enhance and build on the current arrangements. The new national Ambient Air Monitoring Programme (AAMP) is being developed under Section 65 of the EPA Act, 1992 as amended. Placing the programme on this statutory footing emphasises the importance that the EPA places on the monitoring of air quality in Ireland.

The AAMP covers the years 2017 to 2022, with the enhancement and expansion of the monitoring network to be prioritised in the first phases of the programme. Further details on the timeframes for the expansion of the network will be released as they become available.

Insofar as noise is concerned, motorways, including the M50, fall within the scope of EU Directive 2002/49/EC (the Environmental Noise Directive, or END) relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise. This Directive aims to provide "a common framework to avoid, prevent or reduce, on a prioritised basis, the harmful effects of exposure to environmental noise". A key source of noise covered under the END is road traffic noise.

The Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 transpose the END into Irish law. The Regulations designate noise-mapping bodies and action planning authorities for the production of strategic noise maps and action plans. Primary responsibility for both noise mapping and action planning is assigned to local authorities. A number of other bodies also have noise mapping functions which are carried out on behalf of the local authorities concerned. Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII - formerly the NRA – National Roads Authority) is a designated noise mapping body under the 2006 regulations.

The Regulations also designate the Environmental Protection Agency as the National Authority for the purposes of the Regulations. The Agency's role includes supervisory, advisory and coordination functions in relation to both noise mapping and action planning, as well as the reporting requirements for the purpose of the Directive.

The Regulations set out a two-stage process for addressing environmental noise. Firstly, noise must be assessed through the preparation of strategic noise maps every 5 years for areas and infrastructure falling within defined criteria, e.g. large urban areas (referred to as agglomerations), major roads, railways and airports. The current third round of Noise maps are due to be updated this month and officials from my department have been actively involved in this process with the EPA and other national bodies.

Secondly, based on the results of the mapping process, the Regulations require the preparation of noise action plans for each area concerned. The fundamental objective of action plans is the prevention and reduction of environmental noise. Action plans based on the 3rd round Noise Maps will be prepared by designated action planning authorities in 2018.

For national road schemes, potential noise emissions are addressed as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process undertaken by, or on behalf of, the Transport Infrastructure Ireland. TII have published Good Practice Guidance for the Treatment of Noise during the Planning of National Road Schemes which can be accessed at the TII website - http://www.tii.ie/technical-services/environment/planning/Good_Practice_Guidance_for_the_Treatment of Noise during the Planning of National Road Schemes.pdf.

Question No. 507 answered with Question No. 494.

Warmer Homes Scheme

508. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department will be reviewing the warmer home scheme to include additional categories of low-income households in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31138/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme is administered by the Sustainable En-

ergy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department. The scheme provides energy efficiency upgrades free of charge to people who meet the eligibility criteria. Typical measures available under the scheme include attic and cavity wall insulation, draught proofing, lagging jackets and low energy light bulbs. To date the scheme has provided energy efficiency upgrades to 120,000 homes.

Since the scheme is 100% Exchequer funded it is designed to be available only to those in most need of Government assistance. To determine this with complete accuracy SEAI would need to know the condition of a person's home, including its energy efficiency level and heating system, that person's family circumstances and their household income level. However, it would not be practical or efficient for SEAI to perform this assessment for each applicant to the Warmer Homes scheme. Therefore eligibility for the scheme is determined through the use of proxy indicators, principally the National Fuel Allowance. These proxy indicators provide an acceptable approximation that allows SEAI to find and identify people in energy poverty without having to resort to a cumbersome, expensive and intrusive administrative regime.

Eligibility for the National Fuel Allowance is determined by the Department of Social Protection through use of a means tested income assessment. Everyone in receipt of a non-contributory state payment is accepted as satisfying the means test. In addition, if a person is on an employment support scheme or getting a Back to Education Allowance they are entitled to the Fuel Allowance. Any household with a combined weekly income of up to €100 above the maximum State Pension (Contributory) is also eligible for the Fuel Allowance.

In addition to the Fuel Allowance, anyone in receipt of the Family Income Supplement, Job Seekers Allowance for over six months (and with children under 7 years of age) or anyone in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment is also eligible for the Warmer Homes scheme.

These additional eligibility criteria were selected as there are health and well-being consequences to living in a cold and damp home and children can often be particularly vulnerable to these conditions. In addition, lone parent families suffer from a particularly high deprivation rate in Ireland. In the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty, I have committed to ensuring that the eligibility criteria for the Warmer Homes scheme remain consistent with the latest findings on deprivation in Ireland. This is consistent with the aim of ensuring that the limited resources available to the scheme are targeted at those in most need.

Question No. 509 answered with Question No. 499.

Brexit Data

510. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31269/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's Brexit Contingency Framework set out that all Departments identify a senior official to oversee Brexit matters and to create a Top Management sub-committee to deal specifically with the implications of Brexit for their areas of work. This ensures a cross-cutting whole-of-Government approach, with a particular focus on possible economic implications of Brexit and policy aimed at supporting sustainable economic growth.

As Energy is identified as a key priority for my Department, the Assistant Secretary for

Energy undertakes responsibility for Brexit matters. Under the chairmanship of this Assistant Secretary a sub-committee, consisting of Principal Officers representing policy areas with potential Brexit implications in my Department, meets regularly. This sub-committee carries out extensive work across a wide range of divisions, including ongoing analysis of potential impacts at sectoral level.

While no specific funding has been allocated, the work on Brexit to date has been funded from existing budgets, including the All Island Brexit Civic Dialogue on Energy held on 6 February at a total cost of $\[\in \] 3,590.70.$

Given the unpredictability of the on-going Brexit negotiations, it is not practicable to provide an estimate of the future cost at this time.

Waste Disposal Charges

511. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the new charging system for domestic waste collection; the way in which the new system will protect persons and offer the best value service; the assurances he can make that the new system will work in the interest of consumers and not result in increased costs; the way in which the proposed measure will promote environmentally friendly domestic waste practices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31363/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The new framework will give waste collectors the flexibility to continue to offer, or to introduce, a range of incentivised pricing options, which encourage householders to reduce and separate their waste, while choosing the service-price offering that best suits their circumstances and allows them to manage their costs

These options include elements or combinations of per-lift, per-kilogramme, weight-bands, weight allowances and standing charges. This offers the widest choice to consumers to help them manage their costs. About half of households are already on these types of offerings so the general public is familiar with them.

All-in flat rate charging for household waste will start to be phased-out by waste collectors as customers renew or enter new service contracts from September onwards. An annual support of €75 will be introduced for persons with lifelong or long-term medical incontinence. This will help people meet the average annual cost of disposal of incontinence products. The details and arrangements of this support will be finalised later this year, after further consultation with the stakeholder groups.

Waste Disposal Charges

512. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to outline the way in which the figure of €75 was determined in respect of the grant allocated to qualifying families under the pay-by-weight scheme; if this is the maximum grant figure; the detail of the consultation process taken or to be taken with relevant stakeholders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31439/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): From analysis conducted in consultation with the HSE, it was estimated that the average weight of used incontinence wear is 650 kg/annum (0.65 tonnes) per person with medi-

cal incontinence. I have indicated a support of €75 per person per annum for persons with long term or lifelong medical incontinence availing of a kerbside household waste collection. This is to cover the disposal cost of dealing with 650 kg per year of waste. Officials from my Department have engaged with stakeholder groups representing those with medical incontinence and the waste industry on the issue.

Air and Water Pollution

513. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to outline his views on the use of splash plates for slurry spreading in view of the national clean air strategy consultation. [31557/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Research shows that the spreading of slurry can, depending on the timing of the application and the weather conditions, result in nitrogen loss to the atmosphere through ammonia volatilisation. Besides being a pollutant in its own right, ammonia also reacts with other substances in the atmosphere to produce further pollutants such as particulate matter.

As Minister for the Environment, I am committed to examining ways of reducing pollution from all sectors. In this regard, my Department recently completed a public consultation process as an initial step in producing the first ever National Clean Air Strategy. This Strategy will provide the framework for a set of cross-Government policies and actions to reduce harmful emissions and improve air quality and public health to meet current and future EU and international obligations. A document entitled 'Cleaning Our Air' was published as part of this process which explored the impact of a number of sectors, including agriculture. The purpose of the document was to initiate discussion and ascertain the views of the various stakeholders while providing a background to the numerous approaches to improving air quality. To facilitate a structured response, a series of questions were set out at the end of each chapter. At the end of the chapter on the agricultural sector the question was posed 'Should a future end date on the use of splash plate slurry spreading be considered following the completion of schemes to incentivise low emission alternatives?' This question should not be construed as a 'suggestion' or indeed a policy intent either by myself or my Department. It was simply asked as an enabler to ascertain the views of relevant stakeholders but has been mistakenly taken, by some commentators, to reflect a policy proposal.

My officials are currently conducting a thorough examination of all submissions received through the consultation phase and are engaging in a series of detailed bilateral discussions to ascertain the views of the key stakeholders. I would stress that no changes to existing practices have been proposed at this point.

In the meantime, I understand that as a result of farmer demand to improve the utilisation of slurry as a fertiliser, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is assisting almost 950 farmers in the purchase of Low Emission Slurry Spreading equipment under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS). I also understand that more than 4,750 farmers have applied under the Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) to apply slurry using low emission equipment. In addition, the Association of Farm and Forestry Contractors of Ireland have recently also identified their support for this technology.

Departmental Staff Data

Environment to set down the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31775/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I refer the Deputy to the reply to Question No.1799 of 20 June 2017. The position is unchanged.

Road Traffic Legislation

515. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will introduce a system of licensing and regulating the use of horse-drawn vehicles (details supplied). [30927/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): While there is no licensing regime for drivers of animal-drawn vehicles comparable to the system of driver licensing for mechanically propelled vehicles, nor are animal-drawn vehicles subject to NCT-type tests, I have no plans at present to change the law in this regard.

However, the same traffic driving rules apply to horse drawn vehicles and their drivers as do to drivers of mechanically propelled vehicles and cyclists. Similarly, the same obligations to obey the rules of the road and to drive with care and consideration to other road users apply. Sections 52 and 53 of the Road Traffic Act of 1961 deals with the careless and dangerous driving of vehicles, while Section 51 specifically prohibits the driving of an animal drawn vehicle while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or a drug.

The matter of licences for horse ownership, as well as the question of chipping animals, and animal welfare, fall within the remit of my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Greenways Development

516. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to set out the status of the proposed Boyneside trail project that will run from Drogheda to east County Meath; his plans to progress and prioritise this project to boost tourism in the Drogheda and east County Meath areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31040/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the delivery of cycling infrastructure in the GDA in cooperation with the relevant local authority. Given the NTA's involvement in this project I am forwarding the Deputy's question to the NTA for comment and direct response to you. If you have not received a further reply within 10 working days please contact my office.

The Programme for Partnership Government commits to making additional funding available for greenways into the future and I am pursuing this in the context of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan. When the capital plan review is finalised and there is clarity on the totality of the funding that will be available for greenways in the coming years, my Department will issue further funding calls and local authorities would then be able to submit projects for funding.

My Department's advice to all local authorities wishing to progress greenway projects is to advance the planning and design elements to the greatest degree possible so as to be best placed in the event of future funding calls. Clarity on land ownership and access is also very important. The Deputy may be aware that I recently launched a public consultation process to inform the development of my Department's new Strategy for the future development of greenways. A public consultation paper is available on my Department's website http://www.dttas. ie/public-transport/publications/english/greenways. All interested parties are invited to make submissions by 14 July, 2017 and I would welcome your views as part of this process.

Road Safety

517. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a review of the effectiveness of road safety interventions and policy in regard to drink driving has been ordered or will be ordered following the revelation that enforcement metrics in this area, such as the numbers of drivers being breath-tested over several years, are not reliable or credible. [29943/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Intoxicated driving is widely acknowledged as one of the major causes of road traffic collisions. There is plenty of evidence available for the scale of drink driving, quite independently of the figures for preliminary breath tests, to which the Deputy refers. RSA research, published in 2016, indicates that alcohol was a contributory factor in 38% of fatal collisions in the period 2008 to 2012. An Garda Síochána's six-week campaign during the last Christmas period resulted in 961 arrests for drink-driving, representing a 35% increase in arrests over the same period in 2015. This clearly illustrates that drink driving remains a significant road safety issue in Ireland that needs to be addressed urgently.

For these reasons I am bringing forward a Bill to Cabinet for approval next week, which will ensure that all those detected drink driving receive an automatic disqualification from driving. This means removing the privilege currently afforded to certain drivers of receiving penalty points as an alternative to disqualification under section 29 of the Road Traffic Act 2010.

Last November I began a mid-term review of the Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020 to examine the Strategy to ensure its effectiveness is maximised in combatting the causes of road fatalities and serious injuries. I expect to receive a draft of the review from the Road Safety Authority for my consideration shortly. I have increased the frequency of meetings of the Ministerial Committee on Road Safety, from twice yearly to every couple of months, with the next meeting later this month when I will again review our road safety interventions including regarding drink driving to ensure everything possible is done to reduce the incidences of deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

Coast Guard Services

518. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to specify the body responsible for ensuring proper upgrading of navigational equipment on Coast Guard helicopters; and if these upgrades include information on all wind turbines here. [31336/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Following a competitive tender process a contract agreement for search and rescue helicopters was signed in July 2010 between the then Minister for Transport and CHC Ireland DAC. These Helicopters respond to emergencies at sea, inland waterways, offshore islands and mountains. The helicopters are operated by CHC Ireland DAC and the fully qualified crews are employees of CHC Ireland DAC. The helicopter service contract commenced on 1 July 2012 for a period of 10 years.

The contract requires that CHC Ireland Ltd comply with all applicable Irish Aviation Authority (IAA), European Safety Agency (EASA), and International Civil Aviation organisation (ICAO) guidance, regulation, standards and recommended practises.

Officials from my Department have contacted CHC Ireland DAC and they have informed me that anybody who erects a wind turbine above a certain height must apply for planning permission through their local authority. The Local Authority inform the IAA who will then in turn add the information to their aviation maps. These updated maps are then uploaded (as software updates) onto the helicopter navigational systems used by helicopter operators such as CHC Ireland DAC.

Ministerial Meetings

519. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he last met with the UK Secretary of State for Transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30806/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I met with Right Honorable Chris Grayling, Secretary of State for Transport at the Department for Transport Office in Westminster on 26 May last along with an Official from my Department.

The meeting was at my request and the purpose was to discuss issues common to both UK and Ireland in relation to Brexit. The meeting was informative and constructive and covered aviation, maritime, land transport and also the interdependencies of cross-border trade on the island of Ireland.

Brexit Negotiations

520. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the way in which his Department and the equivalent UK Department are liaising on Brexit matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30807/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Officials from my Department are in regular contact with their UK counterparts, in London and Northern Ireland, at sectoral level including on Brexit related matters.

In addition, the Secretary General of the Department, along with members of his Management Board and senior officials, met in London with their UK counterparts from the Department for Transport on 19 January 2017 specifically to discuss the transport implications of Brexit across all modes of transport. I also met with my counterpart Chris Grayling, the Secretary of State for Transport in the UK, on 26 May 2017 again to specifically discuss Brexit matters.

Late last year, I met with then Northern Ireland Minister for Infrastructure Chris Hazzard on 12 December 2016 concerning North South Ministerial Council matters and on Brexit matters.

Cycling Policy

521. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the traffic management measures he is taking to reduce and eliminate death and injury to cyclists in view of the unacceptable and tragic rise in such casualties in 2017; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [30815/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The creation of a safer cycling environment is a priority for me and I share the Deputy's concerns regarding the figures this year.

Under the Sustainable Transport Measures Grants Programme, my Department provides funding to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for the seven local authorities in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) for the implementation of sustainable transport projects which includes safety, integration and traffic management projects as well as cycling and walking infrastructure throughout the region. A significant amount of on-road cycling facilities are also provided as part of the work on developing the bus network in the GDA.

The NTA also manages a similar sustainable transport grants programme under the Regional Cities Programme in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

I am acutely aware of the need for more and better cycling infrastructure and I am seeking additional funding for cycling initiatives under the mid-term review of the Capital Plan.

However, infrastructure is only part of the solution. How all road users behave is also important. I understand from the Road Safety Authority (RSA) that the deaths of people cycling in recent years have been spread across urban and rural locations and on every type of road (National, Regional, Local). While we all are free to use the road safely, we also all have the responsibility to ensure that our driving or cycling does not impact on that. It is up to all road users to be attentive and the RSA have highlighted the dangers of distracted driving and the importance of passing cyclists at a reasonable distance.

I intend, with the RSA, to further highlight the need for all road users to take account of the vulnerability of cyclists in the coming weeks, as I am conscious that the numbers of people cycling generally peaks at this time of the year.

National Transport Authority

522. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the number of complaints or reports made to the National Transport Authority regarding rickshaws and rickshaw drivers in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30820/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy will appreciate, complaints or reports made to a State agency, in this case the National Transport Authority (NTA), are a matter for that agency. I have therefore referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Bus Services

523. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider the provision of bus services or bus licences from provincial towns directly to the main universities in view of the extraordinary costs of rents facing students from the regions who are living in Dublin. [30834/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with the transport providers and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Bus Services

524. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the number of Bus Éireann journeys that have been cancelled in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the main reasons for this; the number of Bus Átha Cliath journeys that are cancelled each year; the main reasons for this; if substitute bus drivers are available in the event of drivers calling in sick; and the amount of sick days taken on average per driver. [30849/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issues raised are matters for Bus Éireann and Bus Átha Cliath and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the Companies for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive responses within ten working days.

Road Traffic Legislation

525. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline his views on whether it is appropriate for Transport Infrastructure Ireland to overrule local Garda advise on speed limits on stretches of road (details supplied) in view of the fact that local Garda advice is based on local knowledge of past accidents and the potential for future accidents; his plans to review the powers of TII to overrule both An Garda Síochána and local authorities in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30890/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The application of Special Speed Limits, i.e. speed limits other than the default speed limits, are provided for in Section 9 of the Road Traffic Act 2004, which gives local authorities the power to make byelaws ("special speed limit bye-laws") in respect of any specified public road or specified part of a public road or specified carriageway or lane of a public road within its administrative area. Under the Act, local authorities are required to give notice to and consider representations from, any borough or town in the administrative county concerned and also the Garda Commissioner. The public must be informed by way of Press Notice in at least two daily newspapers.

The 2004 Act also states that a county council or city council shall not make bye-laws relating to a national road or a motorway without the prior written consent of the National Roads Authority (now Transport Infrastructure Ireland or TII).

The 2013 Speed Limits Review Group includes a wide range of representatives from relevant bodies such as, among others, the City and County Management Association, the Local Government Management Agency, TII, An Garda Síochána and officials of this Department. The report of the Representative Group which was accepted by the Minister suggested that, if anything, the role of TII in respect of speed limits on national roads should in certain circumstances be strengthened with a view to better managing and protecting the national road network from, among other things, inappropriate development. It should also be noted that TII maintain detailed records of traffic collisions, including fatalities and serious injuries, on the national road network and use them to identify where works are needed for safety reasons. It

is therefore not appropriate to say that local Gardaí are better informed than TII regarding the safety of particular locations.

Driver Test

526. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the options and supports available to a person (details supplied). [30986/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the Driver Theory Test is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority.

If the Deputy checks the theory test website - *www.theorytest.ie* - she will find that there are various options to assist people with difficulties with the test. These include a voice-over option where a recording reads out the questions, additional time provided, and the provision of a Driver Theory Test staff member to read the questions and record the candidate's answer.

Regional Airports

527. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has made an application for state aid exemption for runway works at Ireland West Airport Knock; the date it was submitted; the expected date for approval; and the details of the works. [31009/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The maximum level of grant aid that is permitted under the 2014 EU *Guidelines on State aid to airports and airlines* for capital projects at qualifying airports is 75% of the 'funding gap', i.e. the net present value of the difference between the positive and negative cash flows (including investment costs) over the lifetime of the project.

However, the EU Guidelines provide that, in certain limited circumstances, an aid rate exceeding 75% of the funding gap may be justified in exceptional circumstances for airports with traffic volume below 1 million passengers per annum. In such a scenario, the EU Commission have indicated that a business case, justifying the proposed higher aid rate, would have to be approved by them. Clearly, the EU Commission view any support above the 75% level as an exception, rather than the norm.

The airport authorities at Knock have indicated that, even at the maximum 75% level of capital support allowed for under the EU Guidelines, they believe that it will be difficult for them to finance the proposed project to upgrade and resurface the runway at the airport and they are seeking a 90% State aid contribution towards this project.

The final business case for this project that has been prepared by the airport authorities in Knock was received by my Department only last week and the relevant officials are currently engaging with their counterparts in the EU Commission as to how best to advance this application for approval for the higher funding rate.

State Aid

528. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the additional state aid exemptions on infrastructure projects which the Government has sought.

[31010/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department has notified the European Commission that Fáilte Ireland's Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects, which was launched on 8 June 2016, will be seeking state aid exemptions in respect of the scheme.

The scheme has a total fund of €65 million and runs from 2016-2021. The scheme seeks to avail of five categories under Commission Regulation (EU) No. 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty (the "General Block Exemption Regulation").

The categories are:

- Regional Investment Aid;
- Culture and Heritage Conservation and Consultancy Aid in the Context of Culture and Heritage Conservation;
 - Aid for Sport and Multi-Functional Leisure Facilities;
 - Local Infrastructure Aid;
 - Consultancy Aid to SMEs.

In May of this year the EU Commission announced amendments to the EU General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER). The revision of this Regulation was subject to two public consultations by the EU Commission with various stakeholders and Member States and Ireland participated in those consultations. The GBER Regulation exempts certain categories of State aid from the requirement of prior notification to the Commission, if these are unlikely to distort competition in the Single Market. The revisions will have limited impact for our regional airports since Ireland already received State-aid clearance from the EU Commission in 2015 for our current, five-year, Regional Airports Programme 2015-2019. However, one new concession (for airports that handle less than 200,000 passengers annually) in the revised GBER regime that would be relevant to the airports in Donegal and Waterford is that they would be eligible for aid towards operating losses, if incurred. In practice, Waterford is already eligible for this kind of operational support under our current Regional Airports Programme.

As I outlined in a separate reply today to the Deputy (Ref No: 31009/17), officials in my Department are also currently engaging with their counterparts in the EU Commission as to how best to advance an application by the authorities in Knock airport for approval for a 90% State aid contribution towards a project to upgrade and resurface the runway at the airport.

Olympic Council of Ireland

529. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has issued emergency funding to the Olympic Council of Ireland (OCI) in 2016 and to date in 2017 outside the normal allocation; if Sports Ireland has issued funding to the OCI in 2016 and to date in 2017 outside the normal allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31020/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have issued no such emergency funding for either 2016 or 2017.

Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the promotion, development and co-ordination of sport. This includes responsibility for the allocation of funding for the Olympic Council of Ireland.

As this is a matter for Sport Ireland, I have referred the Deputy's questions to Sport Ireland for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Olympic Games Ticketing Arrangements

530. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 1843 of 20 June 2017, if he has considered the advice from the Attorney General regarding the report on the Olympic ticketing arrangements; the position regarding the 2017 funding arrangements from Sports Ireland to the Olympic Council of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31031/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I expect to receive advice from the Office of the Attorney General in this matter at an early date, which I shall then consider as a matter of urgency. I will separately inform the Deputy once that advice is received.

In relation to the 2017 funding arrangements from Sport Ireland to the Olympic Council of Ireland, the position remains that the board of Sport Ireland intends to consider the funding allocation for 2017 once Judge Moran's report has been published. The timing of the publication of the Moran Inquiry report will be subject to consideration of the advice from the Office of the Attorney General.

While I am disposed to publication of this report at the earliest possible date, the matters concerned are complex. In the event that there is a protracted period before the report is published, the question of Sport Ireland funding to the Olympic Council of Ireland will be considered as a matter of urgency.

Greenways Development

- 531. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the progress to date in advancing a greenway utilising sections of the disused Sligo and Leitrim and northern counties railway (SLNCR) route; the status of this application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31071/17]
- 532. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the position regarding the proposal to develop a greenway between Ballinamore, County Leitrim and Belturbet, County Cavan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31072/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 531 and 532 together.

Both Leitrim (with the support of Cavan) and Sligo County Councils submitted applications to my Department under the last tranche of the National Cycle Network (NCN) funding programme 2014-2016 for the construction of a greenway along the sections of the disused Sligo, Leitrim and Northern Counties (SLNCR) railway within their jurisdiction. Cavan County Council also submitted an application for the Ballinamore to Belturbet greenway along the Cavan to Leitrim Railway. Unfortunately these proposals did not secure funding at that time, due to the significant over-subscription for funding. Leitrim County Council were also unsuc-

cessful in their application for funding under the INTERREG VA ERDF Programme.

The Programme for Partnership Government commits to making additional funding available for greenways into the future and I am pursuing this in the context of the mid-term review of the Capital Plan. When the capital plan review is finalised and there is clarity on the totality of the funding that will be available for greenways in the coming years, my Department will issue further funding calls and local authorities would then be able to submit projects for funding. My Department's advice to all local authorities wishing to progress greenway projects is to advance the planning and design elements to the greatest degree possible so as to be best placed in the event of future funding calls. Clarity on ownership of routes and agreement on access is also very important in this regard.

The Deputy may be aware that I recently launched a public consultation process to inform the development of my Department's new Strategy for the future development of greenways. A public consultation paper is available on my Department's website, http://www.dttas.ie/public-transport/publications/english/greenways. All interested parties are invited to make submissions by 14 July, 2017 and I would welcome your views as part of this process.

Bus Services

- 533. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the additional resources that will be provided to roll out further orbital bus routes around the greater Dublin area to improve connectivity between the outer suburbs and commuter towns in the greater Dublin region in addition to the routes that have been put out to tender; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31150/17]
- 534. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the measures his Department proposes to fund in conjunction with the National Transport Authority to improve bus frequencies and express bus services from commuter towns into Dublin city centre to improve commute times for persons working in Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31151/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 533 and 534 together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) recently launched the *BusConnects* initiative which proposes a radical transformation of the bus system in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) that will involve, inter alia, the development of a network of 'next generation' bus corridors and a complete redesign of the network to be accompanied by a network of bus-based park and ride sites at strategic locations.

I am seeking additional funding for public transport investment in the mid-term review of the Capital Plan to support this initiative.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Rail Network Expansion

535. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to expedite the electrification of the DART to Maynooth, County Kildare; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [31152/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my response to Dáil Question No. 541 which I answered on Tuesday, 16 May 2017. The position remains as outlined in that response.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

536. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application (details supplied) in respect of an urgently needed facility which would contribute greatly to the community in the west of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31263/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on 24 February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received and all of these applications are currently being assessed. The total amount available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging. Given the number of applications received and the detailed information submitted, it will take a further number of weeks to complete this process and I expect that an announcement regarding allocations will be made in September.

Brexit Data

537. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31281/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Brexit has the potential to have serious adverse economic impacts on transport and tourism and as a result has been identified as the main strategic risk facing the Department. The Department in response has organised itself internally to address this risk. While all relevant areas of the Department are actively engaged in Brexit related work and consultations with stakeholders, overall responsibility for the preparation and coordination of the Department's response to Brexit has been assigned to the Head of Function of the Policy and Governance Coordination Division. Brexit issues relating to Tourism are managed by the Head of Function of the Tourism Marketing Policy and Impact Assessment Division. Both Heads of Functions are at Principal Officer level. The Minister and Management Board members are also actively involved in reviewing the implications and response to Brexit.

The Management Board keeps under review the Department's internal organisation and structures for Brexit to ensure that they remain robust in addressing the evolving Brexit situation. As part of this ongoing review, the Department yesterday restructured part of its internal organisation in order, inter alia, to facilitate a greater focus on Brexit by the Policy and Governance Coordination Division as it moves into the negotiation phase. The additional cost to the Policy and Governance Coordination Division arising from Brexit activities, outside of staff costs, is estimated to be €50,000 in 2017, of which some €10,000 has been incurred to date. The

need for additional funding will be kept under ongoing review.

Road Projects Status

538. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress in the upgrading of the M7 Naas to Newbridge-Osberstown interchange and Sallins bypass; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31309/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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 implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authorities. In the case of regional and local road projects the local authority is responsible for project implementation.

Noting the above position and in view of the fact that the projects mentioned by the Deputy are being progressed together, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport Initiatives

539. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consideration which is given by his Department to service provision and policy response further to the publication of the census of population; the sections of his Department that are affected and-or involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31409/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ensuring that we have the appropriate level of investment into our transport network to meet the demands placed on it by the population is core to the business of my Department. In 2015 we published the *Strategic Investment Framework for Land* Transport, which set out the priorities and principles for future investment in that area, and just last week I announced the publication of *Transport Trends 2017*, which highlights the continued growth of transport activity within the State.

An important piece of planning future service provision is accurate statistics about the population, and in that regard Census 2016 provides an invaluable source of data at a point in time. The publication in May of statistics relating to the geographical distribution of the population will assist the Department in prioritising effective interventions while the forthcoming publication of the age profile of the population and statistics on commuting should provide additional rich sources of data for my Department to use.

The impact of changing demographics is felt right across Transport, Tourism and Sport, affecting where people choose to live, how they prefer to travel, which sports and activities they participate in, and many other decisions. As such, I expect that officials in every section of my Department will be involved in using the results of Census 2016 to inform future service provision and policy.

Early Childhood Care and Education Staff

540. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the measures her Department is taking to attract trained and qualified staff to the early years workforce; and

if she will make a statement on the matter. [30909/17]

546. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the measures her Department is taking to attract trained and qualified staff to the early years workforce; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30907/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 540 and 546 together.

I am very much aware of the difficulties being reported regarding the recruitment and retention of early years staff. The matter has been discussed at the Early Years Forum which I chair, and in other fora with my Department.

We are working with the Department of Education and Skills to develop a new Early Years workforce plan. This will examine workforce supply issues.

I am also aware that pay and conditions of staff is a significant barrier to retaining staff in the sector. Whilst my Department is not an employer of childcare workers, we are a significant funder. I am committed to the development of high quality services in this country and it has been proven that high quality care is dependent on a workforce that feels valued. My Department is working with the sector to explore how we can improve retention rates. The Programme for Government contains 14 commitments to improving access to high quality, affordable childcare. The Affordable Childcare Scheme, which is currently under development, will provide an important infrastructure for future investment in the Early Years sector. It is clear that we need to focus collaboratively on how best to make the early years sector a more attractive and personally rewarding place in which to work. I think that pay is only one issue, although, clearly an important one. The fact that we are investing considerably increased resources in the sector will also be important. In Budget 2017 I secured a 35% increase in childcare funding, up by €120m to €466m. This was on top of a 35% increase in Budget 2016 also. These increases reflect the emphasis I am placing on developing a quality service with appropriately supported staff. In this regard, the City & County Childcare Committees are assisting services who experience difficulties in recruiting or retaining staff, and the Learner Funds are in place to support staff in achieving minimum qualification requirements, both regulatory and contractual. The existing workforce are a significant resource and substantial investment in upskilling and CPD opportunities for early years practitioners has been put in to the sector by my Department, e.g. through the Learner Fund, the National Síolta Aistear Initiative and the Leadership for Inclusion in Early Years Settings, known as LINC under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). The Department of Education and Skills (DES) are undertaking a review of education programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care to ensure that the quality and content of further and higher education programmes prepare early years professionals for practice in the sector. My Department welcomes this work including the recent establishment of a Working Group chaired by DES that has been tasked with the development of a draft set of Criteria and Guidelines for higher education programmes that offer Initial Professional Education for early years professionals, that will be available for wider consultation with the sector before the end of the year. Childcare workers are part of a growing sector, which the Government is strongly supporting. I believe that by working together we can ensure that it is a viable and strong sector which makes a significant contribution to the care and personal development of our children.

Visiting Teacher Service

541. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on whether it was the correct decision to abolish the visiting teacher service for children from

the Traveller community; if education outcomes for Traveller children have improved since it was abolished; and her further views on whether this should be restored or a replacement education programme is required. [30941/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy may be aware, the Visiting Teachers Service for Travellers was discontinued with effect from September 2011, in line with Department of Education and Skills policy on the phasing out of segregated Traveller provision.

The Child and Family Agency, established in 2014 under the aegis of my Department, has statutory responsibility in relation to school attendance and supports for young people at risk of educational disadvantage, including traveller children. Through its Educational Welfare Service, the Agency responds to instances where children, including children from the Traveller community, are not attending school regularly, leading to concerns for their educational welfare.

I am advised that the Department of Education policy in relation to Traveller Education is informed by the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy which was launched in 2006 following wide ranging consultation with Traveller representative groups and other relevant stakeholders. The principle of inclusion is at the core of the Strategy. The focus of both current and future provision is on the development of an inclusive school environment through the whole school planning process, teaching practice, admissions policies, codes of behaviour and whole school evaluation. In keeping with this principle, additional resources provided in the education system for children are allocated on the basis of identified individual educational need. This includes Traveller children who require additional resources based on need and not on their identity as Travellers. Segregated Traveller specific programmes such as the Visiting Teacher for Travellers were phased out in line with the principle of inclusion.

I am further advised by the Department of Education and Skills that funding for special education in provision in 2017 will amount to some €1.68 billion, which is equivalent to approximately 19% of the gross overall current allocation for education and training and represents an increase in spending in this area of 12% over the last two years. This funding provides for a range of supports and services including additional learning and resource teaching support, access to SNA support, special transport arrangements, building adaptations, enhanced capitation in special schools and special classes, specialised equipment, additional teacher training and the services of the National Educational Psychological Service.

There are currently over 12,500 learning support and resource teacher posts in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

School attendance is one of the critical building blocks of positive educational outcomes. While educational outcomes for Traveller children continue to improve, in most areas attendance still falls well behind the national average and we are aware that there are still areas where attendance and participation among Traveller children is not improving consistently. Following the launch of the 2017 National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, my Department is committed to working with the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Justice and Equality, Tusla Educational Welfare Services and Traveller and Roma representative groups to examine ways in which Traveller children's attendance and participation may be further enhanced especially in areas where attendance is of greatest concern.

Aftercare Services

542. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the

number of aftercare workers recruited by Tusla in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; the number that left during the same period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30812/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As this is an operational matter for Tusla, I have asked that they respond to the Deputy directly.

Legislative Measures

543. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) (No. 2) Bill; when she expects this Bill to be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30859/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Department intends to commence development of a scheme for the provision of information and tracing service to adults and children who are the subject of an inter country adoption as soon as possible.

Youth Services Funding

- 544. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress her Department is making in establishing a new youth funding programme in view of a 2014 review of youth services and its subsequent recommendations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30905/17]
- 545. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department has been working in relation to mapping of youth service provision across the State; the areas which are showing high levels of deprivation in relation to youth services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30906/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 544 and 545 together.

The Value for Money and Policy Review (VFMPR) of the Youth Funding programmes 2014 examined three of the targeted funding schemes, the Special Projects for Youth scheme, the Young People's Facilities and Services Fund, and Local Drug Task Force projects scheme. The schemes support the provision of youth services for young people who are at risk of drugs, alcohol misuse, early school leaving, homelessness or who are living in disadvantaged communities. The review involved an in-depth scrutiny of a complex area to do with the impact youth service provision has in young people's lives. Overall, the review found that the youth programmes can provide a significant contribution to improving outcomes for young people and should be considered for on-going public funding. The review makes a number of recommendations for the future operation of the youth schemes and their development in the years ahead to ensure an evidence-based and outcomes focussed programme designed to secure the optimal outcomes for young people.

The implementation of the recommendations in the review have commenced over the course of 2015, 2016 and this year. The National Youth Strategy Lead Team, established in July 2016, has a specific sub-group to support implementation of the VFMPR. My Department has initiated a detailed consultation at national and regional level with the youth sector and providers of youth services about the review's findings and recommendations. Consultations have taken place with the national youth organisation, local youth services and youth officers of the Education and Training Boards that administer funding on behalf of my Department, and with other

youth interests. A youth consultation process is also underway to inform the development of the VFMPR implementation.

To facilitate the review's recommendations regarding the future development of a single targeted youth funding programme to replace the current schemes, I have given approval for funding to be provided for the establishment of several sample projects in 2016 and 2017. These sample projects will provide youth services in areas of need as identified by the Education and Training Boards with responsibility for those regions.

In implementing another of the review's recommendations, my Department embarked on an exercise, in conjunction with Pobal and each Education and Training Board Youth Officer, to map youth service provision across the State. This mapping exercise will assist my Department and the relevant Education and Training Board in developing a detailed social demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels, particularly as the Census 2016 data becomes available. Following extensive work by those involved, this exercise is now in its final stage. It remains my intention that this mapping exercise will inform future development and investment in youth services. The map will available to view on Pobal's website from September.

Question No. 546 answered with Question No. 540.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation

547. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason the Government favours day care over other child care choices in its affordable childcare scheme; if she will consider financial supports that allows parents to choose the childcare that best suits them; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30908/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) will be open equally to any Tusla-registered childcare provider, including both centre based providers and home based childminders. Facilitating parental choice of childcare provider is a key objective of the ACS, and the equal inclusion of childminders is therefore a central feature. For this reason it is incorrect to say that the ACS favours day care over other childcare choices.

I acknowledge that the number of Tusla-registered childminders is still small. However, I established a working group to make recommendations on how to support the development of childminding in the short, medium and long term, and I hope to build on that group's work in supporting a larger number of childminders to become registered and to participate in the ACS over the years ahead.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme provides financial supports for paid childcare rather than care by parents or relatives. However, the specific purpose of the ACS is to reduce the cost of childcare to parents, and it must be seen in the wider context of other policy measures that are aimed at supporting parents who choose to care for their children at home.

In this regard it should be noted that, according to the European Commission, childcare costs in Ireland are currently the highest in the EU for lone parents and the second highest for couples, and the European Commission has, for several years, been recommending action by the Irish Government to address the high cost of childcare, both to support labour market participation of parents and to help reduce child poverty.

Supports for parents who choose to care for their children at home include the Home Carer

Tax Credit, which was increased in the last Budget, as well as provisions for maternity benefit, parental leave and the recently introduced paternity leave. It should be noted that the Programme for Government commits to extending paid leave for parents in the first year of a child's life, which will be a key financial support enabling parents to care for their children at home in the critical first year.

Youth Services Provision

548. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the need for youth facilities and programmes in the Newcastle, County Dublin area; her plans to put funding and resources in place to address these growing needs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31019/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 2017 I was delighted to approve funding of €800,000 for the establishment of new youth projects and for the augmentation of a small number of existing youth services to meet new challenges arising from population increases. This additional investment is being provided in regions of the country where there is a pressing need for services to meet the needs of young people.

Each of the sixteen Education and Training Boards, including Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB, was invited to nominate locations within their catchment areas for the establishment of new services and to nominate a project or service to be considered for augmentation. In total twenty-eight applications for new Sample VFM Services were received, including an application for a new service in Dublin Rural South, an area which includes Newcastle.

Based on the recommendations of a specially convened appraisal committee, and given the very limited resources available for the scheme, last week I approved the establishment of nine new targeted youth services across the country.

The application in respect of Dublin Rural South was, unfortunately, not successful on this occasion. Should further monies be made available to my Department in the coming years, it is my intention to invite Education and Training Boards to nominate locations for the establishment of new services.

School Meals Programme

549. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the withdrawal of the provision of school lunches in a primary school (details supplied) in Dublin 11; if she will instruct her Department to intervene to ensure that funding is made available for this school to continue providing meals to children in a very disadvantaged area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31068/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy I have no function in this matter, which is within the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Employment and Social Protection.

Question No. 550 answered with Question No. 28.

Question No. 551 answered with Question No. 54.

552. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she is taking to address child poverty here; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31231/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In recognition of the higher risks and life-long consequences of child poverty, the Government set a child-specific poverty target in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* to reduce consistent child poverty by at least two-thirds by 2020. This figure currently represents 102,000 children.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is a whole of government policy framework, which requires all Departments and Agencies to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children and young people. The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, which I chair, has responsibility for whole of government implementation, and includes representatives from all government Departments and Agencies.

The Department of Social Protection has the lead role in coordinating government strategies on child poverty. It also has lead responsibility for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and has identified child poverty as a key cross-sectoral priority to be addressed.

Officials in my Department are working closely with the Department of Social Protection in informing the development of this cross-sectoral priority.

Officials in the Department of Social Protection have co-convened a subgroup with members of the Advisory Council for *Better Outcomes*, *Brighter Futures* to progress solutions to child poverty.

In recognition of the fact that child poverty is a multi-faceted problem, this group also includes officials from other Departments, including the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Skills

Led by the Department of Social Protection, this group has developed a paper which outlines a whole of government approach to tackling child poverty. This is based around the three pillars outlined in the EU Recommendation on Investing in Children:

- Access to adequate resources
- Access to affordable, quality services
- Children's right to participate.

Key priorities arising from this include providing universal access to GP care for under 18s, reducing the cost of education, housing, affordable childcare, labour activation and provision of in-work benefits.

In line with this, my Department is developing a Single Affordable Childcare Scheme to provide families with quality childcare at a cost they can afford. Budget 2017 provided additional funding for the scheme's development and initial roll-out, to include both a targeted and a universal element. Subsidies will be available for children aged from 6 months up to 15 years and will meet families' full-time and part-time childcare needs, including outside of school hours and during school holiday time. The highest levels of subsidy will be provided to those on low incomes, helping families to overcome disadvantage and contribute to a reduction in child poverty.

The Advisory Council held a round table event on 22 June with a range of key experts and

stakeholders. The learning from this event will inform the further alignment of efforts across government and from civil society.

My Department has also established a Children's Equality Commission to ensure that the voices of children who experience or understand economic hardship or poverty are directly heard and acted on by policy-makers. The Commission will be comprised of Child Commissioners and Adult Commissioners. The Child Commissioners are children who experience or have an understanding of economic hardship or poverty. The Adult Commissioners will be senior policy makers from Government Departments, Stage agencies and other bodies relevant to the issues raised by children.

Consultations with relevant children and young people have been ongoing for some months. The findings from the work with the children and young people were discussed in detail at a closed meeting held on 22 June 2017 between Child and Adult Commissioners. The next phase of this process is now at design stage and details will be announced shortly.

I and my colleagues in Cabinet are committed to advancing these efforts and actions in our collective response to addressing child poverty.

Question No. 553 answered with Question No. 29.

Question No. 554 answered with Question No. 32.

Brexit Data

555. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31268/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): On 2 May, the Government published a comprehensive document on Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union. This document sets out the approach of the Government to the negotiations, following the successful campaign to have key Irish issues recognised in the EU negotiation position. Following on from this publication, work is underway to prepare a further paper on economic implications of the Brexit challenge. This will draw on the work to date across Departments, which will be developed to mitigate emerging sectoral challenges. These plans will build on ongoing cross-Government research, analysis and consultations with stakeholders, and will reflect the core economic themes of the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA on 15 February last.

Ireland's economic interests lie firmly in a strong and well-functioning EU with continued and unfettered access to the single market. There is a lot of negotiation to be done around trading arrangements. Our contingency work is examining all scenarios and we cannot preempt the outcome at this stage. We are not under any illusions about the complexity of these negotiations and are engaged in detailed planning in relation to these. That said, it has been a good start to the negotiations - which will, without doubt - be lengthy and difficult. In January of this year, I hosted a sectoral dialogue with children, young people and key stakeholders in Croke Park at which the views of all interested parties were captured. Since then, the Advisory Council to Better Outcomes Brighter Futures; the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 - 2020 has considered the report of the event and work is ongoing in relation to the more detailed implications of Brexit. Furthermore, matters in relation to Brexit were discussed by over 100 children and young people in April of this year as part of the annual

regional Comhairle na nÓg Networking events. This has enabled my Department to table those issues which may impact on children and young people, post-Brexit, and indeed identify those issues which resonate most strongly with our youngest citizens. However, it must be stated that such matters are subsets of much larger items which will be considered, in the main, in conjunction with colleagues in the Departments of Finance, Justice and Equality, Education and Health as part of the wider negotiating process. Accordingly, given the limited impact of Brexit on my Department, there is not the requirement to resource a dedicated Brexit Unit. However, while a dedicated unit is not needed, my Department continues to engage with all relevant structures and communication channels – coordinated by the Department of An Taoiseach.

Census of Population Data

556. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the consideration which is given following the release of census of population data in respect of provision of services; if the census is not used to determine need, the way in which deployment of resources is decided; if there is a change planned in this context; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31400/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department makes good use of data from the Census of Population for a variety of purposes, including analysis of key demographic information on the cohort of children and young people that are under the Department's remit. Much of this data will feature in my Department's forthcoming publication of an indicator set to track the progress for children and young people aged 0-24, across the five outcomes outlined in Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF) and some is already utilised as contextual data in the Department's biennial publication - State of the Nations Children.

As part of the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI) my Department has invested in Tusla's Outcomes for Children Project. The project offers a sustainable opportunity to provide a national standardised framework for mapping outcomes, indicators and services for children and young people based on the Children & Young People's Services Committee's (CYSPC) geographical areas, to underpin all multi-agency children's service planning.

One of the aims of the Outcomes for Children Project, is to develop one nationally centralised open platform data hub which will hold and analyse data for all CYSPC areas, regionally and nationally, to ensure effective, accessible, integrated, multi-agency outcomes based children services planning. The data hub will utilise all relevant published and other data including CSO, SAHRU, Pobal, HSE, TUSLA, DES, An Garda Síochána *et al*, to ensure system users have access to quality information that will inform children services planning.

It is envisaged that through the development of the open platform and the related extensive training and capacity building provided by Tusla, that CYSPC across the country will utilise the data gathered, including census data, to optimally plan children's services.

CYPSC, as part of their three year planning cycle also use socio and demographic data and census data to plan for delivery of services in their local area.

In 2016, my Department embarked on an exercise, in conjunction with Pobal and each Education and Training Board Youth Officer, to map youth service provision across the State. This mapping exercise will assist my Department and the relevant Education and Training Board, in developing a detailed social demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and de-

privation levels; particularly as the Census 2016 data becomes available. The exercise is now in its final stage and it is my intention that this mapping exercise will inform future development and investment in youth services.

Child Protection Services Provision

557. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is satisfied that her office has access to the requisite number of qualified staff to ensure the operation of children's protection as envisaged in the Children First legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31536/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I wish to inform the Deputy that the Children First Act 2015 was enacted in November 2015 and it is the intention that it will be fully commenced by the end of 2017.

Each Government Department is responsible for making the necessary arrangements to ensure compliance with the Children First Legislation and Guidance in the Department and in its funded services.

My Department will be responsible for compliance with Children First among the staff of my Department and my Department's funded services.

To assist in this, officials in my Department participate in the statutory Children First Interdepartmental Implementation Group. My Department also has an internal Departmental Children First Oversight Group whose purpose is to make the necessary preparations within my Department for full commencement of the Children First legislation. All Units of my Department are currently reviewing the range of their responsibilities to identify their safeguarding responsibilities.

Finally, the Management Board of my Department monitors progress to ensure that all staff in my Department will be in a position to fully comply with the provisions of the legislation and to ensure that the necessary governance assurance mechanisms will be in place in relation to the relevant services funded by my Department.

Child Protection Services Provision

558. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which the child protection services have the necessary resources and staff available to them to meet the demand; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31537/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla employs approximately 3,637 whole-time equivalent (WTE) staff and the vast majority of these are focused on responding to the needs of children and families at risk. I wish to assure the Deputy that with the current available staff all urgent and emergency cases, such as situations of abandonment, allegations of physical and sexual abuse, parental ill-health and the need to find an immediate placement, or a threat to the safety or life of a child by a third party, are dealt with immediately. My Department also provides oversight to ensure that the quality and performance of social work service is maintained to deal with service demands.

I am aware also that to ensure Tusla staff are able to support children and families it is the organisation's policy to ensure all staff are trained in Child Protection and Children First guidelines and staff attend a broad range of Child Protection Training including:

- Core Court Room Skills
- Introduction to Court Skills
- Domestic Sexual & Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) Awareness & Response
- Practice Development for Newly Appointed Social workers
- Supervision Making the most of Supervision for Supervisees
- Supervision Staff Supervision Skills Training for Supervisors
- Foundations for Assessment
- Evidence Informed Practitioner Programme
- Legal Briefing Seminar

However, I am very mindful of the correlation between recruitment and cases where a child does not have a dedicated social worker and the need for Tusla to closely link its recruitment programme with operational decisions to effect improvements. As part of my regular engagement with the Board, I have requested that the Agency provides me with an assessment of recruitment for the remainder of 2017, linked to specific targets to reduce the number of children awaiting allocation of a dedicated social worker. I have requested that Tusla develops a robust workforce plan which addresses succession planning, retention, career pathways, training and development, future workforce needs, priority gaps and a strategy for tackling the priority gaps and reducing unallocated cases.

Tusla's 2017 recruitment target is 369 additional staff across its grades. Tusla's social work target for the end of 2017 is 1,520 whole time equivalent and Tusla appears to be on track to meet this target. However, it is unlikely that 1,520 WTE social workers will be sufficient to execute Tusla's current and future responsibilities without changes to the composition of Tusla social work teams. Accordingly, Tusla is evaluating management and staff skills mix with a view to service enhancement, including reviewing the roles of family support workers; social care workers in the community; and administrative structures to support the delivery of more efficient and cost effective services. Part of the evaluation also includes looking at enhanced job roles, increasing multi-disciplinary team-working in an effort to alleviate pressure; redesigning tasks; and promoting greater efficiency in working.

Tusla has also appointed a dedicated Workforce Planner to work closely with Tusla services/ operations with a view to identifying the areas' required resource mix reflecting the ongoing challenge of recruiting social workers and the potential for more social care workers, family support etc.

I am confident that the Exchequer funding of €713m in 2017 will provide Tusla with significantly increased capacity to respond to areas of identified risk and anticipated demand and to progress a number of key service developments which will ensure better outcomes for vulnerable children, and families, who need our services and support.

Child Protection Services Provision

559. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which she remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of available facilities to ensure the follow-up required in cases of children at risk or reported to be at risk in various settings;

and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31538/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the Child Care Act 1991, as amended, and the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a statutory duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection. Tusla provides a continuum of care supports and interventions for 'at risk' children and their families, including early intervention and prevention services, family support services and community based services, such as Meitheal.

The State only intervenes in family life in exceptional cases. However, if there is a child protection concern, Tusla can investigate and take the child into care if necessary. The immediate safety of the child is the first consideration. When necessary, an initial assessment will take place. This assessment identifies the risk and protective factors in each given situation so that informed decisions and recommendations can be made.

Based on the information available, the duty social worker, in conjunction with the team leader, gives the case a priority level of high, medium and low, depending on the risk identified in the information available. Following the initial assessment, the case remains with the duty team, who monitor risk, while awaiting its allocation to a social worker. The priority level may change where new information shows an increased or decreased risk to the child.

If a report to the social work department indicates immediate and serious risk, urgent action must be taken to protect the child and in this instance a child may be placed in care. The separation of children from their parents is only considered when all alternative means of protection have been exhausted.

In 2017, Tusla has been allocated Exchequer funding of €713 million to extend and improve the services it provides. This represents an increase of €37 million from 2016.

Children in Care

560. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in State care in respect of residential and fosterage settings; if the supervisory and professional supports required remain readily available in all such cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31539/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, Child and Family Agency, has advised that to the end of March 2017 there were 6,130 children in care. There were 5,834 children in foster care, of whom 4,148 children were in general foster care, and 1,686 were in care with relatives. There were 361 children in residential care placements, including a small number of special care units. There were a further 115 children in care who were in other placement types suited to their identified needs.

As the Deputy may be aware there has been an ongoing recruitment drive to recruit additional social workers and social care workers. The majority of children in care have access to their allocated social worker. However, there are some cases where a child in care does not have an allocated social worker. These placements are closely monitored, supported and managed by the duty social work team, under the supervision of the Principal Social Worker.

Child Abuse

number of reports of child abuse in situations of children in residential care directly in the custody of the State or otherwise; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31540/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, Child and Family Agency, has advised that information of the type requested by the Deputy is not collated nationally.

Individual cases of children in care are reported to Tusla and dealt with under Children First Guidelines. Each referral is assessed and dealt with on an individual basis by the relevant social work team. The immediate actions that result from a report are aimed at removing the risk from the children in the first instance.

There are safeguards surrounding each child care placement, whether foster or residential care. Placements are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker, and the provision of care services is monitored by Tusla management and subject to inspections by the Health Information Quality Authority and by Tusla Registration Services.

The Deputy should also be aware that children in care have access to independent advocacy supports, such as the organisation Empowering People in Care, or EPIC. Children in care also have access to the complaints mechanism in Tusla, and may make complaints, or be assisted to make complaints, about their care to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

Tusla, Child and Family Agency, receives over 45,000 referrals of child welfare and protection concerns each year from officials and members of the public. In 2016, Tusla received 47,399 referrals, of which 60% related to welfare concerns. Referrals are most often received from members of An Garda Síochána or from employees of the HSE or of Tusla.

Child Abuse Reports

562. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of reports received of alleged child abuse in respect of children in the home in each of the past three years; the extent to which adequate facilities have been put in place to address the issues arising; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31541/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information requested by the Deputy, that is the location at which abuse has occurred, is not collated at a national level by Tusla. Tusla have provided me with a breakdown of the referrals they have received in the years 2014, 2015 and 2016. The information in the table refers to referrals received by Tusla, and it should be noted that multiple referrals may relate to the same child.

| Referrals | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Physical abuse | 4,066 | 3,991 | 4,450 |
| Emotional abuse | 6,233 | 6,535 | 6,871 |
| Sexual abuse | 3,114 | 2,940 | 3,042 |
| Neglect | 5,263 | 4,769 | 4,724 |
| Total | 18,676 | 18,235 | 19,087 |

The Deputy will notice that the vast majority of referrals are for emotional abuse and neglect, possibly indicating abuse within the family setting.

563. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the back-up facilities available on an ongoing basis for children and young adults on leaving institutional care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31542/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Children leaving care before their 18th birthday are normally being reunited with either their parents or responsible family members. This is carried out in a planned manner. Tusla continues to engage with the family and provide family supports where appropriate.

The Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015 was signed into law in December 2015 and I will commence this legislation on 1 September 2017. It entitles eligible young people to a formal aftercare plan, prepared by Tusla in collaboration with the young person leaving care. In response to this legislation Tusla has introduced a number of new practices. It has developed dedicated aftercare teams, it has standardised the financial supports that it offers to those leaving care, and it continues to roll out inter-agency steering committees to strongly promote good co-ordination of these services at local level. Through these measures, young people leaving care are offered a wide range of services from different sectors including income supports, health supports, accommodation and education. I can tell the Deputy that 58% of young people in receipt of aftercare services are in full-time education.

Child Abuse

564. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department can react quickly to allegations of child abuse in a setting in which the State has intervened or accepted responsibility for the care of such children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31543/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla holds the statutory responsibility for child welfare and protection, and is the appropriate body to receive reports relating to the safety and well-being of a child. This applies to children under the age of 18, living in their own home or living in care. Each referral received by Tusla is assessed and dealt with on an individual basis by the relevant social work team. In March 2017, Tusla informs me that there are 6,308 children in the care of the State. Of these the vast majority, (5,819) are in foster care, while 489 are in residential care or other types of care.

There are safeguards surrounding each child care placement, whether foster or residential care. Placements are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker, and the provision of care services is monitored by Tusla management and is subject to inspections by the Health Information Quality Authority and by Tusla Registration Services. Tusla is also aware of and alert to the possibility of child on child abuse in care settings, and has processes in place to deal appropriately with such incidents.

The Deputy should also be aware that children in care have access to independent advocacy supports, such as the organisation Empowering People in Care, or EPIC. Children in care also have access to the complaints mechanism in Tulsa, and may make complaints, or be assisted to make complaints, about their care to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

There is, however, no room for complacency about our safeguarding measures, and they are under constant review to ensure that they are effective.

Child Protection

565. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she supports voluntary bodies involved in the provision of care or support to children at risk; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31544/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has responsibility for grant programmes covering Child Welfare and Protection, the School Completion Programme, and Family and Community Support, all of which provide supports for children and young people at risk. Grants are issued to service providers that work in conjunction with Tusla, as well as local school completion projects and voluntary organisations.

The total expenditure in grants paid by Tusla in 2016 came to €143.9m. This is a significant sum, and my Department supports the work of Tusla in providing these grants to community and service providers working with children at risk. Tusla will continue to support voluntary bodies that carry out this important work in 2017 and into the future.

Youth Services Funding

566. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will offer grant aid to youth organisations or others involved in the provision of facilities for young persons on an ongoing basis in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31545/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

Budget 2017 provided an additional €5.5m in current funding to my Department to support the provision of these youth services. This will bring total youth funding in 2017 to €57.4m. In recent years, capital funding has also been made available to my Department to purchase equipment and to support small-scale projects, including refurbishment, health and safety fit-outs and accessibility improvements in local voluntary youth services.

Child Protection Services Provision

567. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she and her Department can intervene to support children whose parents are undocumented and who may as a result be open to exploitation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31546/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department does not have a policy remit for undocumented adults. This falls under the remit of my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, provides a continuum of care supports and interventions for 'at risk' children and their families, including early intervention and prevention services, family support services and community based services, such as Meitheal. Every child who is normally resident in Ireland is entitled to equal access to services. Tusla operates under a principle of equity of care. If a report is made to Tusla concerning the welfare, safety or well-

being of a child whose parents are undocumented, Tusla will provide that child with the same level of service, care and support as any other.

Child Protection Services Provision

568. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she and her Department has access to the necessary information to address the needs of children of homeless families; if particular referrals or recommendations are received in her Department from the relevant local authorities in which there is a risk of children becoming homeless; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31547/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As part of a whole-Government approach to homelessness, my Department is working closely with Tusla to provide supports for families in emergency accommodation in order to mitigate the challenges faced by parents and children in this situation.

As the Deputy will know, Tusla has agreed a joint protocol with the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE). This covers child welfare protection matters for children in emergency accommodation. It is fully operational in the DRHE area and it is intended to extend it to Galway, Limerick and Cork this year.

It is important to note that the State only intervenes in family life in exceptional cases. Children who are with their families in emergency accommodation remain in the care of their parent or guardian. If there is a specific child protection concern, Tusla can investigate and take the child into care if necessary. The reporting of any such concerns to Tusla is governed by Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children. Where there are no welfare or protection concerns, Tusla's role is to provide family support, where this is required.

Tusla is providing additional supports to assist families in emergency accommodation. It funds child support workers for this purpose and has also appointed a Homelessness Liaison Officer. My own Department is providing free child care for homeless children in the Dublin area for up to 25 hours a week. Our Family Resource Centres (FRCs) are working with people who are experiencing homelessness. Many FRCs have already developed a local response to the needs of families in emergency accommodation. These include, for example, family fun days, homework support, after-school programmes, play therapy and transport services. Tusla will be developing a reporting mechanism this year to record the extent of homeless work in the Family Resource Centres.

In recognition of the difficulties associated with homelessness and school attendance, the Educational Welfare Office (EWO) offers a number of supports to children and their families. The DRHE has also arranged Leap cards for homeless families in Dublin to facilitate family days out and for school journeys.

It is of the utmost importance that we minimise the impact of homelessness on children and offer families comprehensive supportive measures, while ultimately working towards eradicating homelessness in Ireland.

Child and Family Agency Services

569. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has satisfied herself regarding the adequacy of the child counselling services available to chil-

dren that are at risk; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31548/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, provides family support services to children and families at risk when a need is identified. These services can be provided directly by Tusla through its family support services, social work or social care services, or through play therapies, as appropriate. Tusla also provides funding to voluntary organisations offering a range of counselling and support services to children and families, including marriage and relationship counselling, child counselling, bereavement counselling and peer support programmes.

Key elements of the support provided to children at risk may include referral and advocacy for access to specialist services to meet the child's identified needs as part of their care plan, such as speech and language therapy, counselling and psychology services. Children may need to be referred to the child and adolescent mental health teams (CAMHS) and primary care psychology services provided by the Health Service Executive. Additionally, there are a number of services commissioned by social work departments around psychotherapeutic supports. In special cases Tusla may procure private psychology services where the waiting time for the HSE service is considered to be detrimental for the child's welfare.

Tusla will continue to strive to meet the requirements of the children and families they serve, and I will continue to support them in doing so.

Youth Services Funding

570. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department continues to support an organisation (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31549/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

I am pleased to confirm that I have allocated an extra €5.5m in current funding to support the provision of youth services in 2017. This will bring the total youth funding by my Department to €57.4m, an increase of 10% over last year's allocation. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

In 2017, an amount of €525,425 was allocated for the projects and services under Kildare Youth Services, which operates under Youth Work Ireland. My Department provides funding to Kildare Youth Services under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme in respect of six local youth projects in Athy, Naas, Leixlip, Newbridge, the Curragh and Kildare town and a Youth Information Centre in Naas.

Departmental Staff Data

571. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of civil servants in her Department who have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in her Department who have requested a transfer from a

location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31774/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): With regard to applications for transfers to or from other Departments or State Agency offices, my Department does not operate a transfer list. Staff may have their interest in a transfer listed with other Departments which hold a transfer list, or they may seek a possible transfer by means of a "Head to Head" transfer by directly contacting a person willing to transfer with them. My Department only becomes aware of such possible transfer requests when staff have identified suitable opportunities. At such time, it is at the discretion of the Departments concerned to agree to the transfer arrangements, having regard to sick leave and performance assessments. Accordingly, my Department has no information on the number of staff seeking transfers to or from other locations.

Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan has a commitment to develop a mobility scheme within the Civil Service and work is ongoing with the Civil Service Management Board, Departments and staff interests. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is currently developing Phase 1 of the scheme for the general service grades of Clerical Officer and Executive Officer which is planned to be launched later this year. Phase 2 of the scheme will be developed following the implementation of Phase 1 and will include the general service grades of Higher Executive Officer, Administrative Officer and Assistant Principal Officer.

The scheme will be centralised and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will have the facility to report on numbers on lists per Department and location following its successful launch.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

572. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a carer's allowance appeal can be expedited for a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31021/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 18 April 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

School Meals Programme

573. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the withdrawal of the provision of school lunches in a primary school (details supplied) in Dublin 11; if she will instruct her Department to intervene to ensure that funding is

made available for this school to continue providing meals to children in a very disadvantaged area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31067/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to 1,460 schools and organisations benefiting over 200,000 children at a total cost of some €47.5 million in 2017. As part of Budget 2017, the funding for the scheme was substantially increased this year by an additional €5.5 million (13% over the previous year's allocation) which will benefit over 50,000 children.

The school referred to by the Deputy has been funded for a breakfast and lunch based on the Department of Education and Skills enrolment figures to the end of the 2016/2017 academic year. It received €49,680 in total, which represents a small decrease on the previous year's funding as pupil numbers had decreased. The school was notified of its allocation and is expected to manage within the funding provided. The Department is in contact with the Principal regarding this matter.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Data

574. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons refused a State pension (non-contributory) in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30809/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The statistics the Deputy has requested are not readily available. The data are being assembled and will be sent to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Social Welfare Benefits

575. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the supports available to a person (details supplied); if the case can be examined with a view to ascertaining the most suitable support; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30822/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to the records of the Department, the person concerned has not submitted an application for income support. If the person concerned is not currently fit to resume work, he should contact his doctor to obtain the MC1 and MC2 forms, for submission to the Illness Benefit section of the Department. Should he not have sufficient means to meets his needs in the interim, he should contact the Community Welfare Service in Naas.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Dietary Allowance Administration

576. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of dietary supplement under 18 years of age; the number of persons in receipt of dietary supplement under 22 years of age in full-time education; the number of persons over 18 years of age in receipt of dietary supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30825/17]

577. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will reinstate diet supplements for persons suffering from coeliac disease and throat cancer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30826/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 576 and 577 together.

Diet supplement, administered under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, is payable to qualifying persons, in receipt of the supplement prior to February 2014, who have been prescribed a special diet as a result of a specified medical condition. The Government has provided €4.6 million for the scheme in 2017.

There are currently approximately 3,100 persons in receipt of the diet supplement of which 15 are aged 22 years and under (of which 3 are aged 18 years and under). Department records do not indicate the education status of these young people. Diet supplement can be paid to a recipient in respect of a qualified child or qualified adult, however, statistics are not available on these cases, including details of their age or education status.

Following the outcome of a review of the costs of healthy eating and specialised diets by the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute commissioned by the Department during 2013, the scheme has been closed to new applicants from 1 February 2014. This independent research showed that the average costs across all of the retail outlets of the diets supplemented under the scheme can be met from within one third of the minimum personal rate of social welfare payment, i.e. the SWA rate which was then paid at €186 per week. The weekly rate of SWA has recently increased to €191 further to Budget 2017. The diet supplement scheme was discontinued for new applicants on the basis of this evidence and I have no plans to reverse this decision.

Existing recipients continue to receive the diet supplement at the current rate of payment for as long as they continue to have an entitlement to the scheme or until their circumstances change. This measure ensured that nobody was immediately worse off by the closure of the scheme.

In cases of particular hardship, officials continue to have the legislative power to award a SWA payment in cases of exceptional need. Any person who considers that they may have an entitlement to financial support should contact the Community Welfare Service at their local Intreo centre who may be able to offer assistance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Homemakers Scheme Applications

578. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of persons signing for homemakers credits; the percentage of the estimated number of homemakers this represents; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30848/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The homemaker's scheme was introduced on 6 April 1994 and provides that a period of up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age (or caring for incapacitated people over that age) can be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes; subject to the standard qualifying conditions for state pension (contributory) also being satisfied.

Recipients of child benefit (who are providing the child with fulltime care), carer's allowance, carer's benefit or carer's support grant are automatically entitled to the homemaker's

scheme and are not required to make a separate application. Their entitlement is taken into consideration when they reach pension age and when their state pension (contributory) entitlement is being calculated.

As the majority of the homemaking periods are only registered when a person reaches pension age, my Department does not have statistics on the number of persons who are currently homemaking. In total, 25,000 homemaking periods have been registered with the Department since the start of the scheme

Carer's Allowance Payments

579. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Social Protection if a carer's allowance payment in the case of a person (details supplied) will be backdated to 13 August 2015 as stated in correspondence dated 16 March 2016; if her department will acknowledge this decision as a departmental error; and if the repayment being demanded by her department will be set aside in view of the overall circumstances of the case. [30863/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 10 August 2015 in respect of his wife who is his care recipient.

The application was awarded on 10 March with effect from 13 August 2015 and the first payment issued to his nominated post office on 7 April 2016.

The person concerned was notified on 10 March 2016 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

Net arrears amounting to €556.00, due for the period from 13 August 2015 to 6 April 2016 were paid to the person concerned on 13 April 2016. In accordance with social welfare legislation, any overlapping payments made to him during this period, in this case jobseeker's allowance, were deducted from the gross arrears.

The wife of the person concerned was previously in receipt of a carer's allowance in her own right to provide care for another person. Social Welfare legislation prohibits a person from receiving carer's allowance as a carer while another person is receiving carer's allowance in respect of them as a care recipient.

As the wife of the person concerned continued to claim a carer's allowance from 12 August 2015 to 21 October 2015, an overpayment occurred. She was notified on 3 June 2016 of this overpayment, the amount in question and the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

No appeal was lodged in relation to this overpayment and deductions commenced on 16 August 2016 from her weekly supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) in recovery of the debt owing. She subsequently applied for and was awarded a disability allowance (DA) in her own right. Weekly deductions are currently being made her DA payment to recover the outstanding debt. These deductions will continue until the amount owing to the Department is paid in full.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

580. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application will

be processed for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30929/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 22 February 2017 in respect of her care recipient aged 10 years.

It is a condition for receipt of carer's allowance, that where the care recipient is aged less than 16 years of age, a domiciliary care allowance (DCA) must be in payment in respect of that child.

An application for DCA is currently awaiting decision. Once a decision is made, the application for CA will be processed without delay. The person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy

School Meals Programme

581. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of children eligible to receive and the number in receipt of the school meals programme; and the estimated cost of expanding the programme by 10% to provide for a wider eligibility. [30931/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to some 1,460 schools and organisations benefitting over 200,000 children at a total cost of some €47.5 million in 2017. The funding for the scheme was increased this year, as part of Budget 2017, by an additional €5.5 million (13% over the previous year's allocation) which will benefit over 50,000 children.

Based on the 2017 budgetary allocation of €47.5 million, the additional annual costs of expanding the school meals programme by a further 10% is €4.75 million. Changes to increase the funding of any scheme administered by my Department would have to be considered in a budgetary context.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Oireachtas Joint Committee Reports

582. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the actions she plans to take in view of the recent report on lone parents published by the Joint Committee on Social Protection; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30964/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I have recently received the report of the Joint Committee on Social Protection on the position of lone parents in Ireland.

I would like to thank the Committee for their work on this issue which I know included discussions with a wide range of stakeholder groups and officials from this Department. I have no doubt it will make a valuable contribution to the policy on this issue.

The report and its recommendations are currently being considered by my Department. In addition the independent review of the changes to the One-Parent Family Payment, which was agreed during the passage of the Social Welfare Act 2016, is currently well underway and is due

to report by the end of August this year. I anticipate that both of these reports will be of great assistance to me and my Department in this important area.

Qualified Child Increase Payments

583. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full year cost of increasing the qualified child increase from €29.80 to €32.30; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30965/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Increases for a Qualified Child (IQCs) are paid as child-related supplements to most weekly social welfare payments in recognition of the need for greater incomes among benefit-dependent households with dependent children. The current full rate of payment is €29.80 per week per dependent child. The estimated expenditure on qualified child increase in 2017 is around €471 million. The Department currently pays IQCs in respect of 356,236 children.

IQC payments do not of themselves constitute a specific social welfare scheme and entitlement to the appropriate primary adult payment must be established in the first instance.

Where children continue in full-time education, payment of the IQC can continue up to 22 years of age or up to the end of the academic year in which the child reaches 22 in the case of long-term payments as well as short-term payments that have been in payment for at least 156 days.

The estimated full year cost of increasing the qualified child increase from \in 29.80 to \in 32.30 would cost an additional \in 43 million. Any changes to the rate of the IQC would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Family Income Supplement Eligibility

584. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated full-year cost of reducing the hours work to qualify for family income supplement from 19 to 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30966/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Family Income Supplement (FIS) is an in-work support which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings with children. FIS is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependants and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment. The estimated expenditure on FIS in 2017 is approximately €422 million and it is currently paid to almost 57,000 families in respect of some 126,000 children.

To qualify for FIS, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. A couple may combine their hours of employment to meet the qualification criteria. The applicant must also have at least one qualified child who normally resides with them or is supported by them. Furthermore, the average family income must be below a specified amount which varies according to the number of qualified children in the family.

The "hours worked" eligibility criterion has been reduced significantly since the introduction of the scheme in 1984, from 30 hours per week to 19 hours per week in 1996. Further reducing the "hours worked" requirement would have potentially significant expenditure implications.

For low income workers with less than the minimum hours of employment for FIS and working on a casual basis up to and including 3 days per week, jobseeker's schemes provide in-work income support through daily disregards and tapered withdrawal of payments.

The number of families who are working between 15-18 hours and are earning below the relevant FIS thresholds is currently unknown.

Reducing the numbers of hours worked required to access FIS from 19 to 15 could have a number of behavioural effects including:-

- reducing the incentive to increase part-time hours;
- resulting in recipients on the minimum 19 hours threshold reducing their hours of work; and
- a reduction in the "hours worked" criteria might attract new recipients currently on higher wages above the FIS threshold, who might decide to reduce their hours in order to qualify.

Under EU regulations FIS is defined as a family benefit and is exportable in cases where the claimant is working in Ireland but where the children are living abroad. My Department has no way of predicting with any degree of accuracy the potential in-flow from this category.

For all of the reasons above my Department has no way of accurately estimating the cost of reducing the numbers of hours worked required to access FIS from 19 to 15 hours.

Reducing the "hours worked" requirement would have implications for existing working age schemes. Under jobseeker's benefit and jobseeker's allowance a person may, subject to scheme criteria, work for up to three days and continue to receive support under the schemes.

Lowering the "hours worked" threshold could also create the risk that FIS would end up inadvertently subsidising unsustainably low earnings and contributing to an increase in the levels of precarious employment.

Training Support Grant

585. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her Department has considered or examined the feasibility of removing the condition whereby a person must be on the live register in order to access training and activation supports; if so, the implications of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30967/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The key objective of activation policy and labour market initiatives is to offer assistance to those most in need of support in securing work and achieving financial self-sufficiency. This policy objective prioritises resources to those in receipt of qualifying welfare payments - Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance - that are conditional on the recipient being actively seeking and available for employment, as well as, in the case of Jobseeker's Allowance, meeting a means test. The employment services and schemes provided by the Department are focused in the first instance on this cohort of unemployed people.

Many other services are also available to people who are not in receipt of a social welfare payment. For example, employment services, such as advice on job-search activities and the use of online job search tools, are available to people if they register with the Department's Intreo offices regardless of their social welfare status.

Unemployed persons not in receipt of qualifying payments may also be eligible to avail of up-skilling opportunities, for example through ETB training for unemployed people, but are not eligible to receive a training allowance while undertaking the course. An unemployed person who does not qualify for a social welfare payment due to the assessment of their means may be eligible to sign for social insurance contribution credits. Persons signing on for credits for 12 months or longer over the previous 18 months are entitled to participate on Momentum courses through Solas, provided that they have been actively seeking work, however they will not receive any payment. Persons signing for credits for six months or more are entitled to participate on ETB-run VTOS courses subject to availability. In the case of VTOS courses, participants do not receive a training allowance but may receive travel and lunch allowances. Springboard and Skillnets courses for unemployed people, funded through the Department of Education and Skills, are also open to people regardless of their social welfare status.

In addition, the Qualified Adult Dependent of a person in receipt of one of the qualifying payments for BTEA purposes may be approved for BTEA provided they establish an entitlement to a BTEA qualifying payment in their own right and subject to satisfying all other BTEA conditions. Those in receipt of a number of other qualifying payments (including One-Parent Family Payment and Disability Allowance) may be approved for BTEA subject to satisfying all BTEA conditions.

Action 26.5 of the current Pathways to Work Strategy commits to examining the supports required to facilitate greater participation by people with disabilities, single parents, qualified adults and individuals in need of greater support in education and training. Having reviewed this action, the Department is satisfied at present that existing supports are sufficient but will continue to review the situation in conjunction with the Department of Education and Skills and SOLAS.

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 barriers they may encounter in finding and sustaining employment.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Applications

586. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for exceptional needs payment for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [30985/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned submitted an unsigned Supplementary Welfare Allowance application form to the Department and as this is not a complete application it was returned to the customer on 23 May 2017 with a request for the applicant to sign it and return it to the Department. To date a completed application form has not been received from the person concerned and as such the Department is not in a position to make a decision on the claim.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Exceptional Needs Payments

587. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if the recent exceptional needs payment issued on 18 April 2017 was paid to the person or an agent in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31005/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An Exceptional Needs Payment in respect of funeral expenses, which issued on 18 April 2017, was paid to the person concerned and was not paid to an agent.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 588 withdrawn.

State Pensions

589. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Social Protection the assistance available for a person that is contracted to retire at 65 years of age but is not entitled to a State pension until 67 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31008/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There is no statutory retirement age in the State, and the age at which employees retire is a matter for the contract of employment between them and their employers.

The Social Welfare and Pensions Act, 2011 provides that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the standardising of State pension age for all at 66 years and the cessation of State pension transition. The State pension age will increase to 67 years in 2021 and to 68 years in 2028.

Where a person exits the workforce before reaching State pension age they may apply for either the jobseeker's benefit or jobseeker's allowance schemes. Jobseeker's payments are paid to eligible jobseekers aged 18 to 66 years and all recipients of a jobseeker's payment are subject to the rules of the scheme.

People in receipt of a jobseeker's payment must engage with my Department's activation measures and can face sanctions if they fail to do so. However, from January 2014 these criteria were eased for people aged 62 and over, such that they are not obliged to engage with the activation process. They are still able to voluntarily avail of an array of supports, which are available from my Department if they wish to return to work, training or education. Furthermore the majority of these individuals will have to register with their local office only once a year and their payments will be paid directly into their bank accounts.

Once a person has exhausted their entitlement to jobseeker's benefit they may be eligible for jobseeker's allowance, subject to the means test and other qualifying conditions. However, someone claiming jobseeker's benefit from a date after their 65th birthday continues to be eligible for that payment until reaching State pension age.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

590. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the status of an appeal for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31032/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that two appeals by the person concerned were registered in that office on 12 June 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the deciding officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the cases in question will be referred to

an appeals officer who will make a summary decision on the appeals based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

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

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Payments

591. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her officials are examining a charity's (details supplied) proposal in its 2018 pre-budget submission to tackle the 145% increase in the proportion of persons that cannot afford to heat their home; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31130/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of $\[\in \] 22.50$ per week for 26 weeks from October to April, to low income households, at an estimated cost of $\[\in \] 229$ million in 2017. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household

My Department also pays the household benefits package at an estimated cost of €232 million in 2017. €177 million of this cost relates to the electricity or gas allowance element of the household benefits package. In addition, under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, exceptional needs payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their own resources and this may include exceptional heating costs.

The best way to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling. My Department works closely with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on these issues and in moving forward the actions agreed in the energy affordability strategy. In that regard, the Better Energy Homes scheme provides support towards the installation of attic and wall insulation, and heating system upgrades.

Any decision to increase the fuel allowance payment would have to be considered in the overall budgetary and policy context. In this regard, my Department is hosting its annual pre-Budget Forum in Dublin Castle on 21 July, where I will listen to the views of representatives from some 45 NGOs, advocacy and representative organisations, including the organisation referenced by the Deputy.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Payments

592. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to a charity's (details supplied) 2018 pre-budget submission and its proposal to increase the fuel allowance payment by ϵ 6.50 per week; the total cost of implementing such a proposal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31140/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a pay-

ment of €22.50 per week for 26 weeks from October to April, to low income households, at an estimated cost of €229 million in 2017. The purpose of this payment is to assist these households with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

My Department also pays the household benefits package at an estimated cost of €232 million in 2017. €177 million of this cost relates to the electricity or gas allowance element of the household benefits package. In addition, under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, exceptional needs payments may be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which customers are unable to meet out of their own resources and this may include exceptional heating costs.

The estimated cost of increasing the fuel allowance by €6.50 a week to €29.00 per week is €66 million in 2018. It should be noted that this cost is subject to change over the coming months in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018. The best way to tackle fuel poverty in the long term is to improve the energy efficiency of the dwelling. My Department works closely with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on these issues and in moving forward the actions agreed in the Energy Affordability Strategy. In that regard, the Better Energy Homes scheme provides support towards the installation of attic and wall insulation, and heating system upgrades.

Any decision to increase the fuel allowance payment would have to be considered in the overall budgetary and policy context. In this regard, my Department is hosting its annual pre-Budget Forum in Dublin Castle on 21 July, where I will listen to the views of representatives from some 45 NGOs, advocacy and representative organisations, including the organisation referenced by the Deputy.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Benefit Eligibility

593. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to a charity's (details supplied) proposal in its 2018 pre budget submission to make child benefit payable to families with children over 18 years of age and still at secondary school; the cost of implementing such measure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31142/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to around 626,525 families in respect of over 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of over €2 billion in 2017.

Budget 2009 reduced the age for eligibility for Child Benefit from 19 years to less than 18 years. A value for money review of child income supports, published by the Department of Social Protection in 2010, found that the participation pattern of children in education supports the current age limit for Child Benefit.

It is not possible to give the full year estimated cost of making Child Benefit payable to families with children over 18 years of age and still at secondary school as according to data from the Department of Education and Skills there are people still attending second level insti-

tutions up to 21 years and over.

Families on low incomes can already avail of a number of provisions to social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22 years, including:

- qualified child increases (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- family income supplement (FIS) for low-paid employees with children;
- the back to school clothing and footwear allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second level education rate).

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked with household income and thereby support low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Given the universal nature of Child Benefit making Child Benefit payable to families with children over 18 years of age and still in secondary school would not be a targeted approach. Any decision to would have to be considered in the overall budgetary and policy context. In this regard, my Department is hosting its annual pre-Budget Forum in Dublin Castle on 21 July, where I will listen to the views of representatives from circa 45 NGOs, advocacy and representative organisations, including the organisation referenced by the Deputy.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Payments

594. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her Department has examined the proposal by a charity (details supplied) in its 2018 pre-budget submission to increase the back to school clothing and footwear allowance to €305; the cost of implementing such an increase; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31143/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) scheme provides a once-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when children start school each autumn. The 2017 payment rates have been increased from €100 to €125 for children aged 4 to 11 years and from €200 to €250 for children aged 12 years and over and attending secondary school. The additional funding for the increase in rates brings the total allocation for the allowance this year to €47.4 million, an increase of €10 million on what was originally provided.

Similar to arrangements in previous years, the majority of payments under this scheme will be paid with no application form required. The allowance will be paid in the week commencing 10 July to allow parents sufficient time to prepare for back to school. Customers who have not received notification of an automated payment should make a written application to my Department.

The pre-Budget submission for 2018 referred to by the Deputy includes the proposal to restore the allowance to the 2011 rates of payment of \in 200 in respect of children aged 4 to 11 and \in 305 for children aged 12 years and over. Using the number of children covered by the scheme in 2016 as a basis, the full year additional cost to increase the 2017 rates to the 2011 rates would be an additional \in 18.9 million.

Any changes to these rates would have to be considered in a budgetary context and within the scope of the overall resources available for welfare improvements.

The Minister for Education and Skills, has recently published a new circular on the measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the cost of school uniforms and other costs, as part of

a range of measures to take greater account of the needs of parents and students in the school system. The circular letter is available on the Department of Education and Skills website at http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0032 2017.pdf

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Education Allowance

595. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if his attention has been drawn to the proposal by a charity (details supplied) in its 2018 pre-budget submission to reverse the decision to means test income from part time work for those in receipt of back to educational allowance; the cost of implementing such a proposal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31146/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is designed primarily to support second chance education. It is an educational opportunities scheme for persons in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments wishing to pursue second or third-level courses of education in order to improve their employment prospects.

Entitlement to BTEA is conditional on having an on-going entitlement to the qualifying scheme payment. The scheme has been amended in recent years to ensure that the conditions are in line with the qualifying payment. As a result, BTEA participants with eligibility based on jobseekers, transitional jobseekers or one parent family payments, who engage in part-time work, will be assessed in accordance with their primary payment. This measure ensures that only participants who continue to satisfy the means test of their primary payment will continue to receive income support under the allowance and that resources are directed at those most in need of assistance.

It is important to note that the BTEA was never intended to be an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third-level education system. The student universal support Ireland (SUSI) grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for persons pursuing education.

A new €500 annual cost of education allowance will be made available to BTEA participants with children from the next academic year in September. This will help parents, including lone parents, to return to education. Additionally, the age-related payments will no longer apply to participants of the BTEA and, as a result, students who have a reduced payment on their primary scheme payment will now benefit from the maximum rate of payment from the new academic year.

Overall, the priority for my Department is that the BTEA will be focused, targeted and suitable for the needs of jobseekers and of the future skills needs of the economy. It is only in that context that changes to BTEA will be considered. I have no plans to change the current rules for the Allowance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

596. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her Department examined a charity's (details supplied) proposal in their 2018 pre-budget submission to allow

lone parents in employment with children between seven and 14 years of age to receive both jobseeker's transition payment and family income supplement if they meet qualifying criteria; the cost of implementing such a proposal; the changes required; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31148/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Any decision to allow lone parents in employment with children between 7 and 14 years of age to receive both the jobseeker's transitional payment (JST) and the Family Income Supplement (FIS) concurrently would have to be considered in the overall budgetary and policy context and would require Government approval.

In this regard, my Department is hosting its annual pre-Budget forum in Dublin Castle on 21 July 2017, where I will listen to the views of representatives from circa 45 NGOs, advocacy and representative organisations, including the organisation referenced by the Deputy. My Department receives a wide range of pre-Budget submissions in advance of this forum, each of which is considered as part of any Budget discussions.

In relation to cost of allowing the concurrent payment of JST and FIS to lone parents while it is a condition of the JST scheme that recipients must continue to parent alone, this is not a qualifying condition of FIS and so this information is not maintained for FIS recipients. From the data currently available on household composition within the FIS scheme, it is not possible to determine which FIS recipients, who are also lone parents, would satisfy the eligibility criteria to qualify for a JST payment. It is therefore not possible to provide an accurate costing of the cost of this proposed measure.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

597. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding post office payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31170/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Successive Governments, and this one most notably, have consistently stated their commitment to maintaining the post office network. It is Government policy that An Post remains a strong and viable company in a position to provide a high quality postal service and maintain a nationwide customer focussed network of post offices in the community. My Department's support for An Post is equally apparent. We anticipate this year that we will pay over €50m to An Post under a contract for the cash payment services to welfare customers as well as an estimated €9.7m for postal services.

The Department of Social Protection provides two main options for payment methods for its customers: payments in cash in post offices or payments direct to customer accounts in financial institutions. The Department intends, where possible, to continue to offer its many clients the choice of being paid in cash at the post office or directly into an account in a financial institution.

Departmental staff were accordingly advised in July of last year that, when dealing with customers who are making new claims or seeking to change their payment arrangements, customers can choose between payment at the post office or by electronic funds transfer. Customer wishes are to be facilitated where they choose to receive their social welfare payment at their local post office. There is no change to schemes where customer choice is not currently available for control or other specified purpose.

It is also not proposed to limit the freedom of social welfare customers to be paid directly

into a financial institution if they so choose. This is in line with wider Departmental policy where the focus is on ensuring that in-work customers are paid by the most convenient method possible.

Carer's Allowance Applications

598. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 255 of 21 June 2017, if a payment system can be put in place at an early date to address the issues of a person (details supplied) in the absence of a one-parent family allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31258/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The application for carer's allowance (CA) of the person concerned was disallowed on the grounds that she was not providing full-time care as required. She was notified on 2 May 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review or appeal. To date, there has been no new information submitted which would warrant a review of the decision made in this case.

The person concerned is currently in receipt of a jobseeker's allowance transitional (JST) payment from her local Intreo Centre. This is paid at a slightly reduced rate due to her other income from employment and maintenance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Brexit Staff

599. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Social Protection if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in her Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31279/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department's EU and International section, including Irish-UK Relations, is led by an assistant secretary. The Irish-UK Relations unit has, at present, three additional staff assigned to it. These are two assistant principals, one on a full-time basis and one on a four-day per week basis, and one executive officer on a four-day per week basis due to work sharing.

In addition to the salary costs for the three extra staff referenced above, an additional $\in 10,000$ has been assigned to this unit under the Department's administrative budget to cover travel and subsistence and the cost, where necessary, of facilitating the Department's Brexit consultative process with key stakeholders. Expenditure, to date, is $\in 6,271.38$.

Both staffing and funding requirements are being kept under continuous review.

More generally, the Management Board of the Department of Social Protection has been fully engaged with the social protection implications of the vote by the UK to leave the EU and, indeed, the earlier negotiations on the UK's relationship with the EU; a sub group of the Management Board is in place and the Board also receives regular updates on the key developments relating to Brexit.

Ouestion No. 600 withdrawn.

4 July 2017

Child Benefit Administration

- 601. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Social Protection the potential cost to the State of extending child benefit payments to children for an additional year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31304/17]
- 602. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to change the provisions in order that child benefit is payable until such a time as a child finishes secondary education, rather than determining it by age (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31305/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): It is proposed to take Questions Nos. 601 and 602 together.

Child Benefit is a monthly payment made to families with children in respect of all qualified children up to the age of 16 years. The payment continues to be paid in respect of children up to their 18th birthday who are in full-time education, or who have a disability. Child Benefit is currently paid to around 626,525 families in respect of over 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of over €2 billion in 2017.

Budget 2009 reduced the age for eligibility for Child Benefit from 19 years to less than 18 years. A value for money review of child income supports, published by the Department of Social Protection in 2010, found that the participation pattern of children in education supports the current age limit for Child Benefit.

The current estimated annual cost of extending the upper age limit for payment for an additional year, i.e. for those persons who are 18 years and under 19 years of age and in secondary school, based on figures from the Department of Education and Skills, is over €62 million.

Families on low incomes can already avail of a number of provisions to social welfare schemes that support children in full-time education until the age of 22, including:

- qualified child increases (IQCs) with primary social welfare payments;
- family income supplement (FIS) for low-paid employees with children;
- the back to school clothing and footwear allowance for low income families (paid at the full-time second level education rate).

These schemes provide targeted assistance that is directly linked with household income and thereby support low-income families with older children participating in full-time education.

Given the universal nature of Child Benefit extending child benefit payments to children for an additional year would not be a targeted approach. The adoption of such a proposal would also have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Rural Social Scheme Data

603. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of participants on the rural social scheme to date in 2017; the reason the extra 500 participants promised by her predecessor have not been recruited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31306/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, the rural social scheme (RSS) provides employment opportunities for low income farmers and fishermen who are currently in receipt of specified social welfare payments. While communities benefit from the skills and talents of local farmers and fishermen, participants have the opportunity to improve existing skills, or develop new skills.

In recognition of the significant work undertaken in rural communities under the Scheme, the Government announced, as part of the social welfare budget package for 2017, an additional 500 places for the scheme. These places became available with effect from 1st February 2017 and bring the total number of available participant places to 3,100.

As of 30 June 2017, there were 2,683 participants on RSS. While the overall responsibility for the operation of the RSS rests with the Department, it is implemented at a local level by 35 Local Development Companies and Údarás na Gaeltachta in the Gaeltacht areas (known as the Implementing Bodies). While the Implementing Bodies have responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the scheme, including recruitment, I want to assure the Deputy that my Department is working closely with them to ensure that all the places are rolled out as quickly as possibly over the coming months.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Applications

- 604. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a farm assist application will be processed for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31330/17]
- 605. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a jobseeker's benefit application will be processed for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31331/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 604 and 605 together.

To remain eligible for Farm Assist, an individual must continue to satisfy the qualifying criteria for the scheme including a means test. In April 2017 a review of the means in this case was conducted. The person concerned was found to have weekly means in excess of that allowable under the scheme and a decision was taken to terminate the payment.

The person concerned made an application for Jobseekers Benefit (JB) in April 2017. A decision to refuse this application was taken because the person concerned was not considered unemployed. The basis for this decision is that they were engaged in two forms of self-employment, namely farming and the provision of agricultural services and neither of these two self-employments were considered subsidiary employments.

The Donegal Intreo office has written to the person concerned advising him of his right to appeal both of these decisions.

I trust that this clarifies the matter.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

- 606. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will consider allowing carer's allowance to be classed as a recordable contribution for the purpose of eligibility for contributory pensions in view of the expense that is spared to the State through persons taking on caring roles themselves as opposed to having to engage residential or other care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31389/17]
- 607. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Social Protection the estimated cost of allowing for carer's allowance to be classed as a recordable contribution for the purpose of calculating eligibility for contributory pensions. [31390/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 606 and 607 together.

The social insurance system currently provides recognition of the contribution of recipients of carer's allowance and full-time carers generally, through the system of credited contributions and the homemaker's scheme.

Credited contributions (credits) are awarded to recipients of carer's allowance where they have an underlying entitlement to credits. Recipients of this payment qualify for credits where they have at least one paid contribution in the two years prior to commencement of caring or have had credited contributions in that period. Credits are also awarded to workers who take unpaid carer's leave from work.

Credits protect social insurance entitlements by bridging gaps in an employee's social insurance record, where they are not in a position to pay PRSI, such as during periods spent caring. In combination with paid PRSI contributions, credits can assist employees in qualifying for short-term schemes such as jobseeker's benefit and enhance the level of benefit for long-term schemes such as the State pension contributory (SPC). In the latter case, once someone has 520 paid contributions over the course of their working life – the first condition for eligibility for the SPC, credits have the same value as paid contributions when the calculation to determine the yearly average number of contributions paid or credited. The year average determines the rate of pension payable.

In addition, all carers, including those who are not on a welfare payment or who do not qualify for credits, may qualify for the homemaker's scheme. The homemaker's scheme is designed to help homemakers and carers qualify for the SPC and applies to homemaking periods since 6 April 1994. It equally applies to both men and women.

The scheme provides that years spent working in the home while caring on a full-time basis for a child up to 12 years of age or an incapacitated person age 12 or over will be disregarded in calculating a person's yearly average number of contributions.

It is not possible to cost, even on a tentative basis, the granting of contributions for periods spent on carer's allowance or on other homemaking periods as the impact on the rate of State pension which would be payable (and associated costs) would be largely dependent on periods spent in the paid workforce in the past and potential future periods in similar employment.

Census of Population Data

608. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection the policy response which occurs further to the publication of the census of population; the section or sections of her Department involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31407/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department is highly committed to evidence-based policymaking. To inform our policy and operations across all our business areas, we make extensive use of this full range of Irish and European official statistics, including the Census of Population. Alongside this, we regularly conduct research surveys (see www.welfare.ie/en/surveys) and make analytical use of our own detailed administrative data sources.

The Census is a cornerstone of the national statistical system. It is important not only as a point-in-time five-yearly snapshot but also as a key reference point for statistics based on surveys such as the Quarterly National Household Survey, Survey on Income and Living Conditions, and Earnings Hours and Employment Costs Survey. Together, these statistics ensure that we have access to high-quality policy-relevant information not just when each Census is published but at all times in between.

As such, there is not a specific 'policy response which occurs further to the publication of the census of population' – rather, it informs all the policy priorities of my Department, together with the wider statistical system of which the Census forms part.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

609. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason for the long delays for processing applications, reviews and appeals within the domiciliary care allowance and disability allowance sections of her Department; her plans to rectify the issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31423/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Processing times for Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) applications are currently not meeting the target of having 70% of applications processed within 15 weeks. At present it is taking 20 weeks on average to finalise an application. There are a number of factors that have contributed to the extended time required to process claims.

Firstly, there is a significant increase in the volume of applications being received. The numbers applying for DCA have increased significantly since 2009, when the Department took over administration of the scheme from the HSE. The year on year increase in volumes over recent years has consistently been in the 15-20% range due to an increase in population and more awareness of the scheme. Over 1,000 claims were received in May, whereas the average would have been 400 per month a few years ago.

Secondly, following a High Court ruling in 2016, there is now a need for the Department's medical assessors to provide the deciding officer with a more detailed opinion on the child's eligibility for the scheme and for the deciding officer in turn to provide more detailed reasons for their decision when communicating this to the customer. These factors have resulted in the time taken to finalise applications increasing significantly and as a result the numbers being processed have reduced and the timescale to finalise each application has increased.

Due to the priority being given to new applications, processing times for decision review requests and appeals are also affected at this time. However, the number of both review requests and appeals received has fallen in recent years due to the increase in applications awarded at initial decision stage, which is currently 75% of first time applications.

In response to the current situation, additional deciding officers have been assigned to the scheme and the extra processing capacity should allow for an improvement in processing times. The position continues to be monitored closely.

In relation to disability allowance (DA), the average time taken to process a new application in May 2017 was 12 weeks. The processing times target for the DA scheme is to have 75% of new applications decided within 12 weeks and processing times have been consistent so far in 2017. The number of new applications awaiting a decision has decreased slightly since the start of the year from 5,947 to 5,863 currently. The number of DA appeals awaiting decision has also decreased, with 1,367 awaiting decision at the end of 2016, compared to 1,637 at the start of the year.

When deciding entitlement to disability allowance, a deciding officer is required to consider the medical conditionality and the habitual residence condition, in addition to the means condition. The failure of applicants to fully complete the application form and/or provide relevant supporting documentation, in respect of either their medical condition or their means, can contribute to delay in the processing of their application.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

610. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when an application for domiciliary allowance by a person (details supplied) will be processed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31488/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): An application for domiciliary care allowance (DCA) was received from the person concerned on the 10th February 2017. Due to the increased volume of applications currently being received, it can currently take in excess of 20 weeks to process an application for DCA. The application will be examined by a Deciding Officer shortly and the decision notified as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

611. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Social Protection the average wait times in processing domiciliary care allowance applications; if she has satisfied herself with the length of time it is taking for a decision to be made; and if she will allocate extra resources to the section in order to process the applications in a more timely manner. [31530/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Processing times for Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) are currently not meeting the target of having 70% of applications processed within 15 weeks. At present it is taking 20 weeks on average to finalise an application. There are a number of factors that have contributed to the extended time required to process claims.

Firstly, there is a significant increase in the volume of applications being received. The numbers applying for DCA have increased significantly since 2009, when the Department took over administration of the scheme from the HSE. The increase in volume year on year has been between 15% and 20% in recent years, due to an increase in population and more awareness of the scheme. Over 1,000 claims were received in May, whereas the average would have been 400 per month a few years ago.

Secondly, following a High Court ruling in 2016, there is now a need for the Department's medical assessors to provide the deciding officer with a more detailed opinion on the child's

eligibility for the scheme and for the deciding officer in turn to provide more detailed reasons for their decision when communicating this to the customer. These factors have resulted in the time taken to finalise applications increasing significantly and as a result the numbers being processed have reduced and the timescale to finalise each application has increased.

In response to the current situation, additional deciding officers have been assigned to the scheme. This extra processing capacity should allow for an improvement in processing times. The position will continue to be closely monitored.

Social Insurance

612. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a report on the appeal by a company (details supplied) of the Scope findings regarding alleged abuse of RTC1s; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31550/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The role of Scope insurability section in the Department of Social Protection is to make statutory decisions on insurability of employment under the Social Welfare Act. Employers, employees and the self-employed may apply to Scope for an investigation of an employment status and a determination of the correct class of PRSI. Scope insurability decisions are based on all available evidence, including a report from a social welfare inspector where appropriate, and the case law from previous court judgements.

Scope insurability decisions may be appealed to the Social Welfare Appeals Office by the employer, employee or self-employee. The office provides an independent, accessible and fair appeals service in a prompt and courteous manner.

Fourteen cases relating to the company referred to by the Deputy were registered in Scope insurability section in March 2015. These cases pertained to the time period from the end of May to September 2014.

Decisions issued from Scope insurability section in August 2015. The company referred to appealed the decisions for 13 of the 14 workers. Appeal decisions were issued in these cases in May 2017. The following is a summary of the decisions:

- 8 workers were deemed not to be employees of the company referred to;
- 2 workers were deemed to be self-employed;
- 1 worker was deemed to be an employee of the company for periods up to 24 July 2014 but not thereafter;
- 2 workers were deemed to be employees of the company for periods up to 24 July 2014 and employees of a different employer thereafter.

One worker lodged an appeal and an appeal decision issued in June 2016. He was deemed to be an employee, not of the company referred to, but of a different employer.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office operates independently of the Minister. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to comment on the outcome of individual appeals.

Finally, the deputy should note that the administration of RTC1s is a matter for Revenue.

4 July 2017

Departmental Staff Data

613. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of civil servants in her Department that have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in her Department that have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [31782/17]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The manner in which transfer lists are currently held does not allow for the provision of the specific details being sought by the Deputy.

Formal transfer protocols exist only in respect of the Clerical Officer grade. As advised in response to Parliamentary Question No. 2114 which I answered for the Deputy on Tuesday 20 June 2017, each Department maintains transfer lists in respect of its own locations. I provided a table which detailed the number of applications for transfer to the Department's office outside Dublin. While it is open to any Clerical Officer in my Department to apply for a transfer to a location outside Dublin in another Department, details of the number of staff seeking such transfers are not available within the Department.

As you may be aware, Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan has a commitment to develop a new transfer/mobility scheme within the Civil Service. Work on this scheme is ongoing with the Civil Service Management Board, Departments and staff interests.

It is hoped that Phase 1 of the new scheme which will cater for the Clerical and Executive Officer grades will be launched later in the year. Phase 2 of the scheme will be developed following implementation of Phase 1 and will include the general service grades of Higher Executive Officer, Administrative Officer and Assistant Principal Officer.

The new scheme will be centralised and will have the facility to report on numbers on lists per Department and location following its successful launch.

Wind Energy Guidelines

614. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he has taken account of recent cases with regard to future policy on wind turbine construction in view of the settlements made in recent court cases in regard to wind turbine construction and the effects of noise and shadow flicker; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30833/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My predecessor as Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, in conjunction with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment recently announced a "preferred draft approach" to the review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines. A copy of the announcement is available on my Department's website at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/guidelines/wind-energy/coveney-and-naughten-an-nounce-key-development-review-wind-energy-development-guidelines.

The "preferred draft approach" has been developed to address a number of key aspects of the targeted review which include: Sound/Noise, Visual Amenity and Setback Distances, Shadow Flicker, Consultation Obligations on Developers, Community Dividend and Grid Connections.

As part of the overall review, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) will be undertaken on the "proposed draft approach" to the revised Guidelines before they come into effect. This is in accordance with the requirements of EU Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, the SEA Directive. SEA is a process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes which act as frameworks for development consent, prior to their final adoption, with public consultation as part of that process.

It is envisaged that the SEA process will take approximately 9 months. In light of the SEA requirements, it is expected that the Guidelines will be finalised and come into effect in Q1 2018. In the meantime, the current Guidelines remain in force.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts.

I am aware of a number of newspaper articles reporting a recent court case relating to wind turbine noise. However, as this is a legal matter between the operators of a particular wind farm and a number of households living in close proximity to it, it would not be appropriate for me to make any comment on the matter.

Environmental Policy

615. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the situations in which an environmental assessment must be conducted as part of a planning permission to operate a quarry and or landfill site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30887/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Projects requiring an environmental impact assessment (EIA) by a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála (the Board), as appropriate, in respect of an application for planning consent are listed in Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (the Regulations).

Part 1 of Schedule 5 of the Regulations includes projects such as waste disposal installations including landfills for hazardous waste (para 9) and quarries where the surface area exceeds 25 hectares (para 19). Part 2 includes such projects involving the extraction of stone, gravel, sand or clay where the extraction area exceeds 5 hectares (para 2(b)) and installations for disposal of waste with an annual in take greater than 25,000 tonnes (para 11(b)).

These thresholds also apply in the case of applications for a change or extension of such projects or where a change or extension would result in an increase in size greater than 25 per cent of the appropriate threshold. EIA is also required in the consideration of planning applications, other than in the circumstances referred to above, where a development project is likely to have significant effects on the environment, having regard to the criteria set out in Schedule 7 of the Regulations.

With specific reference to quarries, in response to the Judgment of the European Court of Justice in case C-215/06, section 261A was inserted into the Planning and Development Act 2000 (the Act) in 2010. Under this provision, each planning authority was required to examine all existing quarries in its functional area to determine whether EIA, a screening for EIA or an appropriate assessment (AA) should have been, but was not, carried out. Where a planning au-

thority determined that a quarry came within this category, the authority was required to make a further decision in relation to the planning status of the quarry, including registration status. Following on from this, the planning authority had to either take enforcement action, requiring the quarry to cease operations, or direct the quarry operator to apply to the Board for substitute consent under Part XA of the Act, a process involving either EIA or AA, or both, as appropriate.

Renewable Energy Projects

- 616. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the guidelines for the installation of solar farms on farmland which bounds residential areas and residential houses; if assessments or reports have been carried out as to possible health and wellbeing issues associated with solar farms close to residential areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30915/17]
- 617. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to introduce guidelines for solar farm developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30926/17]
- 620. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the national guidelines in place to guide planning permission applications and An Bord Pleanála appeals for solar farm developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31374/17]
- 621. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the various stages and indicative timelines to be undertaken in order to develop guidelines for solar energy planning applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31375/17]
- 626. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his Department has issued guidelines or directives to local authorities in relation to the rollout of solar farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30916/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 616, 617, 620, 621 and 626 together.

There are no specific planning guidelines in place in respect of solar farms. Proposals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in the same manner as other proposed developments. Planning applications are made to the relevant local planning authority with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

Under the Planning and Development Act, each planning authority's development plan must set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned. Section 10 of the Act requires a development plan to include, inter alia, objectives for the provision or facilitation of the provision of infrastructure, including energy facilities, and many local authorities have developed renewable energy strategies for their areas in this context.

In making decisions on planning applications, planning authorities and the Board must consider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, having regard to the provisions of the local development plan, any submissions or observations received and relevant Ministerial or Government policies, including any relevant guidelines issued by my Department. Planning authorities must then make their own decisions based on the specific merits or

otherwise of individual planning applications.

I am satisfied that the planning code is sufficiently robust to facilitate the assessment of individual planning permission applications for solar farm developments. However, the matter will be kept under review, in consultation with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, and his Department - which leads on renewable energy policy - in the context of the Government's White Paper on Energy Policy, published in December 2015, the development of a Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework, as well as the finalisation of a new support scheme for renewable electricity by that Department. I understand that, subject to public consultation and the need to secure Government approval and state aid clearance from the European Commission, it is expected that the new scheme will become operational in 2018.

Development Contributions

618. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the estimated cost to the Exchequer of extending the development contribution rebate scheme to build to rent units by introducing a full rebate on all rental units built in developments of 50 units or more; and the estimated cost for extending the scheme for only units rented at affordable or below market rents. [31000/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The primary objective of the Development Contribution Rebate Scheme is to enhance the viability of the construction and sale of residential housing units at affordable prices in the locations of greatest need. The scheme is a supply-related measure, with the cost of the rebates being funded through my Department.

The rebate will be paid for those units that are completed and sold after 1st January 2016 and before 31 December 2017 and that meet the conditions of the scheme, details of which are set out in the Circular letter launching the scheme which issued from my Department, which is available at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/search/category/planning?query=circular+2015&=Apply.

The scheme already caters for residential units whether for occupation, lease or rent.

Development Contributions

619. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the estimated cost of the development contribution rebate scheme to date in 2017; the number of projects and units availing of the scheme; and the primary reasons for the low take up of the scheme. [31001/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A development contribution rebate scheme featured as part of the Government's housing package, entitled "Stabilising Rents, Boosting Supply", which was announced by the previous Government in November 2015. The primary objective of the scheme was to enhance the viability of the construction and sale of residential housing units at affordable prices in the locations of greatest need. Details of the scheme are available in Circular letter PL 13/2015, which issued from my Department to the relevant local authorities, and which is available on my Department's website at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/search/category/planning/sub-type/circular/topic/development-management?query.

Returns to date from the local authorities concerned indicate that there has been limited uptake in relation to the scheme.

- Cork City Council, Cork County Council and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council have reported no uptake to date.
- Fingal County Council estimates overall costs for 2017 at €6.8 million to cover rebates on 798 units spread across 9 developments.
- South Dublin County Council estimate overall costs of approximately €3.5 million to €4 million to cover rebates on expressions of interest received for 485 units spread across 7 developments.
- Only one application has been received to date by Dublin City Council. It is for a part development and cannot be processed, until the total number of units exceeds 50.

A number of reasons are cited by the local authorities concerned for the low uptake, including -

- the low sale price threshold under the scheme, and
- the minimum scheme threshold of 50 units.

However, these are important design features of the scheme, in order to ensure delivery of homes at affordable prices and to encourage the delivery of housing on a larger scale.

Questions Nos. 620 and 621 answered with Question No. 616.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

622. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will report on the progress with EUROSTAT in respect of allowing credit union investment of surplus funds in social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31498/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The agreed Programme for a Partnership Government recognises the potential role that credit unions can play in housing finance and supports the efforts of the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank to gradually lift current lending restrictions as appropriate, including for housing. The Programme further provides for consideration, with all stakeholders, as to how credit unions can support the delivery of social housing.

Credit Union bodies have set out proposed means by which funding could be provided by credit unions to Approved Housing Bodies for the development of social housing. My Department and the Department of Finance have met with the credit union representative bodies on a number of occasions to examine how credit unions can assist in the area of financing social housing delivery.

Conscious of the independence of the Central Bank in its regulatory role in respect of credit unions, bilateral engagement has taken place between my Department and the Department of Finance to consider the potential regulatory and legislative implications of credit union involvement in the social housing sector. Both Departments have also met with the Central Bank to provide information of a technical nature in relation to social housing funding arrangements. This was with a view to assisting the Central Bank in understanding how these arrangements

operate, as it deals with issues arising from proposals put forward for credit union investment in social housing.

I note the publication in May 2017 by the Central Bank of the Consultation on Potential Changes for the Investment Framework for Credit Unions. The potential changes that are provided for would allow for investment by credit unions in the delivery of social housing by the larger Approved Housing Bodies which are categorised as 'Tier 3' under the voluntary regulation framework for the AHB sector

Ultimately, the funding mechanisms required will have to be put in place in the first instance by the credit union, with the support of their members and with the agreement of the Central Bank. My Department will continue to contribute to this process by providing necessary technical advice and support.

The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme provides a means whereby properties can be built or bought by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) with the combined use of State and private funding, and leased by AHBs and Local Authorities from private providers, for the provision of social housing. This scheme is underpinned by a lease and other legal agreements. These provide that rental payments are made by the State over an agreed long-term time period, typically 20 years. In return, the housing unit is made available for social housing purposes.

Changes are now being proposed to this scheme in order to facilitate larger institutional private investors to become involved in the financing of social housing. Subject to other regulatory requirements being met, this could include credit unions.

The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) is acting as financial advisor to my Department in this work and has undertaken market engagement in the development of the scheme. The new arrangements arising from this process are currently being tested to ensure that there is no negative impact arising from how they are viewed and treated in respect of the State's General Government Balance. As part of this process, the proposed changes are being examined by Eurostat. Work on the scheme is well advanced, with details expected to be announced in the coming months.

Local Authority Finances

- 623. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to tackle the growing unsustainable reliance of the local authority sector on commercial rates for its income; and his further plans to redress this imbalance through increasing central government allocations to the sector. [31501/17]
- 624. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to reform and modernise the commercial rates system in order to rebalance local authority financing and reduce the burden on business. [31502/17]
- 625. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the commercial rates collection process; and his views on whether a centralised model either through the Office of the Revenue Commissioners or a lead authority approach in which one local authority provides the service on behalf of the other local authorities is appropriate. [31505/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 623 to 625, inclusive, together.

Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on any property used for commercial purposes in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation pursuant to the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. The levying and collection of rates are matters for each individual local authority, as are the costs of collection.

Commercial rates form an important element of the funding of all local authorities. However, the legislative basis for the levying of rates is spread over a number of enactments, some dating back to the 19th century. Many of the provisions are outdated and not suitable for business trends in the modern era. My Department has developed legislative proposals to modernise and consolidate the legislation governing commercial rates. The Government approved the drafting of a Rates Bill at its meeting on 11 April 2017. These proposals will be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny in due course.

The Debt Management Project Implementation Board, on which my Department was represented, was established by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform in February 2015, to progress the recommendations of the Debt Management Review, which was published in 2014. The Project Implementation Board concluded its work in 2016 and recommended that a Central Collection Agency was not justified at this time. This was due to the fact that the improvements which had been made by the Public Sector Bodies (PSBs) and the targets set for those PSBs for the period to 2018 were close to those that might be expected of a Central Collection Agency.

The funding system that applies to local authorities is a complex one, as authorities derive their income from a variety of sources including commercial rates, charges for goods and services, funding from my Department, and from other Departments and agencies for a range of activities. While capital funding levels declined in line with national economic circumstances, they have now started to increase significantly again.

The monetary amount of each income source to local authorities in the years 2010 - 2015 is set out in Table 1 while Table 2 sets out each revenue income source as a proportion of the total. Table 3 sets out the total capital income over the same period.

Table 1.

| Income | Year | | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Revenue Income sources | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
| Revenue Income sources | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
| Goods & Services | €1.52bn | €1.482bn | €1.352bn | €1.38bn | €1.394bn | €1.304bn |
| Commer- cial rates | €1.43bn | €1.449bn | €1.497bn | €1.494bn | €1.5bn | €1.496bn |
| Income from local sources | €2.95bn | €2.931bn | €2.849bn | €2.874bn | €2.894bn | €2.8bn |
| Grants & subsidies | €1.225bn | €1.195bn | €939m | €850m | €871m | €878m |
| Other in- come* | €923m | €865m | €791m | €794m | €355m | €386m |

| Income | Year | | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Income from external sources | 1 | €2.06bn | €1.73bn | €1.644bn | €1.226bn | €1.264bn |
| Total In- come | €5.098bn | €4.991bn | €4.579bn | €4.518bn | €4.12bn | €4.064bn |

Table 2.

| Income | Year | | | | | |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Revenue Income sources | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
| Revenue Income sources | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
| Goods & Services | 30% | 30% | 30% | 31% | 34% | 32% |
| Commer- cial rates | 28% | 29% | 33% | 33% | 36% | 37% |
| Income from local sources | 58% | 59% | 63% | 64% | 70% | 69% |
| Grants & subsidies | 24% | 24% | 20% | 19% | 21% | 22% |
| Other in- come* | 18% | 17% | 17% | 17% | 9% | 9% |

^{*} Other income includes: the General Purpose Grants (GPG) which were paid to local authorities until 2014; Local Property Tax (LPT) allocations which commenced in 2015 and replaced GPGs; the County Charge which ceased in 2014 when local authorities and the former town councils merged; and Pension Related Deductions which local authorities retained as income from 2009 to 2015.

Table 3.

| Capital Income | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | €2.898bn | €2.516bn | €1.805bn | €1.396bn | €1.154bn | €1.311bn |

It is important to note that, while income from commercial rates in 2015 makes up an increased proportion of local authorities' income compared to previous years, the quantum of rates income has not increased significantly in monetary terms.

Central Government funding of local authorities similarly presents a complex picture, with transfers, both current and capital, coming from a wide range of Departments and Offices, not solely from my Department, for a variety of purposes. Some streams of funding are delivered directly from funding departments to local authorities, while others are routed through departmental agencies.

The Comptroller and Auditor General reports on the Central Government funding of local authorities as part of his Annual Report. This report provides an overview of the funds flowing

from and through central government sources to local authorities and the purposes for which funds have been provided. The latest report, for 2015, is available at the following link;

www.audgen.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?/documents/annualreports/2015/Report/En/Chapter4.pdf.

I am satisfied that the current funding model is enabling local authorities to meet an appropriate level of service provision across the State, from the most rural and sparsely populated areas to the large urban centres. As local authorities vary significantly from one another in terms of size, population, public service demands, infrastructure and income sources, my Department keeps the funding system under constant review and works with all local authorities to ensure the local government sector can meet existing and emerging challenges.

Question No. 626 answered with Question No. 616.

Homeless Persons Data

627. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if persons residing in direct provision centres are considered in need of housing; if they are included in homelessness figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30786/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The households concerned are not entitled to Social Housing Support (SHS) as they do not have residency rights in the State. It is only after their application for residency has been successfully assessed that they can be considered for SHS.

The assessment of applications for SHS is the responsibility of the relevant local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations. There is a two pronged approach to the assessment that involves, firstly, an assessment of eligibility, followed by an assessment of need. The determination of a household's housing need is arrived at by local authorities in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011.

The official monthly homelessness reports are produced using data provided by housing authorities via the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), the single integrated national data information system on State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements overseen by housing authorities. Therefore they do not capture details of individuals in other accommodation arrangements which are not overseen by housing authorities. Information on the number of persons in Direct Provision are available from the Department of Justice.

Seaweed Harvesting Licences

- 628. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the role he and his Department have in the licensing of kelp; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30795/17]
- 629. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the process for licensing for kelp is the same for commercial kelp as it is for smaller groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30796/17]
- 630. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the mechanical harvest of 1,860 acres of

kelp in Bantry Bay; if the licence was properly advertised at local and national level; if public consultation took place; if an environmental impact assessment was or is to be taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30797/17]

- 631. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he or his officials have policy concerns regarding the impact mechanical harvesting of over 100 acres of kelp in Bantry Bay will have on juvenile fish, lobster and other species; if a study has been taken on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30799/17]
- 632. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he or his officials have concerns regarding the impact of over 1,000 acres in Bantry Bay being used for a mechanical harvest of kelp will have on angling tourism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30800/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 628 to 632, inclusive, together.

The role of my Department in relation to the harvesting of seaweed is to regulate the activity in accordance with the Foreshore Act 1933, as amended. All applications, regardless of whether by an individual or a company, are assessed in accordance with the provisions of the Act and any environmental legislation in force at the given time. In regulating this activity there is a need to ensure, in so far as possible, that the resource is managed appropriately with the twin aims of protecting the marine environment and allowing for a sustainable level of harvesting of seaweed.

The Deputy's questions relate to a specific license granted to an indigenous Irish company . In 2008, the company submitted a foreshore license application to harvest in Kenmare Bay. No licence issued in respect of the Kenmare Bay application. However, the Marine Licence Vetting Committee, a group of marine experts who advise the Minister of the day on the technical and environmental aspects of foreshore applications, recommended that any future application by the company, should focus on an area outside of a Special Area of Conservation and include a commitment to conduct a detailed programme of monitoring.

The license to harvest in Bantry Bay, originally received in June 2009, met with these and other criteria and was processed in the same thorough way as other foreshore lease and license applications received at that time. Normal public consultation procedures were followed with the application being advertised in a local newspaper (The Southern Star) and it was also made available for inspection at a local Garda Station (Bantry) for a period of 21 days. No submissions were received from members of the public during the consultation period.

In line with the usual procedures, the application was also circulated to various bodies for their views and input. Submissions were received from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Underwater Archaeology Unit of the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Marine Survey Office, the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority, the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board, the Central Fisheries Board and the Marine Institute. The Marine Licence Vetting Committee considered all material pertaining to the application and concluded that subject to compliance with specific conditions the proposed harvesting was not likely to have a significant negative impact on the marine environment. This would include no significant impact on juvenile fish, lobster and other species.

The Marine Licence Vetting Committee recommended that a licence should issue and approval in principle was given by the then Minister in 2011. The final legal papers, the licence between the State and the company giving effect to the decision were completed by the then Min-

ister in 2014.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive applies to a wide range of public and private projects. It is a mandatory requirement for project types listed in Annex I of the Directive. For project types listed in Annex II, it is up to the consenting authority to determine if an EIS is required by carrying out EIA screening based on criteria set out in the Directive. An EIA may also be required where the thresholds set out in the Directive are not met (sub-threshold EIA) or where the project or activity is proposed to be carried out in a Natura 2000 site.

If the consenting authority determines that the EIA Directive applies to a project, it requires that an applicant must prepare and submit an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), following which, the consent authority would carry out an EIA. In this case, the proposed project was not within a Natura 2000 site, was not of a class set out in Annex I of the Directive nor does it fall into Annex II. An EIS was not required and while it was open to the Minister at the time to carry out an EIA, it was not considered necessary.

The licence allows the company to harvest specific quantities of specific species of kelp seaweed on a rotational basis in Bantry Bay. The licenced area is split into five distinct harvesting zones and not all of the seaweed in the bay will be harvested. The total area licenced is 750 hectares (roughly 1,850 acres). The licence provides for a four year rotation of zones with a stand by zone only to be harvested if weather is adverse (99 hectares/240 acres). On average, some 175 hectares/432 acres will be subject to harvest annually, less than 1% of the area of the bay.

The rotational harvesting plan, ensures that only a portion of the bay is harvested each year. To strengthen the sustainability of the harvesting plan for the licenced area within the bay, the harvesting is also subject to a strict monitoring programme, and requires approval of a baseline study prior to commencement of operations. All costs associated with the baseline study which was carried out in September 2016 and costs associated with the monitoring programme were or will be fully borne by the licensee.

The monitoring programme includes comparisons between harvested and non-harvested areas in each zone for density and height of kelp together with quantitative measurements of flora and fauna prior to commencement of harvesting (2016) and in years 3 (2019) and 5 (2021) for 15 areas within each zone.

All details of the application and determination are available on my Department's website at http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/foreshore/applications/bioatlantis-ltd.

Local Authority Members

633. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the position regarding the ongoing situation regarding local authority members terms and conditions. [30879/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to review the supports provided to councillors, in consultation with representative bodies, to enable councillors to continue their important work.

My predecessor as Minister met last year with representatives of the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) and the Local Authority Members Association (LAMA) to discuss the view of their members that positive consideration should be given to improving the range

of supports available.

In January this year, taking account of the additional workload on councillors since the 2014 local government reforms were introduced, the then Minister announced important changes to better support councillors in their role as public representatives. Following my appointment as Minister, I am considering the issue of supports for local authority members, with a view to concluding the matter as quickly as possible.

Housing Assistance Payments

634. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the specific allocation of funding that is planned to be accessed in order to fulfil the offered incentive to landlords to sign up to the housing assistance payment scheme in circumstances in which applicants on the Dublin housing lists are able to seek approval and payment of two months rent in advance and a month's deposit to a landlord; the other regions this funding is accessible by; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30930/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Exchequer funding for the HAP scheme increased from €57 million in 2016 to €152.7 million for 2017. This increase is in order to meet the continuing costs of existing HAP households, and the costs of supporting an additional 15,000 households to be supported by HAP in 2017. The HAP scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies.

Under the HAP scheme, eligible households source their own accommodation in the private rented sector. The tenancy is between the tenant and the landlord and is governed by the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended).

While eligible homeless households may source accommodation for themselves, a dedicated placement team, the Place Finder Service, assists homeless households in areas where there is a high demand for properties but low levels of supply making the rental market very challenging, and where the provision of such a service is justified. Currently, a Homeless Placefinder Service is operated in the Dublin region by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, and in Cork City Council area.

The Place Finder Service seeks out potential properties suitable for households currently identified as homeless. The service liaises with individual households to establish their specific needs and to ensure that any additional supports which may be needed are put in place, it establishes relationships with local property agents and landlords and it assists the household in securing the tenancy. Additional discretion of up to 50% above HAP rent limits is available to the Dublin local authorities to assist in housing homeless households in the Dublin Region. The Place Finder Services can also pay a deposit and rent in advance on behalf of the tenant, meaning that that homeless households are provided with the best chance of finding a new home with the security that HAP provides.

In cases where a tenant, currently on a local authority waiting list, wishes to access rented accommodation with HAP support in another local authority area, I have directed local authorities to provide that HAP tenants continue to be dealt with by their originating local authority. However, the rent limits will be those that apply in the local authority where the property is situated. The originating local authority will engage with the relevant new local authority to facilitate eligible requests for inter-authority movement. Where homeless households have sourced or been assisted by the Place Finder Service in sourcing accommodation outside the

Dublin area, the relevant rate of support is based on the rent limits that apply in the local authority where the property is situated. The DRHE have been advised to consult with the new local authority in relation to the appropriate level of support that should be provided. However, the Place Finder Service can still pay a deposit and rent in advance on behalf of the tenant.

In order to maintain the equitable treatment of all housing applicants, inter-authority movement for HAP applicants is based on the current Social Housing Eligibility Income Bands, i.e. movement will only be facilitated across local authorities with Income Bands that are equal or higher; or where shared areas of choice are already operated.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review, including the operation of inter authority movement. In general, I am satisfied with the operation of the HAP scheme and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

635. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the assertion of his predecessor that the social housing capital programme is adequately financed in view of the scale of the housing crisis, years of drastic underspending and the fact that the capital housing budget is still 72% below 2008 spending levels or 65% below the historical average levels for 2004 to 2009. [30945/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): While I fully acknowledge that funding for social housing delivery was severely constrained for a number of years, given the economic circumstances prevailing at the time, under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Government has committed funding of €5.35 billion to accelerate the delivery of 47,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisitions and leasing, over the period to 2021. In addition, €226 million is being provided for the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund through investment in key enabling infrastructure.

This $\[\in \]$ 5.35 billion investment comprises some $\[\in \]$ 4.5 billion in capital funding and $\[\in \]$ 844 million in support of programmes funded from current expenditure. Overall, over 40% of the available capital fiscal space for the 2017 to 2021 period is being assigned to housing. In total, $\[\in \]$ 1.3billion is being made available for housing-related purposes thus year.

The good progress being made under the social housing capital programme is clearly evident from the latest Status Report on Social Housing Construction Projects, which is available at the following link: http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/. The report shows that there is a substantial construction pipeline in place which will see over 10,000 new social houses being built over the coming years across 600 different projects. These projects are funded under a range of initiatives such as local authority construction, rapid delivery projects, regeneration programmes and construction developments under the Capital Assistance Scheme and the Capital Advance Leasing Facility for funding projects by Approved Housing Bodies.

The scale of the construction pipeline as at end quarter 1 in 2017, represents a major escalation in the social housing build programme and more projects are being added on an ongoing basis to ensure delivery on the Rebuilding Ireland targets.

Water and Sewerage Schemes Funding

636. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the provision which has been made in 2017 under the rural water programme; the facility which has been put in place for local authorities to submit projects for funding in 2017; and if submissions have been received to date. [30956/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's new Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2016 - 2018 was developed through a working group of key stakeholders involving local authorities, the Water Services Transition Office, Irish Water, the National Federation of Group Water Schemes as well as my Department.

Under the new programme there are six different funding measures as follows:

- Measure 1 Environmental and public health compliance (group water sector): This measure is aimed at improving water quality in existing Group Water Schemes so that they can achieve compliance with the quality parameters of the Drinking Water Regulations 2014.
- Measure 2 Enhancement of existing schemes (group water sector): This measure supports projects to make existing Group Water Schemes more efficient in their operation (e.g. water conservation, network upgrades and source protection).
- Measure 3 Rural development (group water sector): This measure supports social and economic development in rural towns and villages and their hinterlands by providing new group water schemes where public water supply schemes or private wells are not an option.
- Measure 4 Transition of group schemes to Public Water and Waste Water Sector (Irish Water): This measure enables group water and sewerage schemes, where they wish to do with agreement of Irish Water, transition to the public water and waste water sector.
- **Measure 5 Innovation and Research:** This measure is aimed at issues in the rural water sector which given the major transition of water services in Ireland, require new and innovative approaches.
- Measure 6 Individual wells (more commonly called private wells) and on-site waste-water treatment systems (more commonly called septic tanks): This measure is aimed at allowing householders that are dependent on these services to obtain funding support for their improvement.

In May 2017, my Department invited local authorities to submit bids under Measures 1 and 2 of the programme. Bids for Measures 3, 4 and 5 were already invited and approvals made in 2016 on a scheme/project specific basis for the duration of the programme. Measure 6 is a demand led initiative which does not require a specific funding allocation.

In order to maintain momentum in the programme, interim funding allocations issued to local authorities on 13 June 2017 for Measures 2, 3, 4 and 5. Bids under Measure 1 will now be examined by an Expert Panel convened by my Department for approval recommendations which will be on a scheme specific basis. Allocations under Measure 2 are based on a block grant as in previous years. Final funding allocations for all measures will issue to local authorities as quickly as possible.

637. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to grant funding in relation to the cases of persons (details supplied); and if his attention has been drawn to the ongoing hardship being imposed on the persons concerned. [30978/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Ballyduff Upper Group Water Scheme, a small existing three house scheme located on the Cork – Waterford border, was included by Cork County Council in its 2016 bids under Measure 3 of the Multi-Annual Programme Rural Water 2016 – 2018. This measure supports social and economic development in rural towns and villages and their hinterlands by providing new group water schemes where public water supply schemes or private wells are not an option.

An Expert Panel was convened by my Department to examine the 2016 bids from local authorities for projects under a number of the programme's measures, including Measure 3, and to make recommendations to the Department on funding. However, following examination of the bids under this measure by the Panel, the Ballyduff Group Water Scheme was not recommended for funding under the programme. My Department accepted the recommendations of the Panel in full in making final overall funding allocations in 2016 to local authorities.

A copy of the Expert Panel's report and consideration of all proposals under the Programme for 2016 for are available on my Department's website at the following link:

www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/group-water-schemes-and-rural-water-issues.

In May 2017, my Department invited local authorities to submit bids for schemes for the period 2017-2018 for certain measures including under Measure 1 which is aimed at improving water quality in existing group water schemes to achieve compliance with the parameters of the Drinking Water Regulations, 2014. While it is a matter for Cork County Council to consider which schemes to include in its bids, the Council has not included Ballyduff Upper Group Water Scheme.

Local Authority Funding

638. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the way the taking in charge initiative measure two funding allocations were calculated for each local authority when the funds were allocated in July 2016; if the allocations were intended to be enough to complete the necessary works; and if local authorities requested or were allocated further funding. [30980/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department established a Steering Group, consisting of representatives from Irish Water, the Environmental Protection Agency as well as from within my own Department, to oversee the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative, including funding allocations.

The Steering Group selected the following seven local authorities for demonstration projects - Cork, Clare, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Tipperary and Wexford - as these represented about 70% of problematic housing estates nationwide served by Developer Provided Infrastructure (DPI).

Projects demonstrating the capacity for potential delivery of cost effective sustainable solutions in 2016 and for subsequent taking-in-charge (TIC) and where relevant for asset transfers to Irish Water, were considered to be the most eligible for selection.

Housing estates submitted were selected, using the following criteria:

- Size of eligible estates proposed to be resolved,
- Proposed design solutions, including the provision of any effluent licence and compliance certificates as necessary,
- Cost of proposed solution, including ongoing operational/maintenance costs and any additional funding from other sources,
 - Procurement and work method proposals for completion of works, and
- Project timescale for completion to TIC standard, including hand-over to Irish Water where appropriate.

The total funding allocation under Measure 2 was approximately €2 million and was mainly aimed at completing works. However, in the case of one large and complex scheme, NTI-CI funding assisted in investigating optimal solutions rather than works, with alternate local authority or other funding being required to implement such solutions.

My Department did receive some late requests from local authorities in early 2017, seeking funding to assist in the taking-in-charge of other estates, where developers are no longer operating and where no bonds exist. However, given that the NTICI was never intended as providing a rolling annual programme of funding to facilitate taking-in-charge, but was instead intended to pilot new working methods between relevant stakeholders in accelerating the process, my Department was not in a position to facilitate such funding requests.

A report on the 2016 NTICI Programme is currently being finalised by my Department and I intend to publish the report over the Summer, which will include findings and recommendations on sustaining progress on the taking-in-charge issue.

Local Authority Funding

639. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the funds currently owed by his Department to Meath County Council. [30981/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I assume the question refers to the payment of Local Property Tax from the Local Government Fund.

The Local Property Tax allocation for Meath County Council in 2017 is epsilon13,954,243. To date Meath County Council has received epsilon6,977,121.60. A further epsilon6,977,121.60 will be paid by the end of this year.

Homeless Persons Supports

640. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the way in which the place finder service works; the way in which homeless persons or persons at risk of homelessness access this service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30987/17]

Murphy): A specific and targeted service for homeless households who can benefit from the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme has been available across the four housing authorities in the Dublin Region since February 2015, and is being implemented by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). The focus is the transitioning of qualified households from emergency accommodation into private rented tenancies. However, support is also provided to prevent households from entering emergency accommodation and homeless services. In addition, a Homeless Placefinder Service is also operating in Cork City since May 2017 and is focused on moving households out of emergency accommodation, primarily.

While eligible households may source accommodation for themselves, the dedicated placement team, the Homeless Placefinder Service, engages directly with property owners and supports qualified households to find suitable tenancies, and to ensure that any additional supports that may be needed are put in place. Homeless specific HAP in Dublin encompasses additional flexibility to exceed the specific rent limit by up to 50%; in Cork this flexibility is up to 20% above the maximum rent limit.

The Service has relationships with local estate agents and property owners and can identify properties quickly. In addition, the Placefinder Service can support homeless households to secure a tenancy by providing upfront payments for deposits and rent. The cost of these deposits is recouped by the Department of Social Protection in respect of eligible households, and the HAP Shared Service Centre (SSC) facilitates the payment of HAP rent payments to landlords, on behalf of local authorities, as is the case ordinarily in the operation of the HAP scheme.

There are currently more than 1,600 formerly homeless households whose needs are being supported by the homeless specific HAP supports in the Dublin region, with an average of 32 additional households a week in 2017 being supported by homeless HAP in Dublin.

Foreshore Licence Applications

641. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when a decision will be made in respect of a 35 year foreshore lease application (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30994/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The compilation of the Marine Licence Vetting Committee (MLVC) Report which is a key element of the foreshore decision-making process is now nearing completion. I expect the report to be approved shortly and for the application in question to be submitted for a decision in the coming weeks.

Electoral Reform

642. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will report on plans to allow UK citizens who have been living here for a significant amount of time a vote in referenda; and if he is examining voting rights for UK citizens as part of Brexit. [30995/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Only Irish citizens are entitled to vote at referendums, in accordance with Article 47.3 of the Constitution. I have no plans to seek to amend the Constitution to give the right to vote in referendums to any other persons.

British citizens, who are ordinarily resident in the State and are 18 years or older, may vote at Dáil, European Parliament and local elections if they are entered in the register of electors. For future European elections, the specific impacts of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union on European citizenship and the right to vote at elections to the European Parliament will ultimately be a matter to be determined within the negotiating process that has commenced between the United Kingdom and the European Union under Article 50 of the Treaty. As these negotiations have only recently commenced, it is not possible, at this point in time, to state what arrangements will apply into the future between the United Kingdom and the European Union in the matter of European citizenship and the rights pertaining thereto.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

- 643. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the infrastructure projects that have received a contribution from the local infrastructure housing activation fund. [30996/17]
- 675. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if grant agreements in respect of the 34 approved applications under the LIHAF have been concluded; if so, the projected number of units on each site; the projected number of affordable units on each site; the projected number of social housing units on each site, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31339/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 643 and 675 together.

The aim of the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) is to relieve critical infrastructural blockages in order to enable the accelerated delivery of housing on key development sites in urban areas with high demand for housing.

On 28 March 2017, funding was announced for 34 projects under LIHAF. Funding will be provided to Local Authorities to build public infrastructure such as roads, bridges and public amenities through a public procurement process and these projects will be key to the delivery of 23,000 housing units over the next four years, with a longer term projection of up to 70,000 units as the associated sites are fully built out.

The full list of approved projects, with the projected housing yield for each site, is available on my Department's website at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/housing/rebuilding-ire-land/local-infrastructure-housing-activation-fund-approved-projects. Under Part V provisions, some 10% of the housing to be delivered will be for social housing purposes. Where sites are in public ownership, up to 30% may be for either social housing or potentially housing for the elderly or those with special needs, according to the particular needs of that Local Authority.

The affordability dividend in relation to associated private housing is in the form of a cost reduction proportionate to the LIHAF contribution. The developer may provide a percentage of the houses at a higher cost reduction or spread it out over all of the associated housing to be provided by 2021.

Following approval in principle, the relevant Local Authorities are engaging in negotiations with developers to obtain agreements in relation to land transfer, housing delivery timelines and cost reductions. It is expected that the Local Authorities will conclude agreements with developers this month. Drawdown of funding cannot occur until the grant agreements are in place.

4 July 2017

Legislative Measures

644. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the status of amendments (details supplied) regarding the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016; and if he has consulted with the Minister of State with special responsibility for housing and urban development on these amendments. [30998/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 is still being considered at Report Stage in the Dáil. The amendments referred to are connected to the proposed Office of the Planning Regulator.

In line with the commitment made at Report Stage, my Department is examining the amendments proposed and has had productive discussions with the Department under whose remit this falls. I understand there is a broad agreement on the approach but work is ongoing in relation to the legal and technical drafting aspects. I expect to bring forward an amendment to the Bill in the Seanad, which will appropriately address the issues involved.

Building Regulations

645. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the regulations in place regarding accessibility in private sector housing developments to ensure the needs of persons with disabilities are met in the provision of private sector housing; and if he will provide copies of relevant regulations or legislation. [31033/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): All new buildings must comply with the legally enforceable minimum performance standards set out in the Second Schedule of the Building Regulations 1997-2017. In this context, the Building Regulations (Part M) Amendment Regulations 2010, S.I. No. 513 of 2010, and the accompanying Technical Guidance Document M - Access and Use (2010), which came into effect on 1 January 2012, set out the minimum statutory requirements applicable to new buildings, and to existing buildings where new works, a material alteration or a material change of use is proposed.

The requirements of Part M aim to ensure that regardless of age, size or disability:

- (a) new buildings other than dwellings (including multi-unit developments) are accessible and usable;
- (b) extensions to existing buildings other than dwellings are, where practicable, accessible and useable;
- (c) material alterations to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable;
- (d) certain changes of use to existing buildings other than dwellings increase the accessibility and usability of existing buildings, where practicable; and
 - (e) new dwellings are visitable.

Part M of the Building Regulations aims to foster an inclusive approach to the design and construction of the built environment. While the Part M requirements may be regarded as a statutory minimum level of provision, the accompanying technical guidance encourages build-

ing owners and designers to have regard to the design philosophy of universal design and to consider making additional provisions where practicable and appropriate.

A copy of the Building Regulations (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2010 may be accessed at www.housing.gov.ie/housing/building-standards/tgd-part-m-access-and-use/si-513-2010-building-regulations-tgd-part-m.

My Department has also issued guidelines on 'Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities' which may be accessed at www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/FileDownLoad%2C1979%2Cen.pdf.

These guidelines provide guidance on accessibility and adaptability in scheme layout and design and also dwelling design with the aim of ensuring ease of access and circulation for all residents, including people with impaired mobility.

Homeless Persons Data

646. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 2,100 of 20 June 2017, if these persons will now be included in his Department's monthly homeless statistics in view of the fact it is now sourced and funded by Dublin City Council under section 10 of the Housing Act 1988 (details supplied). [31037/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Official homeless reports are published on my Department's website and can be accessed using the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data.

These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS), the single integrated national data information system on State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements overseen by housing authorities. These reports are published on a monthly basis capturing details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities.

With effect from 22 May 2017, the Department of Social Protection's New Communities Unit have no role in the placement or administration of emergency accommodation. All placements into emergency accommodation overseen by housing authorities, irrespective of nationality, are now completed by the relevant housing authority and those persons/households will be included in all future PASS monthly homeless reports published on my Department's website.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

647. **Deputy Eoin O Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if the place finders service that was promised to assist programme refugees find private rented accommodation has been established; and if so, if he will allow the 399 persons with a form of status that reside in State provided accommodation to access the place finders service in order to find private rented accommodation. [31051/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, an opera-

tional sub-group under the auspices of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) Task-force, composed of all relevant Departments of State and other bodies such as representatives of local authorities and the Irish Red Cross, was established to support the process of housing programme refugees referred to by the Deputy. This sub-group is co-chaired by my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality.

Any person assessed as eligible for social housing is immediately eligible for housing support through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme.

Arrangements are being put in place at local authority level across the country to support the identification of units and housing for programme refugees, including through HAP. Such housing solutions are being funded from the €5.35billion approved by Government under Rebuilding Ireland. It should be noted that a range of other supports are also being made available at local level to support the integration of the families concerned into their new communities. My Department continues to work with key stakeholders in this area, as we finalise the necessary arrangements.

It should be noted that eligibility for consideration for social housing support for non-EEA nationals without refugee status requires such persons to be able to show that they have 5 year reckonable residence (out of the last 8 years) or the potential to have such residence, as well as a current valid stamp.

Legislative Measures

648. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to publish the Water Services (Amendment) Bill 2017 in June or July 2017 and to seek to have the Bill passed before the 2017 summer recess; and if not, the implications for the current suspension of domestic water charges. [31074/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services was published on 12 April 2017 and approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Government approved the priority drafting of a Bill to give effect to the relevant recommendations set out in the Committee's report on 30 May 2017. My Department is working with the Attorney General's Office on the drafting of the Bill with a view to it being published as soon as possible.

The Water Services (Amendment) Act 2016 provided for the suspension of domestic water charges. Charges are currently suspended until 31 July 2017. If necessary the period of suspension can be extended.

Homeless Persons Data

- 649. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if he will provide a county breakdown of homeless figures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31079/17]
- 650. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of instances in 2016 and to date in 2017 in which a local authority has provided emergency accommodation for persons presenting as homeless, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31080/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 649 and 650 together.

My Department publishes official homeless reports on a monthly basis. These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). These reports capture details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities and include data on a regional and county basis.

These reports are published on my Department's website and can be accessed using the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data.

Fire Safety

651. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of inspections carried out by fire officers in each local authority over the past five years, by county; the number of properties that have failed these inspections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31081/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Local authorities have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under a range of legislation including the Building Control Act 1990, the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003 and the Dangerous Substances Acts 1972 and 1979, all of which may be relevant in relation to fire safety arrangements in properties, other than those specifically excluded under the Acts.

Under the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003 local authorities are designated as fire authorities and overall details in relation to inspections and notices issued by fire services from 2011 up to 2015 are available on my Department's website at the link - 2016 information is currently being compiled and should be available shortly: www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/current/sub-topic/statistics-fire-prevention/sub-type/fire/type/statistics?query.

Section 20 of the Fire Services Act, 1981 provides that the appropriate fire authority may serve a Fire Safety Notice on the owner or occupier of any building which appears to the authority to be a potentially dangerous building. Section 20(2)(a) of the Act provides that a Fire Safety Notice in relation to a building may prohibit the use of a building or part of a building for any of the purposes specified in the notice. Section 20(2)(b) of the Act provides that a Fire Safety Notice in relation to a building may prohibit the use of the building, or a specified part of the building, for any of the purposes specified in the notice unless or until specified precautions are taken to the satisfaction of the fire authority; whether by the provision in the building of specified appliances or fittings or by the execution of specified structural alterations or additions to the building, or by the removal from the building of furniture, furnishings, fittings or any other material or thing, or by the doing in relation to the building or its contents of any other thing whatsoever.

Section 20(6) of the Act provides that a Fire Safety Notice may specify a time-frame under which remedial actions, such as those set out above, must be completed. Failure to comply with the requirements of a Fire Safety Notice is an offence under the Act and any person found guilty may be subject to a range of penalties as set out in the Act.

Section 20(8) of the Act provides that each fire authority shall keep at its offices a register of Fire Safety Notices served by it and the register shall be open to inspection by any person at all reasonable times. Information on the details of individual Fire Safety Notices served by local authorities are not held by my Department but may be obtained directly from the relevant local

authority.

Emergency Accommodation Data

652. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the moneys spent by each local authority to provide emergency accommodation each year for the past three years. [31082/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department does not fund any homeless service directly but provides funding to housing authorities towards the operational costs of homeless accommodation and related services under Section 10 of the Housing Act, 1988. Under 'Section 10' funding arrangements, housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of services from their own resources. Furthermore, housing authorities may also incur additional expenditure on homeless related services outside of the Section 10 funding arrangements. Therefore, the exact amounts spent by housing authorities on emergency accommodation are a matter for those authorities.

Section 10 Exchequer funding is provided through my Department to housing authorities on a regional basis. Drawdown for 2014, 2015 and 2016 is set out on a regional basis in the table below.

| Funding under Section 10 of the Housin | ig Act, | 1988 |
|---|---------|------|
|---|---------|------|

| Region | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Dublin | €35,322,223 | €48,270,201 | €68,627,075 |
| Mid-East | €928,489 | €1,716,245 | €2,746,651 |
| Midland | €649,707 | €805,995 | €1,109,748 |
| Mid-West | €3,405,060 | €3,499,898 | €3,500,000 |
| North-East | €879,963 | €996,849 | €1,493,336 |
| North-West | €348,879 | €387,643 | €411,946 |
| South-East | €1,818,969 | €2,394,619 | €3,041,840 |
| South-West | €4,307,772 | €5,000,686 | €5,375,609 |
| West | €1,544,712 | €1,698,834 | €2,370,295 |

Housing Policy

653. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of new dwellings which will be required each year over the coming 15 years based on headship rates and demographic projections and taking account of obsolescence, in view of under-supply of new housing compared to demand for the past number of years. [31084/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, which is available at the following link http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Rebuilding-Ireland_Action-Plan.pdf, is a multi-stranded, action-oriented approach to achieving the Government's housing objectives, as set down in the Programme for a Partnership Government. At its heart, it aims to increase housing supply, across all tenures, to 25,000 homes per year by 2021. The 25,000 target was the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) estimate of the housing requirement based on demographic change, household formation and a

level of obsolescence of existing stock.

With regard to housing supply requirements over the coming 15 years and beyond, the new National Planning Framework (NPF), to be titled Ireland 2040: Our Plan, will address emerging trends such as a potential population increase of one million, more than a fifth of whom will be over 65 by 2040.

As was broadly indicated in the NPF Issues and Choices consultation paper published in February 2017, over 500,000 new homes will be required to support an additional projected population of one million people by 2040. The ESRI has undertaken demographic and econometric modelling work to inform the drafting of the NPF. This work effectively provides a baseline 'business as usual' scenario as well as examining alternatives. Projected national housing supply requirements for the draft NPF have been determined based on headship rates, demographic projections and a rate of obsolescence.

Published data from Census 2016 has also become available since April 2017 and coupled with the work of ESRI, is informing the drafting process. As further planned data publications become available from Census 2016, they will be factored into policy considerations, as appropriate.

An initial draft of the NPF is nearing completion for consideration and approval by Government with a view to publication as a draft for public consultation over the Summer period, running into September. The NPF remains on schedule for completion by the end of this year.

Housing Policy

- 654. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of new dwellings his Department estimates that will need to be built per year before supply begins to have an impact on enhancing affordability on rental prices and house prices. [31085/17]
- 655. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on whether new housing supply in the coming years will have a downward impact on house purchase prices and on renting prices as opposed to just having an effect on stemming the upward inflation in both house prices and rents; and if reversing the price level rises in both is a policy goal of his Department. [31086/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 654 and 655 together.

Fundamentally, it is the lack of supply, across all tenures of housing, that is widely accepted as being primarily responsible for driving the high levels of house price and rental inflation we have seen in recent years. Residential construction output reached unsustainably high levels, with peak output of 93,000 new homes in 2006, and then dropped to 8,300 in 2013, including a large proportion of single houses. As a result, the construction of starter and affordable homes at scale came to a virtual standstill.

The Government has made housing a top priority, bringing forward the range of measures under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness in July 2016. The overarching objective of Rebuilding Ireland is to increase overall housing supply to a more sustainable 25,000 homes per year by 2021. The 25,000 target was the ESRI estimate of the housing requirement based on demographic change, household formation and a level of obsolescence of existing stock. The longer-term objective is to create a functioning and sustainable

housing system, where supply more closely meets housing demand over time.

In order to directly influence and generate supply of new homes, Rebuilding Ireland contains a suite of actions that will increase housing construction and refurbishment, bringing forward the supply of thousands of extra homes. Under Pillar 2 of the Action Plan, 47,000 new social housing units will be delivered by 2021, supported by €5.35 billion in Exchequer funding. In terms of direct construction and refurbishment, 26,000 will be provided as part of the 2021 target. So far, good progress has been made and there are now over 10,000 new homes in the social housing construction pipeline, details of which are available at the following link; http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/.

Pillar 3 contains a set of actions targeted at increasing private housing supply. The €226m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund has now been fully allocated and will fund key enabling infrastructure to open up 34 sites across 15 local authorities. The LIHAF funding has the capacity to encourage the supply of 23,000 new homes by 2021.

Also under this Pillar, the State land bank is being actively targeted for the provision of new homes in the immediate term. In April, the Rebuilding Ireland Map was published, containing details of over 2,000 hectares of land in public ownership, with the potential to deliver up to 50,000 new homes nationally. As set out in the Strategy for the Rental Sector, the commitment to bring forward an affordable rental scheme is being progressed through kick-starting supply on such lands held by local authorities.

In practical terms, the development of these public lands will mean accelerating social housing delivery and securing more homes for sale and rent at lower and more affordable price points. Where local authorities have large sites in their ownership, there is a real opportunity to bring them forward for mixed tenure housing, at much more affordable price points, where the Council can directly influence the housing provision through the procurement process and development agreements. All local authorities have been requested to prepare Strategic Development and Management Plans for residential lands in their ownership to ensure they are brought forward for development at the earliest opportunity.

A key factor in terms of housing supply at scale, of both houses and apartments, is the cost of construction and the associated issue of viability. In this regard, a Working Group on housing delivery costs was established, led by my Department, to carry out a detailed analysis of housing delivery input costs with a view to identifying economies across a range of constituent areas such as finance, planning, design, land costs and levies. The Group comprises representation from all key public sector and industry stakeholders and is scheduled to complete its Report in the coming weeks.

Recent housing activity reports, available on www.rebuildingireland.ie, show that strong supply-side measures under Rebuilding Ireland are beginning to have a positive impact with all output indicators showing steep upward trends. However, it is crucial that we continue to focus on supply and particularly the supply of social and affordable homes at scale.

To this end, the Taoiseach signalled the Government's intention to carry out a focused review of Rebuilding Ireland, as we approach the completion of the first year of its implementation. This work is now under way, with an emphasis on strengthening the measures already in place and identifying new initiatives that add value and raise ambition. As part of the review process, my Department will focus in particular on the broad issues of housing supply and affordability for different market segments, building on the measures already being advanced.

656. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the way in which fire safety certificates can be awarded on developments, such as a development (details supplied) in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown in view of the fact these buildings were in breach of fire regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31087/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has overall responsibility for the statutory regulatory framework governing Building Regulations, Building Control and Fire Services. Inspection and enforcement are a matter for local authorities who, under the Building Control Act 1990 and the Fire Services Acts 1981 & 2003, are designated as Building Control and Fire Authorities in their respective functional areas and have extensive statutory powers of inspection and enforcement.

A Fire Safety Certificate is a certificate granted by a local Building Control Authority which specifies that the works or building to which the application relates will, if carried out in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted, comply with the requirements of Part B of the Second Schedule to the Building Regulations. A Fire Safety Certificate is required for certain new buildings and works to existing buildings to which the requirements of Part B of the Building Regulations apply.

Fire Safety Certificates and all other statutory Certificates required pursuant to the Building Regulations and Building Control Regulations are lodged with the appropriate local Building Control Authority and my Department has no involvement in the operational aspects of this mandatory statutory requirement.

Building Regulations

- 657. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his plans to ensure that builders of substandard developments such as a development (details supplied) with fire safety standards that appear not to have been reached, cannot easily construct such developments again in the future; if planning applications are monitored; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31088/17]
- 658. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on the statement recently by an organisation (details supplied) that has indicated that there should be a redress scheme put in place for the owners of apartments in developments, such as a development (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31089/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 657 and 658 together.

Under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the Building Regulations rests with the owners, designers and builders of buildings. Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities who have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Acts. Neither I nor my Department has any direct role in relation to enforcement matters and cannot interfere in individual cases.

In general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved: the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. It is important to note that while my Department has overall responsibility for establishing and maintaining an effective regulatory framework for building standards and building control it has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately

owned buildings, including residential apartments, nor does it have a budget for such matters.

In response to the many building failures that have emerged over the past decade, my Department introduced the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 9 of 2014), which require greater accountability in relation to compliance with Building Regulations in the form of statutory certification of design and construction by registered construction professionals and builders, lodgement of compliance documentation, mandatory inspections during construction and validation and registration of certificates.

A Certificate of Compliance on Completion is jointly signed by the builder and the assigned certifier. This must be accompanied by plans and documentation to show how the constructed building complies with the building regulations and also the inspection plan, as implemented.

At the end of May 2017, the Government approved the draft heads of a Bill to place the Construction Industry Register Ireland (CIRI) on a statutory footing and this Bill has now been referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government for pre-legislative scrutiny. Once it is enacted the Bill will provide consumers who engage a registered builder the assurance that they are dealing with a competent and compliant operator and will complement the reforms which have been made through the Building Control Amendment Regulations and contribute to the development of a culture of competence and compliance in the construction sector.

Social and Affordable Housing Funding

659. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the steps his Department has taken to increase the amount invested in further acquisitions for additional social housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31133/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The acquisition of new and previously-owned houses and apartments through my Department's Social Housing Investment Programme has been a feature of delivery over the last several years of new social housing for those on the waiting lists. Delivery of social housing through acquisitions has increased in recent years in line with the Government commitment to accelerate the overall delivery of social housing through some €3 billion provided over the period 2015-2017.

Building on this investment, the funding framework for the implementation of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness provides €5.35 billion in investment to deliver 47,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisitions and leasing, over the period to 2021.

While statistics for acquisitions completed in 2016 are being finalised, it is estimated that almost 2,000 houses and apartments were purchased by both local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for social housing use last year. Further significant acquisitions will be made this year, including through the allocation of €70m for the Housing Agency to establish a revolving fund to acquire some 1,600 units over the period to 2020 for social housing use. The fund will be replenished by the Agency through the sale of units primarily to the AHB sector.

Acquisition of new and previously-owned houses and apartments has resulted in important early delivery of social housing. However, it is important that this activity is carried out with due regard to the impact it has on the local housing market. This principle is set out in the funding arrangements put in place by my Department for local authorities and AHBs in respect of

social housing acquisitions. Also emphasised in these arrangements are that the acquisitions approach for new social housing should reflect the importance of mixed tenure, should not be overly-concentrated in any particular location, should represent reasonable value-for-money and that newly-acquired properties must comply with statutory building and fire safety regulations.

Local Authority Funding

660. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the additional resources that local authorities are to receive to ensure adequate levels of inspection of private rented properties to enforce current minimum standards for rental properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31135/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): When a property is let, or available to let, it must comply with the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations. The Regulations specify requirements in relation to a range of matters, such as structural repair, sanitary facilities, heating, fire safety and safety of gas and electrical supply. Responsibility for enforcement of the regulations is a matter for the relevant local authority.

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible.

The Government's Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, sets out a number of actions in relation to standards, with the combined aim of improving the quality and management of rental accommodation. On 27 January 2017, the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017 were made and came into operation on 1 July 2017.

The Strategy for the Rental Sector also prioritises strengthening the inspection capacity of local authorities to increase the number and frequency of inspections of rental properties. In addition to the updated Regulations, procedures for a more efficient, standardised and transparent inspection and enforcement approach across all local authority areas will be introduced.

Specific ring-fenced funding for inspection and compliance activity will be identified from 2018 onwards and annual targets for both inspection and compliance will be agreed with local authorities. The objective set out in the Strategy is to increase inspection numbers incrementally each year so that, by 2021, 25% of all rental properties are inspected annually.

Legislative Measures

661. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the legislative proposals his Department is working on to secure the rights of sitting tenants in buy-to-let homes being repossessed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31136/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Strategy for the Rental Sector recognises that receivership and repossession processes in relation to rented dwellings can cause confusion and distress to tenants. It is essential, in such circumstances, that the rights of tenants are protected. 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 should not affect the ability of tenants to vindicate their statutory or contractual rights under the Residential Tenancies Act.

However, the interplay between receivership law and the Residential Tenancies Act is complex. Recognising this, the Strategy for the Rental Sector committed my Department to establishing an Inter-Departmental Working Group to explore the scope for the obligations of landlords to transfer to receivers and for amending legislation to provide for greater protection of tenants' rights during the receivership process. The objective is to ensure that persons appointed as receivers will be required to fulfil the obligations of a landlord.

Following the Government's endorsement of the Strategy, the Working Group was established in February, chaired by my Department, with representatives from the Departments of Finance; Justice and Equality; Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation; and from the Office of the Attorney General.

The Working Group's Terms of Reference are to examine:

- the law governing the appointment of receivers to rented dwellings;
- the types of receiver that can be appointed to a rented dwelling;
- the effect of the appointment of a receiver on the rights of a tenant under a tenancy;
- the powers of a receiver appointed to a rented dwelling; and
- the scope for amending legislation to provide that the obligations of landlords transfer to receivers appointed to rented dwellings, and whether any such amendment could apply retrospectively.

The Working Group has just finalised an interim report, producing findings in terms of:

- the definition and scale of the issues to be addressed in any legislative amendment;
- the objectives of such legislative change; and
- the application of the legislation and the identification of the obligations to be transferred from landlords to receivers.

On receipt of further legal advice, the Working Group intends to produce its final report with findings and recommendations in relation to the feasibility, nature and content of legislative change.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

662. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of homes that have been acquired for social housing under initiatives such as the repair and leasing scheme; the amount spent on this in tabular form; the number of units in the next 12 months to be delivered under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31149/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department has introduced a range of schemes to provide local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) with the capacity to utilise existing vacant stock for social housing use. In particular, the Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) is targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their properties up to

the required standard for rental property.

In recognition of both the critical demand for units and the potential the RLS has to offer, an additional €26m was assigned to fund the scheme in 2017, which brings the total amount available this year to €32m. This additional investment in 2017 means that delivery under the scheme can be accelerated and up to 800 vacant properties can be brought back into use as new homes for families on local authority waiting lists this year.

Individual targets have been communicated to each local authority to ensure that the objective of 800 units for 2017 is achieved, and local authorities have been provided with delegated authority to enter into contractual arrangements in respect of that number of units. If a local authority is in a position to secure more units through the scheme than their target, this is welcomed and funding will be provided accordingly. The RLS targets for each local authority are set out in tabular form below.

My Department will be closely monitoring this activity to ensure that the scheme works well; that the funding available is utilised effectively; and ultimately, that new social houses are delivered using the scheme in 2017. The progress of individual local authorities will be reported later in the year.

The Buy and Renew Scheme is also available to local authorities to complement the Repair & Leasing scheme, allowing local authorities and AHBs to approach owners of vacant, privately-owned houses in need of repair or remediation, with the option to either lease and repair, or to buy and repair, the unit. An initial \in 25 million has been made available in 2017 and may be increased to as much as \in 50 million in 2018, which should result in at least 400 - 500 renewed houses – or a greater number if costs per unit prove reasonable.

In addition in 2017, a capital fund of €70m is being provided to the Housing Agency to establish a revolving fund to acquire some 1,600 units over the period to 2020 for social housing use. The fund will be replenished by the Agency through the sale of units primarily to the Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector.

This is intended to be a short term to medium term initiative, targeting the vacant property portfolios of financial institutions and investment companies and is a direct response to the current shortage that would be designed to complement, not displace, ongoing targeted acquisition activity by local authorities and AHBs.

Under Actions 2.5 and 5.6 of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Housing Agency continues to actively and positively engage with banks and investment companies in relation to its acquisitions programme to deliver on the overall target of acquiring some 1,600 units by 2020. In that context, since the launch of Rebuilding Ireland in July 2016 and as of 31 May 2017, the Agency has accepted bids on 489 dwellings from a range of vendors. Of these, the Agency has signed contracts for 379 dwellings and 225 of these purchases have closed. Bids are pending on a further 18 dwellings.

2017 RLS Targets per Local Authority

| Local Authority | RLS Target 2017 |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Carlow County Council | 14 |
| Cavan County Council | 9 |
| Clare County Council | 18 |
| Cork City Council | 26 |
| Cork County Council | 50 |

| Local Authority | RLS Target 2017 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Donegal County Council | 22 |
| Dublin City Council | 150 |
| Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council | 25 |
| Fingal County Council | 41 |
| Galway City Council | 24 |
| Galway County Council | 20 |
| Kerry County Council | 27 |
| Kildare County Council | 31 |
| Kilkenny County Council | 13 |
| Laois County Council | 13 |
| Leitrim County Council | 6 |
| Limerick City and County Council | 30 |
| Longford County Council | 10 |
| Louth County Council | 22 |
| Mayo County Council | 20 |
| Meath County Council | 18 |
| Monaghan County Council | 5 |
| Offaly County Council | 13 |
| Roscommon County Council | 8 |
| Sligo County Council | 10 |
| South Dublin County Council | 47 |
| Tipperary County Council | 23 |
| Waterford City and County Council | 53 |
| Westmeath County Council | 20 |
| Wexford County Council | 19 |
| Wicklow County Council | 13 |
| | 800 |

Fire Safety

663. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the steps he has taken to review fire safety in apartment blocks in view of the appalling tragedy at Grenfell tower in London; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31153/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): While there are no residential buildings in Ireland directly comparable or of a similar scale to Grenfell Tower, in response to this tragedy and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, I requested that a number of initial actions be taken, including:

- Local authorities were requested to review fire safety in the multi-storey social housing sector and to report back to my Department by 19 July 2017;
- The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) were requested to notify all landlords of their responsibilities and obligations as landlords in terms of ensuring that their properties fully comply with fire safety requirements. An information notice on fire safety has gone up on the RTB's website and a further fire safety information leaflet is in the process of being distributed

to all landlords;

- A Building Control Management System (BCMS) alert was issued to all 57,000+ registered users of the BCMS to remind those involved in works to existing or new buildings of the need to be vigilant in relation to compliance with the Building Regulations and in particular to Part B Fire Safety;
- The Management Board of the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management met and reviewed the state of preparedness of Ireland's local authority fire services to respond to large scale incidents. The Board noted the recent report of the External Validation Group titled "Local Delivery National Consistency Fire Services in Ireland" and concluded that the available evidence provides for confidence regarding the capability of fire services to respond to emergencies.

Following on from these initial actions, on 27 June 2017, I tasked my Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management with coordinating a high-level Task Force to lead Ireland's re-appraisal of fire safety in the wake of the Grenfell Tower fire.

The Task Force will oversee and report on the initial steps already taken and look to identify and consider urgently potential life safety issues and to initiate appropriate remedial action where necessary. Following this initial work, the Task Force will review and re-appraise existing arrangements and systems for Fire Safety and related issues/issues which impact on fire safety in Ireland.

The Task Force will prepare an interim report by the end of September 2017, with a Concluding Report at a later stage setting out, inter alia, proposals for the consideration of the Minister.

The Task Force consists of senior representatives from the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management and other Divisions of my Department, in addition to representatives from the local government sector including the Chief Fire Officer, Dublin who is also Chair of the Chief Fire Officers Association, an international fire service expert, a fire safety consultant and a representative from Insurance Ireland. Further representatives, including representatives from other public bodies, may be invited to join the Task Force as work develops and issues emerge.

I have also directed that a series of further steps be undertaken in the weeks ahead. These include:

- The preliminary survey of the use of cladding products on residential buildings over 18m (more than 6 storeys) being undertaken by fire services in Dublin is to be extended to the rest of the country and to cover buildings in all categories over 18m in height. The results to be reported to my Department by 19 July;
- My Department is to meet with the local authority Chief Fire Officers in the coming weeks to review current activities and to plan for further fire safety initiatives in prioritised areas of action;
- Responsibility for fire safety in buildings of all kinds (other than dwellings) is placed by section 18(2)(4) of the Fire Services Acts 1981 & 2003 on the 'person having control' of each building. In order to assist those in both the public and private sector who hold this responsibility, I have requested that the Fire Safety Task Force give urgent consideration to the publication of a guide on undertaking Fire Safety Assessments as provided for in section 18(6)(a) of the Act. This will facilitate persons having control of buildings to demonstrate that they are complying with their statutory responsibilities;

I will consider all issues emerging, including regulatory arrangements, in line with developments and the reports of the Task Force and, particularly, as further information becomes available in respect of the Grenfell Tower situation.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

664. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the discussions his Department has had with a firm (details supplied) regarding the company establishing a special purpose vehicle to build 1,000 social and affordable homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31154/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): While my Department is aware of the proposal referenced, it has not had discussions with the company in question in respect of this proposal.

Constituency Commission

665. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when he plans to introduce legislation to give effect to the recommendations for Dáil Éireann constituencies in the Constituency Commission Report 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31209/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following publication of the preliminary census results on 14 July 2016, the Constituency Commission (Establishment) Order 2016 was made establishing an independent Constituency Commission to begin work on a report on Dáil and European Parliament constituencies. In accordance with requirements under section 9 of the Electoral Act 1997 (as amended), the Constituency Commission Report 2017 was presented to the Chairman of the Dáil on 27 June 2017. Under the Act, the Constituency Commission stands dissolved upon presentation of its report.

Given the report is now published, the next step, in accordance with accepted practice, is for the preparation of a Bill in my Department to give statutory effect to the Commission's recommendations. Ultimately, the final determination of the constituencies for Dáil Éireann will be a matter for the Oireachtas to prescribe in legislation. In this regard, I will bring the necessary legislation forward in the coming months for the consideration of the Oireachtas.

Electoral Register

666. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government his views on implementing a policy (details supplied) to increase the level of voter registration here in view of the decision of Seattle City Council obliging landlords to provide voter registration information and an application form when a tenancy starts. [31247/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The preparation of the register of electors is a matter for each local registration authority. It is their duty, as far as possible and with the cooperation and engagement of the public, to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of that register. In support of activity by local authorities in preparing the register of electors, my Department promotes greater awareness of the register of electors through an annual campaign of promotional posters, the use of

social media and the taking out of both newspaper and on-line advertisements.

I understand that one of the aims of the decision by the Seattle City Council is to increase voter turnout amongst younger voters. In addition to the campaign that I have outlined, my Department liaises with student bodies and youth organisations, in the State, to promote awareness amongst their members and younger people generally who may be registering for the first time.

My Department has commenced work on the modernisation of the voter registration process. This is in the context of facilitating the registration of voters resident outside the State, in the event of an extension of the franchise at Presidential elections being approved by the people in a referendum. All aspects of voter registration, including the provision of registration information, and experiences from other countries, will be reviewed as part of this project.

Brexit Data

667. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31272/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Matters in relation to Brexit are managed by the team responsible for the existing coordination of EU and international business in my Department, with input from relevant line sections and experts across the organisation, as necessary. The relevant team, in the Assistant Secretary led Corporate and Business Support Division, is headed by a senior official at Principal Officer level and, while there are no staff deployed full-time to the issue, three people are involved directly at various times along with input from a larger number of staff across the organisation as required. Brexit-related matters are also kept under regular review by my Department's Management Board. Apart from the normal staff and overhead costs, which have not been quantified to date, no specific additional funding has been allocated in my Department for Brexit-related matters at this point in time.

Brexit is a Government-wide issue and my Department has been working closely with other Departments on the preparations to date and will continue to do so during the negotiation period.

Pyrite Remediation Programme Expenditure

668. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the cost of the pyrite remediation scheme; and the portion borne which has been covered by a company (details supplied) and his Department. respectively. [31282/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013, provides the statutory framework for the establishment of the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the creation of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board with support from the Housing Agency. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of "last resort" and is limited in its application and scope.

Some €2.2 million was provided to the Housing Agency in 2014 to meet expenditure incurred under the scheme in respect of design work, contractors, expenses to homeowners, op-

erational costs, the administrative costs to the Housing Agency and the remediation of a number of dwellings in the final quarter of that year.

An additional sum of €10 million was made available in Budget 2015 to fund the operation of the scheme in 2015. A further 148 dwellings had remedial works completed under the scheme in 2015.

An allocation of €19 million was provided for the pyrite remediation scheme in Budget 2016 to meet activity under the scheme in 2016. Sanction for a further €7.6 million to support additional activity under the scheme last year was granted in August 2016. Some 400 dwellings were remediated under the scheme in 2016.

A sum of €22 million was announced under Budget 2017 to fund the operation of the pyrite remediation scheme in 2017, of which €15.9 million has already been drawn down by the Housing Agency. This allocation will facilitate the remediation of some 400 additional dwellings this year and is a clear signal of the continuing importance attached by Government to addressing the issue of significant pyritic damage in private dwellings.

In the context of the pyrite remediation scheme, an agreement was reached between the Pyrite Resolution Board and the company referred to by the Deputy in June 2014, under which the company agreed to contribute technical and project management services to the Board to the value of €2 million. Such services include assisting in organising and managing the testing of dwellings and project management of remediation contracts. The company has also agreed to make available to the Pyrite Resolution Board/Housing Agency the results of testing undertaken by it prior to the operation of the scheme.

A Supplemental Agreement has been signed with the company for dealing with structural defects not related to pyritic heave, which are identified prior to or during the course of pyrite remediation works. In such cases, it will, under the Supplemental Agreement, make an appropriate contribution towards the cost of such structural works.

Pyrite Panel Report Recommendations

669. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the cost of the expert panel on concrete blocks; and the estimated costs of remediation of the defects identified in its report. [31283/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Expert Panel on concrete blocks was established by my Department in April 2016, to investigate problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

Estimating the possible costs of remediation was not included in the terms of reference of the panel. The panel had the following terms of reference:

- (i) To identify, insofar as it is possible, the numbers of private dwellings which appear to be affected by defects in the blockwork in the Counties of Donegal and Mayo;
- (ii) To carry out a desktop study, which would include a consultation process with affected homeowners, public representatives, local authorities, product manufacturers, building professionals, testing laboratories, industry stakeholders and other relevant parties, to establish the nature of the problem in the affected dwellings;

- (iii) To outline a range of technical options for remediation and the means by which those technical options could be applied; and
 - (iv) To submit a report within six months.

On 13 June 2017, the report of the Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks was published and included eight recommendations, which my Department are now advancing.

My Department has already taken action to implement recommendations 1 and 2 as priorities. With regard to Recommendation 1, the Department met with the NSAI recently to discuss the establishment of a Technical Committee to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol.

With regard to Recommendation 2, my Department has been in contact with Engineers Ireland in regard to the establishment of a register of competent engineers for homeowner/affected parties' reference. Engineers Ireland provided assurance that they will collaborate with the Department, the NSAI and others on measures to establish such a register.

In addition and in light of the information contained in the report, I am currently considering what further actions may be required to assist the parties directly involved in reaching a satisfactory resolution to the problems that have emerged in the two counties.

The four members of the panel provided their services on a pro-bono basis. The cost of €9,072 associated with the preparation of the report relates to travel and subsistence (at Civil Service rates), legal fees and printing.

Fire Safety Regulations

670. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the cost of the Millfield Manor fire defects report; and the estimated costs associated with remediation of same. [31284/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In July 2015, the then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government directed that a review be undertaken by an independent fire expert to develop a framework for general application, in the interest of supporting owners and residents living in developments where concerns regarding non-compliance with fire safety requirements arise. A Steering Group was convened to oversee the review.

The independent fire safety expert procured, has completed his review and a report on the matter has been received by my Department from the Chairman of the Steering Group. The report remains under consideration pending clarification of a number of legal issues at which point it is intended that the necessary arrangements for publication will be made.

The cost of the review was €34,905. The contracting authority for this report was Kildare County Council and the costs were recouped in full by Kildare County Council from my Department.

It is important to note that my Department has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings nor does it have a budget for such matters.

In general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved: the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. In this regard, it is incumbent on the parties responsible for poor

workmanship and/or the supply of defective materials to face up to their responsibilities and take appropriate action to provide remedies for the affected homeowners.

Priory Hall Development

671. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the full costs of remediation of the building defects at the Priory Hall development in Dublin; and the amount borne by his Department and Dublin City Council respectively. [31285/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The difficult process of resolution of the Priory Hall issue, involving the relevant members of the Irish Banking Federation, the Residents' Committee, the Government and Dublin City Council, concluded with a Framework Agreement in October 2013. In recognition of the unique and exceptional circumstances which arose in Priory Hall, all parties entered into this Agreement. The Framework sets out that the cost burden is shared between the State, DCC, the Irish Banking Federation and other stakeholders, as appropriate.

The refurbishment of Priory Hall is being undertaken in a number of phases with 187 units overall being refurbished. The overall work scope relates to the extensive remediation of the residential and retail units, and extensive basement remediation including pyrite works.

While the full costs of the remediation have yet to be finalised, to date, €21.191m has been recouped to Dublin City Council for the refurbishment works (€10.288m of which was self-funded through Local Property Tax receipts with €10.903m being provided in Exchequer funds).

Social and Affordable Housing Maintenance

672. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the estimated cost of remediating building, fire safety or disability access defects in properties in use as social housing in each of the four Dublin local authorities over the past three years; and the portion of these costs that were borne by his Department and the local authorities respectively. [31286/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department is committed to supporting local authorities in maintaining and improving the quality of the national social housing stock through a range of measures, including large-scale urban regeneration programmes, improving the standard and energy efficiency of dwellings, pre-letting repairs and improvement and refurbishment works to vacant properties in order to return these to productive use as quickly as possible. Works under these programmes are carried out in accordance with relevant building standards.

The routine management, maintenance and upgrade of local authority housing stock, including the identification, prioritisation and implementation of related works programmes is, however, a matter for each local authority, and it is open to each authority to fund such works from within their own resources. My Department does not, therefore, hold details in relation to costs incurred by the four Dublin local authorities in respect of the categories of work referred to by the Deputy.

In certain limited circumstances funding has been made available in order to address defec-

tive social housing; details in relation to the local authorities concerned for the years in question will be compiled and forwarded to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

Water Services Infrastructure

673. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the consideration that has been given by Irish Water to identify and prioritise capital investment requirements for settlements that align with the sustainable transports links such as rail networks to support proportional and sustainable growth in areas in order to mitigate against transport related climate change effects. [31287/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Section 33 of the Water Services (No. 2) Act 2013, Irish Water is required to prepare a Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP). In preparing a WSSP Irish Water must consult with the Commission for Energy Regulation, the EPA, local authorities and each regional body.

The Act also provides that when preparing the WSSP Irish Water must ensure, as far as practicable, that it is consistent with the National Spatial Strategy, regional planning guidelines and river basin management plans. The WSSP must also have regard to proper planning and sustainable development, housing strategies, special amenity orders, strategic development zones, water quality management plans, waste management plans and such other matters as the Minster may direct.

In October 2015, the then Minister for the Environment, Community and local Government approved Irish Water's 25-year WSSP which sets out the challenges affecting the provision of public water services in Ireland and identifies the priorities to be tackled in the short and medium terms. A copy of the plan in available in the Oireachtas Library. The plan takes a long-term view of water services investment needs at a national level, and provides an opportunity to ensure that investment is strategically targeted towards priority needs.

The Act also requires that the WSSP is subject to review at least every 5 years.

Water Services Provision

674. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government when the issue with regard to the water connection at a location (details supplied) in County Louth will be resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31300/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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 connections and I have no function in these matters.

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.

Question No. 675 answered with Question No. 643.

4 July 2017

Local Authority Housing

676. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the number of the 1,552 social housing acquisitions in 2017 that were purchased by local authorities and approved housing bodies respectively. [31373/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The number of social housing acquisitions in 2016 was approximately 1,960, as reflected in the publication of the Rebuilding Ireland Third Quarterly Progress Report, which can be seen at the following link: http://rebuildingireland.ie/install/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ Third Quarterly Progress Report RBI 31 May 2017.pdf.

While certain remaining details in respect of quarter 4 activity for 2016 are being finalised, approximately 1,400 of these acquisitions were by local authorities, with the remainder by AHBs.

Development Contributions

677. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the development contribution balances of each local authority; if special development contributions are included; if so, the balances of these of each local authority; the amount of both balances for years other than 2017; the number of requests for sanction of spending on specific projects that have been made to his Department, by local authority; the projects that were given sanction; the amount involved in each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31391/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The information requested by the Deputy is not collated within my Department but should be available from each individual local authority.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

678. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the planned cooking and recreational facilities and size of the living space that will be in the new family hubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31394/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, while my Department's role involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding. It is therefore a matter for the relevant housing authorities to consider the precise support services/facilities to be available at specific family hubs, taking account of guidelines provided by my Department, the physical configuration of individual buildings and any specific needs of families being accommodated.

Homeless Accommodation Provision

679. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community

and Local Government if families leaving emergency accommodation to be moved into family hubs will be given assurances on tenure there; if there will be a maximum stay in these hubs; if families will be then rehoused by local authority or voluntary housing bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31395/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As part of the response to the commitment contained in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness that, by mid-2017, hotels will only be used as emergency accommodation in limited circumstances, housing authorities are delivering a number of family-focused, supported temporary accommodation facilities (Family hubs).

Family hubs are an important first response for families who become homeless and who have no alternative other than commercial hotels. The hubs will provide more appropriate and suitable accommodation for families. They are not a long term housing solution as families will move into houses and apartments that will be provided under social housing supports, as supply becomes available. This type of emergency accommodation provides a secure and stable placement for families on an on-going basis unlike the insecurity of hotel accommodation especially during peak periods and holidays.

These custom-developed facilities will offer family living arrangements with a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation while move-on options to long-term independent living are identified and secured. Furthermore, such arrangements will facilitate more coordinated needs assessment and support planning including on-site access to required services, such as welfare, health, housing services, cooking and laundry facilities and appropriate family supports.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, while my Department's role involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding. In relation to the Deputy's specific query, the operation and management of individual housing solutions for families, such as family hubs, Housing Assistance Payments, local authority allocations, etc. are a matter for the relevant housing authorities.

Census of Population Data

- 680. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the account taken of the census of population in the local property tax redistribution model; the way in which new needs associated with new populations are measured; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31399/17]
- 681. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the consideration which is given following the publication of the census of population; the sections involved; if it prompts policy responses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31420/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 680 and 681 together.

The Statistics and Data Analytics Unit within my Department closely monitors all the outputs of the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The Unit is the primary point of contact between the Department and the CSO and as such is regularly in contact with that Office in relation to a variety of different issues, including assisting with queries of a statistical nature and developments such as the National Data Infrastructure.

Census results are of interest right across the Department but particularly inform policy considerations in respect of planning, housing, water, local government and franchise functions. Census data is centrally relevant to much of the planning arena both in relation to strategic planning such as for the National Planning Framework (NPF),but also in preparing for the forthcoming Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategies to be prepared by the three Regional Assemblies. As part of the formulation of the NPF, the finalised Census 2016 results are under review to ensure the most recent and accurate data is considered and reflected in any evidence-based proposals that may form part of the draft NPF and subsequent Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies.

In relation to housing, up-to-date Census information is utilised across all areas of policy development. In April and May of this year for example, the CSO released two major Census 2016 publications of relevance to the housing area. These were Census 2016 Profile 1 - Housing In Ireland and Census 2016 Profile 2 - Population Distribution and Movements both of which can be accessed via the following weblink: www.cso.ie/en/census/census2016reports/census2016publicationschedule. These reports contain important data in terms of the context in which housing policy is formulated and they will be a key data source to inform the recently announced review of Rebuilding Ireland.

My Department collaborates actively with the CSO and, by way of example, engaged extensively with the Office prior to Census 2016 being conducted, in view of the CSO's intention to publish a specific Homeless Persons report. The Department is represented on the CSO's Housing Data Group and the CSO in turn participates in the Department's Housing Data Analytics Group.

Census data also informs policy considerations in the franchise area. The publication of preliminary census results triggers the establishment of a Constituency Commission under the Electoral Act 1997 and the Commission is required to present its report on Dáil and European Parliament constituencies within three months of publication of final census results. Other franchise considerations informed by Census data include, for example, voting age and citizenship requirements for voter registration and voting rights.

Census information also informs the preparation of terms of reference for any review of local electoral areas to be undertaken and provides a basis for the work of any Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee established by the Minister or any other local government review committee which may be established from time to time. Population changes are also one of a range factors that my Department considers in the context of Local Property Tax allocations, which are kept under review to ensure equitable treatment of all local authorities, recognising also that the resource requirements of local authorities vary significantly across the State.

Finally, regarding the water function in my Department, the Census results provide statistics on the number of households connected to different types of piped water supplies and to different types of sewerage facilities. This data is vital in relation to policy on public water and wastewater services, the group water sector, private wells and small private supplies.

Housing Adaptation Grant Data

682. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government the annual allocation under the housing adaption scheme made by his Department to each local authority in each of the years from 2002 to 2016, and to date in 201, in tabular form. [31428/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes for Older People and People with a Disability were introduced on 1 November 2007. Information on Exchequer funding provided by my Department to each local authority for these schemes for the years 2008 to 2016 is available on my Department's website at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordble/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics.

Details of the allocation for the grant schemes in 2017 are available at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/housing/rebuilding-ireland/older-people/minister-coveney-announces-eu598million-improve-homes-older.

Defence Forces Personnel Data

683. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of personnel in the Defence Forces receiving technical pay group 3 in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [30788/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The information requested is shown in the following table:

| Year | Number in receipt of Technical Pay Group 3 |
|--------------|--|
| 2011 | 766 |
| 2012 | 792 |
| 2013 | 790 |
| 2014 | 782 |
| 2015 | 749 |
| 2016 | 738 |
| 2017 to date | 670 |

Air Corps Recruitment

684. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a recruitment drive for the Air Corps will occur in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31065/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service personnel, as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence.

The Air Corps (Pilot Officer) Cadetship competition was launched at the end of March 2017. There are currently 3 Cadet Classes, comprising 26 personnel, at various stages of their Pilot Officer 'Wings Course'. 6 Cadets of the Senior Cadet Class are due to be commissioned as Pilot Officers in Q4 of 2017.

On 13 March 2017, a class of 11 new Apprentice Technicians began their training, who, along with 12 General Service Recruits in training, will be assigned to the Air Corps on completion of their training.

It is my intention that targeted recruitment will continue to be carried out for the Air Corps,

Brexit Data

685. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there is a senior official with designated responsibility for Brexit matters in his Department; if so, the grade of the designated official; the funding allocated to the said Brexit unit; the cost to date in 2017; the anticipated cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31270/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The outcome of the vote of 23 June 2016 in the UK will have implications across all aspects of the business of the European Union. While the vote does not give rise to fundamental strategic issues for Defence Forces operations or for Ireland's continuing engagement within the EU in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it is expected that Brexit will have an impact on future developments in the Defence sphere.

The structures put in place in the Department of Defence to address the potential challenges arising from Brexit include the assignment of responsibility to a senior official at Assistant Secretary General level in relation to Brexit related matters. The senior official is leading the Department's input to deliberations within the framework established across Government and is supported in their role by a number of branches in the Department. The senior official represents the Department on the Interdepartmental Group on EU-UK Affairs which is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and is engaged with the identification of key strategic, operational and policy issues arising from Brexit. In addition, the Management Board is acting as a clearing house for Brexit and maintains oversight on an ongoing basis.

As the Deputy will also be aware, the Government has adopted a contingency framework to deal with all issues arising in respect of the UK vote to leave the EU. Accordingly, any issues arising, including those within the Defence area, whether bilateral, or in respect of developments in CSDP, or regarding our wider international multilateral defence engagements, will be also addressed within that framework.

As matters relating to Brexit are currently being absorbed and dealt with within already existing Department structures and resources, there is currently no dedicated Brexit funding allocation in the Department of Defence.

As the Deputy is aware the formal EU-UK negotiations commenced earlier this month. All potential consequences in the defence sphere, arising during these negotiations, will remain the subject of ongoing consideration by my Department throughout this process, including whether there will be a future requirement for a dedicated unit to exclusively handle Brexit related matters.

Commemorative Medals

686. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the 1916 to 2016 commemorative medals issued to members of the Defence Forces for their respective contributions and service to the State were not also issued to members of the emergency services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31397/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Programme for Government provided for the award of a commemorative medal to all Defence Forces per-

sonnel, Permanent and Reserve, who were recorded as being in service in the course of 2016. This was a special acknowledgement from the Government to the members of Óglaigh na hÉireann, both Permanent and Reserve, who served during the centenary year of 2016.

Recognition of the contribution to the State by members of the emergency services is a matter that is not within my remit as Minister with responsibility for Defence.

Departmental Staff Data

687. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer to a location outside County Dublin; the number of civil servants in his Department who have requested a transfer from a location outside of Dublin into County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [31776/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Department of Defence is largely a decentralised department with offices in Newbridge, Galway and Roscrea. From time to time civil servants based in my Department may apply for specific posts in other Government Departments but aside from such cases my Department does not currently hold central information on civil servants seeking to transfer out of the Department to another location, including to or from County Dublin.

Action 15 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan has a commitment to develop a mobility scheme within the Civil Service. Work on this scheme is ongoing with the Civil Service Management Board, Departments and staff interests. When that scheme is operational I understand a facility will exist to report on numbers on lists per department and location.