

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 7, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 8 to 33, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 34 to 45, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Public Sector Pensions Expenditure**

46. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he will take to ensure that excessive pensions for former politicians and public servants are curtailed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40459/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The pay and pensions of public servants including members of the Oireachtas were significantly reduced by a series of Financial Emergency Acts. The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Acts, including the FEMPI 2010 Act which imposed the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) on public servants in receipt of public service pensions, owe their constitutional legitimacy to the presence of an overriding public interest, and because they are very general in application, fair and proportionate. This is the legal basis for the reductions in pensions applicable to former members and office holders of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The FEMPI measures are only lawful because they are very general (many tens of thousands of pensioners are affected by the FEMPI reductions), and are designed to be fair and proportionate. It is not legally possible to single out individuals or groups and apply cuts to them on a different basis. It is the Government's stated position to unwind the measures imposed under the FEMPI Acts as soon as possible with particular regard to the impacts on public service pensions in payment and public service pensioners.

The Courts are extremely sensitive to retrospective changes to pensions which are viewed as vested property rights. The Government is required to work within the constitutional and statutory legal framework under which all Irish Governments operate.

### **Public Spending Code**

47. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has revised the method of cost benefit analysis currently in use for transport and infrastructure projects; and if he has satisfied himself with the current method for assessing such projects. [40454/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The *Public Spending Code* is the set of rules and procedures that apply to ensure that *value for money* standards are maintained across the public service. The Code draws together the long-established elements of *value for money* arrangements that have been in place and validated over many years.

The objective of the Code is to seek to ensure that the State achieves *value for money* in all areas of public spending. Consequently, the Code applies to both capital and current expenditure and sets out what is required of public service managers at each point of the expenditure lifecycle as well as how to fulfil those requirements.

The Public Spending Code encompasses guidance on a variety of issues related to the management of expenditure at each stage of the expenditure lifecycle. This includes central guidance on the application of appraisal and evaluation methodologies including cost benefit analysis. This methodological guidance aims to enhance consistency across sectors through common approaches and the use of key technical parameter values needed for quantifying costs and conducting economic appraisals.

The *Public Spending Code* is currently under review. The review of the *Public Spending Code* involves economic and evaluation resources within Government Departments ensuring that the appraisal framework meets best practice and the best available advice on measuring and reporting on the costs and benefits, including their distributional impacts, associated with climate change.

Additional sectoral specific appraisal guidance has been developed in certain areas by relevant Departments, in consultation with my Department, to further detail specific approaches related to that sector. For instance, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport has published the Common Appraisal Framework for Transport Projects and Programmes. The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport have developed parameters and methodology for appraising the impacts on journey reliability, public transport crowding conditions, and reliability.

In parallel with and drawing on similar work being done in my Department for the *Public Spending Code*, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport intend to update and improve their guidance on how to carry out a multi-criteria analysis, in order to make it clearer to practitioners what is expected of this type of appraisal. They are also updating transport related parameters and will update any central and macroeconomic parameters in line with DPER guidance. More specific information on transport specific sectoral guidance is available on request from the Department for Transport, Tourism and Sport. In this regard, the Deputy may also be interested in the information on appraisal available on the Department's website <http://www.dttas.ie/corporate/english/appraisal>

Finally, it is expected that the updated *Public Spending Code* will be able to better inform public investment decisions. The updated *Public Spending Code* will be kept under ongoing review to ensure sound decision-making based on the best available analysis and assumptions in light of technical knowledge, best practice guidance and experience of the application of the Code in practice.

### **Flood Relief Schemes Expenditure**

48. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the additional financial measures he will employ in 2018 to develop flood defences across the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40460/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Government has committed €430m of Capital Investment in the flood risk management area over the period 2016-2021 which will see average annual expenditure rising from the current €45m to €100m by 2021. The recently completed mid-term review of the Capital Plan 2016-2021 has confirmed that allocation.

The indicated allocation of capital funding for flood risk management in the Capital Plan for 2018 is €70m. The actual allocation will be published in the Revised Estimates for Public Services after the Budget. The significantly increased allocation in 2018 will allow the continued progress of all major flood relief projects currently under construction and the anticipated commencement of construction works next year on other projects including Clonakilty, Blackpool, Glashaboy, Douglas and Lower Lee Schemes all in Cork City or County, along with other major schemes at King's Island in Limerick and the Lower Morrell in Kildare. At the same time, the design and planning of a further 16 schemes from the current Capital Works Programme will continue with the intention that almost all of these will be implemented before the end of 2021.

It is anticipated that other structural flood relief works arising from the Flood Risk Management Plans due to be completed shortly under the National Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme will start to be advanced in 2018 in a prioritised manner and be brought through the detailed design, planning and construction commencement stages in the period up to 2021.

Within the overall allocation for flood risk management, the Office of Public Works will also continue in 2018 its very successful Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme where funding is provided to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems. The Scheme was reviewed this year and, under new criteria, funding for eligible projects up to €0.75m can be applied for by Local Authorities. Over 600 projects have been approved for funding since the Scheme was introduced in 2009 which has brought protection to an estimated 6,000 properties approximately.

The Government is fully committed to the programme of capital investment in the flood risk management area which will bring substantial benefit to thousands of households in the coming years throughout all parts of the country.

### **Public Sector Staff Recruitment**

49. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has satisfied himself that there is sufficient transparency, accountability and oversight in the area of top level appointments in the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40481/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, open publicly advertised competition is a key principle of senior level appointments to posts across the public service reflecting the Government's commitment to ensure that such posts, which are central to the effective performance of our system of public administration, are filled by high-calibre candidates.

In my area of direct responsibility, the civil service, recruitment in relation to senior level appointments above Principal Officer is undertaken by the Top Level Appointments Committee, TLAC. TLAC holds competitions for and advises, as appropriate, Ministers and/or the Government on appointments to civil service posts at Secretary General and Assistant Secre-

tary and equivalent levels.

The policy on open competitions for Assistant Secretary and for Secretary General and equivalent posts has been in place since 2011.

In relation to recruitment to the wider public service, various Government Ministers, in accordance with the legislation setting up public service bodies or agencies under their aegis, are responsible for matters relating to senior appointments in those bodies.

Clearly the public interest is usually best served by opening public service posts to the widest possible pool of suitably qualified candidates.

TLAC operates under the Code of Practice issued by the Commission for Public Service Appointments in accordance with the principles of merit, consistency, accountability, probity, best practice and professional confidentiality.

TLAC operates in an independent manner and strictly on the basis of open competition and merit. TLAC is responsible for determining its own procedures and remit, subject to Government decisions as appropriate.

### **Public Sector Staff Recruitment**

50. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to increase staffing levels and to ensure adequate funding for same in view of the clear connection between staff shortages and significant crises across the public sector in areas such as housing, health and, in particular, mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40480/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The provision for Public Service staffing numbers in 2017 is just under 315,000 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs). This represents an increase of over 8,000 or 2.7% on the 2016 outturn and an increase of over 25,000 or nearly 10% on 2014.

The corresponding provision for the Exchequer pay bill in 2017 is €16.47 billion. This is an increase of approximately €850 million on the 2016 outturn and approximately €2 billion on the 2014 pay bill.

In terms of the sectors specifically highlighted by the Deputy, in the health sector, at the end of June 2017, numbers stood at just under 111,000, an increase of just under 2,000 on the 2016 outturn. In relation to the Health Service Executive, there has been significant provision of additional staff in recent years, increasing by over 11,500 or 12% since 2013, of which approximately 90% would be front-line staff. In the same period, staffing levels in the mental health service of the HSE have increased by 1,744 or nearly 20%.

Much of the staffing dedicated to the area of housing is within the Local Authority sector where staffing allocations and resources are determined by the individual Local Authorities, with appropriate oversight by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. Across both the Department and the Local Authorities, nearly 30,000 staff are currently engaged.

Other Public Service staffing increases provided for in the 2017 Estimates include:

- over 2,500 in the Education Sector, including additional teachers, resource teachers and SNAs;

- an additional 500 Gardaí, and a further 500 additional civilian staff; and
- 400 additional staff in Children and Youth Affairs, including Tusla.

Allocations related to staff increases will be provided in the context of Budget 2018 and will build on the significant increase in resources that have already been committed to support increased service delivery in recent years.

The Deputy will appreciate the importance of ensuring that growth in public service numbers is achieved in a manner that supports the sustainability of both the public service pay bill and the overall fiscal position. The Government's success in this regard is evident from the figures I have set out on the increased numbers of public servants employed in priority front-line service areas against the backdrop of continued improvements in key measures of fiscal performance.

### **Public Procurement Regulations**

51. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he given consideration to substantial penalties for companies in receipt of public contracts that do not meet minimum standards of proper wages and conditions for their employees or that are found to be fraudulent and or non-compliant with the law in areas such as tax, health and safety and building regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40483/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The enforcement of tax, social welfare, and employment legislation; health and safety, and building control regulations etc. apply equally to public and private sector contracts. Consequently, it is not for me as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to set out a separate policy for public sector contracts.

It is the responsibility of each contracting authority to ensure that contracts are awarded to compliant businesses through the standard procedures contained in the procurement process.

The public works contracts make provision for certain contractual remedies where the contractor's or their subcontractor's workers have not been paid in accordance with statutory requirements.

The contracts also permit deductions to be made from payments in accordance with the legislation governing taxation.

Health and Safety legislation is also underlined and enforced throughout the contract, enshrining legal requirements as conditions of contract so that serious health and safety breaches may be relied upon as breach of contract leading to termination.

Payments under the public works contracts are in arrears and for work that is certified to have been carried out in accordance with the contract's requirements. Such requirements must have regard to the Building Regulations. Deductions may be made for non-compliant work and, depending on the nature and extent of the defect, failure to remedy same may lead to early termination.

These are in addition to the remedies contained in law which are enforced by the appropriate statutory bodies who possess the necessary powers to investigate and to bring proceedings.

52. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his Department's progress with acquiring the new site identified in recent months for Bailieboro Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40147/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Office of Public Works and the Chief State Solicitor's Office continue to progress the acquisition of the site in question as a high priority and expect the process to reach a conclusion shortly.

### **Brexit Expenditure**

53. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he will take to ensure that spending priorities are sufficiently focussed in view of the threat to the economy of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40458/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Planning for the withdrawal of the UK from the EU poses a significant challenge, particularly given that the precise nature of the relationship that will exist between the UK and the EU is yet to be agreed. The impact of Brexit will depend on the outcome of the complex negotiations that are currently taking place.

However, Ireland's economy is in a strong position to deal with this challenge. Economic growth has become more firmly established in recent years, and our public finances remain on a path towards sustainability. The period of 2015 to 2017 has seen an average annual increase in gross voted expenditure of 3 per cent. This means that 2017 was the third successive year in which we were able to increase expenditure on public services and infrastructure. The Summer Economic Statement, published earlier this year, set out planned average annual growth of gross voted expenditure of 3.5 per cent over the three year period 2018 to 2020.

This Government's priority is to protect and consolidate the progress that has been made in recent years. In this context, expenditure has been allocated in 2017 to areas that may be significantly impacted by Brexit. This includes support for our agrifood industry, through continued investment towards Foodwise 2025, as well as support for our rural and regional communities through funding for the Rural Development Programme and the Action Plan for Rural Development, which was published in January. Additional resources have also been allocated this year to Enterprise Ireland and the IDA, specifically in the context of Brexit, in order to grow the number of jobs supported by our enterprise agencies.

Negotiations are still ongoing around allocations for Estimates 2018. While it would be premature to discuss any specific expenditure decisions at this time, I wish to reassure the deputy that the potential impacts of Brexit are a key feature of Budget deliberations.

In addition to expenditure measures, the Government has also put in place a number of whole-of-Government arrangements in response to Brexit, such as the Cabinet Committee chaired by the Taoiseach. We are also strengthening our relevant Departments, agencies and overseas missions to ensure that they have the necessary capacity, capability and expertise to address issues that have the potential to arise as a result of Brexit.

### **Capital Expenditure Programme Review**

54. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status

of the spending review currently taking place; the timeframe for the publishing of the review; the estimated savings to be made; the measures that will be implemented as a result of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40450/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The 2017 Spending Review is the first in a series of rolling, selective reviews, which will cover the totality of Government spending over a three year period to 2019. Work on the Spending Review began in January of this year and concluded in July, when I published the output of the Spending Review alongside the Mid-Year Expenditure Report. The papers prepared for the Spending Review cover a wide range of policy areas and account for a significant proportion of current expenditure. In total, 17 papers were produced by officials in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and other Departments. In addition, an analysis of expenditure trends in key sectors was also published. These papers are available on my Department's website at <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/spending-review/>

Unlike previous review processes, where the focus was on identifying spending reductions, the aim of this Spending Review process was to examine existing spending by reference to the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact. This approach allows for systematic examination of existing spending programmes to assess their effectiveness in meeting policy objectives and also to identify scope for re-allocating funding to meet expenditure priorities. In this way, we can keep our focus on the totality of Government expenditure and ensure that we are achieving the best possible value for money for the taxpayer.

The spending review operates as a complementary process to the Budget Estimates process. The Spending Review was undertaken over the first half of the year in order to enable the output of the review in each area to feed into the consideration of expenditure proposals for Estimates 2018. The results of the Spending Review analysis provide a robust evidence base on key expenditure issues to inform ongoing discussions on Estimates proposals in the context of Budget 2018.

### **Flood Relief Schemes Status**

55. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Enniscorthy flood defence scheme will be addressed over the coming months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40455/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The River Slaney (Enniscorthy) Flood Relief Scheme is being progressed by Wexford County Council in conjunction with and funded by the Office of Public Works.

Good progress is being made in advancing the Scheme and a significant amount of the necessary preparatory work to inform the detailed design of the scheme has been carried out to date.

A Public Information Day is planned to be held in Q1 2018, outlining the current design of the scheme, and, at this point, it is anticipated that the Scheme will be ready to go to tender and to be submitted for Confirmation or formal Ministerial approval in Q2 2018. Subject to formal Confirmation of the Scheme by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform it is hoped to commence construction in late 2018 or early 2019.

56. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of his officials that are gender, equality and carbon proofing budget 2018; the extent to which these examinations with relevant costings are taken into account before the finalisation of the budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40176/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Responsibility for proofing policy proposals as referenced in the Deputy's questions is, in the first instance, a matter for the relevant individual spending Departments, as appropriate, in developing proposals for submission to my Department in connection with the Estimates process. In advance of the finalisation of the Estimates for 2018, officials in my Department are currently assessing the expenditure and budgetary implications of a broad range of proposals submitted by Departments related to Government policy objectives such as, for example, advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights.

The Deputy may wish to note that in response to the commitment regarding Equality Budgeting included in the Programme for Government and in the context of preparation for Estimates 2018 substantial work has been undertaken by my Department, in consultation with key stakeholders in relation to the appropriate approach to gender budgeting. This project is based on international best practice and linked to the performance budgeting initiative incorporated in the Revised Estimates Volume.

In terms of carbon proofing, ultimately, each Department is responsible for ensuring their spending programmes are consistent with whole-of-Government priorities such as environmental sustainability. Consequently, my Department has requested that all submissions to the current review of the Capital Plan, from both Government Departments and the Public, examine all potential impacts - both positive and negative - of capital proposals in the context of meeting Ireland's existing and forthcoming Climate and Energy goals. My Department also made clear that proposals for additional capital spending should be aligned with the upcoming National Mitigation Plan and National Adaptation Framework.

It is important to stress that there is a detailed governance framework already embedded in the allocation of capital resources through which significant investment decisions must be aligned with all government policies, including environmental policy. The review of the Capital Plan will, therefore, ensure that resources continue to be allocated and aligned to support sustainable growth, as required under the Government's current policy framework.

### **Public Spending Code**

57. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the type of cost benefit analysis which will be applied to the additional tax expenditures or new public spending which are being proposed to support business here in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40417/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Discussions and negotiations around Budget 2018 are ongoing and there are guidelines in place for evaluation of all proposals.

Guidelines for the appraisal of spending projects and programmes are set out in the Public Spending Code (PSC). The PSC sets out the rules and procedures that maintain Value for Money standards across the public service. The PSC highlights the appraisal requirements for projects and programmes and provides central guidance on the application and evaluation methodologies including Cost Benefit Analysis. The aim of this methodological guidance is to



ensure consistency of approach across sectors.

Similarly, the Department of Finance has strict guidelines for tax expenditure evaluation, the most recent of which were published in 2014 (2014 Guidelines for Tax Expenditure Evaluation). These guidelines are informed by international best practice and represent the evaluation framework that the Department uses in considering proposals for a new tax expenditure or in reviewing an existing measure. The evaluation questions contained in the guidelines are now applied to proposals for new tax reliefs (ex-ante evaluation) and to existing tax expenditures (ex-post evaluation).

Examples of the ex-ante evaluation questions include identifying the market failure the tax expenditure is thought to address, the tax expenditure's likely economic impact and its expected costs. Examples of the ex-post evaluation questions include identifying its actual cost, its actual economic impact and its continued relevance. For tax expenditures with an annual cost of more than €50 million, the Guidelines provide for the undertaking of a cost-benefit analysis.

I can assure the Deputy that my officials are engaged in ongoing discussions with other Departments regarding the potential impacts of Brexit and how they might be best addressed. The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, in developing measures to support business through Brexit, engages in extensive stakeholder consultation and review of relevant research to build a strong understanding of the needs of businesses. This work is carried out in collaboration with bodies such as SBCI, Department of Finance, Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine. In carrying out this work it is, of course, a priority to ensure that proposals for new measures are robust and can be assessed to deliver their objectives on a value-for-money basis.

### **Public Expenditure Policy**

58. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the public expenditure envelope allowed for in the existing fiscal space is adequate to meet the needs and demands for key areas of infrastructure and crucial public services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40482/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I should first explain the context behind the fiscal rules, to the extent that it relates to capital spending.

Substantial progress has been made in restoring Ireland's public finances as reflected in Ireland's movement from the corrective to the preventive arm of the Stability and Growth Pact from the beginning of 2016.

The core element of the Preventive Arm is the Medium-Term Budgetary Objective (MTO), which is a fiscal target based on the structural rather than the actual or headline government budget balance. This structural target is measured using the difference between government income and expenditure after one-off and cyclical elements of the public finances are accounted for.

In addition to the Structural Budget Balance (SBB) requirement, the Expenditure Benchmark comprises the second pillar of the Preventive Arm. This is designed to assist Member States to reach or maintain their MTO by putting a limit on expenditure growth year-on-year. Ireland is now required to limit expenditure growth in line with the medium term potential growth rate of the economy.

The Government's policy objective is to achieve Ireland's MTO of a SBB of -0.5% in 2018

and further improvements in the headline General Government Balance (GGB) and SBB in the years ahead in order to strengthen the resilience of Ireland's public finances against external shocks such as Brexit.

Following the onset of the economic and fiscal crisis there was a major retrenchment in public capital investment. This is now being reversed. An additional €5.14 billion in Exchequer capital investment was originally committed in the 2016 Summer Economic Statement (SES) over the period of the Capital Plan 2016 – 2021, with a further €1.5 billion committed in the 2017 SES.

Allowing for the €2.2 billion of additional investment that the Government has already decided will be allocated for housing to support the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness and other commitments already made in Budget 2017, the Government has substantial additional Exchequer capital funding amounting to €4.1 billion to allocate over the four years 2018 - 2021 for increased public investment in Budget 2018, based on the assessment contained in the recently published review of the Capital Plan. As confirmed by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, this will see public investment in Ireland moving from relatively low levels to among the highest in the EU.

I am satisfied that this new planned level of capital investment represents an appropriate balance between the need for additional investment, the capacity of the economy to deliver additional public infrastructure consistent with fiscal and macroeconomic sustainability and the need to adhere to the responsible spending path agreed by Government with reference to the requirements of the EU Fiscal Rules.

### **National Investment Plan Publication**

59. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when he expects to publish the revised capital plan; and if the plan once published will be finalised or if it will be open for revision. [40453/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I assume the Deputy is referring to the proposed National Investment Plan, which will set out key priority themes for public capital investment for the period 2018 to 2027, in support of the forthcoming National Planning Framework. The National Investment Plan will mark the culmination of an extensive deliberative process conducted by my Department in the course of this year, under the Mid Term Capital Review. I published the results of this Review on Thursday 14 September 2017.

The Review draws on an evidence base that includes detailed submissions by Departments and Offices, an extensive public consultation, as well as an Infrastructure Capacity and Demand Analysis completed by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

I intend to convene a consultative forum in the coming weeks, to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to comments on the outputs from the Mid Term Review and contribute to the framing of the National Investment Plan.

Following this consultative process, it is currently intended to publish the National Investment Plan in tandem with the publication of the National Planning Framework by my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government before the end of the year. As is the case for any long-term plan or strategy, it will of course be important for the Government's capital expenditure objectives set out in the National Investment Plan to be responsive

to significant changes in the overall environment for public capital investment in the future.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

60. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress on his Department's discussions with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection regarding the implementation of Labour Court recommendation, LRC 19293, regarding the rights of community employment scheme supervisors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40448/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Community Sector High Level Forum was reconvened in 2015 and met most recently on 7 April 2017, to give consideration to a number of issues including the issue to which the Deputy refers.

In considering the matter, I must have regard to the costs and precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created. A scoping exercise is currently being progressed by officials in my Department and should be completed later this year.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme. The employees in question are, or were, employees of private companies notwithstanding the fact that the companies concerned are, or were, reliant on State funding.

### **Company Data**

61. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Taoiseach the number of companies that operate here that do not trade goods or services here. [40611/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Central Statistics Office (CSO) does not compile separate statistics on the number of companies that do not trade in goods or services in Ireland. Under current EU statistical legislation, holding companies (NACE category 64.20) are excluded from Business Demography statistics due to the complexities of such analysis.

### **Company Data**

62. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Taoiseach the number of companies that are domiciled here but derive all profits from outside Ireland. [40612/17]

63. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Taoiseach the number of companies that are domiciled here but repatriate profits from overseas. [40613/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 63 together.

The Central Statistics Office publishes information on the repatriation of profits in and out of Ireland as part of its Balance of Payments statistics. The inward profits repatriated to all Irish-domiciled firms in 2016 was €12,184m. A notable subgroup are firms that have moved their global headquarters to Ireland, mostly in the years 2008 to 2016. These firms are often termed redomiciled PLCs or corporate inversions, where their income is almost entirely re-

ceived from overseas subsidiaries. These companies repatriated €5,786m in 2016 to their Irish domiciled headquarters. The Central Statistics Office does not compile or publish information on the number of companies with overseas investment or earnings.

The following table shows the corresponding figures for the years 2012 to 2016.

Extract from the Irish Balance of Payments Statistics (€m)

-	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Reinvested earnings inflows (profits) of Irish-domiciled firms	10,915	11,583	14,199	10,562	12,184
Net Income of Redomiciled PLCs	7,102	6,477	6,855	4,666	5,786

### Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

64. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the wide range of national and international issues he discussed with church leaders at the meeting with them and other ministers. [40712/17]

**The Taoiseach:** On 31 August last, I held a formal meeting under the structured dialogue process with representatives of the Catholic Church, led by Archbishop Eamon Martin. I was accompanied at the meeting by the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation and by the Ministers for Education and Skills, Health, Transport, Tourism and Sport and Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

The agenda for the meeting included the World Meeting of Families 2018 and possible visit by Pope Francis; education issues; the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution; Northern Ireland and International issues (overseas development aid); and justice and social issues. A wide ranging discussion took place on these matters and I was very pleased with the engagement that took place and found the exchange to be valuable.

This was the first in a series of meetings that I will be holding with dialogue partners.

### NewERA Administration

65. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the amount NewEra has transferred to Coillte and Bord na Móna in respect of developing alternative energy and other new industry; the criteria which has been applied to a cost-benefit analysis of value for the use of this public funding; the amount of NewEra funding which has come from the National Pension Reserve Fund; the other sources of funding it has availed of; the person or body in charge of NewEra; the person or body overseeing its operations, that is, Minister and Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40376/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The NTMA, which is a body under my aegis, acts as NewERA (New Economy and Recovery Authority) in providing centralised financial and commercial advisory services and as a dedicated source of corporate finance advice to

Government Ministers with respect to the following designated bodies: ESB, Ervia, Irish Water, EirGrid, Bord na Móna, and Coillte.

On request by a Government Minister, NewERA also provides financial and commercial advisory services in relation to other State bodies or assets.

In addition, NewERA works with relevant stakeholders to develop proposals for investment in energy, telecommunications, water and forestry to support economic activity and employment. Ms. Eileen Fitzpatrick is the NTMA Director in charge of NewERA.

NewERA does not provide funding to the State Bodies or assets that it engages with such as Coillte or Bord na Mona.

More information on NewERA's activities is available in the NewERA section of the NTMA's latest Annual Report at the following link:

*<http://www.ntma.ie/annualreport2016/index.html>*

I can also inform the Deputy that neither the old National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF) or its successor the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) have provided funding to either Coillte or Bord na Móna.

### **Brexit Issues**

**66. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he can take steps to minimise the impact of Brexit on the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40745/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Government's Brexit priorities are clear: minimising the impact on trade and the economy, protecting the Northern Ireland Peace Process, maintaining the Common Travel Area and influencing the future of the European Union.

In relation to the economy, the Government's paper 'Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union', published in May 2017, sets out the twin goals of securing the closest possible economic and trading relationship between the EU and UK post Brexit and preparing the economy to cope with economic turbulence of coming years and the structural shift of new realities, including Brexit. It also sets out the five-pronged approach which is being taken to mitigate the economic risks of Brexit : This involves, at a macro-economic level, the continued prudent management of our economy and the public finances to enable us to meet future challenges in order to ensure that Ireland's economy continues to remain competitive in the face of future economic headwinds; effective negotiation, as part of the EU 27, with the objective of reaching an agreement that sees the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK while also ensuring a strong and well-functioning EU; continued support for business and the economy through Government measures, programmes and strategies; the exploration of existing and possible future EU measures that could potentially assist Ireland in mitigating the effects of the UK's withdrawal; and exploiting fully any opportunities that arise as a result of Brexit.

The Department of Finance has been to the fore in producing and funding a number of important macroeconomic and sectoral studies on Brexit, both before and since the UK's referendum decision in June of last year. These studies are an important evidence base for the development of the overall Government approach to Brexit. On Budget day last October, the

Department of Finance published a paper that examined exposure of different sectors to the UK. Following on this study, Budget 2017 included a range of ‘Getting Ireland Brexit ready’ measures targeted at the most exposed sectors. These include measures to support SMEs, entrepreneurship, agrifood and Irish exporters.

More recently, my Department has recently published a wider in-depth analysis of the possible sectoral impacts that Brexit may have on Ireland’s trade relationship with the UK in comparison to the possible impacts in other EU Member States.

As regards the overall macroeconomic strategy, the best and most immediate policy under the Government’s control to counter the likely negative economic impacts of Brexit is to prudently manage the public finances in order to ensure that Ireland’s economy continues to remain competitive in the face of future economic headwinds. It is important also to recognise that the full impact of the UK’s exit is only expected to materialise over time. As we cannot control the international environment, we will need to continue to improve our competitiveness, including by focusing on costs we can control, by boosting our productivity and ensuring sustainable public finances. This approach is confirmed in the Summer Economic Statement which reaffirmed that improving the resilience of the economy against the backdrop of heightened uncertainty is the key focus of our macroeconomic strategy. Budget 2018 will continue to support prudent budgetary policy to help prepare for the economic risks that we face, including from Brexit.

In terms of opportunities, Brexit will provide opportunities for Ireland to increase its share of financial services based inward investment. Minister of State at the Department of Finance, Michael D’Arcy T.D. has responsibility for Financial Services, including the implementation of the dynamic and evolving IFS2020 Strategy for driving growth in the financial services sector. The Government has also made an attractive bid for the European Banking Authority when it is relocated from the UK and will continue to leverage our IFS2020 Strategy to maximise opportunities arising as a result of Brexit.

The Department of Finance will continue to carry out the necessary research, analysis and consultations, and to develop budgetary policy in the context of Brexit.

### **Real Estate Investment Trusts**

67. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the net total dividend withholding tax collected in respect of REIT dividends paid to non-resident investors and other relevant parties in each of the years 2013 to 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40140/17]

72. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the amount paid out by REITs here in each year since their introduction; the amount of tax collected on those payments; his plans to review the operation of REITs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40259/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 67 and 72 together.

The Finance Act 2013 inserted Part 25A into the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 which introduced the tax regime for the operation of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) in Ireland.

Part 25A provides, inter alia, that a REIT must distribute to its shareholders at least 85% of property income by way of property income dividends. In order to ensure that tax from foreign REIT investors is retained in the State, the REIT tax legislation specifically provides that Dividend Withholding Tax (DWT) would apply to REIT dividends at the standard rate of income

tax of 20%.

Non-resident investors who might otherwise be exempt from DWT do not have an exemption in respect of dividends paid by a REIT. However, non-resident REIT investors from countries with which Ireland has a tax treaty may be able to reclaim some part of this DWT if the relevant tax treaty allows for this. The taxation of dividends varies from treaty to treaty, but commonly a source state would retain the right to a withholding tax of up to 15% on dividends paid from that state.

I am advised by Revenue that dividends amounting to €23.9m in 2015, €54.7m in 2016 and €35.6m in 2017 (to August) were paid out by REITs. No dividends were paid out prior to 2015. DWT amounting to €4.1m in 2015, €8.5m in 2016 and €5.3m in 2017 (to August) was collected in respect of dividends paid by REITs. These figures include DWT relating to both resident and non-resident investors. Due to the way in which investor details are returned it is not possible to separately identify DWT collected from non-resident investors only. However, DWT amounting to €68,000 in 2015, €235,600 in 2016 and €563,700 in 2017 (to August) was refunded to non-resident investors in respect of REIT dividends.

### **Irish Real Estate Fund**

68. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the net total dividend withholding tax paid by IREF funds in respect of dividends paid to non-resident investors and other relevant parties in 2016 and 2017 in tabular form. [40141/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Irish Real Estate Fund regime, which was introduced by section 23 Finance Act 2016, took effect from 1 January 2017. Therefore, there were no distributions by IREFs in 2016.

IREFs must operate a 20% IREF withholding tax on the happening of certain taxable events (such as a distribution of profits or a redemption of units). IREF withholding tax is a separate tax to dividend withholding tax and the normal exemptions which apply to dividend withholding tax do not apply to IREF withholding tax. If a non-resident who owns less than 10% of the units in an IREF is resident in a country with which we have a double tax agreement, then, depending on the terms of the agreement, they may be entitled to claim a refund of some or all of the IREF withholding tax deducted. Non-resident investors who hold more than 10% of the units in an IREF are not entitled to claim a refund of IREF withholding tax under a double tax agreement.

Any withholding tax deducted in respect of distributions made during 2017 must be returned to Revenue by the end of July 2018. Therefore, I am advised by Revenue that they are not yet in a position to identify the amount of withholding tax relating to IREF taxable events that have happened so far in 2017.

### **Electric Vehicles**

69. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if there are taxation incentives to encourage companies to get their employees to use electric vehicles as company cars as opposed to petrol or diesel vehicles; if not, if incentives are planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40213/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** There are a number of tax incentives

in place to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles which are an environmentally cleaner mode of transport. A relief from Vehicle Registration Tax is provided up to a maximum €5,000 and the annual rate of motor tax is the lowest rate chargeable at €120. Further to this electric vehicles qualify for the Accelerated Capital Allowance (ACA) Scheme which is a tax incentive for companies paying corporation tax with the aim of encouraging investment in energy efficient equipment. The ACA Scheme allows for the write off of 100% of the purchase price of energy efficient equipment, including electric vehicles, in the year of purchase as opposed to the normal 8 year capital write-down.

It is the long-standing practice of Ministers for Finance not to comment on what may be contained in upcoming budgets.

### **Fire Service Staff**

70. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a person's (details supplied) concerns regarding retained fire fighters status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40250/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In light of the detail provided by the Deputy, Revenue will contact the person directly to discuss the matter further.

### **Living City Initiative**

71. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of extending the living city initiative to Drogheda and Dundalk; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40258/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that there are no data available in respect of potential qualifying premises, or the likely additional uptake, to estimate the cost of extending the Living City Initiative scheme to Drogheda and Dundalk.

It should be noted that the Special Regeneration Areas for the Living City Initiative were designated following consultation with the relevant city councils and an independent review by a third party advisor. Specific criteria were set down in respect of the areas that should be included within the remit of the Living City Initiative which were required to be taken into account by the relevant city councils when putting forward the proposed Special Regeneration Areas for each city. In particular, Special Regeneration Areas should be inner city areas which are largely comprised of dwellings built before 1915, where there is above average unemployment and which demonstrate clear evidence of neglect, dereliction and under-use.

Officials in my Department reviewed the Living City Initiative in 2016 in consultation with the relevant councils and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. On foot of that review, a number of changes were brought forward to the scheme in Budget 2017 in order to make the initiative more attractive and effective. The principal change extended the residential element of the scheme to landlords, who are now able to claim the relief by way of accelerated capital allowances for the conversion and refurbishment of property, which was built prior to 1915, where such property is to be used for residential purposes. In addition, the requirement for a pre-1915 building to have been originally constructed for use as a dwelling in order to qualify for the residential element of the Initiative was removed. The floor area restriction for owner-occupiers has also been removed, while the minimum amount of capital expenditure required for eligibility for relief, under all elements of the scheme, was also



amended and must now only exceed €5,000. The possibility of extending the special regeneration areas was considered, but it was decided that such a change would dilute the incentive's potential impact on the originally targeted areas and that it would be better to get it working effectively before considering any further extension of the areas eligible.

The review was included in the Report on Tax Expenditures (October 2016) that was published on Budget Day.

*Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 67.*

### **Insurance Industry Regulation**

73. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if further measures are being taken by the EU Commission and his department to address the alleged cartel-like activity and price gouging in the insurance market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40285/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The European Commission on 04 July 2017 carried out an unannounced inspection at the premises of companies active in motor insurance in the State. The basis for this inspection was a concern by the Commission that the companies involved may have engaged in anti-competitive practices in breach of EU antitrust rules that prohibit cartels and restrictive business practices and/or abuse of a dominant market position.

As Minister for Finance, I am not in a position to make any comment in relation to any further measures being taken by the European Commission. Any inspection or investigation being undertaken by the Commission is done independently of this Department and we have no insight into the development of any such exercise.

However, the Department has taken an active role in tackling insurance costs. The issue of rising insurance costs was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group in July 2016. Its report titled the 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 time-frames, which are set out in an Action Plan.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and there is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress. The second such update was published on the Department's website on 21 July 2017 and shows the progress to date on the overall implementation of the recommendations, with a particular focus on the 17 action points which were due for completion in the second quarter of 2017. All 17 of these action points were completed by this deadline. The third quarterly update will issue in the coming weeks.

In addition, in January, the Cost of Insurance Working Group embarked on its second phase to examine issues around the cost of insurance for businesses, specifically employer and public liability insurance. It is hoped that a final report will be published during the autumn/winter term.

I believe that the implementation of these reports will make a difference to the pricing of insurance premiums over the next 12-18 months. It is envisaged that the implementation of all the recommendations cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, will achieve the objective of delivering fairer premiums for consumers. 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 motor insurance pricing in the short to medium term.

It should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for August) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have reduced by 14% year-on-year. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore there are many people who may still be seeing increases. I am hopeful however that greater stability in pricing will continue to occur, and that premiums will continue to fall from the very high level of last year.

### **Revenue Commissioners Resources**

74. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the definition of an income tax case, for example, if it includes all persons in receipt of taxable income with regard to the Revenue Commissioners budget 2018 ready reckoner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40298/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am informed by Revenue that the relevant Income Tax and Universal Social Charge (USC) figures in the pre-budget 2018 Ready Reckoner include all cases registered with Revenue for self-assessment Income Tax or as PAYE employees (employees for this purpose includes those in receipt of occupational pensions).

The income data published in the Ready Reckoner relates to gross income. The definition generally used for gross income is that it is considered the income before adjustments are made in respect of capital allowances, losses, allowable expenses, retirement annuities etc., but after deduction of superannuation contributions by employees. It also includes certain income belonging to individuals whose total income is below the exemption limits. Certain social welfare incomes will also be included in some cases. Therefore the gross income data presented in the Ready Reckoner includes both tax cases with taxable income and tax cases that are exempt from tax and/or USC.

The data presented in the Ready Reckoner is presented in terms of tax units. A tax unit may consist of a singly assessed individual; married persons / civil partners who have elected or who have been deemed to have elected for joint assessment that would then be treated as one tax unit; or married persons/civil partners who elect to be separately assessed.

The publication of the Ready Reckoner, as well as the increased information contained therein in recent years across the full range of taxes, represents an important contribution by Revenue to using the data available to them to inform policy makers and support research work. I am advised by Revenue that they are seeking to ensure the Ready Reckoner is as relevant as possible to the demands of users and are open to feedback from the Deputy or from any other interested parties.

### **Mortgage Interest Rates**

75. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the interest rate banks (details supplied) apply to the warehouse portion of a split mortgage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40299/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank is aware of various information about the operations of regulated firms as their supervisor. The Central Bank is

subject to strict confidentiality requirements under section 33AK of the Central Bank Act 1942, which prevent the disclosure of firm-specific information gathered in that role.

My Department sought information from the Banks in which the State has an interest, and received the following responses:

Permanent TSB's current policy in respect of interest rates on the warehoused portion of Split Mortgages is as follows:

- The Bank applies a rate of 0% on the warehoused portion of debt secured by way of a Primary Residence, and under the protection of the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013.

- The Bank applies a reduced rate of interest on the warehoused portion of debt secured by way of a Buy To Let property. The reduced rate depends on the level of rental cash flow and principal repayment. It is typically 0.5%, 1.00% or 1.5%. Interest rates outside of these bands may apply in limited circumstances, but once again at a reduced level dependent on rental cash flow and principal repayment.

AIB have confirmed that the warehoused portion of the split mortgage is currently at a rate of 0% within AIB and EBS.

Bank of Ireland state that their Owner Occupier borrowers may choose to stay on their existing interest rate or choose one of the Bank's fixed rate products.

### **Financial Services Regulation**

76. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the practice by which banks are requesting know your customer type anti money laundering documentation (details supplied) for accounts held by voluntary and community groups under threat of accounts being frozen should such documentation fail to be provided within one week; if he will request the Central Bank to direct some latitude to be given regarding timelines in such cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40325/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am aware that banks may request documentation of the type described from any account holder, including voluntary and community groups, as part of ongoing efforts to combat both money laundering and terrorist financing.

The Central Bank oversees regulated financial services providers in Ireland and an important part of its supervisory remit is to ensure that credit and financial institutions comply with their obligations under the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Acts 2010-2013. In carrying out these functions the Bank is required to act in an independent fashion and consequently I am not in a position to request it to direct some latitude to these groups regarding timelines for compliance.

It should be noted that section 33 of the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010, as amended, sets out the requirements in relation to customer due diligence ('CDD'). Pursuant to section 33, designated persons, including banks, are required to identify the customer and verify the customer's identity on the basis of documents (whether or not in electronic form) or information which the designated person has reasonable grounds to believe can be relied upon to confirm the identity of the customer.

The legislation does not set out the CDD requirements to be carried out in relation to customers that are voluntary and community groups and as such designated persons will take a risk

based approach to determining how they comply with section 33 in relation to those customers.

Guidelines on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering and terrorist financing have been published which advise credit and financial institutions to take a risk-based approach in the following terms:

“There may be circumstances where it is reasonable to delay discontinuing a business relationship while the designated person facilitates the customer’s efforts to rectify the failure. The reasonableness of such a delay will vary depending on the circumstances of each case. Where a customer refuses to provide requested documentation or information then the business relationship should be discontinued once the customer has been warned of the potential implications and given time to respond accordingly”.

In summary, banks are required to ensure that all of its customers provide them with the necessary anti-money laundering documentation as per section 33 of the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010, however the guidelines referred to above do appear to give them some latitude as to the approach they adopt based on the circumstances of each case.

### **Poultry Industry**

77. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to allegations from a person (details supplied) regarding tax loopholes in the poultry sector that allow or allowed co-op members to avail of VAT rebates even if not registered; the actions that were taken by his Department following notification of same; if the loopholes have been corrected; if they apply to other sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40443/17]

78. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners were requested to investigate VAT loopholes in the poultry sector further to comments made by his predecessor at the economic and monetary affairs committee in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40444/17]

79. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if the European Commission was in contact with him regarding a tax loophole in the poultry sector that put co-op members at a competitive advantage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40445/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 to 79, inclusive, together.

The Deputy will be aware that the Revenue Commissioners advised my Department that a business model had emerged in the poultry sector that could result in a systematic excess of flat rate addition payments to farmers over VAT incurred on their inputs.

While the business structures and contractual arrangements employed in the sector were lawful they are not acceptable if they result in a systematic overcompensation of farmers for the VAT borne on their input costs. Accordingly, when this matter was brought to the attention of my predecessor a provision was introduced in Finance Act 2016 that enables me to exclude, by Ministerial Order, any specified agricultural sector where the business structures or models employed result in a systematic excess of flat-rate addition payments over input costs borne by flat-rate farmers within that sector. If it proves necessary to do so, I fully intend to make any order required to exclude any sector from the flat rate scheme.

I am advised by Revenue that they have engaged with all relevant players in the poultry

sector to establish the detail and extent of such structures and contractual arrangements and to establish if they plan to unwind any structures and arrangements that could give rise to over-compensation of farmers for the VAT borne on their input costs. I also understand that following undertakings to change important elements of the business model employed in the sector, Revenue will now evaluate if systematic overcompensation of flat rate farmers in the sector could still arise, which is still a risk given the nature of some of the contractual arrangements that are a feature of the sector. If Revenue's evaluation finds that there is still an excess of flat rate addition payments to farmers in the sector over the VAT borne on their input costs, they will prepare a report for my office as provided for in Section 86A of the VAT Consolidation Act, 2010 (inserted by Section 47 of Finance Act 2016).

In relation to other agricultural sectors, I am advised by Revenue that they are conscious of the risks and are actively looking for indications of the emergence of similar structures and contractual arrangements in other agricultural sectors and have discussed this matter with the Irish Farmers Association.

With regard to your question in relation to the European Commission, Ireland responded to a number of questions raised by the Commission on the application of the Flat-Rate Scheme for Farmers in the agricultural sector in Ireland. The Commission closed this file in February 2017.

### **NAMA Reports**

80. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has issued yearly reports to the EU Commission for the Directorate General for Competition on the use of NAMA's post-acquisition powers; the number of yearly reports that have been issued to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40478/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** A stipulation of the European Commission's decision of 26 February 2010 on the "Establishment of a National Asset Management Agency (NAMA): Asset relief scheme for banks in Ireland", (Ref: State aid N725/2009 - Ireland), was a requirement that the Irish authorities "report on a yearly basis on the use of such post acquisition powers to both the Commission and the Irish competition authorities (paragraph (74)vii.7)". The Commission's decision is publically available via the following link: [http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state\\_aid/cases/234489/234489\\_1086237\\_117\\_2.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/cases/234489/234489_1086237_117_2.pdf)

I can confirm that yearly reports on NAMA's use of post acquisition powers have been submitted to the European Commission and Irish competition authorities for the years 2010 - 2016 inclusive, a total of seven such reports.

### **Film Industry Tax Reliefs**

81. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that foreign companies may be partnering with Irish companies for the purpose of availing of section 481 tax exemptions; and if he has put in place mechanisms to ensure that real work and real development happens within Ireland as a result of the section 481 scheme. [40510/17]

82. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if Irish companies receive section 481 tax exemptions for work exclusively carried out outside Ireland; and if so, the value of the section 481 tax exemptions granted to Irish companies for work carried out in total or in part abroad for each of the past five years. [40511/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 81 and 82 together.

I am advised by the Revenue that the film tax credit, found in section 481 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, provides for a tax incentive for companies which produce films in Ireland. The tax incentive may apply to any portion of the production, or post production work, carried on in Ireland. The design of the film tax credit ensures that the work on the production of a qualifying film takes place in Ireland.

An application for eligibility for the relief must be made prior to the completion of the film. For each film, the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht specifies the number of trainees who must be engaged in the production of the film in Ireland. The aim of this trainee requirement is to ensure that a skilled workforce is available to work on the production of films here.

Relief is given by way of a tax credit calculated with reference to the “eligible expenditure” incurred in producing the film. “Eligible expenditure” is defined as amounts paid to employees who carry out their employment in Ireland plus any amounts spent on the goods and services which are used in the production of the film in Ireland and which were acquired from a person in Ireland. Therefore, relief under section 481 is not given in respect of expenditure incurred outside of Ireland.

The companies who have received the film tax credit are published on the Revenue website at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/reliefs-and-exemptions/film-relief/beneficiaries-of-film-relief.aspx>.

### Insurance Industry

83. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the remaining claims from a company (details supplied) to be settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40549/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Setanta Insurance was placed into liquidation by the Malta Financial Services Authority on 30 April 2014. As it was a Maltese incorporated company, the liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law.

As you are aware, the Supreme Court delivered its judgment on 25 May 2017 and overturned the previous decisions of the High Court and the Court of Appeal that the Motor Insurers’ Bureau of Ireland (MIBI) is liable in respect of third party motor insurance claims made against the policyholders of Setanta Insurance. The consequence of this is that the Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF) has been deemed responsible for the payment of such third party claims.

As the judgment has been delivered, the process of making payments in accordance with the provisions of the Insurance Act, 1964, as amended, has commenced. Payments can only be made out of the ICF, with the approval of the High Court and only if it appears to the High Court that it is unlikely that the claim can be met otherwise than from the ICF. If satisfied, the High Court can order payments out of the ICF up to 65% (or €825,000, whichever is the lesser) due to relevant claimants.

In this regard, an Order was granted in the High Court on Monday 24 July 2017 in relation to 324 claims which were subsequently paid by the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice. The Liquidator has informed the Department that, as of 31 August 2017, there are

1,576 active claims, of which 573 claimants have been paid compensation from the ICF subject to the 65%/€825,000 limits.

The Liquidator is currently working on the next batch of claims to be included in the next application to the High Court scheduled to be made in February 2018 in accordance with the legislation. It is hoped that a significant proportion of the claims who have yet to receive any payment will be paid compensation subject to the ICF limits at this time. However, it is important to note that in some instances there may still be ongoing claim settlement discussions between the liquidator and third party claimants which means that such people will not be paid until the first scheduled payment date after formal sign off by both parties.

Over and above the 65% ICF payment, it is expected that a proportion of the balance of money due to third party claimants will be met from the proceeds of the distribution of Setanta's assets on completion of the liquidation process. However, it is not possible to say definitively at this stage what proportion of the claims this will amount to. In this regard, a preliminary assessment was carried out by Towers Watson in 2014 who indicated that the Liquidator would not be in a position to meet more than 30% of claims out of the assets of the liquidation. The Liquidator has subsequently informed the Department that as the Supreme Court has now made its judgment, a new actuarial report is being commissioned. This is expected to be completed in Q4 2017.

### **Tax Exemptions**

84. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the exemption of Government securities where an owner is not ordinarily resident in Ireland, which is listed in a Revenue Commissioners' table called "Cost of Tax Allowances, Credits, Exemptions and Reliefs"; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40569/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Section 43 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides that any securities issued by the Minister for Finance may contain a condition that neither the interest nor the capital on that security are liable to income tax or capital gains tax provided they are held by a non-resident. This is in keeping with the general scheme of the taxation of the returns on financial products where non-residents are not subject to Irish tax. For example deposit interest retention tax (DIRT) does not apply to deposit interest earned by non-residents and exit tax does not apply to non-residents who invest in investment undertakings.

In addition, under Ireland's double tax treaties there is a restriction on the amount of tax that could be withheld on interest payments to residents of our double tax treaty partners. Some agreements provide for no withholding, while others provide for withholding up to a maximum of 5% to 15%.

I am advised by Revenue that the costing included in the "Cost of Tax Allowances, Credits, Exemptions and Reliefs" is the maximum cost of the exemption. It is calculated as 20% of the Central Bank of Ireland's figures for interest payments. It therefore does not take account of the effect that double tax agreements would have on Ireland's right to tax on those interest payments.

### **Help-To-Buy Scheme Data**

85. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the cost of the help-to-buy scheme

on an annual basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40570/17]

**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 house, as well as incentivising additional building and the provision of extra housing stock. At the time of Budget 2017 my Department estimated that the Help-to-Buy incentive would cost €40 million per annum for 2018 and 2019 and €50 million in 2017 due to the back-dating of the relief in respect of properties which became eligible for the incentive between 19 July 2016 and the end of that year. Currently, these estimates remain valid.

To avail of the incentive involves two stages. Stage 1 is the application stage, wherein prospective applicants can query whether they qualify for the incentive. They can also get clarity on the maximum amount of rebate they could potentially benefit from, based on their tax paid in a four-year period. Stage 2 is the claims stage, wherein applicants that decide to proceed with purchasing or building a qualifying property must provide documentary evidence of the relevant property transaction or their mortgage draw down.

The estimates for the potential cost of the incentive that have featured in recent media reports are based on the number of applications received by Revenue to stage 1 of the scheme, rather than the number of claims to date. However, many of these applicants may never make a claim to stage 2 for a variety of reasons. These could include individuals who do not go on to obtain mortgage approval, who may decide to purchase a second-hand property, or who are not able to source the new home that they desire.

As of 31 August 2017 Revenue has received 9,629 applications to stage 1 of the Help-to-Buy incentive; of these, 6,626 have been approved. 3,625 stage 2 claims have been created to date; of these 2,998 have been approved. The total estimated cost to the Exchequer to date of the incentive is some €43 million of which some €14.4m relates to retrospective claims for 2016.

The Deputy may also wish to know that Revenue regularly publishes statistics on the Help-to-Buy incentive (including the estimated cost of the incentive) at <http://www.revenue.ie/en/about/statistics/htb-incentive-stats.html>.

### Central Statistics Office

86. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated effect of including universities on-balance sheet; the discussions that have taken place on this issue with EUROSTAT or other organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40586/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Statistical classification issues are a matter for the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

At the request of Eurostat, the CSO is currently engaged in an assessment of whether the universities be included in, or excluded from, the general government sector. The CSO is engaging with Eurostat regarding the progress and outcome of these deliberations.

Should any university be re-classified within the general government sector (i.e. on balance sheet), then any liabilities to bodies outside the general government sector will clearly add to gross general government debt. Similarly, any revenue or expenditure associated with transactions between the university and bodies outside the general government sector will affect the general government balance.



My Department is awaiting the results of this assessment and will ensure that the fiscal forecasts of the general government sector are appropriately compiled.

### Tax Code

87. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40591/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** There are a number of tax incentives in place to encourage the adoption of alternative and electric vehicles which are an environmentally cleaner mode of transport. A relief from Vehicle Registration Tax is provided up to a maximum €5,000 for electric vehicles, €2,500 plug-in hybrid electric and €1,500 for hybrid electric vehicles. The annual rate of motor tax for electric vehicles is the lowest rate chargeable at €120. Further to this electric vehicles qualify for the Accelerated Capital Allowance (ACA) Scheme which is a tax incentive for companies paying corporation tax with the aim of encouraging investment in energy efficient equipment. The ACA Scheme allows for the write off of 100% of the purchase price of energy efficient equipment, including electric vehicles, in the year of purchase as opposed to the normal 8 year capital write-down.

The excise duty rate on natural gas, when used as a transport fuel, is at the minimum allowable under the Energy Tax Directive and will be sustained at that low level for a total period of 8 years.

It is the long-standing practice of Ministers for Finance not to comment on what may be contained in upcoming budgets.

### Tax Code

88. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding changes in structure of the VRT, road tax or fuel duties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40592/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, it is a long-standing practice of the Minister for Finance not to comment, in advance of the Budget, on any tax matters that might be the subject of Budget decisions.

### VAT Rate Reductions

89. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance if he will reduce the VAT rate on servicing and repairs (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40616/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that the VAT rating of goods and services is subject to the requirements of EU VAT law with which Irish VAT law must comply. The VAT Directive provides that Member States may apply either one or two reduced rates of VAT to certain goods and services listed in Annex III of the VAT Directive. In addition, the VAT Directive allows for historic VAT treatment to be maintained under certain conditions on certain goods and services not provided for in Annex III.

Ireland currently operates two lower rates of VAT, 13.5% and 9%, as permitted by the Di-

rective. The VAT rate applicable to the servicing and repair of motor vehicles is the reduced rate 13.5% and under the Directive the rate applicable to such services cannot be reduced below 12%. As Ireland already applies the maximum allowable number of reduced rates, it is prohibited under the VAT Directive from introducing a third reduced rate of VAT of 12% to the servicing and repair of motor vehicles as proposed by the Deputy.

### **Tax Code**

90. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if he is considering making changes to the forthcoming finance Bill to deal with past issues pertaining to other sectors of the agricultural industry, similar to those in the poultry industry (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40689/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware a legislative measure was introduced in Finance Act 2016, which enables me to exclude by Ministerial Order, from the Flat Rate Scheme, any specified agricultural sector where the business structures or models employed result in a systematic excess of flat-rate addition payments over input costs borne by flat-rate farmers within that sector.

This legislative measure applies to all agricultural sectors. I can make an order for exclusion where the Revenue Commissioners has carried out a review on an agricultural sector and I am satisfied that, because of the business structures, contractual arrangements or models in place, the application of the flat-rate addition within that sector has resulted in, and would otherwise continue to result in, a systematic excess of flat-rate addition payments over input costs incurred by flat-rate farmers in that sector.

I am advised by Revenue that they are conscious of the risks and are actively looking for indications of the emergence of similar structures and contractual arrangements in other agricultural sectors. I am currently aware of claims concerning one particular agricultural sector, the poultry sector, but I am not aware of other such instances. I would encourage the Deputy to provide any information he has concerning such activities to Revenue.

### **Tax Data**

91. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance if he will release the microeconomic statistics for the relevant three year timeframe pertaining to the calculation of the current flat rate VAT repayment percentage of 5.4% with the calculation deriving therefrom; the amount of under or overpayment arising; if same was included separately in the economic accounts for European agriculture, EEA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40691/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the farmer flat rate methodology is based on detailed estimates across the major items of the Agricultural Accounts, these are produced by the Central Statistics Office to meet both national and EU requirements and are part of the Economic Accounts of Agriculture (EAA) framework. The published estimates provide information such as output, input costs, gross and net value added and operating surplus. A breakdown of items of expenditure such as feed, electricity, fuel, maintenance and repair, etc. is estimated from the National Farm Survey (NFS) where the average expenses per farm is available by type and size of farm. This information is used to estimate the apportionment of expenditure across different expenditure types. Additional adjustments are made to account for VAT registered farmers and VAT refunded to VAT unregistered farmers.

The flat rate addition is designed to compensate VAT unregistered farmers on an overall basis for the VAT charged to them on the purchases of goods and services. VAT unregistered farmers add this percentage to their prices when selling to VAT registered businesses (co-ops, meat factories, etc.) who treat the flat rate amount as a normal business input in their periodic VAT returns.

In accordance with Article 298 of the EU VAT Directive the maximum level of the flat rate addition is calculated annually based on an average of the last three years rates. It is open to the Member State to decide what flat rate level to apply but it has been the policy of successive Governments in Ireland to grant full compensation. The flat rate statistics for each of the relevant three years pertaining to the 5.4% rate as calculated ahead of Budget 2017 were as follows:

Year	Flat Rate %
2014	5.34
2015	5.35
2016	5.53
Average	5.4

The statistics which underpin these rates are continually subject to review in the context of annual reviews relating to VAT Own Resources. The percentages may increase or decrease upon review, but this does not change the legal method of calculating the flat-rate addition based on figures available at the time of calculation.

### Customs and Excise Controls

92. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of boats, vessels and trawlers that were searched by a customs drug dog unit at Sligo port in each of the years from 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40708/17]

93. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the number of boats, vessels and trawlers that were searched by a customs dog unit along the west coast in each of the years from 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40709/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 92 and 93 together.

I am advised by Revenue that a broad range of data, intelligence and analytics is used to evaluate risk and to identify and target sea-going vessels for specific interventions, including rummage and other searches. The specific intervention, if any, in any particular instance will be informed by the risk assessment and the nature of any risk determined on foot of the assessment.

For operational reasons, I am advised by Revenue that they will not be providing details on the number or nature of interventions undertaken by them on foot of their risk assessments for specific locations. All relevant arrivals and traffic is subject to risk assessment and subsequent intervention where necessary. I am assured by Revenue that they carry out regular and ongoing monitoring of the western coastline, including patrols and physical checks at ports, harbours and piers. Revenue continues to actively engage with the coastal community to increase their awareness of the need to report any suspicious activity, suspicious vessels or movements in the area.

I am satisfied with the risk-focused approach adopted by Revenue.

**GDP-GNP Levels**

94. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the figures for potential GDP growth in percentage terms for each of the years from 2002 to 2021; and if he will provide the actual and Government assumed levels for 2015 in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40746/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My Department's estimates of potential output for the years 2002 to 2021 are set out in Table 1. These estimates were prepared in the context of SPU 2017 published in April. They are prepared using the EU's harmonised methodology.

Table 1

Year	Potential GDP Growth Rate (%)*
2002	6.7
2003	5.6
2004	5.1
2005	4.6
2006	4.0
2007	2.9
2008	0.7
2009	-0.8
2010	-0.5
2011	0.1
2012	0.9
2013	1.9
2014	3.6
2015	4.3
2016	5.1
2017	4.2
2018	4.3
2019	3.5
2020	3.0
2021	2.8

The CSO's National Income and Expenditure Annual Results (NIE) 2015 indicated a real GDP growth rate of 26.3%. Incorporation of the NIE 2015 figures into the harmonised methodology resulted in estimates of potential output growth of 24.8% in 2015.

On the basis that this unprecedented increase in potential GDP growth would not correspond to an increase in the revenue generating capacity of the economy, the 2015 figure was adjusted for the purposes of calculating Ireland's reference rate under the SGP expenditure benchmark pillar. The adjustment entailed replacing the 2015 potential growth rate with the average of the growth rates in 2014 and 2016. In terms of the estimated level of potential GDP, no adjustment was made to the 2015 figure of €226m. This approach was also followed by the Commission and favoured by IFAC.

My Department will publish updated macroeconomic forecasts in October this year, as part of the Budget 2018.

### Fiscal Data

95. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide figures for the reference rate used by his Department in the calculation of the available fiscal space for each of the years from 2010 to 2021. [40747/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Having reduced the deficit below 3% of GDP in 2015, Ireland exited the corrective arm of the Stability and Growth Pact and became subject to the requirements of the preventive arm including the expenditure benchmark in 2016.

The annual reference rate over the period 2016-2021 is set out in the table, and is sourced from the Summer Economic Statement, July 2017.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Reference Rate %	1.9	3.3	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.4

### Fiscal Policy

96. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the assertion made by an organisation (details supplied) in its recent pre-budget submission that the Government could increase the level of available fiscal space in the coming years while still meeting its targets under European fiscal rules. [40748/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am aware of the proposal referred to by the Deputy.

The analysis proposes that fiscal space estimates for the next number of years incorporate the extraordinary 26 per cent GDP growth figure recorded in 2015.

My Department has advised that this approach is inappropriate and risks repeating the pro-cyclical mistakes of the past. I agree with this advice - the 26 per cent growth rate was due to one-off factors which could easily be reversed. For instance, intellectual property can be moved off-shore as quickly and as easily as it was moved on-shore. If this happened, we would be left with a large gap, once again, in the public finances.

In the last Budget, my Department highlighted that it would adjust the fiscal space calculations to take this into account. This approach has been supported by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council. Moreover, the European Commission has formally stated that it will ignore the 26 per cent growth rate when it (the Commission) assess Ireland's compliance with the rules.

I would also point out that our public debt ratio is very high - on a per capita basis, we have one of the highest debt ratios in the developed world.

Finally, I want to stress that the economy is approaching full employment and it is imperative not to overheat the economy by adopting inappropriate budgetary policies. It is the fiscal stance that is more important than fiscal space.

In summary, I want to assure the Deputy that the Government will not jeopardise future living standards by adopting inappropriate policies.

### Departmental Staff Allowances

97. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on whether the current system under which mileage is calculated for business journeys undertaken in a car creates an incentive to drive greater distance; his plans to undertake a review of this system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40215/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The motor travel rates reimburse an officer only for the costs incurred in using their own cars for official business and are not deemed to be a source of emolument or profit. Officers are authorised to use their own cars on official business only where no suitable public transport (i.e., train or bus) is available or available only at equal or greater expense or where the use of public transport would result in the loss of official time which it is necessary to avoid. Where an officer is permitted to use a private car in a work setting it is incumbent on the line manager to ensure that travel is by the shortest practicable route while taking account of value for money.

Paragraph 2.28 of the Haddington Road Agreement provided for a review of Travel and Subsistence arrangements. In respect of mileage rates and with effect from 1 April 2017, a number of changes were introduced to the motor travel rates. The revised arrangements were agreed with Staff Side Representatives and were designed to reflect the changes in motoring technology, road conditions, commuter behaviour, and car ownership patterns.

The changes introduced include:

1. An increase in the number of distance bands from two to four allowing a more nuanced compensation regime focused on officers who do significant work related driving;
2. A lower recoupment rate for the first 1,500 km;
3. The formula for calculating mileage now assumes an officer replaces their car every four years rather than every three years.

The agreement with Staff Side Representatives means that the current system will remain in place for three years. At that stage the system will be further reviewed in light of the conditions then applying to business needs and motoring technology.

### **Office of Public Works Projects**

98. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if applications have been received from County Louth by the Office of Public Works for works to be carried out at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40272/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Office of Public Works has not received an application from Louth Council in respect of the Abbey of St. Mary D’Urso. Although the structure has some local historical significance, the building in question is not in the care of The Office of Public Works and it has no role in relation to it.

### **Public Appointments Service**

99. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the detail of the recent open principal officer competition in which scoring errors have been made in the critical reasoning part of the aptitude test which was outsourced to a UK provider; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [40340/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Principal Officer Competition was run by the Public Appointments Service (PAS), which is an independent, statutory body which provides professional recruitment and selection services to the civil and public service. PAS have confirmed that during the course of the quality assurance process, their test provider identified an issue with the Critical Analysis test which affected the scoring of a small number of candidates. All of the candidates impacted were contacted on Tuesday 5 September, 2017, informed of the issue, and assured that the necessary action was taken so that no candidate was disadvantaged as a result.

PAS continually monitor all their processes with regard to competitions to ensure as much as is possible that issues such as this are avoided.

### **Community Sector High Level Forum**

100. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the high level forum which was established some seven months ago will make recommendations in relation to the provision of a pension or gratuity scheme for community employment supervisors and assist community supervisors in the context of a Labour Court recommendation which facilitated the awarding of such pensions gratuity and in circumstances in which many such personnel are now coming to retirement age and have just the old age State pensions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40692/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Community Sector High Level Forum was reconvened in 2015 and met most recently on 7th April 2017, to give consideration to a number of issues including the issue to which the Deputy refers.

In considering the matter, I must have regard to the costs and precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created. A scoping exercise is currently being progressed by officials in my Department and should be completed later this year.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme. The employees in question are, or were, employees of private companies notwithstanding the fact that the companies concerned are, or were, reliant on State funding.

### **Public Sector Debt Management**

101. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the savings that have resulted from the work of the Debt Management Implementation Board, by area, that is, the HSE, the Courts Service and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40130/17]

102. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the future targeted savings for the Debt Management Implementation Board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40131/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 101 and 102 together.

The Final Report of the Debt Management Implementation Project Board was published by

my Department in October 2016. The report set improvement programmes that included qualitative and quantitative targets for 2016 - 2018 for each of the five in-scope public service bodies. If implemented successfully, the improvement programmes, in tandem with the economic recovery, were projected to contribute some additional €700m in collections for the exchequer over the three years 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The additional money targeted for collection was calculated by deducting the 2013 collection rate (%) from the current year collection rate (%), and multiplying this by the total amount estimated available for collection in the projected year. For example, in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, in 2013 the collection rate was 56%, the 2016 collection rate was targeted at 78%. Multiplying this 22% difference by the estimated total amount available for collection (€115m) in 2016 equalled €25.3m. This methodology was used as the total amount available for collection can vary significantly each year. Collection rates can exceed 100% due to the collection of prior years' arrears.

The projected additional targeted collection amounts for each of the five in-scope public service bodies are set out in Table 1.

**Table 1: Projected additional amounts (€ million) to be collected in 2016-2018**

Body	2016	2017	2018	Total
Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection	25.3	25.3	25.3	75.9
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	0.14	0.23	0.22	0.59
Courts Service	0.39	0.39	0.39	1.17
Health Service Executive	6.52	7.16	7.82	21.5
Local Authority Rates	150.03	208.15	269.62	627.8
Total	182.38	241.23	303.35	726.96

Projected collection amounts for 2016, including the projected collection rates, are set out in Table 2 alongside the actual amounts collected in 2016. Final figures for 2016 are not yet available for all five of the public service bodies who participated in this project as detailed below.

**Table 2: Projected and Actual amounts collected (€ million) 2016**

Body	Projected Available for Collection	Projected Collection Rate	Total Projected Collection	Actual Available for Collection	Actual Collection Rate	Actual Total Collection
Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection	115.0	78%	90.0	115.0	71%	82.0
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	21.0	96%	20.2	24.9	93%	23.2
Courts Service	14	89%	12.46	15.5	68%	10.5
Health Service Executive	50	92%	46	n/a	n/a	n/a
Local Authority Rates	1,735.33	84%	1,457.68	n/a	n/a	n/a

#### Courts Service

As identified in the Final Report of the Debt Management Implementation Project Board (pages 35-38 and page 78), the Courts Service has embarked on a fundamental change of approach to the collection of court imposed fines arising from the implementation of the Fines



(Payment and Collection) Act 2014. This Act came into effect in January 2016 and has introduced a number of new approaches to the collection of fines, including the option to pay by installment, attachment to earnings and community service. None of these options were available previously.

In effect, the Courts Service is in a transition period at present as not all aspects of the new legislation have taken effect yet. The time period to pay a fine has in effect been extended considerably compared with the previous situation, and as such the amount of fines collected in 2016 is, as expected, below the level collected in previous years. Taking account of the new arrangements, it is to be expected that there would be some drop off in the collection rate in the period immediately after the commencement of the new arrangements.

As stated in the report it will take approximately two years before the Courts Service can properly assess the impact of the new arrangements. For this reason it is not possible, at this point, to assess any savings that can be achieved, or other impacts of the new legislation.

#### Health Service Executive

The Finance function of the Health Service Executive is consulting hospitals to ascertain the total 2016 figure equivalent to the projected collection of statutory inpatient charges and emergency department charges. The figure will be provided to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

#### Local Authority Rates

The achievement of the 2016 targets for the local authorities will be assessed when the 2016 audited Annual Financial Statements of the local authorities are available. 2016 figures will be provided to the Deputy as soon as they are available.

### Office of Public Works Properties

103. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the sale price and the name of the buyer of all buildings sold by the OPW in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40132/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Commissioners of Public Works sold the following properties in the past five years (2012 – 2016).

When providing information on the disposal of property, the Commissioners do not disclose personal information pertaining to purchasers.

#### Properties and Sites Sold 2012

	Property	Sale Amount
1.	Garda Residence, Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal	€100,011.16
2.	Plot of Land adjacent to Skibbereen Garda Station, Co. Cork	€10,101.53
3.	Sale of State interest in Plot of Land at the Heath, Portlaoise	€127.00
4.	Coast Guard Cottage 12, Crosshaven, Co. Cork	€130,003.09

There was no disposal of State Property by the Commissioners of Public Works in 2013.

#### Properties and Sites Sold 2014

Questions - Written Answers

No.	Property	Sale Details	Sale Amount
1.	Former Garda Station, Inchigeela, Co. Cork	Sold by auction	€55,000
2.	Former Garda Station, Mal-low Road, Co. Cork	Sold by auction	€260,000
3.	Former Garda Station, Let-termore, Co. Galway	Sold by auction	€63,000
4.	Former Garda Station, Cloone, Co. Leitrim	Sold by auction	€50,000
5.	Former Garda Station Grangemockler, Co. Tipper-ary	Sold by auction	€103,000
6.	Former Garda Station, Bald-winstown, Co. Wexford	Sold by auction	€75,000
7.	Former Garda Station, New-towncashel, Co. Longford	Sold by auction	€41,500
8.	Former Garda Station Bal-linure, Co. Tipperary	Sold by auction	€100,000
9.	Former Garda Station Dun-drum, Co. Tipperary	Sold by auction	€90,000
10.	Former Garda Station Doon, Co. Limerick	Sold by auction	€50,000
11.	Former Garda Station Finea, Co. Cavan	Sold by auction	€56,000
12.	Former Garda Station Tul-lyvin, Co. Cavan	Sold by auction	€45,000
13.	Former Garda Station Kilm-essan, Co. Meath	Sold by auction	€200,000
14.	Former Garda Station Long-wood, Co. Meath	Sold by auction	€76,000
15.	Former Garda Station Bal-lymore, Co. Westmeath	Sold by auction	€55,000

Properties and Sites Sold 2015

No.	Property	Sale Details	Sale Amount
1.	Sale of Land adjoining Kinlough Garda Station, Co. Leitrim	Sold by private treaty	€10,000
2.	Sale of Land at Rosanna Rd to Tipperary County Council	Sold by private treaty	€679,000
3.	Sale of land at rear of Foxford Garda Station, Co. Mayo	Sold by private treaty	€2,500
4.	Former Garda Station, Rathowen, Co. Westmeath	Sold by private treaty	€15,000

No.	Property	Sale Details	Sale Amount
5.	Former Garda Station, Meelin, Co. Cork	Sold by private treaty	€44,500
6.	Sale of land at Clondergole, Clones, Co Monaghan	Sold by auction	€24,178
7.	Abbeydorney plot of land, Co. Kerry	Sold by private treaty	€20,000
8.	Former Garda Station and Residence, Kiltyclogher, Co. Leitrim	Sold by private treaty	€58,000
9.	Former Garda Station, Newtowncashel, Co. Longford	Sold by auction	€8,500
10.	Former Garda Station, Crossakiel, Co. Meath	Sold by private treaty	€6,000
11.	Sale of land at Cappamore Garda station, Co. Limerick	Sold by private treaty	€3,000
12.	Former Garda Station, Aclare, Co. Sligo	Sold by private treaty	€40,000
13.	Chantilly Stud, Rathmichael, Co. Dublin	Sold by auction	€1,275,000
14.	Former Garda Residence, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois	Sold by auction	€103,000
15.	3, Manna South, Templemore, Co. Tipperary	Sold by private treaty	€52,000
16.	Site at Ballinure, Co. Tipperary	Sold by auction	€5,500
17.	Transfer of Drogheda Site to Courts Service	Transfer	€10
18.	Transfer of Waterford Site to Courts Service	Transfer	€10
19.	6, Manna South, Templemore, Co. Tipperary	Sold by private treaty	€53,000
20.	Former Garda Station, Ballywilliam, Co. Wexford	Sold by auction	€110,000
21.	Former Garda Station, Carrigaholt, Co. Clare	Sold by private treaty	€105,000
22.	Former Garda Station, Kiltytealy, Co. Wexford	Sold by auction	€86,000
23.	Former Garda Station, Inistioge, Co. Kilkenny	Sold by auction	€132,000
24.	1 Talavera, Templemore, Co. Tipperary	Sold by private treaty	€57,500
25.	Former Garda Station, Johnstown, Co. Kilkenny	Sold by auction	€115,000

Questions - Written Answers

No.	Property	Sale Details	Sale Amount
26.	Former Garda Station, Geashill, Co. Offaly	Sold by auction	€123,000
27.	Former Garda Station, Ballyragget, Co. Kilkenny	Sold by auction	€141,000
28.	Naomh Barrog (GAA Pitch), Dublin	Sale of freehold	€290,000
29.	Site at Enfield, Co. Meath	Sold by private treaty	€40,000

Properties and Sites Sold 2016

No.	Property	Sale Details	Sale Amount
1.	Former Garda Station, Ballylinakill, Co. Laois	Sold by public auction	€92,000
2.	Former Garda Station, Lahardane, Co. Mayo	Sold by private treaty	€70,000
3.	4, Manna South, Templemore, Co. Tipperary	Sold by private treaty	€52,500
4.	Abbey Street Former Church, 12C Lower Abbey Street, Dublin	Sold by public auction	€1,475,000
5.	Former Garda Station, Ballynahowen, Co. Westmeath	Sold by private treaty	€20,000
6.	14, Church Avenue, Templemore, Co. Tipperary	Sold by private treaty	€62,500
7.	Former Garda Station, Labasheeda, Co. Clare	Sold by private treaty	€18,500
8.	Former Garda Station, Lauragh, Co. Kerry	Sold by private treaty	€115,000
9.	Site at Kilfinane, Co. Limerick	Sold by private treaty	€30,000
10.	Former Garda Station, Dromod, Co. Leitrim	Sold by public auction	€142,000
11.	Former Garda Station, Churchill, Co. Donegal	Sold by public auction	€62,000
12.	13, Church Avenue, Templemore, Co. Tipperary	Sold by private treaty	€62,500
13.	Former Garda station site, Ballyvary, Co. Mayo	Sold by private treaty	€6,000
14.	17, Harcourt Terrace, Dublin	Sold by public auction	€965,000
15.	Former Garda Station, Easkey, Co. Sligo	Sold by public auction	€65,000
16.	Former Garda Station, Ballyacolla, Co. Laois	Sold by private treaty	€15,000
17.	Strip of land at Quin Garda Station, Co. Clare	Sold by private treaty	€3,000

No.	Property	Sale Details	Sale Amount
18.	Former Garda Station, Tournafolla, Co. Limerick	Sold by private treaty	€42,500
19.	Former Garda Station, Ballyfarnon, Co. Roscommon	Sold by private treaty	€40,000

### Office of Public Works Properties

104. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the buildings licensed by the OPW for community use in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40133/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that the following State properties have been licensed to community groups during the past five years:

No.	Name of Property	Community Group
1.	Former Garda Station, Ballinskelligs, Co. Kerry	Coiste Forbartha na Sceilge.
2.	Former Garda Station, Ballycastle, Co. Mayo	Ballycastle Development Company.
3.	Former Garda Station, Beaufort, Co. Kerry	Beaufort Community Council.
4.	Former Garda Station, Castle-townsend. Co. Cork	Castlehaven Nursing Association.
5.	Former Garda Station, Cootehall, Co. Roscommon	Cootehall Community Development Group.
6.	Former Garda Station, Donard, Co. Wicklow	Cumann Croise Deirge na hEireann / Glen of Imaal (Red Cross) Mountain Rescue.
7.	Former Garda Station, Glenisland, Co. Mayo	Glenisland Development Group.
8.	Former Garda Station, Killaloe, Co. Clare	Killaloe/Ballina Family Resource Centre.
9.	Former Garda Station, Kilmeedy, Co. Limerick	Kilmeedy Community Development Group.
10.	Former Garda Station, Mulranny, Co. Mayo	Mulranny Community Futures Association.
11.	Former Garda Station, Rush, Co. Dublin	Rush Musical Society.
12.	Former Garda Station, Tourmakeady, Co. Mayo	Coiste Cultur Teanga agus Forbartha Thur Mhic Eadaigh Teo.

### Intestate Estates

105. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the most recent transfer from the intestate estate funds deposit account to the Dormant Accounts Fund took place; the amount involved; the period to which the transfer referred; when the next transfer is anticipated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40438/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The last transfer from the Intestate Estates Fund Deposit Account to the Dormant Accounts Fund took place on 30 April 2007. The amount transferred at the time was €4.4 million. This transfer covered the period from 1999, when a sum of £1 million was also transferred to the Exchequer.

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has no plans at present to transfer any further monies to the Dormant Accounts Fund.

### **Public Sector Pay**

106. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of restoration of civil servant pay under FEMPI; when he expects further pay restoration to take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40356/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** On Monday the 18th of September the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions endorsed the terms of the recently negotiated extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement on pay and reform in the public service.

This Public Service Stability Agreement will run from 2018 to 2020 by which point pay will be fully restored to all public servants earning up to €70,000 which is equal to almost 90 per cent of public servants. Benefits to different income groups are progressive and weighted towards the lower paid with pay increases ranging from 7.4 per cent to 6.2 per cent over three years.

This Agreement achieves the right balance between addressing the legitimate expectations of public service workers for increases in their pay and ensuring that the Government continues to exercise a prudent approach to the overall management of our public finances while securing industrial peace to support the ongoing delivery of our public services.

The improvements in pay provided for in this Agreement mark another important step in the gradual normalisation of our collective bargaining approach to pay arrangements in the public service through the process of unwinding the FEMPI legal framework on pay that has been in place for the last number of years.

A copy of the Agreement can be found on the Department's website: <http://www.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/LRA-extension.pdf>

### **Public Sector Pay**

107. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department will make retrospective the compensation to all public servants recruited since 2011 on lesser pay than their longer serving comparators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40488/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The issue of addressing the difference in incremental salary scales between those public servants, who entered public service employment since 2011 and those who entered before that date was addressed with the relevant union interests under the provisions of the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA). From 1 November 2013 pre and post-2011 pay scales were merged into a single consolidated scale applicable to each grade. Generally, the third point of 1 November 2013 pay-scale is equivalent to the first point of the pre 2011 scale. Guidelines in relation to the merging

of the scales are available on my Departments website <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/haddington-road-agreement/>.

It should be noted that under the new Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 which has recently been ratified by the Public Services Committee of the ICTU, pay increases range from 7.4 per cent to 6.2 per cent over three years, are progressive and will therefore favour new entrants.

The Agreement also recognises the issue of concern in relation to the salaries of new entrants and I understand arrangements between the parties to the Agreement will be made at an early date to engage on this matter.

### **Legislative Measures**

108. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason FEMPI remains on the Statute Book; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40489/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The full year cost of repealing the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) legislation as it applies to public service employees would be €1.4 billion post full implementation of the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA).

Pay bill increases of this magnitude in one year would: exceed available additional resources; violate the terms of EU Stability and Growth Pact; increase the deficit; increase the national debt and result in reduced shares of Government Expenditure for capital investment and other measures.

By contrast the phased approach to unwinding FEMPI which commenced with the LRA and which will now continue with the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, allows for strong fiscal planning, with dedicated resources ring fenced within multi annual expenditure ceilings, without compromising service delivery or capital investment plans.

The new Agreement, voted on and endorsed by ICTU, achieves the right balance between addressing the legitimate expectations of public service workers for increases in their pay while ensuring that the Government continues to exercise a prudent approach to the overall management of our public finances while supporting the ongoing delivery of our public services. As such it delivers a clear negotiated pathway for unwinding the remaining FEMPI legislation over the next few years.

### **Public Sector Pay**

109. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the total cost liability of public sector pay restoration, as provided for under the gradual unwinding of the FEMPI measures, with respect to local authority staff, for 2017 and 2018 for each local authority, in tabular form [40553/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Mid-Year Expenditure Report 2017 outlined an amount of €0.3bn to be allocated from the Lansdowne Road Agreement and €0.2bn from the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 in 2018.

The allocation of these central provisions to Departments is a matter that is subject to ongoing assessment in the context of the expenditure out-turns for 2017 and the estimates for 2018.

### **Flood Relief Schemes Status**

110. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding a flood protection scheme (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40588/17]

111. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the position regarding a flood protection scheme (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40589/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 110 and 111 together.

I am advised that the reports on Whitestrand, Spanish Point and Liscannor have been received from Clare County Council and are currently being examined by the OPW technical staff. This technical review will be completed in the near future and the OPW will have further discussions with Clare County Council.

### **Fire Safety**

112. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to undertake a comprehensive fire safety audit of all high risk buildings within the State's property portfolio including historic properties. [40606/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** In July 2017, a fire safety task force was set up by my colleague Eoghan Murphy TD, Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government. The task force is chaired by the Head of the National Directorate for Fire & Emergency Management. The Office of Public Works (OPW) has recently accepted an invitation to provide a representative to that task force.

OPW is cooperating with any requests received from Local Authorities in relation to fire safety assessments required to be carried out on buildings that it maintains arising from the Circular issued to Local Authorities by the National Directorate for Fire & Emergency Management in July 2017.

In addition, and as a first priority, OPW is reviewing fire safety in any building under its remit that is residential or partially residential. The number of such buildings is relatively few. If any issues are identified for remediation, they will be addressed as a matter of urgency.

OPW is also compiling an inventory of all its buildings that are fitted with external cladding, rain screens or similar, regardless of height. In due course, and as resources permit, these buildings will also have a fire safety review carried out either by desk assessment or by site-specific inspections as considered appropriate. Again, if fire safety issues are identified, these will be addressed. The reviews will be completed as soon as possible.

OPW has maintenance contracts in place in appropriate buildings, to ensure that active fire safety systems, such as emergency lighting, fire detection and alarm systems are regularly serviced to the requirements of the relevant Irish standards. A Circular is issuing from OPW to all occupants/building managers of properties it maintains to remind them of their responsibilities in relation to fire safety management.

### **Public Procurement Regulations**



113. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the detail of the procedures for tendering outlined in the new guidelines for public procurement for goods and services published in July 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40635/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My colleague, Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan, launched the new Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services in July. The purpose of these guidelines is to promote best practice and consistency of application of the public procurement rules in relation to the purchase of goods and services. The guidelines are published on the *OGP website @ www.ogp.gov.ie*.

Public Procurement is governed by well-established EU and National rules and guidelines. The aim of these rules is to promote an open, competitive and non-discriminatory public procurement regime which delivers best value for money.

The EU Directives on public procurement require that public works, supplies and service contracts above certain thresholds (exclusive of VAT) must be advertised on the Official Journal of the EU and awarded on the basis of objective and non-restrictive criteria. For works contracts, the threshold is €5.225 million; for supplies and service contracts awarded by Government Departments, the threshold is €135,000 and for the remainder of public bodies, the threshold is €209,000. The new EU Directives also introduced a simplified award regime (a "light-touch" regime) for certain services, notably health, social, educational and cultural services where the threshold is €750,000.

In relation to tendering procedures, there are six types potentially available to contracting authorities in awarding contracts. the Open Procedure; the Restricted Procedure, the Competitive Dialogue procedure; the Competitive Procedure with Negotiation procedure; the Innovation Partnership procedure; and the Negotiated Procedure without Prior Publication procedure. The choice of procedure will vary depending on the nature and circumstances of each contract. The Open Procedure is the most commonly used procedure.

For contracts or purchases below the EU threshold levels, the following national guidelines apply:

- contracts for goods and services with an estimated value of less than €5,000 (exclusive of VAT) to be awarded on the basis of verbal quotes from one or more competitive suppliers (best practice is to seek a minimum of 3 quotes confirmed by e-mail);

- contracts for goods and services with an estimated value between €5,000 and €25,000 (exclusive of VAT) to be awarded on the basis of responses to written specifications (e.g. sent by email) to at least three suppliers or service providers;

- contracts for goods and or services, with an estimated value of €25,000 (exclusive of VAT) and up to the value of the EU thresholds should normally be advertised as part of a formal tendering process on eTenders using the Open Procedure in line with DPER Circular 10/14.

Full details of public procurement procedures (both EU and National) can be found in the guidelines.

### **Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme**

114. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has satisfied himself that the increase in capital investment to 2021 set out in the summer economic plan is sufficient to deliver key promised infrastructural projects, including the new national

maternity hospital. [40636/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As set out in the Summer Economic Statement 2017, published in July, the Government will invest a further €4.1 billion in key infrastructure supporting economic and social progress. This is in addition to the extra €2.2b in Exchequer funding already allocated to housing under Rebuilding Ireland.

I am satisfied that this new planned level of capital investment represents an appropriate balance between the need for additional investment, the capacity of the economy to deliver additional public infrastructure consistent with macroeconomic and fiscal sustainability and the need to adhere to the responsible spending path agreed by Government with reference to the requirements of the EU Fiscal Rules.

The delivery of specific infrastructural projects is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant responsible Minister.

### **Office of Public Works Expenditure**

115. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the OPW started paying rent on the new Department of Health headquarters (details supplied); the cost of the rent per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40688/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** OPW started paying rent on the lease on this property on 22nd December 2016.

The cost of rent per annum in relation to the proportion of office space to be provided for the Head Quarters of the Department of Health equates to €3,312,467 per annum. The relocation of the Department of Health to this property will allow for the redevelopment of the Hawkins House site and will also provide a modern cost effective office space for the Head Quarters of Department of Health.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent of savings likely to be required in Departments in the remainder of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40731/17]

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has satisfied himself that expenditure and reform goals continue to be achieved throughout all Departments and subordinate agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40734/17]

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has satisfied himself regarding the adequacy of budgetary provisions affecting each Department; his views on whether the original allocation will remain sufficient throughout 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40736/17]

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has satisfied himself that expenditure overruns by Departments barring exceptional circumstances are likely to be curtailed in full; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40739/17]

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which he remains satisfied that all Departments and bodies under their aegis remain within the required expenditure and reform guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40740/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 116, 119, 121, 124 and 125 together.

Effective management of expenditure has been a key contributor towards putting Ireland's public finances back on a sustainable footing. On an ongoing basis, managing the delivery of public services within budgetary allocations is a key responsibility of each Minister and their Departments. Important measures are in place to ensure that budgetary targets continue to be met. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is in regular contact with all Departments and Offices to ensure that expenditure is being managed within the overall fiscal parameters and there is regular reporting to Government on expenditure levels. The drawdown of funds from the Exchequer is monitored against published expenditure profiles and this information is published each month in the Exchequer Statement.

As set out in the most recent Exchequer Statement, total gross voted expenditure at end-August 2017 was €36,575 million, which is €206 million below profile, but an increase of 4.7% in year-on-year terms. Gross current voted expenditure of €34,417 million was €168 million below profile at end-August, but up 3.8% year-on-year. Gross voted capital expenditure of €2,158 million at end-August was €38 million below profile, but up 20.8% year-on-year.

In relation to the adequacy of budgetary provisions for 2017, the Deputy will be aware that 2017 was third consecutive year in which we were able to increase public spending. As set out in the Mid-Year Expenditure Report, total gross voted expenditure for 2017 is estimated at €58.1 billion. This is an increase of €1.9 billion compared to 2016. Along with funding for demographics and other expenditure pre-commitments, this increase allowed for additional allocations for staffing in the health, justice and education sectors, increases in weekly Social Welfare rates and progression of the Action Plan for Housing. As I stated previously, all expenditure is subject to careful monitoring to ensure that it is being managed effectively and delivers public services on a value-for-money basis.

Public Service Reform continues to be a key feature of my Department's policy. Considerable progress has been made since the first Public Service Reform Plan was published in 2011. Five progress reports on Public Service Reform have been published to date. The most recent progress report is the Final Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-16 and was published in July 2017 alongside an OECD Assessment of the Plan and two case studies on reform (on INTREO and the Office of Government Procurement). These publications coincided with the launch of a Public Consultation on the next phase of reform. All documents are available on [www.reformplan.per.gov.ie](http://www.reformplan.per.gov.ie)

We are now moving from a stage of reform to one of development and continuous improvement which will cover the period to 2020. My Department is currently developing a new Public Service Development and Innovation Framework, Our Public Service 2020. This will set out a series of actions to be delivered out to 2020 which will both build on the achievements of the last six years and respond to new challenges. Our Public Service 2020 aims to deliver better outcomes for the public and to build more responsive and agile public service organisations. It identifies a series of actions grouped under three pillars: Delivering for our Public; Innovating for our Future; and Developing our People and Organisations. This next phase of public service reform is due to be launched before the end of the year.

## **Departmental Reform**

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent reform remains a feature of his Department's policy with particular reference to ensuring good value for the taxpayer and quality service for the consumer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40732/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Public Service Reform continues to be a key feature of my Department's policy. Considerable progress has been made since the first Public Service Reform Plan was published in 2011. We are now moving from a stage of reform to one of development and continuous improvement which will cover the period to 2020. My Department is currently developing a new Public Service Development and Innovation Framework, *Our Public Service 2020*. This will set out a series of actions to be delivered out to 2020 which will both build on the achievements of the last six years and respond to new challenges.

Our *Public Service 2020* will have a particular emphasis on quality service for the customer. We aim to place the customer's needs at the core of every decision from policy formulation to service design through to the service delivery. The framework will focus on increasing access, enabling better delivery and engagement with our customers using new tools such as increased digitisation, increasing accessibility of services and better data-sharing.

The approach of the framework will be underpinned by the principles of evidence, flexibility, inclusion, outcomes focus and evaluation and review. These will ensure a continued focus on quality service for the customer and on value for money. There will be a strengthened effort to move from an emphasis on outputs and processes to focus on outcomes and impact. Regular evaluation and review with indicators measuring whether the aims of the plan are on target will ensure we measure progress.

Ensuring value for the taxpayer is an important element of public expenditure management. In July this year I published the output of the spending review. The papers prepared for the Spending Review cover a wide range of policy areas and account for a significant proportion of current expenditure. In total, 17 papers were produced by officials in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and other Departments. In addition, an analysis of expenditure trends in key sectors was also published. This was the first in a planned series of 'rolling' selective reviews that will take place each year to 2019. The aim of the Spending Review process was to examine existing spending by reference to the principles of efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact. This approach allows for systematic examination of existing spending programmes to assess their effectiveness in meeting policy objectives and also to identify scope for reallocating funding to meet expenditure priorities. In this way, we can ensure that value for money is achieved for every euro of public funding spent.

As the Deputy may already be aware, in July my colleague Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan launched the following four public service reform initiatives:

1. The final progress report on the implementation of the 2014-16 Public Service Reform Plan which reflects on reforms implemented during that period, highlighting a wide range of improved services for the public and savings across a range of projects. The report showed that almost 90% of the 227 actions in the plan were on target or completed.

2. The OECD Assessment of the 2014-16 Public Service Reform Plan which was undertaken with a view to informing future public service reform efforts. The OECD Assessment acknowledges the achievements made and identifies the key areas where public service reform

needs to focus on going forward.

3. The first ever public consultation on public service reform which was carried out in preparation for the third phase of the Plan. Our Public Service 2020 – Development and Innovation Framework. The framework aims to deliver better outcomes for the public and to build more responsive and agile public service organisations. It identifies a series of actions grouped under the following three pillars:

1. Delivering for our Public
2. Innovating for our Future
3. Developing our People and Organisations

Two case-studies on recent major reform projects; the creation of the Office of Government Procurement and the establishment of the INTREO one-stop-shop service for job-seekers. These address a gap in access to public service case studies to date, and are educational resources for free use in third-level and public policy environments.

The four initiatives reflect well on the progress on reform to date, across the public service and show how we are using past experience to inform the next phase of reform, which is due to be launched before the end of the year. All documents are available on [www.reformplan.per.gov.ie](http://www.reformplan.per.gov.ie).

### Capital Expenditure Programme

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which current expenditure levels are likely to impact on capital expenditure requirements in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40733/17]

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he expects to be in a position to allow the various capital projects already announced to proceed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40737/17]

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which his Department can facilitate capital expenditure under various headings with particular reference to addressing infrastructural deficits thus generating great employment and providing a basis for future economic development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40743/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 118, 122 and 127 together.

Both current and capital expenditure levels for 2018 will be published in the Revised Estimates for Public Services. All Departments will provide profiles for how this expenditure will be allocated across the year.

As set out in the Summer Economic Statement 2017, published in July, the Government will invest a further €4.1 billion in key infrastructure supporting economic and social progress over the period 2018-2021. This is in addition to the extra €2.2b in Exchequer funding already allocated to housing under Rebuilding Ireland.

Consequently between 2014 and 2021 public capital expenditure in Ireland will have more than doubled and as set out by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, this will see public investment

in Ireland moving to among the highest in the EU.

I am satisfied that this new planned level of capital investment represents an appropriate balance between the need for additional investment, the capacity of the economy to deliver additional public infrastructure consistent with fiscal and macroeconomic sustainability and the need to adhere to the responsible spending path agreed by Government with reference to the requirements of the EU Fiscal Rules.

In the meantime, the delivery of the Capital Plan as published in 2015 is proceeding and while the position in relation to any individual project is a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant responsible Minister, the review of the Capital Plan which I published on 14 September, includes an update for each Department setting out the progress already being made in delivering the Capital Plan. A copy of the Review has been supplied to all Deputies. My Department also published a major projects tracker, providing an update on progress on all significant projects and programmes with a value in excess of €20m.

*Question No. 119 answered with Question No. 116.*

### **Public Sector Pay**

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which salary and wage cuts incurred during the economic downturn continue to be a priority in terms of restoration to the public in line with good practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40735/17]

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the unions that signed up to the various agreements including the Lansdowne Road Agreement will not be penalised as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40741/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 120 and 126 together.

As the Deputy is aware this Government believes in collective agreements and that the full benefits of a collective agreement should flow to those who subscribe to that agreement.

Under the terms of the Public Service Stability Agreement there are a series of affordable pay increases which will unwind FEMPI pay reductions for all those earning up to €70,000, which is equal to almost 90% of public servants over the period to 2020.

In total the benefits under the Agreement range from 6.2% to 7.4% and again we have weighted these benefits towards those on lower pay.

This Agreement, voted on and endorsed by ICTU, achieves the right balance between addressing the legitimate expectations of public service workers for increases in their pay while ensuring that the Government continues to exercise a prudent approach to the overall management of our public finances while securing industrial peace to support the ongoing delivery of our public services.

The improvements in pay provided for in this Agreement mark another important step in the gradual normalisation of our collective bargaining approach to pay arrangements in the public service through the process of unwinding the FEMPI legal framework on pay that has been in place for the last number of years.

*Question No. 121 answered with Question No. 116.*

### **Public Procurement Regulations**

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which procurement procedures continue to achieve good value for the taxpayer and speedy delivery to the consumer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40738/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Procurement reform is a key element of the Government's overall reform programme and is aimed at delivering increased value for money, more accurate and timely data and improvements in the capacity and capability of the procurement function across the public service and supporting increased compliance. The fragmented procurement arrangements across the public service which existed prior to this facilitated among other things suppliers charging different public service bodies different prices for the same goods and services. This was not sustainable, as the State could not afford to continue to purchase works, goods and services in a manner that undermined the efficient delivery of services.

All public bodies are keenly aware of the importance of maximising the value for money achievable when procuring any commonly acquired goods or services. The central procurement frameworks and contracts established by the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) have been designed to optimise benefits to the public service through the strategic aggregation of its buying power.

Central procurement frameworks are targeted at securing best value for money and facilitating contracting authorities to deliver services within their budgetary constraints. In this regard, public bodies are encouraged to use these frameworks arrangements. The benefits arising from these central procurement frameworks include: cash savings; administrative savings from reduced duplication of tendering; greater purchasing expertise; improved consistency; enhanced service levels and legal certainty. It is Government policy, as set out in Circular 16/2013, that public bodies, where possible, should make use of all such central arrangements. Where public bodies choose not to use central procurement frameworks they should be in a position to provide a value for money justification. It should also be noted that the OGP issued Circular 10/2014 which contains initiatives aimed at facilitating SME access to public contracts.

The State spends around €12 billion on goods, works and services each year. This represents a very significant portion of overall spending and it is, therefore, essential that the public service achieves maximum value for money and operational efficiency in its approach to public procurement. Developing a strategic approach to public procurement means that the state can deliver much needed public service in a sustainable manner.

While each procurement arrangement is different, each and every procurement competition must adhere to the rules and timelines prescribed in the relevant regulations. Notwithstanding this the professional service provided by the OGP enables the delivery of compliant arrangements within the most expeditious time frame possible. In particular, availing of OGP Frameworks offers a shorter timeframe than running standalone competitions. In terms of delivery of the OGP's programme of work, the OGP Schedule of Frameworks and Contracts sets out the OGP's service delivery plan for Q2 2017 to Q1 2018 and provides details of when key contracts and frameworks will be available for use by public sector bodies. The Schedule has been published to inform public sector bodies and suppliers. The Schedule is updated on a quarterly basis so that a rolling nine-month forward view is visible.

Ireland's procurement reform programme has been successful in establishing new structures and building momentum. The OGP is continuing to refine the model in order to strengthen and improve it, in line with the Programme for Government commitments.

*Questions Nos. 124 and 125 answered with Question No. 116.*

*Question No. 126 answered with Question No. 120.*

*Question No. 127 answered with Question No. 118.*

### **Infrastructure and Capital Investment Programme**

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which his Department has received communication from other Departments and bodies or agencies under its aegis seeking expenditure on such issues as upgrade of motorways, new roadworks, investment in water and other items of infrastructural importance; if he expects to be in a position to respond favourably to such requests in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40744/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I can confirm that my Department has received communications in respect of the Review of the Capital Plan and the 2018 Estimates. The Deputy will be aware that I published the Review of the Capital Plan on the 14th of September, and a copy of the report was made available to each Deputy on that day.

The Review draws on an evidence base that included detailed submissions by Departments and Offices, an extensive public consultation, as well as an Infrastructure Capacity and Demand Analysis completed by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

My Department has also published a range of supporting documentation, including Departmental submissions, which underpin the evidence base of the Review. Copies of the documentation can be found at [www.per.gov.ie](http://www.per.gov.ie).

Based on the analysis, the review of the Capital Plan has identified a number of key sectors as priorities for investment, including transport, education and housing. These findings provide a detailed evidence base which will assist Government in making decisions, in the context of the 2018 Estimates, on the allocation of the €4.1 billion of additional funding now available for allocation over the period 2018 to 2021. Reflecting this significant planned increase in public capital investment, between 2014 and 2021 public capital expenditure in Ireland will have more than doubled and as set out by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, this will result in public investment in Ireland moving to among the highest in the EU.

From a longer-term perspective, the review of the Capital Plan will also provide a significant input into the development of the proposed new 10 year National Investment Plan, to be published in conjunction with the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government's new National Planning Framework (NPF) - the objectives of which are fundamental to the achievement of long-term economic, social and environmental sustainability.

I am satisfied that this new planned level of capital investment represents an appropriate balance between the need for additional investment, the capacity of the economy to deliver additional public infrastructure consistent with overall fiscal and macroeconomic sustainability and the need to adhere to the responsible spending path agreed by Government with reference to the



requirements of the EU Fiscal Rules.

### Legislative Measures

129. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the legislation that his Department is responsible for that puts particular primary or secondary level curriculum on a legislative footing. [40128/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Pursuant to Section 41 of the Education Act 1998, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment develops curriculum and provides advice to me on matters relating to the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. Once curricula are approved by my Department the content is advised to schools through Circular letters. The Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools also set out curriculum requirements for schools.

### School Curriculum

130. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to formalise the SPHE curriculum to ensure it is being taught in an inclusive and diverse manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40129/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) curriculum is mandatory at primary level and up to junior cycle at post-primary level. Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is embedded within SPHE at Junior Cycle level. A framework for Senior Cycle SPHE is available to schools and while its implementation is not mandatory, schools are required to provide an Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme in Senior Cycle.

The SPHE curriculum aims to provide a range of diverse and inclusive skills such as communicating, making decisions, knowing where to find reliable data, belonging and integrating, handling conflict constructively, dealing with bullying, expressing feelings and emotions, substance abuse, resisting peer pressure, personal safety, values and mutual respect.

The Wellbeing area of learning has been introduced into the Junior Cycle programme from the start of the 2017/2018 school year. Up to 400 hours will be available for learning in the area of wellbeing in junior cycle. This began with a minimum of 300 hours of timetabled engagement from this year, 2017 and will move to the full complement of time as the new junior cycle is fully implemented in schools.

### Special Educational Needs Staff

131. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an appeal by a school (details supplied) in respect of the provision of a special needs assistant, SNA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40139/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are provided specifically 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 annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to pupils is set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additional support is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources. SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

Students who have significant care needs requirements are therefore granted access to SNA support, whereby a quantum of SNA support is allocated to a school, which is reflective of the assessed individual needs of a group of identified children. Those SNAs will then be in a position to cater for the care needs of those designated pupils, as the need arises, and as they require assistance, with the level of support being provided reflecting actual need at any given time.

A key aspiration for pupils with special educational needs is that they will, on completion of their school-based education, be able to graduate as young independent adults in so far as this is possible. There is therefore a need to balance the support provided in schools with each pupil's right to acquire personal independence skills. As such, in order to give those pupils every opportunity possible to develop independent living skills, the assistive SNA support which is given to them should always be at the minimum level required to meet the care needs of the pupil.

The NCSE advised all schools of their allocations for SNA support for the coming 2017/18 school year on 6th July 2017. Details of SNA allocations which have been made to schools have been published by the NCSE on their website at [http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NCSE-17\\_18-SNA-Teaching-Allocation-to-Special-Schools2.pdf](http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NCSE-17_18-SNA-Teaching-Allocation-to-Special-Schools2.pdf).

The level of SNA support allocated to all 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.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2017/18, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

In circumstances where a school, or parent, is unhappy with the allocation of SNA support which has been made, or considers the level of support allocated is not sufficient to meet the care needs of the pupils concerned, the school or parent, may appeal that decision via the NCSE appeals process. Details of the NCSE appeals process is available at [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie); the closing date for receipt of appeals is the 29th September 2017.

### Schools Building Projects

132. Deputy **Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress

to date in the determination of availability of additional funding required for school buildings in the case of a school (details supplied) with particular reference to the increase in building costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40184/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The school to which the Deputy refers was approved funding in March 2015 to provide 2 mainstream classrooms with en suite toilets and to convert an existing 40m<sup>2</sup> classroom into a multi-purpose room.

Additional funding was subsequently approved as a contribution towards a GP Hall.

However the school has proposed a project which is outside the scope of that normally approved. In the circumstances, my Department has advised the school that any works over and above that approved must be funded from the school's own resources.

In July 2017 the school was requested to submit an updated Detailed Design Submission (Stage 2) to my Department. This is still awaited.

### Schools Site Acquisitions

133. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a site has been acquired for a new school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40204/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy will be aware, a project to deliver accommodation for the school to which she refers is included on my Department's Capital Programme. The acquisition of a site by my Department is required for the purpose of this project.

With the assistance of officials in the relevant local authority, a number of site options were identified and assessed. Of these, the two most suitable options have been selected. Engagement with the landowner of both of these is currently ongoing.

The Deputy will appreciate that, due to commercial sensitivities, I am not in a position to identify the specific sites involved but the patron of the school in question will be informed of its proposed permanent location as soon as it is possible to do so.

### School Patronage

134. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the catchment area map that applied to the competition to award the patronage to a new school in the Carpenterstown and Castleknock area, which was won by an organisation (details supplied), will be the permanent catchment area for that particular school once it is established; if the school's board of management will be able to amend the catchment area in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40207/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** For school planning purposes, my Department divides the country into 314 geographic areas known as school planning areas which facilitates the orderly planning of school provision and accommodation needs. In identifying the requirement for additional school places, my Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide.

As the Deputy may be aware, on foot of the last nationwide demographic exercises, the

establishment of four new primary schools and nine new post-primary schools to open in 2017 and 2018 was announced. A number of these schools were announced as regional solutions to serve a number of school planning areas under increased demographic pressure, including the new post-primary school announced to serve the Carpenterstown and Castleknock school planning areas in Dublin 15, which opened in September 2017 in interim accommodation at the Le Chéile Secondary School in Tyrellstown.

When it is decided that a new school is required to meet demographic needs in a school planning area(s), a patronage process is conducted to decide who will operate the school. Parental preferences for each patron from parents of children who reside in the school planning area(s) are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

All new schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required to prioritise pupil applications from within the designated school planning area(s) which the school was established to serve. This does not preclude schools from enrolling pupils from outside of the designated school planning area(s), rather it reflects the need to accommodate in the first instance the demographic for which the school was established. The Department's focus is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places within that school planning area(s).

### **School Accommodation**

135. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress which has been made since June 2017 with regard to securing planning permission for a permanent home for a school (details supplied). [40242/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Ballinteer Educate Together National School is currently located on the Notre Dame campus, Upper Churchtown Road, Dublin 14 pending completion of the permanent accommodation for the school at the St. Tiernan's Community School site in Balally. Outline planning permission was submitted to the relevant local authority in December 2012 but was refused on the grounds of site access. This was appealed by my Department to An Bord Pleanála but subsequently withdrawn to facilitate submission to the local authority of an amended outline planning permission in 2013, which was also refused on similar grounds.

This decision was appealed by my Department to An Bord Pleanála but was refused. However, the Board considered that the matter of assessing alternative means of accessing these lands would benefit from a co-ordinated approach by my Department and the local authority in the interests of achieving a comprehensive and balanced solution to ongoing access issues on this educational campus.

This is a complex planning issue and my Department is in ongoing contact with the relevant parties, including meeting with the local authority and third-party landowners on a number of occasions, with a view to finding an acceptable solution to the access issue. All aspects are being progressed in close liaison with the local authority and it is imperative, that all of this work is done to the satisfaction of the local authority in order to ensure that a third planning application is successful. My Department is fully committed to bringing this project to a satisfactory conclusion as soon as the planning issues have been resolved.

### **Schools Inspections**

136. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of members of the inspectorate who are engaged or have previously engaged in post-primary inspections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40276/17]

137. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of members of the inspectorate who are engaged or have previously engaged in post-primary inspections that have served as school principals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40277/17]

138. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of members of the inspectorate who have served as principals in a DEIS post-primary school or elsewhere or as deputy principals, excluding those that subsequently became principals, in a DEIS post-primary school or elsewhere. [40278/17]

139. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of the post-primary inspectorate who regularly engaged in inspections; the number that have served four or more years as permanent teachers in a DEIS school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40279/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Excluding the members of the Senior Management Team of the Inspectorate, there are currently fifty-five post-primary inspectors in service. With the exception of an inspector who has recently joined the service and is on induction, all regularly engage in inspection. The criteria for appointment as a post-primary inspector are included in the application process which is managed by the Public Appointments Service. While, to date, experience of having served in a leadership or management role in a second-level school or centre for education is listed as a desirable attribute in the recruitment process, experience as a principal, deputy principal or teacher in a DEIS school is not an essential requirement for these posts. Therefore, the Department does not currently hold the information requested by the Deputy.

### **Trade Union Membership**

140. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 January 2017 in voluntary secondary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40312/17]

141. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 January 2017 in community schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40313/17]

142. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 January 2017 in comprehensive schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40314/17]

143. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 January 2017 in voluntary secondary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40315/17]

144. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of

teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 January 2017 in community schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40316/17]

145. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 January 2017 in comprehensive schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40317/17]

146. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 July 2017 in voluntary secondary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40318/17]

147. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 July 2017 in community schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40319/17]

148. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 July 2017 in comprehensive schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40320/17]

149. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 July 2017 in voluntary secondary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40321/17]

150. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 July 2017 in community schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40322/17]

151. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers who had a facility for a deduction at source of the payment of membership subscriptions to a union (details supplied) in place on 1 July 2017 in comprehensive schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40323/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The information as requested by the Deputy is being compiled and I will arrange for it to be forwarded to him.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

152. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of teachers in the voluntary secondary school sector who were in receipt of the gross additional payment of €796 in lieu of the supervision and substitution allowance in respect of the 2016-2017 school year on 2 June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40324/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The number of teachers in the voluntary secondary school sector that were in receipt of the gross additional payment of €796 in lieu of the supervision and substitution allowance in respect of the 2016/2017 school year on 2 June 2017 is 1,113.

## DEIS Eligibility

153. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) was not allocated a classification as a DEIS 1 urban school; if this school was incorrectly classified as a DEIS 2 school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40328/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** We have, for the first time, put in place an objective statistics based model for which schools are in or out of the DEIS Plan, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at areas of greatest need.

This model uses data supplied by schools to my Department's Primary and Post Primary Online Databases and CSO Small Area of Population statistics from the National Census of Population as represented by the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data was applied uniformly to all schools in the country in a fair and objective way, to identify the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in each school.

The identification process indicated that the school referred to by the Deputy had a relative level of disadvantage which did not merit its upgrading from its current Band 2 status to Band 1 status at this time.

In June, a communication issued to every school in the country explaining the Identification Methodology by way of a detailed 22-page document which is available on the Department's website at <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>

It is important to note that the fact that a school has not been included in the DEIS programme at Band 1 level on this occasion does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should its level of disadvantage warrant the allocation of additional resources.

## Schools Building Projects Status

154. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the proposed completion date for a new school building (details supplied) County Westmeath; and the capacity of the new building. [40350/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The project for the school in question is to provide a new 6 classroom special school plus ancillary accommodation to accommodate 36 pupils. Architectural planning has commenced and site surveys are currently being progressed. Also a pre-planning meeting was held with Westmeath County Council on 31 July to discuss the development and inform the design process. When the design drawings are complete the planning application will be lodged. It is anticipated that the planning application will be lodged before the end of this year.

## Capitation Grants

155. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the capitation sum allocated to primary schools is inadequate to meet all their expenses; if this sum can be increased in line with that provided to post-primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40352/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I recognise the need to improve capitation funding for primary schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years.

It is difficult to make precise comparisons between the levels of grants paid and the actual costs of running schools at primary and post-primary levels. However it is self-evident that the maintenance and running costs for second level schools are much greater on a unit cost basis than those in primary schools.

In general, post-primary schools are larger than primary schools and have a lower pupil teacher ratio resulting in more classrooms and specialist rooms such as laboratories, workshops and kitchens. This leads to higher unit costs in second level schools for heat, light, power, maintenance and cleaning.

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.

The process is underway for restoring grant funding that is used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff. The ancillary grant was increased by €6 in 2016 and €5 in 2017 in order to enable primary schools implement the arbitration salary increase for grant funded school secretaries and caretakers and to also implement the restoration of salary for cleaners arising from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation.

Capitation funding remains a priority for me to address during the lifetime of the Action Plan.

### **Schools Building Projects Data**

156. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of new school building provisions for an area (details supplied); his plans for the provision for a post-primary school for the area; the status of these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40500/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Two new 16 classroom primary schools for Citywest Educate Together National School and Citywest & Saggart Community National School (which opened in September 2012 in suitable interim accommodation at Fortunestown Lane, Citywest) are currently at advanced architectural planning stage. The site acquisition in respect of these schools is also at an advanced stage and on completion the school projects will proceed to tender.

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 the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department is currently carrying out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed. It is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced later in 2017.



### **Schools Building Projects Status**

157. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made in the provision of a new school building for a school (details supplied). [40502/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's Six Year Plan.

In this regard, my officials are liaising with South Dublin County Council with a view to finalising the acquisition of the site.

Once the acquisition is finalised, it is my Department's intention to initiate the architectural planning process for the provision of a new school building.

### **Schools Amalgamation**

158. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress which has been made in the divestment of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40504/17]

159. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the amalgamation of schools (details supplied); the communication he has had with the archdiocese for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40505/17]

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

I can confirm that my Department has received a proposal directly from the schools, referred to in the details supplied by the Deputy, relating to a proposed reorganisation of the schools. My Department has not received any correspondence from the Patron regarding the above proposals or in respect of a proposal regarding divestment.

My Department has indicated that we will seek to liaise further with the schools following completion of ongoing demographic exercises.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the eligibility for the higher education grant in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40555/17]

**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](mailto:oireachtas@susi.ie). Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

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.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal may be submitted by the applicant via [www.studentgrantappeals.ie](http://www.studentgrantappeals.ie) outlining the position to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

### **Fire Safety**

161. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to undertake a comprehensive fire safety audit of all high-risk buildings, including temporary structures and especially schools, that are under the remit of his Department. [40602/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has recently published an Invitation to Tender on the Governments e-tenders website for fire safety consultants to carry out fire safety audits of a representative sample of 25 to 30 schools constructed over the last 20 years to confirm their compliance with Fire Safety Certificates.

This exercise is being undertaken as a proactive, extra precaution by my Department on foot of recent concerns regarding fire safety in a small number of recently completed schools. Separate actions are being undertaken to address the issues with those buildings.

The selection of a school to be included in this audit in no way means that my Department has concerns about that particular school. The audit exercise is intended to give my Department a clear picture of whether there are any issues arising in respect of compliance with fire safety certificates in school building projects completed in the past 20 years or currently under construction.

### **School Funding**

162. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an appeal by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40610/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has received correspondence from the school in question in relation to its application for capital funding.

This correspondence is currently being considered and a response will issue to the school as soon as this process has been finalised.

### **School Transport Eligibility**

163. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if school transport will be provided for a person (details supplied) with special needs in order that the person can

access secondary school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40656/17]

**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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

In general, under the terms of the Department's 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 (NCSE) through its network of Special Education Needs Organisers (SENO).

Applications for transport provision, under the terms of this scheme, should only be completed in circumstances where children are not in a position to avail of standard school transport services.

The child referred to is not eligible for special school transport as it is reported that she does not have special educational needs as set out in the Department's Circular 02/05.

The terms of the School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs are applied equitably on a national basis.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

164. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the long-delayed three school campus for Buncrana, County Donegal; if he will meet with a delegation of Donegal Education and Training Board in addition to local teachers and parents to hear their concerns regarding the long delay in progressing this project and the implications for the existing three schools and the school children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40667/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy may be aware the project to which she refers is included on my Department's capital programme.

A preferred site option has been identified and officials from the relevant Local Authority, on behalf of my Department, have engaged in discussions with the landowner in question with a view to its acquisition. Once the site has been acquired, assuming no issues arise, my Department will be in a position to progress the project concerned into the architectural planning process.

I have received a request to meet with representatives of the school authorities and a reply will issue shortly to the school authorities in respect of this request. I can assure the Deputy that all parties are working to bring this acquisition process to a completion as early as possible.

### **School Transport Applications**

165. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the case of a person (details supplied) and have a bus ticket issued in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40670/17]

**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.

During the 2016/17 school year almost 116,000 children, including some 12,000 children with special educational needs, were 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.

In general, children with special educational needs are eligible for school transport if they are attending the nearest recognised mainstream or special school that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs under Department of Education and Skills' criteria.

The application for special school transport was submitted in early September and the child in question is eligible for school transport.

Bus Éireann is currently examining the suitability of existing services and in the meantime the Special Transport Grant towards the cost of private transport arrangements may be claimed by the family.

### **Third Level Fees**

166. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the payment of bench fees to third level education institutions; if a person that wishes to pay their own bench fee may do so in conjunction with their regular fees payable at the non-European Union student rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40672/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The position is that higher education institutions are autonomous bodies and, therefore, are responsible for the determination of the level of fees payable by students who are not eligible for free fees under my Department's Free Fees Scheme, as well as the method of payment of those fees.

The criteria governing the level of tuition fees to be charged in cases where students are enrolling as non-EU students is also a matter for the relevant institution to determine in line with its own criteria.

Accordingly, my Department has no function in relation to such matters and the matter should be addressed at institutional level.

### **DEIS Eligibility**

167. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if in the context of a review of the DEIS programme eligibility, he will ensure that a school (details supplied) has its status changed to urban band 1 from its current status of rural; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40690/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** We have, for the first time, put in place an objective statistics based model for which schools are assessed for inclusion in DEIS, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at areas of greatest need.

This model uses data supplied by schools to my Department's Primary and Post Primary Online Databases and CSO Small Area of Population statistics from the National Census of Population as represented by the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is applied uniformly to all schools in the country in a fair and objective way, to identify the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in each school. An information note detailing the methodology adopted, including the designation of primary schools as urban or rural, is available on my Department's website at <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>

### Student Data

168. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of second level students nationally during the academic year 2016-17. [40696/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The number of second level students nationally during the academic year 2016/2017 was 352,404.

### Student Data

169. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of second level students in County Louth during the academic year 2016-17. [40699/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The number of second level students in County Louth during the academic year 2016/2017 was 11,573.

### Student Data

170. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students in a school (details supplied) during the academic year 2016-17. [40702/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The number of students in St. Joseph's CBS, Drogheda during the academic year 2016/2017 was 727.

### Third Level Charges

171. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated first and full year costs of reducing student contributions to third level fees by €100. [40749/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** It is estimated that the net full-year cost to my Department of reducing the Student Contribution by €100 would be €7.5m. The first year cost (i.e. for Sep-Dec 2018) is estimated at €1.5m.

Calculations are based on student numbers for the academic year 2016/17 and take into account the resulting reduction to my Department's Student Grant Scheme budget.

It should be noted that the Government is committed to providing a more sustainable funding model for higher education, as evidenced by the fact that Budget 2017 provided the first increase in investment in higher education since 2009, involving €36.5million extra funding in 2017 and €160million extra over 3 years. In addition, the Government is exploring the possibility of an employer-exchequer funding mechanism which could realise up to €200million in additional annual funding by 2020.

It should be noted that the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education found that abolishing student registration fees for undergraduate students while delivering the level of investment that the higher education system needs would cost the State €1.3billion extra per annum.

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

172. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated first and full year costs of reducing the pupil teacher ratio by one point at primary and secondary level respectively. [40750/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Budget 2017 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 provided for over 2,400 additional teaching posts for our primary and post primary schools in the 2017/18 school year.

Each 1 point adjustment to the primary staffing schedule is estimated to cost in the region of €16.5m per annum. Each 1 point adjustment to the pupil teacher ratio in post primary schools is estimated to cost in the region of €60m per annum.

It is my intention to make further improvements to class sizes over the life of the Government. However, I recognize that there are needs across the system which have to be balanced in the decisions made in each Budget.

### **Human Rights**

173. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the communications he has had with representatives of the Russian Government regarding abuses of human rights of LGBT citizens in that country and, in particular, in the Chechen Republic. [40220/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government closely follows developments in relation to the treatment of members of the LGBTI community in Russia and, in particular, the widespread reports of the persecution of gay men in Chechnya. On 5 May, senior officials of my Department met the Russian Ambassador 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.

The European Union is also pressing the Russian authorities to ensure that the allegations are fully investigated and that those fleeing persecution are given full protection. The EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini, raised the matter during bilateral meetings with the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on 24 April and 11 July. On both occasions, HR Mogherini highlighted the serious concerns of the European Union and its Member States over the allegations and urged the Russian government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the rights of the gay community in Chechnya and elsewhere in the country are respected, in line with Russia's international human rights commitments.

### **Passport Data**

174. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the issues arising for mothers who have a different surname to their child, or children, in cases in which they are travelling abroad with that child, or children; if he has given consideration to providing the names of parents and guardians on children's passports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40135/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** A passport is an internationally recognised travel document which attests to the identity and nationality of the bearer. The Passport Service does not have any plans to expand the purpose of a passport to indicate a parental relationship between a child and his/her parent(s).

Parents are encouraged to complete the emergency contact details page at the back of their child's passport which may assist in this matter, in particular for those parents and children with different surnames.

### **Departmental Funding**

175. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to fund the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, supplies in budget 2018 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40137/17]

177. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to increase core funding to the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, in budget 2018 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40150/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** I propose to take questions 175 and 177 together.

The UNFPA is one of Ireland's UN partners, and the agency's work is closely aligned with many of the areas identified in Ireland's Policy for International Development '*One World, One Future*'.

Hundreds of thousands of women and girls die each year in developing countries from complications in pregnancy and childbirth. Improved maternal and reproductive health, including access to contraception, is an important focus of our aid programme and is critical to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

There is an important link between Ireland's support for improved maternal and reproductive health in developing countries and improved education outcomes for girls, also an important priority of Ireland's aid programme. Ireland values the partnership with the UNFPA. We provide significant core funding to the agency, totalling €2.8 million both this year and last, and this enables UNFPA to respond to needs as they arise - including in the area of supplies. In addition to core funding, we provide funding in our partner countries for specific programmes to improve maternal and reproductive health. This amounted to over €1.5 million in 2016.

My officials attended the UNFPA Executive Board meeting in New York earlier this month, and we will be considering our indicative budget for 2018 shortly, taking into account UNFPA's newly approved global strategic plan (2018-2021).

### **Irish Aid**

176. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the work supported by Irish Aid in Bolivia to promote the sexual and reproductive health of vulnerable and marginalised young persons in line with the commitment in One World, One Future to promote universal access to reproductive health care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40149/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland's Policy for International Development, *One World, One Future* commits to supporting efforts, consistent with the Cairo Programme of Action, to reduce maternal and infant mortality, and promote universal access to reproductive healthcare, including antenatal care and family planning services. In this context, Irish Aid supports a range of programmes related to sexual and reproductive health, including the work of the Irish Family Planning Association supporting vulnerable youth in Bolivia.

Currently, the Irish Family Planning Association supports migrant youth in the cities of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz who are at risk of falling into the cycle of urban destitution in urban slum areas. It works with local partner Centro de Investigación y Servicios (CIES) to provide proactive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and opportunities to exercise leadership, thereby contributing to the long-term goal of improving health status and developing awareness of rights and responsibilities as citizens.

*Question No. 177 answered with Question No. 175.*

### **Human Rights**

178. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to an organisation's recent report (details supplied) documenting the long-term impact of sexual violence on women during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and if he will provide aid to organisations that are offering essential medical, psycho-social and legal support to these persons and, on a European level, ensure that they have proper access to justice and reparation. [40170/17]



**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware of Amnesty International's report "*We Need Support, Not Pity*" which gives a very disturbing account of the legacy of wartime violence, and in particular the horrific crimes of sexual violence which were perpetrated against the women and girls of Bosnia during the Balkan Wars.

I support all efforts to ensure that those affected are afforded access to adequate rehabilitation, including the medical and psychological assistance which is so critical to recovery. We fully support the assistance that the EU provides to NGOs with particular expertise in this area, for example Medica Zenica, Vive Žene, Udružene Žene and the Agency for Cooperation, Education and Development (ACED) and regard the support network they provide as essential.

Ireland continues to support Bosnia and Herzegovina on its European path – an integral part of which is ensuring that human rights, including the right to justice, are fully respected. In the December 2016 Presidency Conclusions, the European Council emphasised "the need to continue handling domestic war crimes cases without discrimination, as well as addressing impunity and ensuring accountability". Along with our European partners, we will continue to ensure that appropriate benchmarks are met in the key areas of justice and fundamental human rights.

The next country report on Bosnia and Herzegovina is expected to be published by the European Commission in late Spring 2018.

### Missing Persons

179. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Ireland will continue to contribute funding the International Commission on Missing Persons, ICMP, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40171/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government is aware that International Commissions that assist victims and their families and take a strong role in capacity building are important to efforts to contribute to international peace and security. In this respect funding totaling €300,000 was provided to the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) in 2005 and 2006 by Irish Aid, for their work in the Western Balkans.

Support for the ICMP in the past formed part of Ireland's efforts to contribute to an effective and responsive approach to peace-building and the promotion and protection of human rights, which are important elements of Ireland's Policy for International Development – One World, One Future. My Department has been engaging with ICMP to explore future cooperation, and is currently considering a request for funding for a programme 2017 which will be decided on shortly.

### International Relations

180. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will contact the Israeli authorities to inform them of Ireland's opposition to the deportation of four persons (details supplied) who were in Israel and Palestine on a peaceful solidarity visit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40191/17]

181. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will request clarification from the Israeli authorities for the reasons for the deportation of four per-

sons (details supplied). [40192/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 181 together.

I am aware of the deportation of these four persons. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was notified immediately by one of the persons, and we have since received letters from each of them about this incident.

The leader of the group has led study groups to the West Bank for over ten years, a total of 17 tour groups involving over 400 people. These groups met a range of Israeli and Palestinian NGOs and other interlocutors, and studied issues on the ground relating to the occupation of the West Bank. She had as usual advised the Department in advance of the dates and itinerary of the tour, so that our missions would be aware of a large group of citizens touring the area.

No detailed reason for refusing admission to Israel was given to them, other than a generic explanation that it was for immigration reasons, and in the case of the leader also because of unspecified 'public security, public safety or public order' considerations. Thirty-three of the group entered Israel, but four were deported.

No report or allegation has ever been made to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of any concerns about the activities of these study groups. The group leader has also stated that she has never taken part in any demonstration in Palestine, nor have any of her groups' programmes included attendance at a demonstration.

The Ambassador in Tel Aviv has already called to the Israeli Foreign Ministry and requested an explanation for this action. We are awaiting a response. I will ensure that the Deputy, and the persons concerned, are notified when we hear more.

### **Overseas Development Aid Data**

182. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the distribution of financial aid to Myanmar; the organisations that are in receipt of aid; and the amounts received for the past three years. [40194/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** Ireland began funding a focussed programme of development assistance in Myanmar in 2013 with the objective of meeting the needs of some of the poorest and marginalised communities and to help underpin peace, prosperity and the political transition to full democracy. Through the programme, Ireland is working with key civil society and other trusted partners to deliver practical support for food and nutrition security, meeting immediate humanitarian needs, supporting the development of the humanitarian demining sector and building capacity for responsible business. Funding to our partners totalled almost €1.5m between 2014 and 2016 or approximately €500,000 per year:

Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT): €750,000

Mine Action Group (MAG): €240,000

Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business: €150,000

Plan International: €234,500

METTA: €100,000

In addition to monies provided under the bilateral aid programme, a number of civil society organisations working in Myanmar received funding of €4.15m for humanitarian assistance and longer-term development programmes between 2014 and 2016 as follows:

Trócaire: € 3,665,751

Misean Cara: € 346,000

International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH): € 64,000

Irish Congress of Trade Unions: € 25,000

Plan International: € 50,000

Separately, Ireland provides core funding to both the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (over €11 million provided in 2017). Core funding enables rapid scale-up in response to escalating humanitarian crises. These organisations are now scaling up operations in Myanmar and Bangladesh, including in border areas, to support those affected by the crisis.

Additionally, Ireland is a strong supporter of the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) which, on 7 September, announced an allocation of US\$7 million to urgently help tens of thousands of people fleeing violence in Myanmar and seeking refuge in Bangladesh. These funds will allow humanitarian partners to scale up urgent aid by providing additional shelter, food and critical health care to those affected by the conflict, especially women and girls. This allocation is in addition to US\$6.5 million which was provided by CERF for emergency relief to Myanmar earlier in 2017.

### **Human Rights**

183. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the political and human rights issues in Nigeria regarding pro Biafra activists (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40281/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** I am aware of the disturbances which have taken place recently in South-East Nigeria. Ireland recognises the sovereignty and unity of Nigeria. Issues relating to Biafra, therefore, are matters for the Nigerian Government. It is the responsibility of the Nigerian Government to create a secure environment in which civilians are protected from violence. I welcome the recent messages from Nigerian leaders on the need to maintain peace. Ireland, as a strong proponent of political freedom and human rights, encourages Nigeria to meet its international commitments in this regard. The Embassy of Ireland in Abuja continues to closely monitor the situation in South-East Nigeria, in co-operation with government authorities, civil society organisations, and our EU and UN partners.

### **Emigration Data**

184. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland historically enjoyed a quota or a formal or informal arrangement regarding the numbers of emigrants to the United States; if so, the arrangement; the numbers involved; when this arrangement, if in existence, came to an end; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40498/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The regulations governing immigration into the United States are a matter solely for the U.S. authorities and immigration from Ireland to the U.S. is not and has not been the subject of bilateral agreements, formal or informal.

Until 1965, immigration into the United States was based on a system of national quotas, with the quota per country set at two per cent of the foreign-born population of that nationality as per the 1890 US census.

In 1965, the US abolished this national-origins quota system. It was replaced with a preference system, based on immigrants' family relationships with US citizens or US permanent residents, as well as other factors.

The numbers of Irish people being admitted to the US as legal immigrants has dropped significantly since 1965.

In response, successive Governments have sought greater pathways for migration to the United States by Irish citizens.

I can assure the Deputy that those efforts are continuing.

### **Northern Ireland**

185. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken recently to the US Secretary of State regarding the appointment of a special envoy to Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40629/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The United States has provided immensely valuable support to the Peace Process over the last three decades and, as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government wishes to see this continue to the fullest extent.

At numerous critical moments, the friendship, encouragement and support of the United States Administration, Congress and people, has proved essential in providing all parties with confidence to move forward with the Peace Process, and this remains the case today. The United States is also an indispensable partner and friend in the ongoing work of the Peace Process to deepen reconciliation between communities and to realise fully the dividends of the peace.

In this regard, the Government would very much welcome the appointment of a new Special Envoy for Northern Ireland by the Administration, as part of its continuing support for the Peace Process.

The Government also welcomes and appreciates the bipartisan support recently conveyed to the US Administration by Members of the US Congressional Friends of Ireland group, for the appointment of a new US Special Envoy for Northern Ireland. Ireland continues to greatly value the support, friendship and engagement of the US Congress, on a bipartisan basis, for the Peace Process.

In the immediate period ahead, the Government looks forward to the continued support of the US Administration and Congress in encouraging the parties in Northern Ireland to take the necessary steps to ensure that the devolved power-sharing institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are re-established without delay.

## Humanitarian Aid

186. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps being taken to assist the people of Yemen, particularly in view of the number of deaths of children due to malnutrition and the outbreak of cholera. [40661/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** The people of Yemen are facing a combined humanitarian catastrophe of conflict, cholera and risk of famine. 17 million Yemenis are food insecure, including 1.8 million acutely malnourished children. In the last six months alone, the cholera epidemic has killed more than 2,000 people and infected nearly 700,000 others, many of whom are children. Yet, due to ongoing attacks and lack of critical supplies, only 45% of health facilities are functioning.

The extent of the crisis in Yemen is a source of deep concern, particularly given its devastating impact on the Yemeni people. Since 2012 Ireland has provided over €11 million in humanitarian assistance to Yemen, with €4 million provided this year to meet the commitment we made at the High-level Pledging Event for Yemen in April. This funding provides rapid and flexible funding to NGOs and UN agencies to deliver services on the ground, including health, water and sanitation, and nutrition interventions.

Ireland is also providing €20 million annually over a three year period (2016-2018) to the World Food Programme (WFP). Last month, WFP reached nearly seven million people in Yemen with monthly food assistance as well as specialized nutrition supplements to treat and prevent malnourishment among women and children. Our core funding of €9.5 million in 2017 to the International Committee of the Red Cross supports the organisation's work in Yemen, where it is providing support to health facilities and on-site training to medical and administrative personnel in dedicated cholera treatment units. Ireland is also the 8th largest contributor to the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which has allocated \$84.8 million to Yemen since 2015.

Conflict is at the root of this crisis and Ireland supports the efforts of UN Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed and his team, who continue to work towards a peace agreement that is acceptable to all parties to the conflict. Ireland has also been consistent in calling for an impartial, international investigation into alleged violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and human rights law by any party to the conflict in Yemen, including at the UN Human Rights Council.

Together with our EU and UN partners, we will continue to monitor the situation closely and to work internationally for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

## Tree Remediation

187. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to introduce legislation regarding a resident's right to light when light is blocked from neighbouring trees in circumstances in which these trees are on private land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40209/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The difficulties experienced by property owners arising from trees and high hedges on neighbouring land were raised in both the Dáil and Seanad during passage of the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009. At that time, my Department consulted on the matter with the Law Reform Commission, which had been involved in drafting the 2009 Act, and the Commission took the view that un-

reasonable interference caused by high trees or hedges was a matter in any particular case for tort law or more generally for planning or environmental law.

In England and Wales, for example, difficulties arising in connection with high trees or hedges are dealt with under Part 8 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003. This Act makes provision for local authorities to determine complaints by the owners or occupiers of domestic property who are adversely affected by evergreen hedges over 2 metres high. Broadly similar legislation, i.e. the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, came into operation in Northern Ireland on 31 March 2012.

The manner in which problems associated with high hedges and overhanging trees are resolved in both England and Wales and Northern Ireland indicates a clear preference for the resolution of such disputes at local level, preferably by mediation, with recourse to the courts only as a last resort. This is intended to reduce the risk of prolonged and costly litigation, and the risk that court proceedings could leave a legacy of bitterness between adjoining property owners and ill-feeling in the local community.

Under our existing law, a person may be in a position to seek damages or an injunction requiring the cutting of boundary hedges or trees under the tort of nuisance. In order for the nuisance to be actionable, the person concerned would have to show that an easement existed and that there had been a substantial interference with that right.

The Mediation Bill 2017, which will shortly complete its passage through the Oireachtas, does not deal directly with the issue of overhanging trees and high hedges. However, it seeks to promote mediation as a viable, effective and efficient alternative to court proceedings. The enactment of the Bill will contribute to the resolution of disputes by means of mediation, thereby reducing legal costs associated with such disputes and avoiding the stress involved in adversarial court proceedings.

### **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

188. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position in relation to ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. [40430/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Ireland signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and since then, successive Governments have emphasised Ireland's strong commitment to proceed to ratification as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to ensure all necessary legislative and administrative requirements under the Convention are met. This Government remains committed to ratification of the Convention.

It is essential that the State is in a position to meet the obligations that it assumes under the terms of an international agreement from the moment of its entry into force for Ireland. Before the State can ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, enactment of new legislation and amendment of existing legislation is required to ensure obligations will be met upon entry into force for Ireland. Ratification of a Convention before we have amended domestic legislation that contradicts it makes no sense and does nothing to ensure compliance or to protect the people for whose benefit the Convention exists. The previous Government published a Roadmap in October 2015, which sets out the legislative measures needed to meet those requirements, along with declarations and reservations to be entered by Ireland on ratification.

Considerable progress has already been made to overcome the remaining legislative barriers

ers to Ireland's ratification of the Convention. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed into law on 30 December 2015 and is a comprehensive reform of the law on decision-making capacity. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 has reformed Section 5 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993 to facilitate the full participation in family life of persons with intellectual disabilities and the full expression of their human rights.

The Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016 was published immediately prior to Christmas and completed Second Stage in February 2017. The primary purpose of the Bill is to address the remaining legislative barriers to Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Work is ongoing on all the other issues set out in the previous Government's Roadmap for Ratification published in October 2015 and these will be progressed as Committee Stage amendments. The Bill will be progressed to enactment at an early date to facilitate ratification of the UN Convention as soon as possible.

The precise timing of ratification now depends on how long it will take for this Bill to progress through the enactment process and on issues in relation to commencement both of deprivation of liberty provisions, which will be included in the Bill at Committee Stage, and of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015. The major issue at this stage is in relation to deprivation of liberty – in the case of persons in nursing homes for example, whose capacity to consent may be in doubt. This is a sensitive and important issue and we must get it right.

Unfortunately, it is taking longer than expected to develop a proposal that is constitutionally sound and operationally effective and reasonable. The Department of Justice and Equality continues to engage with the Department of Health to assist with that work, but there is still some work to be done.

While Ireland's not having ratified the CRPD is a recurring point of criticism by the UN as well as by domestic civil society and NGOs, it should be noted that in terms of quality of service and the actual position of people with disabilities in society, Ireland is in many respects in advance of other EU states. This is not to be complacent and we are continuing to take practical measures to improve the lives of people with disabilities. The Report of the Make Work Pay Group was published earlier this year and already action, as announced by Minister Harris has been taken on its recommendations. We have a Comprehensive Employment Strategy in place and the Government recently published a new National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017 – 2021). This strategy contains a wide range of practical commitments to improve the position of people with disabilities.

I would like to take this opportunity to assure the Deputy that ratification of the UNCRPD remains a very high priority for me as Minister.

### **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

189. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he expects Ireland to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40653/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Ireland signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and since then, successive Governments have emphasised Ireland's strong commitment to proceed to ratification as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to ensure all necessary legislative and administrative requirements under the Convention are met. This Government remains committed to ratification of the Convention.

It is essential that the State is in a position to meet the obligations that it assumes under the terms of an international agreement from the moment of its entry into force for Ireland. Before the State can ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, enactment of new legislation and amendment of existing legislation is required to ensure obligations will be met upon entry into force for Ireland. Ratification of a Convention before we have amended domestic legislation that contradicts it makes no sense and does nothing to ensure compliance or to protect the people for whose benefit the Convention exists. The previous Government published a Roadmap in October 2015, which sets out the legislative measures needed to meet those requirements, along with declarations and reservations to be entered by Ireland on ratification.

Considerable progress has already been made to overcome the remaining legislative barriers to Ireland's ratification of the Convention. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed into law on 30 December 2015 and is a comprehensive reform of the law on decision-making capacity. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 has reformed Section 5 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993 to facilitate the full participation in family life of persons with intellectual disabilities and the full expression of their human rights.

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The precise timing of ratification now depends on how long it will take for this Bill to progress through the enactment process and on issues in relation to commencement both of deprivation of liberty provisions, which will be included in the Bill at Committee Stage, and of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015. The major issue at this stage is in relation to deprivation of liberty – in the case of persons in nursing homes for example, whose capacity to consent may be in doubt. This is a sensitive and important issue and we must get it right.

Unfortunately, it is taking longer than expected to develop a proposal that is constitutionally sound and operationally effective and reasonable. The Department of Justice and Equality continues to engage with the Department of Health to assist with that work, but there is still some work to be done.

While Ireland's not having ratified the CRPD is a recurring point of criticism by the UN as well as by domestic civil society and NGOs, it should be noted that in terms of quality of service and the actual position of people with disabilities in society, Ireland is in many respects in advance of other EU states. This is not to be complacent and we are continuing to take practical measures to improve the lives of people with disabilities. The Report of the Make Work Pay Group was published earlier this year and already action, as announced by Minister Harris has been taken on its recommendations. We have a Comprehensive Employment Strategy in place and the Government recently published a new National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017 – 2021). This strategy contains a wide range of practical commitments to improve the position of people with disabilities.

I would like to take this opportunity to assure the Deputy that ratification of the UNCRPD remains a very high priority for me as Minister.



## Refugee Status Applications

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40134/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** If an application for international protection has been made in the State, the Deputy will be aware that, for confidentiality reasons, it is not the practice to comment on such applications.

As the Deputy is aware, applications for refugee status in the State were, prior to 31 December 2016, determined by an independent process comprising the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) which made recommendations to the Minister of Justice and Equality on whether such status should be granted.

Following the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, new arrangements for the investigation and determination of applications for international protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and cases involving permission to remain in the State have been introduced. Such applications will be processed, as part of a single application procedure, by the International Protection Office (IPO) which has replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and Appeals will be processed by the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT).

The Chief International Protection Officer, following consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published a statement on the Prioritisation of Applications for International Protection under the International Protection Act 2015 on 27 February 2017, which is available on the website of the International Protection Office ([www.ipo.gov.ie](http://www.ipo.gov.ie)).

## Naturalisation Applications

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); the timeframe for the case to be progressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40185/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, is still under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion. The application will be submitted to me as expeditiously as possible.

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

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

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

### **Citizenship Applications**

192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); the timeframe for this application to reach a conclusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40186/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that progress on the application referred to by the Deputy is well advanced and the file will be re-submitted to me for final decision as expeditiously as possible.

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

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.

### **Naturalisation Applications**

193. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40187/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is still under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion. I understand however that the case is due to be submitted for decision in the near future.

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

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most cases are now generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will

take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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.

### **Domestic Violence Policy**

194. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the funding which is provided for groups or programmes which assist men that have or are likely to engage in intimate partner abuse; the numbers of men that have engaged in such programmes; if there is information on the success of these programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40208/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The second national strategy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence is a whole of government response to these issues. As part of that strategy's objective of holding perpetrators to account and supporting victims, there is an action to establish a single national programme for perpetrators of domestic violence, to replace the different existing programme

Domestic violence perpetrator intervention programmes in Ireland are delivered by three organisations and in 2016 programmes were delivered in 14 locations.

In 2016 the funding paid by my Department for running these programmes amounted to €653,500.

There were 187 interventions with men on domestic violence perpetrator programmes in 2016. Interventions include individual assessments for programme applicants, one to one work with men in relation to their participation in groups to address the offending behaviour(s) and working with them in such groups. The programmes have been developed in order to maximise the safety of female partners and ex-partners of the men on the programmes and their children. All programmes have a dedicated partner contact element where partners are provided with practical support and advice. In 2016, 102 partners/ex-partners participated in the partner contact arrangements facilitated by the perpetrator programmes.

Informal feedback suggests that the programmes give rise to positive outcomes in relation to the safety of women and children and positive outcomes also for the men.

A new uniform national programme is due to be delivered by all domestic violence perpetrator programmes commencing shortly. Importantly it is intended that it will involve systematic follow up with programme participants and partners, once the first group of participants have completed that programme.

### **Direct Provision Data**

195. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that have died while in the direct provision system since 1 January 2007; the ages of the persons that died; the reason for the death; the number that were the result of suicide; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [40223/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):**

The wellbeing of residents in direct provision is an absolute priority for the Reception and Integration Agency, which is the agency of my Department tasked with overseeing the provision of full board accommodation and certain ancillary services to persons in the protection process. Since the direct provision system was established in 2000 some 60,000 persons have benefited from these services, and some deaths of residents have occurred in this period.

While overseeing the delivery of different services, my Department has no direct role in the provision of health or health related services to protection applicants. Such services are provided through the Department of Health by the Health Service Executive (HSE) via hospital, primary care and the GP services. Protection applicants receive these health services on exactly the same basis as Irish or EU citizens who have medical cards. All health matters are private between a patient and his or her medical advisor and records in relation to any illness, including mental illness are, properly, not available to Departmental staff. Similarly, when persons in the protection process die, their deaths are treated by medical personnel and/or the coroner in exactly the same way as any other person who passes away within the jurisdiction of the State. The same procedures apply to protection applicants as to other persons who are not protection applicants.

While my Department collates some statistics on deaths of persons in the protection process, this is usually by way of a general knowledge of the cause of death, such as by way of information arising from the specified medical needs of the resident concerned. In most cases, the deaths would have occurred outside of State-provided accommodation e.g. in hospitals or hospices. Official records in relation to deaths are maintained by the Register of Births Marriages and Deaths (HSE). The Department has no access to death certificates, nor would it be appropriate under data protection safeguards for it to seek such access, and it is therefore not possible to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

### **Direct Provision Data**

196. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of complaints that have been made to An Garda Síochána by residents of direct provision centres regarding staff or management at these centres; the number of prosecutions that have been taken against staff or management of these centres since 1 January 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40224/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter, and I will contact the Deputy again when this report is to hand.

As the Deputy is aware, accommodation centres are subject to regular and frequent inspections by staff of the Reception and Integration Agency and by independent external contractors. The reports of these inspections are published on the RIA website. Centres are also subject to inspection by various other State agencies including for example Environmental Health Officers. The Reception and Integration Agency has implemented a number of policies in all centres dealing with such issues as child protection, sexual and gender based violence and a code of practice for persons working in accommodation centres.

The issue of Garda vetting and child protection in RIA centres is taken very seriously. RIA has a dedicated Child and Family Services Unit, whose role is to manage, deliver, coordinate,

monitor and plan all matters relating to child and family services for all asylum seekers residing in the direct provision system. It also acts as a conduit between RIA and Tusla, the latter having statutory functions in this area. The Unit is headed up by an official seconded from Tusla who has clinical expertise in the area of child welfare and protection.

RIA's Child Protection and Welfare Policy and Practice Document is based on the HSE's "Children First - National Guidelines for the protection and welfare of children. In relation to training of staff in centres, the HSE/Tusla has provided 'Keeping Safe' child protection training and Designate Liaison Person Training [DLP] to each centre's Designated Liaison Persons and other staff members. RIA has recently updated its Child Protection Policy to include a Practice Document. To communicate this policy, briefing sessions were held in family centres around the country for centre staff members and all other relevant personnel. The policy is available on [www.ria.gov.ie](http://www.ria.gov.ie)

I am advised that all staff of centres under contract to RIA are Garda vetted and the remit of the Ombudsman, and the Ombudsman for Children, has been extended to cover those who are living in State provided accommodation since April 2017.

### **Garda Equipment**

197. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to bring in body cameras on Garda uniforms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40225/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the provision of equipment for An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that a working group within An Garda Síochána is currently examining the options available on the market regarding body worn cameras, with a view to developing a business case in the event that it is decided to recommend the their general use by members of An Garda Síochána.

### **Garda Equipment**

198. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the last technical update of Garda information technology services took place; his plans to upgrade the information technology services of An Garda Síochána to increase efficiency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40226/17]

199. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that through a tech rehab, for example, the widespread distribution of smart phones for work, that the New Zealand police force experienced productivity gains of 30 minutes per shift; his views on whether An Garda Síochána could benefit from such a policy of modernisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40227/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 198 and 199 together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda equipment and resources are a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government recognises that Gardaí must have the modern technology and resources necessary to detect and investigate crimes, and to prevent loss and harm to citizens and their property on a 24/7 basis. Accordingly, the Garda Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016 to 2021 sets out a series of initiatives which will enable An Garda Síochána deploy the latest cutting edge technologies in the fight against crime.

In support of this plan, some €330 million, including €205 million under the Capital Plan, is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure between 2016 and 2021. This major investment is unprecedented and will facilitate progress on important reforms arising from the Garda Inspectorate's report on Crime Investigation. Some key ICT projects which are being advanced in this regard are as follows:

- a new Investigations Management system which will support the management of activities completed as part of an investigation, maintain a full history of the chain of events in an investigation, manage information gathered, and decisions/actions taken;

- a new Property and Exhibits Management System which will be used to record all property and exhibits which come into Garda possession and manage them throughout their lifecycle within the organisation from scene to court;

- a new Enterprise Content Management System which will provide An Garda Síochána with a single enterprise content repository for all documentation and multimedia content created;

- in the area of Victims Services PULSE has been updated to include Individual Victim Assessment and Victim Engagement screens to record information about the victim themselves and any Garda interaction or engagement with the victim;

- a new e-Vetting system is now operational which provides online processing of applications for Garda vetting for persons working with children and vulnerable persons;

- a new Rosters and Duty Management System which will support the management of the new rosters in An Garda Síochána and to manage the deployment of human resources on a day to day and also on a strategic long term basis a new Anti-Money Laundering application will support Financial Intelligence Units to counter Terrorist Financing and Money Laundering;

- an updated Intrusion Prevention and Detection System will add an additional layer of security to An Garda Síochána's security architecture by proactively identifying potential threats and having policies in place to act upon them.

An Garda Síochána is also, in collaboration with the Department of Justice and Equality, actively progressing a number of EU ICT Projects to improve police co-operation and increase border security within the EU Community. These include implementation of :

- the FIND solution to enable the Garda National Immigration Bureau to query the Interpol Stolen Lost Travel Document Database;

- implementation of PRUM which will deliver enhancements to the Automated Finger Printing System to step up cross-border cooperation in relation to terrorism, crime and illegal immigration;

- implementation of the Schengen Information System to enable the rapid dissemination of information pertaining to terrorist threats and other subversive and non-subversive crime types across members states of the European Union;

- implementation of ADEP (Automated Data Exchange Process) which will allow searching of other member states criminal records on name, address, date and place of birth, on a hit/no hit basis;

- implementation of PNR (Passenger Name Record) requirements which require air carriers to provide advance passenger data to Immigration authorities. This data can be used for risk analysis by various state agencies;

- implementation of API (Advanced Passenger Information) requirements which require air carriers to provide advance passenger data to Immigration authorities. This data can be used for risk analysis by various state agencies. API data is basic information that includes name, date of birth, gender, citizenship, and travel document data (e.g. passport number).

In addition, a project to enhance network access to rural Garda stations is being progressed and is well advanced.

Further, I understand that the Garda mobility strategy, which aims to ensure that Garda members have remote access to information and technology, is progressing. When fully implemented, access by members to real-time information on mobile devices, as well as enabling investigation teams to collect and share information digitally, will improve the effectiveness of the service provided to communities. Indeed, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the ACTIVE Mobility programme, to be delivered over the next 3 to 5 years, will result in front-line Gardaí having more connectivity to back office systems harnessing the power of mobile technology. I understand from Garda authorities that an initial pilot of the programme will take place in the Limerick Division commencing in Q4 2017.

### **Garda Equipment**

200. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has considered the establishment of a phone service and an online reporting system to allow persons to report crimes via a phone call or web portal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40228/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy, and I will contact her directly when this report is to hand.

### **Garda Training**

201. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the focus or resources that are available for further education and or continuous professional development within An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40229/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána, which includes arranging for the training of Garda members and civilian staff and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Commissioner that each Garda Division has a Continuous Professional Development School (CPD) which provides professional development on a variety of topics and issues ranging from procedural to legislative changes and the implementation of new

initiatives. The Garda College also designs and delivers a range of professional development programmes for members of An Garda Síochána including leadership, management, applied skills and crime training. In addition Garda members and staff are actively encouraged to pursue third level courses through financial support and study facilities such as annual leave and research topic approval.

I have been informed by the Commissioner that as part of major reform programme underway in An Garda Síochána under its Modernisation and Renewal Programme (2016-2021) investment in learning and development in An Garda Síochána will be enhanced to support the development and skills of all members and staff who will receive the training, mentoring, leadership development that they require to continue to develop their skills, to perform more effectively in their roles and progress their careers.

### **Garda Reserve**

202. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria under which the Garda reserves are deployed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40230/17]

203. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the terms of using the Garda reserves was last reviewed; when the next review is scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40231/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 202 and 203 together.

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.

The Garda Reserve was established in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 to enhance the links between An Garda Síochána and local communities and consists of voluntary unpaid members, drawn from the community, to support the work of An Garda Síochána. The Reserve perform policing duties as determined by the Commissioner, while accompanied by full time Gardaí. Their role is to provide local patrols and participate in crime prevention initiatives targeted at specific local problem areas. Reserve members are also involved in policing major incidents and events, and in providing other operational support to full time Gardaí. In recent years, the Commissioner has conferred further powers on reserve members under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 and the Road Traffic Act 1961 and has also decided that they should carry out more duties including the serving of summonses, and the issuing of Fixed Charge Penalty Notices where offences are detected.

The “Programme for a Partnership Government” includes a commitment to double the Garda Reserve to act in a supportive role undertaking local patrols and crime reduction measures. In line with this the Government has in place a plan to achieve a Reserve strength of 2,000 by 2021. This year, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves and that process is well underway.

In conjunction with the major expansion of the Reserve over the next number of years we must ensure that it is used to optimum effect to support effective policing. To inform future decisions around the use of the Reserve An Garda Síochána is conducting a strategic review as a



matter of priority with a view to completion before the end of this year. As a first step the Garda Executive has taken a decision to transfer the management of the Reserve from the Human Resource and People Development Directorate to the Assistant Commissioner with responsibility for Community Engagement. This is intended to ensure that its development and deployment is viewed more broadly through a community policing lens. This is a very welcome step as it is my strong view that the greatest dividend to be gained from the Reserve is in terms of a visible presence on the ground engaging with local communities.

The review will take cognisance of the changed environment in which the expanded Reserve will operate as the major reform programme that is underway is implemented. These reforms include the drive towards a medium term target of 20% civilians by 2021 to boost the management capacity of the organisation and to free up Gardaí to front-line policing duties, and also the phased implementation of the Divisional model of policing to enable resources to be deployed more efficiently to prevent and detect crime.

### **Garda College**

204. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the training capacity at Templemore garda college; his plans to increase its capacity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40232/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works, which has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in relation to these matters.

The Deputy will be aware, however, that 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. 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 that, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am also informed that another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest 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.

The College provides a range of training and development courses to members of An Garda Síochána and all new recruits complete their initial 32 week training programme there. The physical capacity of the College extends to some 496 bedrooms, 16 Classrooms and 4 Lecture Theatres. The Garda authorities inform me that the College has the capacity to accommodate the planned intakes of Garda trainees.

While a number of new facilities were built at the College in the early 2000s, including new administration, catering and recreation facilities, a major programme of works to improve fire safety at the accommodation blocks at the College has been undertaken by the Office of Public

Works.

In the context of the longer-term planning for the College, I understand that the Garda authorities are, in conjunction with the Office of Public Works, developing proposals for a new purpose-built education and training facility and additional residential accommodation for use by trainee Gardaí.

I can assure the Deputy that the Government is committed to ensuring that all members of An Garda Síochána are trained to the highest standard and have the opportunity to avail of ongoing professional development training so that they can continue to provide a 21st century policing service that meets the expectations of our communities.

### **Garda Data**

205. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is data available on the ethnic demographics of the members of An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40233/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have requested a report from the Garda Commissioner in relation to the information requested by the Deputy and I will write directly to the Deputy when the report is to hand.

### **Garda Stations**

206. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if Stepside Garda station will re-open before the end of 2018. [40243/17]

207. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 734 of 20 June 2017, if the final report on the re-opening of six Garda stations was published at the end of June 2017; and if so, when it will be published. [40244/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 and 207 together.

The Deputy will appreciate that the Garda Commissioner is primarily responsible for the effective and efficient use of the resources available to An Garda Síochána, including the opening and closing of Garda stations. As Minister, I have no role in the matter.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to a pilot scheme to reopen 6 Garda stations, both urban and rural, to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order.

At its meeting on 13 June 2017, the Government noted the Garda Commissioner's interim Report in this regard, which analysed population and crime trends and the availability of stations for possible reuse. The report contained a recommendation that the former Stepside station in Co. Dublin be reopened on a pilot basis and indicated that, subject to further analysis, the Commissioner is likely to recommend in the final report the inclusion of the former stations at Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow and Donard, Co. Wicklow in the pilot scheme. If a second station is to be reopened in Dublin, the Report indicates that the Commissioner is likely, subject to further analysis, to recommend that the former station at Rush, Co. Dublin be included in the pilot scheme.

I am informed that An Garda Síochána is liaising with the Office of Public Works in relation to the proposed reopening of the former Garda station at Stepside. I am further informed that work is ongoing in An Garda Síochána to finalise the report and I understand that it is expected to be received shortly, at which point it will be brought to Government.

### **Direct Provision System**

208. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress being made on the implementation of the recommendations of the working group on the protection process, including direct provision and supports to asylum seekers; and his plans to bring an end to direct provision. [40255/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Report of the Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers, also known as the Justice McMahon report, was published in June 2015. Its recommendations have implications for a number of Government Departments and services.

My Department has since published three progress reports on the implementation of its 173 recommendations; the first in June 2016, the second in February of this year and a third and final report in July of this year. All three reports are available to view on my Department's website [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie).

The final progress report shows that 133 recommendations have been reported as fully implemented and a further 36 are in progress or partially implemented. This represents a 98% full or partial implementation.

The Direct Provision system was established in 2000 when the then health boards, which were responsible for homeless people, found themselves unable to cope with a large number of individuals who were claiming asylum in Ireland. Direct Provision is the system whereby State services are delivered directly to protection applicants through the relevant Government Department or Agency. In the case of my Department, full board accommodation is offered to applicants while their application for international protection is being processed. Not every person who seeks international protection in Ireland chooses to accept the offer of full board accommodation and of course many chose to live with colleagues, family or friends in communities across the country, as they are entitled to do.

If the system was simply disbanded, already vulnerable people who we are responsible for protecting would join the lengthy waiting lists for social housing or enter the private rental market with little hope of finding affordable and secure accommodation in the context of the current housing crisis. The Direct Provision system is a guarantee that every person who presents to the International Protection Office will have immediate access to a bed, food, a shower and medical care. They will not have to spend the night on the streets or to look for emergency housing. While I have heard many calls to end the system I have yet to hear a credible alternative being proposed in its place.

Of course no system is without room for improvement and Minister Stanton and I are working with the Department officials to continually enhance and develop the entire system so that the best possible set of facilities and services can be provided to those in our care. This includes the ongoing implementation of the relevant recommendations in the Justice McMahon Report and the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to reforming the system, with particular focus on families and children.

## **Garda Expenditure**

209. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to reports in the media that An Garda Síochána is considering the purchase of drones; his views on such a purchase; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40282/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda resources are a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I have been informed by the Garda authorities that An Garda Síochána does not currently have any plans to purchase drones.

## **Anti-Social Behaviour**

210. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken by An Garda Síochána to bring an immediate end to joyriding and associated criminal and anti social behaviour over the past three months in a district (details supplied). [40286/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am, of course, conscious of the impact which anti-social behaviour, including anti-social driving have on the quality of life for residents in local communities.

The Programme for Government underlines the need for close engagement between An Garda Síochána and local communities as part of the strong community policing ethos which has long been central to policing in this jurisdiction. The Deputy will appreciate that the specific allocation of personnel and other resources is a matter for the Garda Commissioner, but I am assured that the Garda National Model of Community Policing continues to play a key part in responding to crime by taking into account and responding to local conditions and needs. This commitment is also very evident in An Garda Síochána's Modernisation and Renewal Programme, under which new Community Policing Teams are to be introduced in each Garda District.

Local policing measures to address the type of issues referred to by the Deputy will undoubtedly benefit from the resources now coming on stream through the Garda recruitment programme, and in particular the Government's commitment to increase Garda numbers to 15,000 so that the Commissioner has the capacity to address the needs of communities throughout the country and into the future.

I hope you will appreciate that the policing response to such crimes, including the deployment of Garda resources at local level, is a matter for the Garda authorities in the first instance. I am advised that Garda management carefully monitors the incidence of such crime and that Garda resources are deployed in response to changing crime trends. This may include directing resources at areas designated as "hot-spots" for anti-social behaviour.

An Garda Síochána continues to tackle public disorder and anti-social behaviour by working with communities to reduce this type of behaviour and enhance community safety. The Garda approach includes a strong focus on quality of life issues and collaboration with local authorities to help address the causes of anti-social behaviour. The Deputy will appreciate that I do not have a role in relation to Garda policing strategies in any particular local area but have brought Deputy's specific concerns to the attention of the Garda authorities.

I am advised that Garda authorities conduct ongoing strategic local enforcement operations

targeting anti-social driving. These enforcement operations are intelligence-led, targeting areas in particular where young drivers congregate. Regular Garda mobile patrols and checkpoints are also conducted in these areas and social media and websites are monitored to assist in establishing where events are taking place and to implement the necessary operational Garda response. Such operations have resulted in young drivers being prosecuted or for driving without a learner permit, driving unaccompanied while on a learner permit and driving a vehicle with prohibited modifications. Where breaches of road traffic legislation are detected, the Garda authorities make full use of the fixed charge notice, penalty point system, court prosecutions and Juvenile Diversion Programme where appropriate.

Anyone affected by the matters referred to should, of course, contact their local Garda station. Alternatively, information can be provided to An Garda Síochána by way of the Garda confidential line, 1800 666 111, which is a monitored freephone line that allows members of the public to contact An Garda Síochána with information of a confidential nature. Alternatively, members of the public can call Crimestoppers on 1800 25 00 25 to report such matters.

As you are aware, all members of An Garda Síochána are tasked with the enforcement of relevant legislation, including the Road Traffic Acts and persons found engaging in dangerous driving are dealt with in accordance with the law. Specific operations are also conducted targeting anti-social driving behaviour based on analysis of the incidence and location of such behaviour. Garda management closely monitor all patrols and other road traffic strategies in place, with a view to meeting the policing needs of communities, including to address speeding and anti-social driving, and with a view to reducing the number of fatal and serious injuries on our roads.

I might add that there is a range of strong legislative provisions available to an An Garda Síochána to combat anti-social behaviour, including provisions under the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Acts, the Criminal Damage Act and the Intoxicating Liquor Acts. There are also the incremental provisions contained in the Criminal Justice Act 2006 which provide for warnings and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by adults and Part 13 of the Act which provide for warnings, good behaviour contracts and civil proceedings in relation to anti-social behaviour by children.

### **Garda Data**

211. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of members of the PSNI and An Garda Síochána who have served in the other policing service on this island under the secondment provisions of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Police (Northern Ireland) Acts of 2000 and 2003. [40287/17]

**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.

The Inter-Governmental Agreement on Police Co-operation obliged both Governments to introduce the necessary administrative and legislative measures to provide for exchanges, secondments and appointments between the Garda Síochána and the PSNI. The Garda Síochána Act 2005 gives effect to this obligations

In the case of secondments it provides for the secondment from the PSNI to certain ranks in An Garda Síochána for a period not exceeding 3 years. Protocols are in place between the Garda Commissioner and the Chief Constable of the PSNI which provide for the implementation of a

programme of personnel exchanges and secondments between the two police services.

I have requested a report from the Commissioner in relation to the specific information requested and will revert to the Deputy when it is to hand.

### **Garda Operations**

212. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress that has been made in the implementation of the active mobility project in An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40307/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda equipment and resources are a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

The Deputy will be aware that the extensive programme of reform currently underway in the context of the Garda Commissioner’s Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the ACTIVE Mobility programme, to be delivered over the next 3 to 5 years, will result in frontline Gardaí having more connectivity to back office systems harnessing the power of mobile technology.

I understand from Garda authorities that an initial pilot of the programme will take place in the Limerick Division commencing in Q4 2017.

### **Garda Deployment**

213. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there will be an appropriate allocation of probationary gardaí to the Limerick division in the next round of allocations in view of demands on the force in policing urban and rural crime; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40308/17]

**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.

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 that the Garda strength of the Limerick Division, on 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 552. There are also 32 Garda Reserves and 49 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work

of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

I am further informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 39 of whom have been assigned to the Limerick Division including 5 from the most recent attestation on 22 September. I am also informed that another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest 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 needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Limerick Division in the coming years.

In so far as the allocation of newly attested Gardaí is concerned, this is a matter for the Garda Commissioner. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of resources. However, it is important to keep in mind that newly attested Gardaí have a further 16 months of practical and class-room based training to complete in order to receive their BA in Applied Policing. To ensure that they are properly supported and supervised and have opportunities to gain the breadth of policing experience required, the Commissioner's policy is to allocate them to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme.

## **Prison Service**

214. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if reforms have been introduced to the prison system arising from recommendations of prison visiting committee over the past ten years; and if so, the nature of the reforms. [40343/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** A feature of the Irish Prison Service (IPS) is consistent and on-going reform. This process is instructed and informed by many sources: principally from the IPS itself and the Minister for Justice and Equality but also, for example, from recommendations contained in reports of the Inspector of Prisons, the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), various UN Committees and, of course, reports of the Visiting Committees attached to individual prisons. Many of these recommendations overlap or have a common theme.

Over the past number of years the IPS has made many changes in programmes, policies, regimes and infrastructure to improve the lives of prisoners and thereby to create a safer community. Many of these improvements were suggested by the entities referenced above, including Visiting Committees.

These improvements include, inter alia:

- A reduction in the numbers of prisoners in custody to the point where overcrowding is all but eliminated in the prison system;

- A capital programme to enhance the quality of accommodation and which has almost eliminated the practise of ‘slopping out’;

- An Incentivised Regimes Policy which encourages prisoners to engage with the services available and provides tangible evidence of the benefit of such engagement;

- The ending of detention of juveniles in the adult prison system.

- The introduction of Integrated Sentence Management;

- The expansion of drug treatment programmes;

- The significant reduction of the number of prisoners on solitary confinement;

- The introduction of fines legislation which will, over time, eliminate the need for persons convicted of a fines offence to be sent to prison in all but the most serious of cases;

- The introduction of a Community Return Programme and a Community Support Scheme which greatly improved the sentence management of suitable prisoners;

- The current engagement with the Office of the Ombudsman to establish a comprehensive Prisoner Complaints system;

- The introduction of a Families Imprisonment Group which encourages and supports greater family contact to assist those serving a sentence.

In recent years the Prison Service has published two Strategic Plans. The first plan, from 2012 - 2015, focused on 6 key strategic actions, namely Prisoner Numbers, Prison Progression, Prisoner Programmes, Management and Staffing, the Prison Estate and Legislation consolidation. The current Prison Service strategic plan 2016-2018 focuses on 4 key strategies, namely Staff Support, Prisoner Support, Victim Support and Enhancing Organisational Capacity. The progress made over the lifetime of these strategies is published on a yearly basis in the Irish Prison Service Annual Report.

These Strategic Plans as well as the Annual Reports are published on the Irish Prison Service’s website [www.irishprisons.ie](http://www.irishprisons.ie).

## **Visa Applications**

215. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for a visa by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40362/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the particular application referred to was submitted to the Visa Office in Abu Dhabi on 20 April 2017, and is one made under the terms of 2004/38/EC Directive (Free Movement) on the rights of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of Member States.

While every effort generally is made to process these applications as soon as possible, processing times will vary having regard to the volume of applications, their complexity, the possible need to investigate, enquire into, or seek further information in relation to certain applications, and the resources available. Unfortunately, due to the large number of applications waiting to be processed and the fact that such applications are processed in chronological order



(i.e. based on date order of receipt), I cannot at this time give a definitive date as to when this application will be finalised.

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.

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to INIS ([visamail@justice.ie](mailto:visamail@justice.ie)).

### **Residency Permits**

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the correct procedure to be followed to obtain a new GNIB card in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40476/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned was granted a residence permission and a right to work based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child until 5 October 2017. It is open to the person concerned to contact their local registration office for a further renewal period, two weeks in advance of this date. As the person concerned lives in the Dublin metropolitan region, they must present at the Burgh Quay Registration Office, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2. Attendance is by appointment only. Appointments can be made via the INIS website. To make an appointment go to <https://burghquayregistrationoffice.inis.gov.ie/>

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.

### **Immigration Status**

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application pursuant to section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40477/17]

**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 submitted written representations.

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

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.

### **Crime Data**

218. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of homicides in each of the years 2010 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40501/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and I will contact the Deputy again when this report is to hand. The Deputy will wish to note that, as previously reported, the recording of homicide statistics on PULSE is currently under review by An Garda Síochána.

### **Direct Provision System**

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the extent to which the case of a person (details supplied) has been examined with a view to ensuring the availability of suitable accommodation in view of the person's medical history; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40587/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** If an application for international protection has been made in the State, for confidentiality reasons it is not the practice to comment on such applications.

When accommodation is being offered to an applicant for international protection, the particular needs of that applicant are taken into consideration when that offer of accommodation is being made. It is of course the case that it may not always be possible to address all of those needs.

If an applicant for International Protection is availing of accommodation in the Direct Provision system and is not satisfied with that accommodation, the procedures for raising complaints are set out clearly on the website of the Reception and Integration Agency ([www.ria.gov.ie](http://www.ria.gov.ie)) and in the RIA House Rules. Applicants living in Direct Provision also have access to the Offices of the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children.

### **Fire Safety**

220. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to undertake a comprehensive fire safety audit of all high-risk buildings, including Garda stations, which fall under the remit of his Department. [40601/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The majority of properties occupied by my Department and its agencies are owned or leased on its behalf by the Office of Public Works (OPW). This would include garda stations occupied by An Garda Síochána. The OPW has confirmed that it is undertaking a review of properties under its management in

relation to fire safety and compliance.

For properties owned or leased directly by the Department or its agencies, the Department is working with the relevant property holding bodies to verify fire safety compliance across the sector.

### **Immigration Status**

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of extension of residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); the documentation outstanding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40617/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the records indicate that the person referred to by the Deputy has no legal status in the State since 08 February 2008. The Residency Division has no record of a request being received from this individual to regularise the situation. The person should be advised to write to Unit 2, Residence Division, INIS, Burgh Quay, Dublin 2, supplying a full copy of their passport and full details outlining their current circumstances.

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 Deployment**

222. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for a further sergeant to be appointed to the community policing unit at Coolock Garda station, Dublin 5; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40631/17]

**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 units and 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. Furthermore, when allocations are taking place comprehensive consultation is carried out with local management during which all factors are taken into consideration. Where a deficiency in resources is identified the matter is considered fully and addressed accordingly. It is the responsibility of the Divisional Officer to allocate personnel within his/her Division.

### **Immigration Status**

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40641/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the Residence Division is currently in correspondence with the legal representative of the person mentioned.

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.

### **Immigration Status**

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and or expected position in respect of residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40645/17]

**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), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

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

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 Commissioner Appointment**

225. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether members of the Policing Authority or the policing commission should stand aside from their position on either organisation if they are applying for the job of Garda Commissioner. [40657/17]

226. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether it would be appropriate for a member of the Policing Authority or the policing commission to be a candidate for the post of Garda Commissioner. [40658/17]

227. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether members of the Policing Authority should be part of the process of preparing the competition for the new Garda Commissioner post if they are actually intent on applying for the post. [40659/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 225 to 227, inclusive, together.

The Policing Authority under section 9 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 (as amended) has responsibility for nominating persons for appointment by the Government to the post of Garda Commissioner, following a selection process undertaken by the Public Appointments Service.

This will be the first time that the new legislative process is utilised and I do not believe that it would wise to seek to exclude any candidate who meets the agreed eligibility criteria from the selection competition. As with all such competitions, high standards of probity, merit, equity and fairness must apply. In this regard the Authority, in accordance with good governance, has a Code of Conduct for Members and Staff of the Authority in place. The Code is available on the Authority's website ([www.policingauthority.ie](http://www.policingauthority.ie)) and I would refer the Deputy to section 9 which addresses the management of potential conflicts of interest. All members and staff are required to sign a declaration agreeing to be bound by the Code. In the circumstances, I am satisfied that the Authority has appropriate processes and procedures in place to address any potential conflict of interest in the event that a member is considering putting themselves forward for the post.

I have consulted with the chair of the Authority about a process to identify and appoint a permanent Commissioner to An Garda Síochána. We agreed that it is crucial that a deliberate and considered recruitment process takes place so that the best possible candidate is appointed. In this regard, the Government will support the Authority in its work. The Commission on the Future of Policing has no direct role in the recruitment process but the chair has also written to me on behalf of the Commission regarding the timescale for the process and I am considering their advice in that context.

### **Community Alert Programme**

228. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda stations that operate a text alert scheme; the amount it would cost to extend this measure to each Garda station in operation; and the number of persons that are signed up to existing text alert schemes. [40662/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government underlines the need for close engagement between An Garda Síochána and local communities. This is an essential feature of the strong community policing ethos which has long been central to policing in this jurisdiction. The Deputy will also be aware that as part of the overall strategy to oppose criminality, the Garda authorities pursue a range of partnerships with community stakeholders; for example, the well established Community Alert Programme and the highly successful Garda Text Alert Scheme to name but a few.

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 An Garda Síochána on the Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021, on further developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. Proposed initiatives include the establishment of local Community Policing Teams (CPTs) headed by an Inspector and made up of Gardaí from across a range of areas to proactively work with the community to prevent and detect crime; and the establishment of Community Safety Fora in every District comprising local Gardaí, local communities and key stakeholders.

Since the Garda Text Alert scheme was launched in September 2013, it has developed as an important crime prevention mechanism with over 700 local groups involving in excess of 130,000 subscribers and with an estimated 200,000 text messages sent each month under the scheme. Every Garda Division, rural and urban, now offers the text alert service and An Garda Síochána has published guidelines to assist in the establishment and operation of local groups.

The Deputy might wish to note that funding from my Department is not used to provide direct assistance to any local Community Alert (or Text Alert) Groups, but is allocated for the employment and associated costs of the national Community Alert programme, including the employment of regional Development Officers. These Development Officers, operating in Muintir Na Tíre, provide support to Community and Text Alert schemes and offer advice on how to establish new schemes. The long-standing view has been that this is the best use of the resources available to the Department to support effective community crime prevention actions.

At the National Ploughing Championships this year, I was pleased to announce that an additional €100,000 was being made available to Text Alert Groups, registered with An Garda Síochána, to provide modest financial assistance with the running costs they incur each year. This Text Alert Rebate Scheme will be administered by Muintir na Tíre and Groups wishing to participate at the Scheme can find more details at [www.muintir.ie](http://www.muintir.ie).

### **Invasive Plant Species**

229. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there is a national policy in relation to the treatment of Japanese knotweed; the steps being taken to control the spread of this plant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40440/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department is responsible for the implementation of the Wildlife Acts and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011), both of which prohibit the spreading of invasive species.

In law, control of invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed is a matter for landowners. In this regard, my Department carries out considerable work on controlling invasive species in National Parks and Nature Reserves.

There is significant work also being carried out at present by a range of agencies in this area, including a number of local authorities. In addition, the Management of Invasive Alien Plant Species (IAPS), led by Transport Infrastructure Ireland, is a €5.5 million project aimed at managing invasive knotweed and other non-native invasive plant species, over the next 5 years, on the national road network and its interactions with regional roads. The project involves collaboration with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS).

While my Department does not collect data from local authorities on the incidence of Japanese Knotweed in their areas, information on the distribution of invasive species in Ireland, including Knotweed, is available on the invasive species section of the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) website at <http://maps.biodiversityireland.ie>.

My Department has also worked closely over the years with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to fund and manage the Invasive Species Ireland Project. Information on general management approaches to invasive plant species is available from the Invasive Species Ireland website: <http://invasivespeciesireland.com/toolkit/invasive-plant-management/>.

## Heritage Promotion

230. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to purchase the Yeats family collection; and if not, the reason therefor. [40174/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** It is a long standing policy of the State not to comment one way or another in its interests or otherwise on items that may be coming up for auction.

## Arts Funding

231. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she will commit to the long-term goal of increasing arts funding to the European average of 0.6% of GDP; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40265/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I refer the Deputy to my response to Question No. 388 on 7 March 2017. The position remains unchanged.

## Creative Ireland Programme

232. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the work her Department has carried out with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to develop a mechanism for artists that have applied for jobseeker's benefit as part of the Creative Ireland programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40266/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department, together with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, launched a new pilot initiative on 12 June last to make it easier for artists and writers to access social welfare supports.

The initiative which was a key commitment under the Creative Ireland Programme, aims to assist self-employed artists who apply to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for Jobseekers Allowance. The pilot initiative, which will be reviewed after one year, applies to visual artists and writers.

Under the new mechanism, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection will provide for the classification of self-employed professional artists in consultation with representative artists organisations such as the Visual Arts Ireland and the Irish Writers Centre.

This new mechanism allows artists to be classified as self-employed for the purposes of accessing social welfare supports. The normal checks and balances will apply to ensure the initiative is not open to abuse, but my hope is that this will make it much easier for professional artists to access social welfare supports when they need them.

Confirmation of self-employed artist status must be obtained from the Visual Arts Ireland or the Irish Writers Centre. Such artists would not be subject to the activation process for 12 months. The other conditions associated with jobseeker's allowance will continue to apply, as they do for all other claimants.

## **Film Industry Development**

233. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the work her Department has carried out with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment regarding the development of screen-based creative industries; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40267/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department has commissioned an economic analysis of our screen based creative industries, in partnership with the Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Business, Enterprise and Innovation. This study will examine the economic impact including employment and the potential of the Irish film, TV and animation sector. Following an open tender process, Olsberg SPI Ltd in association with Nordicity, was selected to conduct the study in November last year. The commissioning of the study was also a commitment in the Action Plan for Jobs 2016.

The recommendations of the economic study will inform the development of the plan envisaged under the Creative Ireland Programme for an industry wide, long term plan for Ireland as a global hub for the production of film, TV Drama and animation.

On 5 May last, I hosted a very successful Media Production Workshop at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham which attracted attendance by representatives of the film, broadcast, animation and gaming industries. The outcomes of this event will also input into the consultant's study and the proposed Government plan. The economic study is due to be completed shortly and will underpin a Government plan for the audio-visual industry to be published later this year.

## **Creative Ireland Programme**

234. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the work her Department has carried out with the Department of Education and Skills on enabling the creative potential of every child; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40268/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department is currently engaging with the Department of Education and Skills in relation to Pillar 1 of the Creative Ireland Programme - Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child. Substantial progress has been made in relation to this Pillar and it is intended that a plan to Enable the Creative Potential of Every Child will be launched later this year.

## **Creative Ireland Programme**

235. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the work her Department has carried out with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government regarding the provision of suitable studio places for arts and implementation of initiatives under pillar two of Creative Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40269/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department has had general discussions with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in relation to providing support to local authorities under Pillar 2 of the Creative Ireland Programme - Enabling the Creativity in Every Community. As part of this pillar each of the 31 local authorities has produced a 2017 Creative Ireland Plan which were formally



launched on the 25th May 2017.

Each of the local authorities is now in the process of producing a more detailed 2018 Creative Plan setting out a five-year vision for local creativity. These plans will set out a range of initiatives to be implemented under Pillar 2 of the Creative Ireland Programme. Local authorities can use these plans to identify the issue of the provision of suitable studio places for the arts, where that is appropriate.

In terms of practical support, so far this year I have announced funding of over €10 million under my Department's Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018 to a total of 122 arts organisations around the country in 2017. This allocation included over €900,000 in funding for 12 projects involving artist's studios and creative spaces. In addition, as part of the Government's initiative on the North East Inner City, I awarded a grant of €35,000 last year to Fire Station Artists' Studios, Buckingham Street, to assist in providing additional studio space in conjunction with Dublin City Council.

My Department has also had discussions with the Arts Council, Dublin City Council and the OPW to consider some possible short-term and longer-term approaches to the issue, both in relation to specific issues in Dublin and to wider national approaches.

### **Turbary Rights**

236. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of landowners and persons with turbary rights in areas of raised bog, natural heritage area network that is scheduled for de-designation; the number of hectares in each county; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40288/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The 2014 Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network concluded that Ireland could more effectively achieve conservation of threatened raised bog habitat through focused protection and restoration of a reconfigured network. Arising from this review, 46 natural heritage areas (including parts of 7 sites) are scheduled for de-designation.

The number of active turf plots in the sites to be de-designated identified as part of the review was 2,707.

The number of hectares of land to be de-designated by county is set out in the following table:

County	Hectares of land to be de-designated
Clare	749
Galway	6149
Kerry	151
Kildare	129
Laois	184
Leitrim	518
Longford	508
Meath	290
Offaly	918
Roscommon	2999
Tipperary	1150
Westmeath	316

County	Hectares of land to be de-designated
Total	14061

### Arts Centres

237. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the legal advice on behalf of the local authority involved in the Cork event centre; if she is seeking or has sought and received legal advice; if her Department officials have met in person with officials from the local authority or the contractor; if so, the dates on which they met; and the date for a decision to be made on funding. [40442/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Cork Event Centre is a project being developed and managed by Cork City Council and the Council is responsible for delivery of the centre.

My Department allocated a capital grant of €12 million to Cork City Council towards the overall cost of the Centre. This allocation is subject to a Service Level Agreement with Cork City Council which lays out the conditions of the grant. My Department has not sought legal advice in relation to the proposed project at this stage and has not seen sight of any legal advice provided to the City Council.

Officials from my Department continue to liaise with Cork City Council on this project on an ongoing basis.

### Film Industry

238. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the value of Irish Film Board, IFB, loans that have been issued each year for the past ten years; the default rate of these loans; if firms that have been in default have been afforded new loans subsequently; the amount of unpaid loans to date in 2017 within the scheme; and the number of full-time jobs in the industry that are created as a result of each euro afforded by the IFB loan scheme. [40509/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Funding for development, production and distribution is provided by the Irish Film Board through a range of programmes which is available to view on its funding webpage at the following link: [http://www.irishfilmboard.ie/funding\\_programmes/](http://www.irishfilmboard.ie/funding_programmes/).

Since 2012 IFB funding awards are announced on a quarterly basis and reflect decisions made by its Board during each quarterly period. It should be noted that these funding decisions reflect offers of funding only.

All the information regarding IFB loans advanced and the repayment/recoupment of those loans can be found in the IFB annual reports which can be viewed online on its Reports and Publications webpage at the following link: [http://www.irishfilmboard.ie/irish\\_film\\_industry/reports/?category\\_id=3](http://www.irishfilmboard.ie/irish_film_industry/reports/?category_id=3). The accounting policies in relation to IFB loans are also documented in their annual report

The Irish Film Board is statutorily independent in relation to its funding and executive decisions. In terms of the economic benefit of investing in the film industry in general, this is an issue which is being considered in the context of an economic study of the audio-visual industry which my Department has commissioned in association with the Film Board, the Depart-

ment of Communications, Environment and Climate Action and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Employment.

### Cóiríocht Scoile

239. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cén deontas atá ceadaithe do Choláiste Chonnacht le hathchóiriú a dhéanamh ar a shealúchas; cé na coinníollacha a bhaineann leis an gceadú sin maidir le hiontaobhaithe; cé na coinníollacha a bhaineann le híocaíochtaí tréimhsiúla nó páirt-íocaíochtaí den deontas a íoc; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [40568/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Cheadaigh mo Roinn deontas nach mó ná €29,600 (nó 80% den chostas, cibé acu is lú) ar 9 Feabhra 2017 le cumasú d'Iontaobhas Coláiste Chonnacht oibreacha athchóirithe a dhéanamh ar chóras leictreachais an choláiste. Cheadaíodh an deontas sin ar an mbunús go gcomhlíonfaí gnáth-coinníollacha na Roinne a chuirtear lena leithéid de dheontas chomh maith le coinníoll nach n-íocfaí aon chuid den deontas go dtí go mbeadh cruthúnas cur ar fáil, chun sástacht na Roinne, ag taispeáint go bhfuil an t-iontaobhas tagtha ar shocrú maidir le struchtúr nua úinéireacht an choláiste. Ghlac an t-iarratasóir i scríbhinn leis na coinníollacha seo.

Cé gur déanadh roinnt dul chun cinn maidir le hathstruchtúirí an iontaobhais, níor sáraíodh na deacrachtaí uile. I litir dár data 10 Lúnasa 2017, leag an Roinn amach proiseis ar mhaithe le cúnaimh a thabhairt chun dul i ngleic leis na constaicí seo ina cuimsíodh bealaigh gur féidir ionadaíocht a bheith ag eagrais pobail an cheantair ar aon iontaobhas nua.

D'aithnigh an Roinn freisin an gá a bheadh le hionadaíocht a bheith ag an iontaobhas atá ann faoi láthair in aon struchtúr nua. Léiríodh sa litir go mbeadh an Roinn sásta íocaíochtaí a dhéanamh ag brath ar dhul chun cinn ar an athstruchtúirí seo.

Leanfaidh mo Roinn ag obair i gcomhar leis an deontaí agus páirtithe leasmhara eile sa chaoi is go mbeifear in ann an deontas iomlán a chúiteamh chomh luath agus is féidir, ach na coinníollacha atá leagtha síos a bheith comhlíonta.

### Scéimeanna agus Tacaíochtaí Tithíochta

240. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta an dtabharfaidh sí sonraí faoin phlean atá aici maidir le deontais feabhsúcháin tithíochta a chur ar bun in athuair i gceantair Ghaeltachta, agus an aontaíonn sí go mbeadh a leithéid riachtanach chun tacú le teaghlaigh chun cónaí i gceantair Ghaeltachta, mar spreagadh do theaghlaigh chun filleadh ar cheantair ina bhfuil laghdú tagtha ar an daonra le breis agus 10 mbliana anuas. [40573/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Tá Achtanna na dTithe Gaeltachta faoina mbíodh cúnaimh ar fáil chun cabhrú le gnóthaí tithíochta sa Ghaeltacht ar fionraí ó 7 Aibreán 2009 agus nil sé beartaithe é a mhúscailt faoi láthair.

Ní miste a mheabhrú don Teachta ar ndóigh go bhfuil fáil ag muintir na Gaeltachta, ach an oiread leis an gcuid eile den tír, ar na scéimeanna agus na tacaíochtaí éagsúla atá ar fáil mar a bhaineann sé le gnóthaí tithíochta, lena n-áirítear scéimeanna na nÚdarás Áitiúil agus SEI.

## Cuanta agus Céanna

241. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta cén fáth go bhfuil an Roinn ag diúltú dul i gcomhairle le Coiste Thrá Mhachaire Rabhartaigh; cén fáth go bhfuil an roinn ag diúltú castáil leis an choiste; cén fáth go bhfuil an roinn ag diúltú glacadh leis an choiste mar ionadaithe don chéidh; cén fáth nach bhfuil an roinn sásta moltaí an choiste a chur san áireamh; cén fáth go bhfuil an roinn ag léiriú neamhshuim iomlán sa chéidh; an mbeidh sí sásta castáil leis an choiste áitiúil ar an láthair leis an cheist thábhachtach seo a phlé; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [40574/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Is faoi chúram Comhairle Chontae Dhún na nGall atá Cé Mhachaire Rabhartaigh. É sin ráite, tá mé agus tá mo Roinn sásta éisteacht le haon mholtaí maidir leis an gcé úd tagaidís ón gComhairle Chontae nó ó Choiste Thrá Mhachaire Rabhartaigh.

Mar eolas don Teachta, bhí cruinniú agam le toscaireacht ó Oileán Thoraí Dé hAoine seo caite (22 Meán Fómhair) agus pléadh forbairt Ché Mhachaire Rabhartaigh i gcomthéacs riachtanais na seirbhíse farantóireachta go Toraigh. Tá iarrtha agam anois ar oifigigh mo Roinne tús a chur leis na próisis pleanála cuí chun bád sainlasta a chur ar fáil le freastal ar phobal an oileáin agus chun an ché a fhorbairt le freastal ar riachtanais an bháid sin. Mar chuid den phróiseas pleanála seo, beidh oifigigh mo Roinne lán sásta dul i gcomhairle le Coiste Thrá Mhachaire Rabhartaigh agus le páirtithe leasmhara eile chun a bhfuil beartaithe a phlé.

## Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga

242. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an dtabharfaidh sí cuntas ar an dul chun cinn maidir le scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga, ag eascairt as an ráiteas poiblí a rinne an t-iarAire Stáit, go háirithe maidir leis na postanna breise a cheadaigh an tAire ach nár líonadh, go háirithe na ceithre scoil i gContae Dhún na Gall (sonraí tugtha); agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [40575/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** D'fhógair mé le gairid go bhfuil allúntas iomlán ar fiú €784,442 ceadaithe do Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga don scoilbhliain 2017/18. As an allúntas iomlán sin, tá €551,813 curtha ar fáil do Mhuintearas Teo agus €232,629 ceadaithe do Oidhrecht Chorca Dhuibhne chun an scéim a riaradh thar ceann na Roinne.

Is ionann an t-allúntas seo agus an deontas a ceadaíodh anuraidh don scoilbhliain 2016/2017. Cé is móite de scoil amháin atá i gceantar feidhme Mhuintearas Teo, SN na Trá Báine a aithníodh in ionad SN Choill an tSidheáin atá dúnta anois, is ionann na scoileanna atá aitheanta faoin scéim sa scoilbhliain reatha agus a aithníodh in 2016/17.

Mar a luadh sa bhfreagra ar Cheist Dála Uimhir 992 ar 20 Meitheamh 2017 agus 689 ar 2 Bealtaine 2017, tá sé beartaithe athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an scéim mar chuid d'fheidmiú an an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 a seoladh i mí Dheireadh Fómhair 2016 agus atá á chur i bhfeidhm ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna i gcomhar le páirtithe leasmhara eile, mo Roinnse san áireamh - mar chuid d'fheidmiú na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge.

Tá i gceist go dtosódh an t-athbhreithniú sin go luath agus beifear ag súil leis go gcuimseofar, mar chuid de, na critéir cháilithe go mba chóir don Roinn a bheith á gcur san áireamh feasta chun críche aitheantais faoi scéim na gcúntóirí teanga i gcomhthéacs feidhmiú an Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta agus an phróisis pleanála teanga araon.

### Waterways Ireland Expenditure

243. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the current and capital expenditure by Waterways Ireland in each of the years 2014 to 2016; the estimated level of current and capital expenditure for 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40607/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The current and capital expenditure by Waterways Ireland for the years 2014-2016 and the estimate of expenditure for 2017 are set out in the table.

Waterways Ireland is jointly co-sponsored and co-funded by my Department and the Department for Infrastructure, Northern Ireland. The current expenditure of Waterways Ireland is funded 85% by this State and 15% by Northern Ireland. Capital expenditure by the Body is supported directly by each jurisdiction.

In addition to the core grants provided by the two Departments, Waterways Ireland activities are also supported from third-party funding contributions towards specific projects and from its own income from licences and property.

Year	Current expenditure	Capital South	Capital North	Total
2017	€24,490,343	€9,043,000	€1,289,907	€34,823,250
2016	€23,436,940	€6,829,788	€900,141	€31,166,869
2015	€24,035,514	€3,974,955	€420,153	€28,430,622
2014	€23,808,690	€4,510,598	€277,565	€28,596,853

### Waterways Ireland Staff

244. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of employees that have moved from the OPW to Waterways Ireland in the past three years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40608/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am informed by Waterways Ireland that no employees from the OPW have transferred into Waterways Ireland in the past three years.

I am also advised by Waterways Ireland that it does not keep track of the previous employers of staff it has recruited through open competition.

### Film Industry

245. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 149 and 150 of 5 July 2017, the location in which this register is maintained; the way in which the trainees receive their ultimate qualifications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40668/17]

246. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to parliamentary question numbers 149 and 150 of 5 July 2017, when these traineeships will be completed, rolled out and available; if years of work experience will also be count-

ed towards official accreditation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40669/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 245 and 246 together.

The Irish Film Board is responsible for the strategic development of the Irish film, television and animation industry training through Screen Training Ireland. These are operational matters for the Irish Film Board and Screen Training Ireland and I have requested the Board to reply to the Deputy directly on these matters.

### **Caiteachas Ranna**

247. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad é an costas iomlán a bhaineann le Raidió na Life a athlonnú ó Chearnóg Mhuirfean go dtí ceanncheathrú nua ar Shráid Amiens agus trealamh, doirse agus fuinneoga acústacha á gcur san áireamh; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [40684/17]

248. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Catherine Connolly** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad é an costas iomlán a bhaineann le Foras na Gaeilge a athlonnú go dtí Sráid Amiens agus cíos agus troscán á gcur san áireamh; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [40685/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 247 and 248 together.

Is é €412,365 an costas iomlán a eascraíonn as athlonnú Fhoras na Gaeilge go dtí a cheanncheathrú nua ar Shráid Amiens. Clúdaíonn an figiúr sin na costais a bhaineann le Raidió na Life a athlonnú go dtí Sráid Amiens mar aon leis an Áisíneacht Dáiliúchán Leabhar a athlonnú go dtí trádstóras nua.

Maidir le Raidió na Life, cuireadh deontas €133,215 ar fáil i ndáil le trealamh nua craoltóireachta a shuiteáil sna stiúideonna nua i Sráid Amiens. Anuas air sin, d'eascair costais daingnean €34,150 d'Fhoras na Gaeilge i ndáil le doirse agus fuinneoga acústacha a chur ar fáil mar chuid de na háiseanna ina cheanncheathrú nua.

Maidir leis na costais eile, tuigtear dom ón bhForas gur baineadh an úsáid is mó as an troscán reatha agus go raibh costas €173,220 ar throscán nua. Bhain costas €15,215 le córas gutháin nua agus costas €12,277 leis an trealamh a bhogadh go dtí an cheanncheathrú nua. Faoi dheireadh, bhain costas €44,288 leis an Áisíneacht Dáiliúchán Leabhar a athlonnú go dtí trádstóras nua fosta.

Tuigtear dom ó Fhoras na Gaeilge nach mbeidh an costas cíosa bliantúil deimhnithe go dtí go mbeidh an tomhas deiridh déanta ar an bhfoirgneamh agus go bhfuil an obair sin ar bun i láthair na huaire. Is féidir a rá, áfach, gur ráta €33 in aghaidh na troighe cearnaí atá i gceist agus, ar an mbunús sin, samhlaítear go mbeidh an costas cíosa thart ar €600,000 in aghaidh na bliana.

### **Ulster Canal Restoration Project**

249. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding the re-opening of the Ulster Canal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40695/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** One of my priorities since taking Ministerial office has been the restoration of the Ulster Canal. I secured Government approval to restore a 2.5 km stretch of the Ulster Canal from the Shannon-erne Waterway to the International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson, County Cavan on 24 February 2015.

The project, which comprises three work phases, is being undertaken by Waterways Ireland.

The contract for the completion of the third and final phase of the works, the construction of a new road bridge north of the existing Derrykerrib Bridge and a new 250 m section of canal running parallel to the existing river, was awarded to the successful tenderer on 25 March 2017.

The contractors are currently on site with completion anticipated by autumn 2018, subject to weather conditions and water levels over the 2017 /2018 winter. The temporary access road is complete and work has started on the canal wall excavations.

I remain firmly committed to delivering this flagship project for the border region.

### **Hare Coursing Regulation**

250. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the measures she will take to ensure that the regulations for coursing clubs, including the condition that no hare will be coursed more than once per day, will be upheld; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40707/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The control of live hare coursing, including the operation of individual coursing meetings and managing the use of hares for that activity, is carried out under the Greyhound Industry Act 1958, which is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. My responsibility relates to the conservation status of the hare.

In August this year, my Department issued licences under the Wildlife Acts to the Irish Coursing Club, covering its affiliated coursing clubs, to capture and tag hares for use at regulated hare coursing meetings for the 2017/18 coursing season, which extends from the end of September 2017 to the end of February 2018.

There are 22 conditions associated with the licences issued to the Irish Coursing Club which have been developed and refined over the year. One of the conditions requires that hares may not be coursed more than once on the same day. In addition, the licence specifically requires that hares that have been coursed can be readily identified to ensure that this condition is rigidly observed.

Veterinary staff from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine carry out inspections during the coursing season to monitor compliance with the rules governing animal welfare relating to greyhounds and hares. The Irish Coursing Club also attends local coursing meetings. In addition, where resources allow, local National Parks and Wildlife Service Conservation Rangers attend coursing meetings, on a spot-check basis, to monitor compliance with licences issued to the ICC and its affiliated clubs.

### **Creative Ireland Programme**

251. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the

status of the process to instate a new director of Creative Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40756/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I intend to fill the position of Director of the Creative Ireland programme through an open competition, managed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). I am advised that applications for the position will be sought shortly.

### **Arts Funding**

252. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the lack of artist-run studio spaces and the fact that Ireland lags far behind other European countries in this regard. [40757/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I am aware of the issue regarding the provision of affordable studio space, particularly as a result of the changing property market. My Department has had discussions with the Arts Council, Dublin City Council and the OPW to consider some possible short-term and longer-term approaches to the issue, both in relation to specific issues in Dublin and to wider national approaches.

This year I announced details of €10.078 million in capital funding to a total of 122 arts organisations around the country under the Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018. This allocation included over €900,000 in funding for projects involving artists' studios and creative spaces.

In addition, as part of the Government's initiative on the North East Inner City, I awarded a grant of €35,000 last year to Fire Station Artists' Studios, Buckingham Street, to assist in providing additional studio space in conjunction with Dublin City Council.

The list of successful projects under the Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018 is available on my Department's website at the following link <https://www.chg.gov.ie/arts/creative-arts/grants-and-funding/>.

### **Built Heritage Investment Scheme**

253. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the progress on the built heritage investment scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40758/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS), which I launched in 2015, is one of a number of State financial supports that provide for the conservation and preservation of heritage structures.

The scheme is operated in partnership with the local authorities. In 2016, the scheme supported over 270 projects across the country, creating over 17,000 days of employment in the conservation and construction industries, while helping to regenerate urban and rural areas. The scheme also leveraged aggregate investment of just under €5.5 million, more than double the scheme's Exchequer allocation of €2 million.

The 2017 Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) was announced in January 2017. It has an Exchequer allocation of €3.5 million.



Nationwide, more than 500 projects across 31 local authority areas received funding approval in 2017.

Work is currently under way on the vast majority of these projects, with a number of them already completed. My Department keeps in close contact with all local authorities throughout the year to ensure the smooth running of the scheme and that the best possible use of funding is achieved.

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme is very popular and successful and I expect the full €3.5 million to be expended in 2017, supporting the owners of protected structures, creating employment in traditional construction and leveraging and encouraging private investment in protecting our heritage buildings.

### **Arts Promotion**

254. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the actions she will take in the coming year to increase children's access to music, art and drama; and the funding she will dedicate to same. [40759/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Creative Ireland Programme, which I launched in December 2016, places a special focus on "Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child". Building on the Arts in Education Charter, this will involve the development of an integrated plan – Creative Children – to enable every child in Ireland to access tuition in music, drama, art and coding by 2022. My Department officials continue to work with relevant Departments and other stakeholders to develop this plan. The plan will be a primary driver of actions in this area in 2018.

I am pleased to say that continuing professional development through teacher - artist partnerships is ongoing and in July 2017 there was a significant increase in the number of courses taking place across twenty-one Education Centres throughout the country.

In addition, the Arts Council commissioned report Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from the Growing Up in Ireland Study, which was published in September 2016, concluded that arts and cultural participation leads to a range of positive outcomes for children, both in terms of their cognitive development and their wellbeing. This study found that schools are important arenas for access to arts/culture and school emphasis on culture has a positive impact on student engagement in these activities.

This year the Arts Council increased funding in this area from €3.1 million in 2016 to €3.7 million in 2017 on foot of the significant increase of support of €5 million which I secured for the Arts Council as part of Budget 2017. I also provided an additional €70,000 to the Arts Council to assist in the expansion of the Teacher Artist Partnership this year.

In terms of next steps, my Department is working closely with the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Arts Council in preparing the Creative Children plan to deliver the objectives of Pillar 1 of the Creative Ireland Programme. This plan will be launched later in the year.

### **Creative Ireland Programme**

255. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the year two programme of work for Creative Ireland; and the steps she will take to advance the

plan in 2018. [40760/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** In terms of practical support, so far this year I have announced funding of over €10 million under my Department's Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018 to a total of 122 arts organisations around the country in 2017. This allocation included over €900,000 in funding for 12 projects involving artists' studios and creative spaces. In addition, as part of the Government's initiative on the North East Inner City, I awarded a grant of €35,000 last year to Fire Station Artists' Studios, Buckingham Street, to assist in providing additional studio space in conjunction with Dublin City Council.

The Creative Ireland Programme is an all-of-Government programme which is being led by my Department in partnership with other Departments and Agencies, local authorities, the third level sector, arts and culture organisations (including the National Cultural Institutions), and relevant NGOs. The launch document for the programme identified ten actions for 2017, under five specific pillars:

- Enabling the Creative Potential of Every Child
- Enabling Creativity in Every Community
- Investing in our Creative and Cultural Infrastructure
- Ireland as a centre of Excellence in Media Production
- Unifying our Global reputation

There has been significant progress in relation to the delivery of these initiatives. My Department, together with its other partners, is now in the process of drawing up plans for 2018 and beyond in respect of the five pillars of the programme.

### **Arts Council Funding**

256. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department will support the Arts Council to move to a longer-term funding model for smaller arts organisations as recently discussed in the media. [40761/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I understand that the Deputy may be referring to the new funding framework (Making Great Art Work Funding Framework) as recently announced by the Arts Council.

The strategic context for the Arts Council's support of arts participation and all other art-forms and areas of arts practice is set out in Making Great Art Work: Arts Council Strategy (2016 –2025). A key commitment in the Council's Three-Year Plan 2017–2019 was to review its funding programmes, schemes and initiatives under its Making Great Art Work priorities. Such a review would assist the Council in how it invests in art and arts practice in a more effective way. It would also help streamline the supports available to artists and to arts organisations, and simplify and clarify the application, assessment and decision-making processes operated by the Council. The Making Great Art Work Funding Framework was the outcome of this review. Further details of the funding framework can be accessed on the Arts Council's website at the following link <http://www.artscouncil.ie/Funding/Funding-Framework/>.

I will continue to support the Arts Council, as set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government, which contains a commitment to work to progressively increase funding to the

arts, including the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board, as the economy continues to improve. To this effect in Budget 2017, I secured significant additional funding for the Arts Council. The increase in the Arts Council's allocation in 2017 is €5 million, or 8%. This will assist the Council greatly in implementing its 10-year strategy Making Great Art Work (2016-2025) including under its new funding framework.

### **Commissions of Investigation**

257. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the costs of inquiries into allegations of historical abuse of persons with intellectual disabilities in community healthcare organisation, CHO, 5 in 2015 and 2016; the likely costs in 2017; and the estimates of costs either directly from Government or through the HSE of such inquiries in 2018. [40245/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The HSE undertook two major pieces of work in respect of the South East foster care case, i.e. the Devine Report (2012) and the Resilience Ireland Inquiry Report (March 2015 and Addendum August 2015).

As the Deputy's question partially relates to reports commissioned by the HSE, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 15 working days, she can contact my Private Office and it will follow the matter up with the HSE.

The previous Government's approval to the establishment of a Commission of Investigation was given in principle, subject to a further decision to be made by the Government on detailed terms of reference, timelines and costs which was informed by the work undertaken by Mr. Conor Dignam senior counsel into related matters. Following the decision by Government concerning the establishment of a Commission, additional resources were allocated to Mr. Dignam and he was asked to identify matters which would assist in framing the Terms of Reference for the Commission. The total cost of the review carried out by Mr. Conor Dignam S.C. amounted to €67,650.

In relation to the likely costs for the Farrelly Commission of Investigation, the Government has noted costs in relation to the staffing, legal and administrative needs of the Commission. This is an active Commission of Investigation and the set up and running costs which have been paid from May to 21 September 2017 amount to €415,442.

### **Service Level Agreements**

258. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the reason staff working in section 39 organisations are not provided for under the Haddington Road and Lansdowne Road Agreements (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40752/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** 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. Employees of Section 39 organisations are not public servants and are therefore not encompassed by the Public Service Stability Agreements. This means that they were not subject to the FEMPI legislation which imposed pay reductions. Section 39 organisations are not obliged to pass on any pay reductions to their staff members or to provide for any pay restoration that may be negotiated as part of these public service agreements.

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. 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.

### Hospital Appointments Status

259. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40136/17]

**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 response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

### Medicinal Products Availability

260. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when the FreeStyle Libre system will be made available under the long-term illness scheme for persons with diabetes; if availability will not be restricted only to people with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to all persons on multiple daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40142/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### Health Services Provision

261. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if a social worker will be assigned to a person (details supplied); the efforts being made to secure housing for this person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40143/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

262. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the provision of Nivolumab on the reimbursement scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40144/17]

368. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Health if he will allow commencement of the prescribing procedures for Opdivo (Nivolumab) for immunotherapy treatment for affected persons with cancer (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40594/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 262 and 368 together.

The HSE has received separate applications for the reimbursement of Nivolumab (Opdivo) for eight separate indications, including for use as a combination therapy. These applications relate to funding of these treatments in the public health service.

Following an assessment by the HSE, and consultation with my Department regarding the funding implications, Nivolumab has been approved by the HSE for the treatment of:

- melanoma (monotherapy);
- renal cell carcinoma, and
- Hodgkins Lymphoma.

I understand that the HSE expect the reimbursement of Nivolumab for these indications in public hospitals to commence from the 1 November 2017.

In addition, the HSE has decided not to support the use of Nivolumab in the treatment of locally advanced or metastatic non-small cell lung cancer.

Availability of these treatments in a private hospital is a matter between the individual patient, their health insurer and the hospital concerned.

Any decision by a private health insurer to link its policy on cover for a drug treatment in a private hospital to the HSE assessment process is a matter for the insurer and the private hospital concerned.

The remaining applications are currently being considered in line with the decision making criteria and are at different stages of the assessment process.

## Hospital Appointments Status

263. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40152/17]

**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, they 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.

### Hospital Appointments Status

264. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40153/17]

**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 response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

### Hospital Appointments Status

265. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [40154/17]

**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.

### Injecting Facilities

266. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons an injecting room at a centre (details supplied) is expected to serve. [40155/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** On 25 August 2017, the HSE published an invitation on the Government's eTenders website for suitably

qualified and experienced service providers to submit tenders to provide a medically supervised injecting centre in Dublin City Centre area on a pilot basis. Tenders must be submitted to the HSE by 25 September 2017. The HSE anticipates that the contract will be awarded by 1 November 2017. The initial contract will be for an 18-month pilot phase with an evaluation at 6 months and again at 18 months.

The provider and the proposed location will be known once the evaluation of the tender submissions is completed by end of October 2017.

As the tender process is still underway, it is not appropriate for me to comment on individual organisations who may be included in the tender process.

It is estimated that it will cost in the region of €1.5m a year to run the SIF. The HSE has been allocated €750,000 in 2017 to set up the facility before the end of the current year.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data**

267. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the amount recouped through the ancillary state support facility under the nursing home support scheme for each year of its operation; the amount owed by participants in the nursing home support scheme that are availing of the ancillary State support facility; if the collection of funds owed under the ancillary state support facility has been unable to take place; if so, the amount; if funds owed under the ancillary state support facility have been cancelled; if so, the amount; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40156/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Health Services Reform**

268. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the obligation he or the HSE has to engage with the public or patients regarding health service planning, for example on the reconfiguration of acute hospital services; the legislative or statutory basis for this obligation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40157/17]

269. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the avenues available to persons to be involved in decisions regarding health service planning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40172/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 268 and 269 together.

Among the overarching principles that underpin governance arrangements in the Department of Health are those of openness, effective public consultation processes and comprehensive engagement with stakeholders. I would like to emphasise both my own and my Department's commitment to openness and transparency in all aspects of our work, including engagement and communication with the public, service users, public representatives and stakeholders generally. This is in line with commitments in the Programme for a Partnership Government and in Working Better Together, the Department's organisational change programme. Consultation is now a core feature of initiatives and policy developments across the health area, with a view to supporting considered, evidence based policy making. My Department's website includes

details of various public consultations, involving calls for submissions on various policy and strategic initiatives by the Department, including those still underway.

The recently published National Cancer Strategy 2017 - 2026 provides a good example of this. A Cancer Patient Forum was established as part of the strategy development process to represent the views of patients and patient groups and to enable them to inform the development of the strategy. In addition, a public consultation was undertaken to obtain the views of the public and of organisations on current cancer services and priorities for the future.

The 2004 Health Act also provides for mechanisms for consultation on health service planning. Section 42 of the Act provides for the establishment of not more than four Regional Health Forums, the membership of which is composed of members nominated by city and county councils. The Regulations providing for the establishment of the Regional Health Forums, the Health Act 2004 (Regional Health Forums) Regulations 2005, were made on 12 December 2005 and provided for the establishment of the Forums on 1 January 2006.

The function of the Regional Health Forums, as set out in the 2004 Act, is to provide local public representatives with an opportunity to make representations to the Health Service Executive on the range and operation of health and personal social services in their area and ensure that such public representatives would continue to be heard in relation to the operation and development of health and personal social services in their areas.

I have asked the HSE to respond direct to the Deputy in relation to the avenues they make available to the public for involvement in decisions regarding health service planning.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme**

270. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if additional costs caused by decision of Government, local or government agencies will be directly funded by Government in such areas as the nursing home sector in which contracts and price are controlled by the HSE; if an economic impact analysis has been undertaken by his Department or the HSE relative to the negative impact these increased costs (details supplied) will have on the fair deal scheme in 2018; if the national forum for elderly care as requested by the sector will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40181/17]

**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.

In relation to the Deputy's reference to a national forum for elderly care as requested by the sector, while consultation is, and always will remain, an important part of our approach, it is considered that it would be inappropriate to delegate elements of public policy, possibly including budgetary policy, to any consultative forum, particularly where some of those represented may have a commercial vested interest in the outcome. That said, there are a number of mechanisms through which consultation and ongoing engagement takes place. The Department engages with key stakeholders regularly to discuss concerns and ideas, and hosts an annual stakeholder forum under the umbrella of the National Positive Ageing Strategy.

### **Respite Care Services**

271. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health further to a public statement issued by the HSE on 27 April 2017 regarding respite services in counties Carlow and Kilkenny, the progress made on each project and the level of funding provided; the general respite services provided in counties Carlow and Kilkenny to parents of children with disabilities, including overnight services; if an organisation (details supplied) continues to provide interim services in County Carlow; if a long-term solution has been agreed; if a full service provider has been put in place to replace a centre (details supplied); the status of the provision of a purpose-built respite service centre for County Carlow and Kilkenny; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40182/17]

**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 Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the issues raised by the Deputy relate to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

272. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health his plans regarding a project (details supplied) in County Kilkenny; if the recent meeting in Kilkenny with the Minister of State for disability has brought a solution to the various issues including funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40183/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The safety and protection of vulnerable people in the care of the State is paramount. This Government's primary concern is that the needs of the residents are being prioritised and addressed.

As the particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

273. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be expedited with an organisation (details supplied) for a person that has been on the waiting list for two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40188/17]

**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.

However, 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 Waiting Lists**

274. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the scoliosis waiting list targets were missed; the steps he will take to address the problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40195/17]

275. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of children affected due to the scoliosis waiting list targets being missed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40196/17]

276. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if new targets are now being

set as a result of the previous scoliosis waiting list targets being missed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40197/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 274 to 276, inclusive, together.

As you are aware, the HSE, working with a number of stakeholders, is actively implementing the action plan that they developed for 2017 to ensure that no patient who requires surgery will be waiting more than four months for scoliosis surgery by the end of the year, where clinically appropriate. The HSE and the Children's Hospital Group have confirmed that they are committed to ensuring that no child will be waiting over 4 months by year end and are focussed on maximising all available capacity both internally and externally to achieve this target.

### **Hospital Facilities**

277. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the difference in capacity between the old emergency department at the University of Limerick hospital and the new emergency department at the hospital [40198/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

278. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare who is waiting for cataract surgery will have this procedure carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40201/17]

**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 is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider the patient's condition warrants and 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.

### **Respite Care Services Provision**

279. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (detail supplied) regarding funding for a condition in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40203/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Earlier this year I was at the launch of the Prader Willi Syndrome National Survey. I also met with the association, the purpose of the meeting was for PWSAI to outline the research findings of "A Population-Based Profile of Prader-Willi Syndrome in Ireland" and to make a case for the delivery of respite services specifically catering to the needs of Prader Willi sufferers. The HSE

met the PSWAI representatives on the 7 July 2017 and are committed to establishing a working group to look at the challenges of those suffering from Pradar Willi Syndrome.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability. The HSE's Social Care Operational Plan for 2017 aims to provide 182,000 overnight stays in centre-based respite services, in addition to 41,000 day respite sessions. Respite care for children and adults with disabilities is provided by the HSE directly in some instances, or by agencies funded by the HSE to provide services on its behalf.

The HSE remains committed to working with all voluntary disability service providers to ensure that all of the resources available for specialist disability services, including respite services, are used in the most efficient and effective manner possible. And 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 further reply.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

280. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health when the FreeStyle Libre system will be made available under the long-term illness scheme for persons with diabetes; if availability will not be restricted only to persons with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to all persons on multi-daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40205/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

281. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if an organisation (details supplied) is in receipt of Government funding; the financial support received by the organisation in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; the funding granted to persons by the organisation; the assistance that is given to persons who have poor or no sight to assist them to read; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40206/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** This 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 questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

282. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, in Dublin 15 only have the resources to deal with emergency cases; if the level of resourcing in the Dublin 15 area is less than in other parts of the country; his plans to increase CAMHS resourcing in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40216/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

283. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the steps being taken to provide pre-exposure prophylaxis medication here, in particular, for groups that are at high risk of HIV infection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40221/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** One of the priority actions identified under the Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020 was to ‘Prioritise, develop and implement guidance to support clinical decision making for STI testing, screening and treatment and on the appropriate use of antiretroviral therapy in HIV prevention’.

As part of this action, a multisectoral PrEP (HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis) working group, with a wide range of professional and community representation, was established by the HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme in 2016. The terms of reference of this multi-sectoral group includes the development of clinical guidance documents and recommendations in relation to the use of HIV PrEP in Ireland. The Working Group is exploring questions in relation to the feasibility, acceptability and uptake of HIV PrEP in Ireland and work has commenced on identifying how these priority questions can be answered through a project within existing clinical infrastructures. In addition the Working Group had explored the possibility of running a ‘demonstration project’ in Ireland with the support of a manufacturer of a relevant authorised product, however, I understand that the demonstration project is not being pursued at this juncture as the window of opportunity has now closed. The Working Group has also progressed work on the development of standards for PrEP service provision and other issues relevant to any future ‘model of care’ and implementation of a PrEP clinical service within a HIV prevention programme to people who would meet determined eligibility criteria and in services meeting agreed standards.

A pharmaceutical manufacturer has submitted a rapid review dossier to the HSE and a rapid review has been formally commissioned from the NCPE (National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics). This is in line with the standard process under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The outcome of the four week rapid review process has recommended that a full pharmacoeconomic evaluation be undertaken. Following receipt of a further submission from Gilead (which may take between 3 and 6 months) the NCPE starts the 90 day clock on/clock off timeframe for completing the evaluation. This could take between 3 and 6 months to complete at which time the NCPE will make a recommendation to the HSE Leadership team.

### **Disabilities Data**

284. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with intellectual and or physical disabilities in HSE CHO 5 who are being PEG fed on an ongoing basis; and the longest periods of PEG feeding involved. [40234/17]

**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.

### **Disabilities Data**

285. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in CHO 5 registered with intellectual disabilities; the funding allocated for services to them in 2017; and the breakdown of this funding between HSE direct spending and indirect spending through section 38 and 39 grants. [40236/17]

**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.

### **Disabilities Data**

286. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons with intellectual disabilities under 65 years of age living in nursing homes in CHO 5. [40237/17]

**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.

*Question No. 287 withdrawn.*

### **Counselling Services Provision**

288. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied)

in County Cork is on a waiting list for counselling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40254/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

289. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40257/17]

**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.

### **Maternity Services Provision**

290. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing access to foetal anomaly scans to all pregnant women in 2018; the estimated cost involved in ensuring that sufficient ultrasound machines, additional ultrasonographers and foetal medicine consultants are available; the locations in which the additional services would be required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40260/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am advised that foetal anomaly scans are available in all Hospital Groups. Those hospitals/maternity units currently providing anomaly scans accept referrals from other maternity units, if requested. This occurs where the medical team in the referring maternity unit consider that an anomaly scan is clinically indicated.

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 and 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. 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 queries raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

## **Nursing Staff Data**

291. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurse graduates in 2016 and 2017; the number of these nurse graduates offered permanent contracts; and the location by hospital and speciality of these nurse graduates, in tabular form. [40261/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

## **Nursing Staff Recruitment**

292. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has offered all 2016-2017 nurse graduates permanent contracts as per the memorandum of 26 April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40263/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Nursing and midwifery recruitment and retention is a priority for the Government. My Department is in regular contact with the HSE on matters concerning the recruitment of nurses and midwives, including implementation of the 2017 Nursing and Midwifery Agreement.

As provided for in the Agreement the HSE is focused on offering graduating nurses and midwives permanent posts. Each Hospital or Community Healthcare Organisation area is focused on making offers to the 2016/2017 nursing and midwifery graduates where possible. Where a Hospital or CHO area is unable to offer places to all graduates then the remaining graduates are being offered places in the respective Hospital Group or alternative CHO location as appropriate.

## **Medicinal Products Availability**

293. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the status of the HSE's negotiations on the drug Respreeza; if the HSE plans to return to negotiations on the availability of this drug; if he and the HSE will ensure that accommodations are made for the 21 persons who participated in trials of the drug in order for them to continue to avail of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40270/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has carefully considered the pricing and reimbursement of human alpha1-proteinase inhibitor (Respreeza) through its decision making processes which are aligned with the statutory criteria set out in the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Following a detailed review process over the past 18 months, the HSE has written to CSL Behring, the manufacturers of human alpha1-proteinase inhibitor, advising them that the HSE will not support reimbursement at this time.

The HSE was unable to recommend reimbursement as they concluded that there is not enough evidence to suggest that patients will derive a clinically meaningful benefit from this treatment.

The HSE was also required to consider cost effectiveness and deemed that the current price was not a cost effective use of resources.

I am aware that there are a number of patients on a compassionate access scheme which is



operated by CSL Behring and that the company is planning to terminate access to this treatment scheme.

I consider this action by the company as unethical and as I have stated previously, there should be no link between compassionate use schemes and reimbursement decisions and manufacturers should be frank with patients and clinicians on the operation of such schemes.

On my request, the HSE has sought assurances from the hospital that appropriate care arrangements are in place in the event that the access programme is discontinued, and that appropriate ethical guidelines have been and continue to be followed in relation to all aspects of the clinical trial and access programme.

It is the responsibility of both the company and the investigator (clinician) to ensure that they have considered and made arrangements for the patients, including in circumstances where the product is not reimbursed by the HSE. I would expect that the company would honour any commitments made to patients in this regard.

### **Maternity Services**

294. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 699 of 26 July 2017, if part of the budget for maternity services was ring-fenced for 2016 or has been ring-fenced for 2017 for expansion of access to 20 week anomaly scans. [40271/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Maternity Strategy confirms that all development funding for maternity services will be ring-fenced and allocated through the HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme (NWIHP). The Programme, with its wide remit and dedicated expertise, will facilitate greater oversight and support for service providers and will ensure the appropriate allocation and targeting of new resources.

The National Maternity Strategy is also 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 NWIHP. Indeed, the issue of anomaly scanning is a priority issue for the Programme. One of the current challenges to increase access to anomaly scans is the recruitment of ultrasonographers. 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 this particular query, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

295. **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. [40273/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Suicide Prevention**

296. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE, through the National Office for Suicide Prevention, will continue to provide core funding to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40274/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** Following extensive engagement recently between the organisation in question and the Health Service Executive, it was agreed by all parties that there was no longer a strategic alignment between the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) and this organisation and that NOSP would be invoking the termination clause of the previous Grant Aid Agreement. However, this organisation was advised to contact other HSE divisions or agencies that may be more aligned with their strategic objectives.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

297. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the supports that exist in County Mayo for young persons with an intellectual disability who have just turned 18 years of age for their continuing education and development; the further supports which exist or are planned; the number of applications that have been made in County Mayo for day services for young persons with an intellectual disability; the number of those that have secured a place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40280/17]

**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**

298. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40295/17]

**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, they 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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

299. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40296/17]

**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, they 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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

300. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40301/17]

**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, they 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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

301. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40302/17]

**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, they 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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

302. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40303/17]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

303. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40304/17]

**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, they 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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

304. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40305/17]

**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, they 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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

305. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40306/17]

**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 Staff**

306. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the steps that are being taken to prioritise employment opportunities for recent mental health nursing graduates in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40327/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

307. **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. [40331/17]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

308. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40332/17]

**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 be-

half, 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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

309. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40333/17]

**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.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data**

310. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the funding provided for the nursing home support scheme in each year since its inception; and the revenue raised each year on the basis of the financial assessment of assets. [40339/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

311. **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. [40342/17]

**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.

### **Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review**

312. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the National Treatment Purchase Fund has reviewed the price being charged for long-term residential care in private nursing homes (details supplied); if the transparency of the pricing mechanism will be increasing in order that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and if so, if he will report on the findings. [40347/17]

**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.

### **Vaccination Programme**

313. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a person under 65 years of age with a medical card can be charged for the flu vaccination. [40349/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE provides the flu and pneumococcal vaccines free of charge for all those in the at-risk groups. Those aged 18 years or older in the at-risk groups may attend either their GP or pharmacist for vaccination and those under 18 years should attend their GP. The vaccine and consultation are free for those with a Medical Card or a GP Visit Card. Those without a Medical Card or a GP Visit Card will be charged a consultation fee. The seasonal flu campaign for 2017/2018 will continue until the end of April 2018.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

314. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40360/17]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

315. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied). [40361/17]

**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.



### **Hospital Appointments Status**

316. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40363/17]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

317. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40364/17]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

318. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40365/17]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

319. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied) at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40366/17]

**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.

### **Autism Support Services**

320. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment with a charity can be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40390/17]

**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.

### **Home Help Service Provision**

321. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for home help services in Dublin north CHO Area 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40391/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Primary Medical Certificates Data**

322. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary health certificates that have been issued to persons suffering from Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and POTS syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40392/17]

323. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary health certificates that have been refused to persons suffering from Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and POTS syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40393/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 322 and 323 together.

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 Deputy will be aware that I have no role to play in the issuing of Primary Medical Certificates. This is a service matter for the Health Service Executive and accordingly I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Crisis Pregnancy Services**

324. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health the progress of his review of the Regulation of Information (Services Outside the State for Termination of Pregnancies) Act 1995 in order that the law related to giving false information on terminations of pregnancy is strengthened (details supplied) [40394/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to crisis pregnancy counselling, a primary concern of Government is the protection of the public when availing of health or social care services. A crisis pregnancy is perhaps one of the most stressful events in a woman's life and therefore places her in a very vulnerable position. Positive Options, a crisis pregnancy service which is funded and overseen by the Health Service Executive, provides counselling in 50 locations nationwide and provides women with free, non-judgemental counselling. I am aware, however, that some other bodies providing counselling may not adhere to the same standards. The Regulation of Information (Services Outside the State for Termination of Pregnancies) Act, 1995 defines the conditions under which information relating to abortion services lawfully available in another state might be made available in Ireland. That Act provides that where information is provided that would assist a woman in obtaining a termination abroad, that information must be truthful and objective and that a breach of this provision is an offence. If an individual considers that information provided under the Act is not truthful and objective the matter may be referred to the Garda Síochána for investigation. As the Deputy will be aware, work is ongoing on regulating counsellors generally under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. Pregnancy counselling (other than that provided by doctors, nurses or social workers) will be taken into account in this context. The Department of Health is preparing the necessary regulations to designate the professions of counsellor and of psychotherapist, which it is hoped will be ready for submission to both Houses of the Oireachtas for approval during this Dáil session.

As well as regulating counsellors under the 2005 Act, consideration will be given as to whether there is a requirement to strengthen the Regulation of Information (Services Outside

the State for Termination of Pregnancies) Act 1995 to prevent professionals who are not regulated by the State from providing crisis pregnancy counselling services.

### **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

325. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if persons entitled to public patient healthcare here will receive correspondence from the HSE with information regarding the cross border healthcare directive upon joining a hospital waiting list [40397/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the terms of the European Union (Application of Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare) Regulations 2014, the Health Service Executive has responsibility for providing information to enable patients resident in the State to exercise their rights in relation to access to healthcare in other Member States. I have asked the HSE to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Accommodation Provision**

326. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to develop the capacity of Ramelton nursing unit, County Donegal, St Joseph's Hospital, Stranorlar, County Donegal and Lifford hospital, County Donegal. [40398/17]

327. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the completion date for refurbishment works at Buncrana nursing unit, County Donegal; and the number of additional beds and staff which will result from these works [40399/17]

328. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the completion date for refurbishment works at Carndonagh community hospital, County Donegal; and the number of additional beds and staff which will result from these works [40400/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 326 to 328, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

329. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when a base for the ambulance service in Buncrana, County Donegal will be operational. [40401/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you.

### **Ambulance Service Provision**

330. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review of ambulance coverage for the Inishowen area of County Donegal by the National Ambulance Service. [40402/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists Data**

331. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting cataract operations at the Mater hospital, Dublin 7; the waiting times for cataract patients that have not yet been given an admission date for cataract assessment and cataract operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40420/17]

**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.

### **Hospital Consultant Recruitment**

332. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when a consultant endocrinologist specialising in diabetes for adults will be appointed to Letterkenny university hospital; the reason this has not happened to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40428/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Saolta University Healthcare Group has advised that there is currently one consultant Endocrinologist at Letterkenny University Hospital providing the adult Diabetes service and is receiving support from a locum Consultant General Physician who has a diabetic interest.

Additional clinics are being run on monthly basis (1 - 2 extra clinics per month), in order to address waiting lists for the service.

In terms of the future of diabetes services in the North-West, the Saolta Group advises that, in line with consultant Recruitment protocols, an application to recruit a second Consultant Endocrinologist has been submitted to the Consultant Application Advisory Committee (CAAC) where it is under consideration.

### **Prescriptions Data**

333. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the figures for spending on prescriptions of specific serotonin reuptake inhibitors and serotonin noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors over the past 15 years; the number of persons that are prescribed SSRIs and SNRIs for the same period; the total for each drug listed for each year in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40436/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Health Products Regulatory Authority**

334. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if general practitioners and other

professionals who have the authority to prescribe drugs are required to report their patients' experiences of adverse drug reactions to the HPRA; if this is a voluntary action on the part of the general practitioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40437/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** General practitioners and other healthcare professionals that have the authority to prescribe drugs are encouraged to report their patients' experiences of adverse drug reactions to the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA); while this is a voluntary action on the part of these healthcare professionals, the HPRA proactively encourages and facilitates reporting of suspected adverse reactions by healthcare professionals and patients.

The national adverse reaction reporting programme in Ireland has been in place since 1968 and has continuously evolved over the years to encourage increased participation across healthcare professional groups as well as patients/consumers. A variety of methods are in place to facilitate reporting, such as online reporting tools, submitting a form by post or email, or reporting by telephone. The HPRA website includes a dedicated section on reporting of suspected adverse reactions which provides information for healthcare professionals as well as members of the public on the importance of reporting and the methods for doing so.

The HPRA regularly highlights reporting recommendations in its Drug Safety Newsletter, which is distributed to registered healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists and dentists. The HPRA has also highlighted the reporting of suspected adverse reactions in its regular articles in MIMS Ireland (an independently edited publication designed as a prescribing guide primarily for general practitioners) and in the Irish Medicines Formulary (a non-promotional medicines reference source for Ireland).

In 2017, the HPRA collaborated on the development of an e-learning module for healthcare professionals to learn about the importance of reporting suspected adverse drug reactions. The availability of this e-learning module was communicated to healthcare professionals via the HPRA website and the HPRA Drug Safety Newsletter. In addition, a number of leaflets have been issued by the HPRA to highlight patient awareness around taking medicines safely and advising patients of reporting options. These leaflets have been distributed to the public through a number of channels, including being made available in GP surgeries.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

335. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital bed will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40468/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medicinal Products Supply**

336. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if he plans to restrict the provision of adult nappies to persons; if so, the reason this measure is being undertaken; the amount that supplies are being reduced by; the timeframe for this measure to be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40469/17]

**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.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

337. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the status of CAMHS services in Sligo region CHO1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40472/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

338. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the job titles and details of contract for of all employees on the CAMHS team in Sligo area CHO1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40473/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

339. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if the full-time senior psychologist position has been filled in the CAMHS service in Sligo area CHO1; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40474/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

340. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the CAMHS waiting list at the end of August 2017 for Sligo area CHO1 by periods (details supplied), in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40475/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

341. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40486/17]

**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 is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider 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 Charges

342. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons are now required to pay for the haemochromatosis clinic in Louth County Council (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40487/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, the Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### Services for People with Disabilities

343. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding investment in supports for persons with disabilities and the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40491/17]

**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.

Funding of €1.69 billion was allocated by the Health Service Executive (HSE) for disability services in 2017. This represented an increased allocation of €130 million compared to the previous year. Funding in 2017 has supported the provision of a wide range of services to people with disabilities as follows:

Disability Services Programme: €1.69 billion 2017	Quantum of Services
Residential services	9,000 people
Day services	Over 22,000 people
Respite residential support	182,500 overnights
Personal Assistant services	1.4 million hours
Home Support services	2.75 million hours
Move from institutions to homes in the community	223 people

In addition, 2017 has seen targeted improvements in a number of priority areas. These include the reconfiguration of disability residential services, supported by €20 million in capital



funding and by the Service Reform Fund and improved compliance with National Standards for Residential Centres for Children and Adults with Disabilities.

As the Deputy will be aware, Ireland signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and since then, successive Governments have emphasised Ireland's strong commitment to proceed to ratification as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to ensure all necessary legislative and administrative requirements under the Convention are met. This Government remains committed to ratification of the Convention. Before the State can ratify the Convention however, enactment of new legislation and amendment of existing legislation is required to ensure obligations will be met upon entry into force for Ireland. The previous Government published a Roadmap in October 2015, which sets out the legislative measures needed to meet those requirements, along with declarations and reservations to be entered by Ireland on ratification. Considerable progress has already been made to overcome the remaining legislative barriers to Ireland's ratification of the Convention. The major issue at this stage is in relation to deprivation of liberty – in the case of persons in nursing homes for example, whose capacity to consent may be in doubt. This is a sensitive and important issue and we must get it right. Unfortunately, it is taking longer than expected to develop a proposal that is constitutionally sound and operationally effective and reasonable. This work is being led by the Department of Justice and Equality with the assistance of the Department of Health.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

344. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding investment in new service developments for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40492/17]

345. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the level of unmet needs of persons with intellectual disabilities aged 55 and older; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40493/17]

347. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether there is a model imperative to ensure that the support needs of persons with intellectual disabilities are prioritised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40495/17]

348. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will invest €200 million in new service developments for persons with intellectual disabilities in each of the next five years commencing with budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40496/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 344, 345, 347 and 348 together.

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.

Funding of €1.69 billion was allocated by the Health Service Executive (HSE) for disability services in 2017. This represented an increased allocation of €130 million compared to the previous year. Funding in 2017 has supported the provision of a wide range of services to people with disabilities as follows:

Disability Services Programme: €1.69 billion 2017	Quantum of Services
Residential services	9,000 people
Day services	Over 22,000 people
Respite residential support	182,500 overnights
Personal Assistant services	1.4 million hours
Home Support services	2.75 million hours
Move from institutions to homes in the community	223 people

In addition, 2017 has seen targeted improvements in a number of priority areas. These include the reconfiguration of disability residential services, supported by €20 million in capital funding and by the Service Reform Fund and improved compliance with National Standards for Residential Centres for Children and Adults with Disabilities.

My Department is currently engaged in discussions with the HSE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as part of the Estimates Process for Budget 2018. Pending the conclusion of these discussions, I am not in a position to comment on the level of funding that will be available in 2018 for disability services.

### Services for People with Disabilities

346. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding bus services for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40494/17]

**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 a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

*Questions Nos. 347 and 348 answered with Question No. 344.*

### Primary Care Centres Provision

349. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a primary care centre in an area (details supplied); the starting date of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40503/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

### Emergency Services

350. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of non-health care, community based organisations or enterprises, such as cafes or hotels, which have applied for authorisation by the Health Products Regulatory Authority to be a listed organisation permitted to administer emergency medicines as provided for under SI 449/2015; the number of persons authorised to administer emergency care within these listed organisations to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40507/17]

351. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the extent to which both the excessive cost and duration of training required by members of community organisations recognised as listed organisations under SI 449/2015 to become recognised as authorised persons to administer emergency medicines under the terms of this legislation is acting as a barrier to the successful implementation of this initiative, including the widespread roll-out of such training and the increased access to emergency medicines by persons who require them; his views on whether it is time to update the training to enable communities to have access to these life-saving medicines in GAA clubs, cafes and workplaces; the measures he plans to take to address these barriers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40508/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 350 and 351 together.

In October 2015, my predecessor, Minister Leo Varadkar T.D., signed regulations which allow certain prescription-only medicines to be administered by trained members of the public in emergency situations.

In order for an organisation to avail of an emergency medicine without the need for a prescription, they must first register with the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) and undergo a training course accredited by the Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC).

This register is publicly available through the Emergency Medicines Portal on the HPRA website and can be found at: [www.hpra.ie/homepage/medicines/emergency-medicines/emergency-medicines-search/results](http://www.hpra.ie/homepage/medicines/emergency-medicines/emergency-medicines-search/results).

There are currently a total of 14 organisations listed on the register for Emergency Medicines. The number of accountable persons for emergency medicines is 21 overall. Each organisation may have more than one site and more than one accountable person registered.

Prescription only medications (POMs) are so designated because there are safety concerns about these medications. The administration of a POM should not be done lightly and should only occur following appropriate training. A decision to undergo training on the use and administration of an emergency medicine rests with individual organisations.

The cost of the Cardiac First Response (CFR) and Medications for Listed Organisations (MLO) training courses and the supplementary modules in administering emergency medicines are determined by the Recognised Institutions (RIs) approved to deliver the training programme. PHECC RIs include voluntary organisations, higher education institutions, commercial companies and statutory public bodies. Education course material, including assessment tools, has been developed by PHECC for use by the RIs in their delivery of the CFR and MLO courses.

The CFR and MLO courses involve 2 modules - medication management and medicinal product administration modules of 2-4 hours duration and incorporate the basic modules of Cardiac First Response. Thus the total duration of the course may be between six to eight hours. This time period facilitates the teaching, learning and skill assessment required for non-medical persons to safely care for persons in the community who may be experiencing life

threatening conditions such as anaphylaxis, hypoglycaemia, severe angina, acute asthmatic attack and pain relief in emergency rescue situations. Acute illness can progress very quickly to cardiac arrest therefore all authorised persons must be able to identify and treat a cardiac arrest which is the minimum clinical training required prior to completion of the medication modules.

PHECC have advised that they do not believe, at this point in time, that their Education and Training Standards need to be updated in order to enable communities to have better access to these life saving medicines. Rather that continued improvement of the general public's awareness of this health policy initiative is critical to its successful implementation.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

352. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40556/17]

**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.

### **General Practitioner Services Provision**

353. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if a replacement general practitioner for a doctor (details supplied) in Kildare has been advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40558/17]

354. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if interviews have been held for a replacement of a retired general practitioner (details supplied) in Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40559/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 353 and 354 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

355. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the detail of the standard contracts offered to each of the members of the community teams in CAMHS services (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40560/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Report**

356. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide the HSE CAMHS service reports for each of the years 2013 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40561/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Expenditure**

357. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the agency spend by CAMHS for each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by CHO area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40562/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

358. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the number of professions (details supplied) employed in CAMHS services in 2016 and 2017 [40563/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

359. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the number of young persons awaiting longer than 12 months for a first appointment for CAMHS at the end of June for each of the years 2014 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40564/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Funding**

360. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the percentage of the overall mental health budget CAMHS services have received by year since 2012; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [40565/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Data**

361. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the waiting list times for a mental health service (details supplied) by site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40566/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Question Heading for question(s) 362**

362. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the number of employees in each of the sites of a mental health service (details supplied) in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40567/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Disability Services Provision**

363. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health if he has read the recently published HIQA inspection report on an organisation (details supplied); if he has satisfied himself that the organisation can implement the proposed action plan in view of the volume of complaints from families and their lack of confidence in the board and directors of the organisation and other issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40576/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I am aware of the organisation to which the Deputy refers and I understand that there have been issues at its centre in Wicklow in relation to compliance with regulatory standards. The most recent inspection report on this centre, which was published by the Health Information and Quality Authority on 13 September 2017, identified a number of areas where significant improvements were needed.

Where issues of non-compliance are identified, HIQA's inspection reports include a series of follow-on actions that the service provider must implement within a prescribed time-frame. The Health Service Executive has assured me that it is working closely with Sunbeam House Services to help it address these issues with a view to ensuring that HIQA's action plan is implemented in a timely fashion and to the satisfaction of the regulator.

### **HSE Data**

364. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the number of day care centres

for the elderly that have received capital funding from his Department or the HSE in 2016, and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40577/17]

365. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the number of community run day care facilities are in operation; the number of persons that attend these centres on a weekly basis; the number of persons referred to these facilities by the HSE on a weekly basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40578/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 364 and 365 together.

As these are a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Expenditure**

366. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health if there are grants from his Department, the HSE or another Department for community groups to purchase defibrillators; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40582/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** It is the local community who initiates the setting up of a First Responder scheme or group or the provision of public access defibrillators in their area and a local committee is usually formed to organise and implement these initiatives. The local committee contacts the National Ambulance Service (NAS) and a formal process is undertaken to integrate the group with the NAS.

The NAS continues to support the establishment of new groups around the country and encourages all communities to consider the setting up of such schemes in their areas. The National Ambulance Service is in the process of appointing a Community Engagement Officer in each of the three NAS areas to establish a range of health educational and training programmes, including Basic Life Support within the community and will be developed in conjunction with public health and health promotion staff and key external partners such as the Irish Hearth Foundation and Community First Responder Ireland, as part of a wider commitment to promote the Health and well-being of patients and the general public.

The HSE has been allocated National Lottery Funding for distribution to community based groups and voluntary organisations. Groups and organisations involved in the provision of Health and Personal Social Services can apply to their Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) for once off funding of between €500 and €10,000 for suitable projects.

### **Health Services Staff**

367. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if Ireland is implementing the Kampala Declaration and Agenda for Global Action of the World Health Organisation; his views on the fact that foreign doctors are taking up permanent positions in the health service rather than practising in their home countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40593/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Kampala Declaration and Agenda for Global Action recognise the need for action to resolve the accelerating crisis in the global health workforce and call on Governments to determine the appropriate health workforce skill mix while providing coordinated and coherent support to formulate and implement comprehensive

country health workforce strategies and plans.

As set out in its *Statement of Strategy 2016-2019*, my Department has committed to developing a national strategic framework for health workforce planning, in collaboration with Government Departments and agencies. During 2016, my Department convened a Cross-sectoral Steering Group to develop a national strategic framework for health workforce planning. A consultation draft of the framework was completed in mid-2017 and was subject to a stakeholder consultation process over the summer. Submissions received as part of this consultation process have been considered by the Steering Group and the draft Framework has been updated accordingly. I expect to receive the final version of the Framework shortly, accompanied by a high-level implementation plan.

The Fourth Global Forum on Human Resources for Health, which will take place in Dublin in November and is co-hosted by my Department in collaboration with the WHO, Irish Aid and HSE will provide a key opportunity for all stakeholders to show a collective commitment to developing and making available the workforce required to achieve universal health coverage and deliver the Sustainable Development Goals targets for health.

*Question No. 368 answered with Question No. 262.*

### **Respite Care Services Funding**

369. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if there will be funding for respite care services outside Dublin in 2018. [40595/17]

**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 Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

Funding of €1.69 billion has been allocated by the Health Service Executive (HSE) for disability services in 2017. This represents an increased allocation of €130 million compared to the previous year.

My Department is currently engaged in discussions with the HSE and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as part of the Estimates Process for Budget 2018. Pending the conclusion of these discussions, I am not in a position to comment on the level of funding that will be available in 2018 for disability services generally and for respite care services outside Dublin in 2018.

### **Respite Care Services Availability**

370. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to close the Mullingar respite centre (details supplied). [40596/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Govern-



ment 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 Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Fire Safety**

371. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to undertake a comprehensive fire safety audit of all high risk buildings, including temporary structures, that are used to house hospitals and health care facilities that fall under the remit of his Department. [40600/17]

**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.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

372. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he has received correspondence from a patient advocacy group (details supplied) in which a request to meet is formally communicated; if so, if he will facilitate this request; if he will propose a suitable date and time for such a meeting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40615/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I met with the Donegal Branch of Diabetes Ireland on 28 June 2017. I have now received a request from Donegal Branch for a further meeting. I have asked my officials to respond directly to the group confirming my intention of arranging the meeting as soon as my diary allows.

### **Physiotherapy Provision**

373. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of children that have qualified for treatment with the children's physiotherapy services in County Mayo; the number of children on a waiting list to receive physiotherapy; the estimated waiting time for each child; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40619/17]

374. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of children waiting for their first assessment for possible qualification for treatment with the children's physiotherapy services in County Mayo; the estimated waiting time for assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40620/17]

375. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if children that have qualified for treatment with the children's physiotherapy services in County Mayo are designated into

different priority levels or categories; if so, the number of children in each category; the criteria that define each category; the respective average waiting list in each category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40621/17]

377. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons treated on average by each individual physiotherapist working for children's physiotherapy services in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40623/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 373 to 375, inclusive, and 377 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Health Services Staff Data**

376. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of physiotherapists that are employed by the Health Service Executive and or children's physiotherapy services for County Mayo; if there are vacancies for physiotherapists treating children in County Mayo; if so, the number of vacancies and the length of time that each vacancy has existed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40622/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

*Question No. 377 answered with Question No. 373.*

### **Speech and Language Therapy Waiting Lists**

378. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of children that have qualified for treatment with the speech and language therapy department in County Mayo; the number of children on a waiting list for an appointment with a therapist; the estimated waiting time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40624/17]

379. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of children that are waiting for their first assessment for possible qualification for treatment with the speech and language therapy department in County Mayo; the estimated waiting time for assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40625/17]

380. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if children that have qualified for treatment with a speech and language therapist in County Mayo are designated into different priority levels or categories; if so, the number of children in each category; the criteria that define each category; the respective average waiting list in each category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40626/17]

382. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons treated, on average, by each individual speech and language therapist working for the speech and language therapy department services in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40628/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 378 to 380, inclusive, and 382 together.

As these questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for them to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **HSE Staff Data**

381. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of speech and language therapists that are employed by the Health Service Executive for County Mayo; if there are current vacancies for therapists treating children in County Mayo; the number of vacancies; the length of time each vacancy has existed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40627/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

*Question No. 382 answered with Question No. 378.*

### **Hospital Services**

383. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to open a new weight management clinic at Beaumont hospital, Dublin 9; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40630/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In line with the increased emphasis on providing services to patients in the community, currently referrals that the dietetic service at Beaumont Hospital receive for weight management are transferred to Community Services for individual and group programmes such as the “Programme for Healthy Eating and Wait Management” (PHEW).

The HSE has advised that there are no currently plans for a weight management clinic in Beaumont Hospital.

### **Mental Health Services**

384. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, assessment system to ensure that general practitioner referrals cannot be refused without at a minimum a full in-person consultation with the child or family in question by a CAMHS team; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40633/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services**

385. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if he will address the difficulties experienced with child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, referrals to ensure that there is a clear policy and set of procedures in place to make this process more transparent for families and general practitioners alike; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[40634/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Hospitals Capital Programme**

386. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if capital funding will be made available in the HSE capital plan for the provision of a dedicated obstetrics theatre at University Hospital Kerry as recommended by the acute hospital division and the HSE capital steering group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40637/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Hospital Admissions**

387. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a report (details supplied) which highlights the fact that persons over 80 years of age are forced to wait twice as long as those under 20 years of age for admission to hospital; his views on the findings of this report; the steps he will take to address the findings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40638/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I can assure the Deputy that officials in my Department are aware of this report and its content.

This report highlights the need for the system to plan for the current and future healthcare needs of elderly patients within and beyond acute hospitals. Latest HSE data indicates that, to date this year, persons over 75 years old accounted for 11.8% of all presentations at Emergency Departments (EDs), and in July, 50.3% of patients over 75 years who presented at EDs were admitted.

Planning effectively for this growing demand is a priority for my Department, and I look forward to the findings of the Health Capacity Review, due by the end of 2017, in this regard.

A key finding of this report was that EDs are busy all year round, not just in winter, for different seasonal reasons. This was also a key learning from last year's Winter Initiative, and has been used by the HSE to develop and identify measures to improve access for patients in the short to medium term, both in terms of emergency care and waiting lists.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

388. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when required medical equipment will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40642/17]

**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.

### Primary Care Centres Provision

389. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 65 of 3 May 2017, if the ecology assessment has been completed; if so, if a copy of the assessment can be provided; if a programme for procurement of the site and the design services has begun; if so, the timescale for the completion of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40648/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply as the delivery of the healthcare infrastructure is a service matter.

### Primary Care Centres Provision

390. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the progress that has been made on the provision of a primary care centre in Galway, further to the identification of the site as Shantalla, Galway as the appropriate location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40649/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

### Hospital Services

391. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health his plans in place to deal with the situation at Merlin Park hospital, Galway; the expected repair time; the arrangements for surgery to be carried out at an alternative site; the number of persons affected that were scheduled to have operations (details supplied); when they can expect to have their operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40650/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Saolta University Healthcare Group has advised that a leak developed in the roof of a building in the Merlin Park hospital campus that houses the Hospital's two orthopaedic theatres on the 4th of September. Hospital management temporarily suspended operations for a week to facilitate the Galway University Hospital Buildings and Maintenance Unit to effect repairs.

However, a second leak was noted on 13 September and Saolta advise that a multi-disciplinary team, consisting of members of the hospital's management and infection control teams and the HSE's West Estates division, took the immediate decision, in the interest of patient safety, to suspend operations in the two theatres to allow a full assessment of the infrastructural damage and the development of a plan to effect a complete repair of the damage. As a result, elective orthopaedic surgeries are now being deferred at Merlin Park and affected patients are being contacted by the Hospital. It should be noted however that no emergency patients have been affected.

Saolta and the University Hospital Galway management team have engaged an external engineering firm to carry out a full assessment of the damage and provide a time-frame for the completion of repairs. In addition, they are exploring a range of potential solutions including the use of modular theatres as an interim measure; assessing the scope to utilise excess theatre capacity in University Hospital Galway; and evaluating the appropriateness of outsourcing

some services to the private hospital sector.

The relative merits of these solutions or a combination thereof will largely be determined by the length of time the orthopaedic theatres are expected to be out of commission. This timeline is also necessary to estimate the number of patients whose cases may be deferred.

Saolta and the University Hospital Galway management team have both been in regular contact with my Department to update on the situation at Merlin Park and my Department has requested that the Saolta Group formulate and implement a contingency plan to address this incident.

I have asked the HSE to contact you directly as soon as possible with this information.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists Data**

392. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting orthopaedic surgery at Merlin Park hospital, Galway; the length of time they have been on the waiting list; the nature of the surgery to be carried out, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40651/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

### **Hospitals Building Programme**

393. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 136 on 21 June 2017, the status of this project; if a design team has been appointed; the completion date for the new design; the timescale to delivery of the new emergency department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40652/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Significant progress has been made in terms of planning for a new ED at University Hospital Galway and funding of €100,000 to progress the planning phase has been indented in 2017.

The Saolta Group has committed to working to expedite this project as effectively as possible and the Group advise that, at present, HSE Estates is finalising the Tender process for the procurement of design services for the new Emergency Department block at UHG. It is envisaged that the design team will be appointed by the end of October 2017. The initial design stages of the project will commence once the design team is in place. The establishment of a projected timeline for the delivery of the new Emergency Department will constitute part of this design process.

In addition in the interim, the HSE have been asked to develop a short to medium term plan for managing the demand for both scheduled and unscheduled care for both the UHG and Merlin Park sites. The HSE advises that work on this is progressing.

### **Nursing Staff Recruitment**

394. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason nurses and midwives returning from abroad who apply directly to the HSE for job vacancies are not entitled to

a relocation grant, in view of the fact that returning nurses and midwives who submit applications for job vacancies in the HSE through a private nursing agency are; his views on whether this situation is fair; and his plans to extend the relocation grant to those nurses and midwives that apply directly to the HSE for job vacancies [40654/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Nursing and midwifery recruitment and retention is a priority for the Government and my Department is in regular contact with the HSE on matters concerning the recruitment of nurses and midwives. The HSE is currently focused on offering graduating nurses and midwives permanent posts and replacing agency staff with permanent staff. Recruitment of additional nurses is also the subject of considerable ongoing activity by the HSE and voluntary hospitals with campaigns in train in Ireland and abroad. The campaigns encompass General, Mental Health, Intellectual Disability and Registered Children's Nurses, and also Midwives.

In 2015 a recruitment support package was introduced with the agreement of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. This recruitment package provides for up to €1,500 in vouched removal/relocation expenses including the cost of flights subject to Revenue guidelines on allowable removal expenses to nurses who return from overseas. Extension of the scheme was agreed as part of the Nursing Agreement 2017. Circular 26/2017 states:

“As part of the March 2017 agreement between Nursing /Midwifery Unions and the HSE, it has now been agreed to extend this scheme, known as the “Bring them Home” campaign beyond the U.K, to encompass nurses returning and taking up employment in the Irish Public Health Service from any overseas location. Such payments should be processed and drawn down at local employer level as expenses and each Hospital group/CHO should have a robust application process, which includes a commitment by the nurse to remain in the employment for a period of 12 months. This initial payment should be made immediately following these matters being finalised. Additionally, there is, as part of the nursing/midwifery agreement, provision for the payment of an additional €1,500, after a period of 12 months employment with the employer, and subject to a commitment to remain in that employment for a further period of 12 months.”

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

395. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons that are waiting on surgery and are on a hospital waiting list are questioned after a period of time if they still need said surgery and are then removed from the waiting list if they do not reply within a period of time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40655/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Good practice around the management of hospital waiting lists recommends periodic validation processes and in this context, the NTPF National Inpatient/Daycase Planned Procedure Waiting List Management Protocol sets out the national protocols for the management of waiting lists including validation and clinical suspensions.

The purpose of Validation is to:

- Maintain hospital-patient communication during the patient's waiting list journey;
- Update the patient record;
- Reduce the rate of patient non-attendance and/or patient cancellations; and

- Provide clean, accurate, up to date waiting list data which reflects the true demand for hospital services.

Administrative validation is the process whereby hospital administration contacts patients on inpatient and day case waiting lists at pre-planned intervals during the year to ensure that patients are ready, willing, suitable and available to attend a hospital appointment or wish to be removed. When a patient is removed from a waiting list due to non-response to a written validation cycle, notification must be sent to the referring clinician and the patient. A copy should also be placed in the patient's Health Care Record (HCR). If requested by the GP/referring clinician, patients can be reinstated back to their original place on to the Waiting List.

In addition, clinical validation is the process whereby the Clinician or delegate clinical team member conducts a review of the patients healthcare records and/or medical notes for patients on inpatient, day case and planned procedure waiting lists in excess of six months. Where there is a requirement for clinical validation, patients are contacted by phone by the clinician or delegate as part of a virtual clinic. These reviews are carried out at pre-planned intervals during the year.

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage**

396. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1195 of 11 September 2017, the reason chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is not included on the long-term illness benefit list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40665/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As I stated in parliamentary question 1195 of 11 September 2017 there are no plans to extend or amend the list of conditions covered by the LTI Scheme.

The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the scheme are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

397. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health when the access scheme for medicinal cannabis products will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40687/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In February, I published the Health Products Regulatory Authority's (HPRA) report 'Cannabis for Medical Use – A Scientific Review'. On foot of the HPRA's conclusions I announced that I would establish a cannabis for medical use access programme, for patients under the care of a consultant, for the following medical conditions:

- spasticity associated with multiple sclerosis resistant to all standard therapies;
- intractable nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy, despite the use of standard



anti-emetic regimes;

- severe, refractory (treatment-resistant) epilepsy.

An expert group, chaired by Dr Mairín Ryan from HIQA was established in March to develop the operational, clinical and practice guidelines for this access programme.

The Expert Group conducted a targeted consultation on the draft guidelines and is due to finalise these guidelines shortly. Officials in my Department are working on secondary legislation to underpin the programme and on the logistics of sourcing suitable cannabis-based product supplies for the Irish market place.

This work will take a number of months to complete but the Access Programme will be operational later this year.

Pending implementation of the Cannabis Access Programme, and for medical conditions that are not included in the Cannabis Access Programme, under existing legislation it is open to me as Minister to consider granting a licence to an Irish registered medical practitioner, under the Misuse of Drugs Acts, for access to medical cannabis for named patients.

The Chief Medical Officer has advised that the granting of such a licence must be premised on an appropriate application being submitted to the Department of Health, which is endorsed by an Irish-based consultant who is responsible for the management of the patient and who is prepared to monitor the effects of the treatment over time.

Ultimately it is the decision of the clinician, in consultation with their patient, to prescribe or not prescribe a particular treatment for a patient under their care. As Minister for Health I have no role in this clinical decision-making process.

Where consultants require information or clarification in relation to the licence application process, he or she should contact my Department directly.

### **Hospital Staff Recruitment**

398. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the positions of two paediatric advanced nurse practitioners (details supplied) applied for by Letterkenny University Hospital as requested by an association have been turned down by the HSE and his Department; and if he will meet the association again to address its concerns at the decision. [40710/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In June this year, I met with representatives to discuss diabetes services in the Northwest. Following that meeting, officials of my Department requested the HSE to progress a number of action points in relation to the provision of services for paediatric and adult diabetes in County Donegal, including the progression of two Advance Nurse Practitioners posts for Letterkenny University Hospital through the 2018 Estimates process. The Estimates 2018 process is ongoing and no final decisions have been made regarding the allocation of funding.

I have previously committed to a further meeting with the association and I look forward to arranging a meeting as soon as my diary allows.

### **Hospital Staff**

399. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if only one of the 120 advanced nurse practitioner posts sanctioned by the HSE and his Department was allocated to Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40711/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I will correspond directly with the Deputy on this question.

### Services for People with Disabilities

400. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE failed to reply to correspondence (details supplied); the steps that were taken to have this correspondence replied to and the matters raised therein addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40721/17]

**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 Funding

401. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the amount allocated to the mental health budget in each of the years 2015 to 2017; the 2012 funding for mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40751/17]

#### **Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Mental Health Funding**

The overall gross non-capital mental health budget for 2012 – 17 is as follows:

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
€711m	€737m	€766m	€791.8m	€826.6m	€853.1m*

\*includes €2m transferred from another HSE Directorate

Since 2012, around €140 million has been added to the HSE Mental Health Budget; an increase of around 20% between 2012 and 2017.

Over 1,150 new posts have been recruited over the period 2012-16, including some 270 dedicated to CAMHS, to implement the principles and objectives of *A Vision for Change*.

Key priorities to be addressed in the HSE 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.

The Programme for Partnership Government gives a clear commitment to increasing our

mental health budget annually, as resources allow, to expand existing services.

### **Hospitals Data**

402. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1015 of 26 July 2017, the composition of the minimum dataset; the data which will be collected; the degree to which each hospital will be required to adhere and submit to the data collection; the way in which it will help document necessary information on outpatient hospital cancellations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40753/17]

**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.

### **Hospitals Data**

403. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question number 1024 of 26 July 2017, the reason certain data, for example, did not attend rates, is not available for the years 2012 and 2013 for Our Lady's Children's Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40754/17]

**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.

### **Greyhound Industry**

404. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will end the obligation of greyhound owners to register with a club (details supplied) and pay a registration fee to it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40335/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Irish Coursing Club (ICC) is the competent authority with regard to the maintenance of the Irish Greyhound Stud Book. The objects of the ICC are set out in the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 and among these objects is "the promotion of the breeding of thoroughbred greyhounds (including maintenance of the Irish Greyhound Stud Book)".

The ICC is subject to the general control and direction of Bord na gCon, which is the statutory body with responsibility for the improvement and development of the greyhound industry, greyhound racing and coursing.

The ICC has been responsible for the Irish Greyhound Stud Book since 1923 and this was further reinforced by the enactment of the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958. The Constitution of the Irish Coursing Club is set out in the 1958 Act.

### **Greyhound Industry**

405. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the fact that all greyhound owners have to register with an organisation (details supplied) if they wish to enter their dogs in track races here, regardless of objections owners might have to blood sports and the fact that these registration fees go towards financing blood sports; and his

plans to remedy this situation. [40359/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Irish Coursing Club (ICC) is the competent authority with regard to the maintenance of the Irish Greyhound Stud Book. The objects of the ICC are set out in the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 and among these objects is “the promotion of the breeding of thoroughbred greyhounds (including maintenance of the Irish Greyhound Stud Book)”.

The ICC is subject to the general control and direction of Bord na gCon, which is the statutory body with responsibility for the improvement and development of the greyhound industry, greyhound racing and coursing.

The ICC has been responsible for the Irish Greyhound Stud Book since 1923 and this was further reinforced by the enactment of the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958. The Constitution of the Irish Coursing Club is set out in the 1958 Act.

The deputy should be aware that it is not a condition of registering a greyhound in the Irish Greyhound Stud Book that an owner participate in coursing or express an interest in coursing.

### **Afforestation Programme**

406. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the persons, companies or other legal entities, based either here or abroad, that have received an annual afforestation premium in excess of €500,000 in 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40175/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** One person received afforestation premium payments in excess of €500,000 in 2015. These payments were made to the farmer in respect of forests planted under previous Forestry Programmes.

With the exception of this person, no other persons, companies or legal entities received annual afforestation premiums in excess of €500,000 in 2015 or 2016.

### **Livestock Issues**

407. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to reports of smuggling of sheep across the Border in September 2017 causing concern for sheep breeders in the area; and the steps he is taking to prevent such illegal activities. [40256/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I am aware of a recent report of alleged illegal movement of sheep into the Republic of Ireland. The health of the national sheep flock relies on the observance of identification and trade rules. Sheep smuggling results in the breach of these rules and could pose disease risks for the national sheep flock. Reports of illegal movement of sheep are examined by staff in my Department. Where evidence of a breach of identification or trade requirements is established, such cases may be prosecuted, provided the evidence is considered sufficient to sustain a conviction. My Department works closely with An Garda Síochána and with the corresponding authorities in Northern Ireland in an effort to combat farm-animal related crime. I want to assure the Deputy that should evidence of illegal movement of sheep into the country be substantiated, every effort will be made to have the matter prosecuted.

## **Bovine Disease Controls**

408. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has satisfied himself with the accuracy of bovine TB skin and blood tests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40289/17]

409. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the rate of accuracy of bovine TB skin and blood tests. [40290/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 408 and 409 together.

The key measures of a diagnostic test's accuracy are sensitivity and specificity. As is the case with diagnostic tests for most diseases none of the tests currently available for the diagnosis of bovine TB (bTB) allow a perfectly accurate determination of the *M. bovis* infection status of cattle.

However, the single intradermal comparative tuberculin test (TB skin test) which is used in Ireland is universally regarded as the best screening test in a general population of animals.

The blood test that is used in herds in Ireland where there is TB infection present is the gamma-interferon test. When used in parallel to the skin test, the gamma interferon blood test can help to resolve TB problems in a herd more quickly.

The accuracy of the current TB testing methods and tests will remain the subject of ongoing assessment and scientific review within my Department.

## **Bovine Disease Controls**

410. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to increase the compensation scheme for dairy cattle lost to TB in view of the fact that the current scheme compensates below the market value; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40291/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The On Farm Market Valuation Scheme is designed to compensate herdowners for the loss of animals removed under the TB eradication programme and is based on the market value of animals (i.e. the equivalent price which might reasonably be obtained for the animal at the time of determination of compensation, from a purchaser in an open market, if the animal were not affected by TB) subject to certain limits.

The prices used in the valuation of stock are based on prices collected through the Department's price reporting systems. My officials ensure that the prices collated cover a wide range of type, quality and quantity of cattle and also diversity in terms of geographical spread which together ensures the prices provide a fair and equitable value. The prices are under constant review and where adjustment is required due to market changes this will be reflected in the prices.

I am satisfied that the current compensation arrangements which were updated in 2016 provide a very comprehensive range of financial supports to herdowners whose herds are restricted as a result of a TB breakdown in their herd.

## **Milk Prices**

411. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to increase compensation for the loss of milk production in view of the fact that current prices do not reasonably match the market value. [40292/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Milk production for the first half of 2017 was up in Ireland by just over 10% on the same period in the previous year. The Irish raw milk price has been above the EU average for the last number of weeks. On this basis there are no immediate plans to implement any additional compensation schemes for dairy producers.

However, my Department monitors the market situation for dairy and other agrifood commodities on an on-going basis. We also continue to work closely with industry and our European counterparts to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to mitigate against market volatility in as far as is possible.

### **Bovine Disease Controls**

412. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the delays arising from initial animal tagging for TB and the tagged animals' subsequent removal. [40293/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In 2016 the average number of days for reactors to be removed was 27.9 days which is below the legal requirement of 30 days set down in EU legislation. My Department endeavours to have reactors removed from a holding as quickly as possible. However, there are many factors beyond the control of my Department which may delay the removal of reactors. These include delays on the part of the herdowner in accepting a valuation, the need to comply with EU regulations prohibiting the transport of animals in late stages of pregnancy or having recently calved, the medication of animals shortly before the skin test etc. My Department does not believe that such delays constitute a risk to other animals in the herds because farmers are required by law to segregate reactors from the rest of the herd and to take other biosecurity precautions thereby mitigating the risk of the spread of disease.

### **Bovine Disease Controls**

413. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will commence compensation for loss of production from the date of tagging as opposed to the date of removal. [40294/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has a comprehensive compensation regime in place for herdowners who are affected by bovine TB, including compensation both for direct and indirect losses.

There is a legal requirement for reactors to be removed from the holding within 30 days as set down in EU legislation. Given the vital importance of early removal of reactors, one of the eligibility criteria for income supplement is linked to the date of removal of reactors. This operates as an incentive for herdowners to engage with the valuation and removal process.

There have been significant changes to the compensation package which were implemented in 2016 and I am satisfied that the current compensation arrangements provide a very comprehensive range of financial supports to herdowners in a TB breakdown.

## Coillte Teoranta Activities

414. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will instruct Coillte to provide full and clear ownership and title deeds for Massey's Wood and the Hell Fire Club with regard to the current major development proposal for these sites; if he will instruct Coillte to provide all of the ecological and biodiversity studies and reports, including species lists and so on, that it has commissioned or conducted at these sites; if he will instruct Coillte to furnish its plans regarding ongoing management in respect of the pine weevil issue of the public forest estate when its cypermethrin derogation expires; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40369/17]

**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, however, raised with Coillte, who advise that the Masseys Estate, including the Hellfire properties, are registered on Folio DN3540 while the Hell Fire Club is located on property number 28 on Folio DN3540, the title documents of which are available on the website of the Property Registration Authority of Ireland ([www.prai.ie](http://www.prai.ie)). Section 39 of the Forestry Act 1988 provided inter alia that all of the State's forest estate, other than land designated by the Minister, stand vested in the company. Notwithstanding the vesting of the bulk of the State's forest estate in Coillte upon its establishment, a lot of the land may still be registered in the name of one of my predecessors e.g. Minister for Lands. Coillte advise that the company is entitled to act as the registered owner as successor in title to the Minister under the Forestry Act.

In relation to the other material requested, Coillte advise that listed habitats and species relating to these properties, and others within that Business Area Unit (BAU 5), are listed in the relevant BAU Strategic Plan, available on Coillte's website.

Coillte advised that the company received a derogation for the use of cypermethrin for control of large pine weevil (*Hylobius abietis*) in certified forest plantations in Ireland, provided that during the derogation period the certificate holder adheres to conditions as set out by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). I am advised that it is Coillte's policy that cypermethrin will not be applied in the company's forests from the period at the end of the derogation, March 2021.

The company add that, as the major landowner in the country, it recognises the importance of the responsible use of pesticides in its woodlands and confirms that it will use only those pesticides authorised for use in Ireland by the Pesticides Registration and Control Division (PRCD) of my Department.

Coillte advise that it operates an integrated pest management system with primary reliance upon prevention and biological control methods rather than chemical pesticides, and that it strives to avoid the use of chemical pesticides, by firstly considering control methods other than chemicals.

I am advised by Coillte that the company's overall strategy for the five year period of the derogation is to develop and adopt prescriptions for control of large pine weevil on evidence based population assessments. I am also advised that this involves different prescriptions for low, medium and high density population sites where with timing of planting and the pre-treatment of plants in nurseries the use of pesticides on low and medium density populations may not, dependent on ongoing monitoring, be required. On high density population sites

Coillte envisage that some form of pesticide application for control of weevil will be required. I understand that field trials and research are continuing on alternative pesticides (authorised by PRCD) to cypermethrin where focus in this area of research is on pre-treatment that could give two year protection to plants thus eliminating requirement for application in the forest.

Coillte advise me that Ireland, in common with the UK, has weevil population densities of up to seven times that recorded in Europe and that the company work in collaboration with their colleagues in Forest Enterprise Scotland, Forest Enterprise England, Natural Resources Wales and Northern Ireland Forest Service with expertise provided from Forestry Commission Forest Research Branch. I understand that, over the past number of years, the group established trials to identify alternative treatments for Hylobius, researching and trialling alternative chemicals to cypermethrin, barriers (wax and paper sleeves), biological control through nematodes and non-chemical substance barriers and development of a Hylobius Management Support System.

Coillte further add that it also collaborates with Irish research organisations in order to develop non-chemical pest control products, such as research with the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM) on biological control methods like entomopathogenic nematode and entomopathogenic fungi and will continue to review and evaluate non-chemical alternatives as they become available.

### Afforestation Programme

415. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide the latest afforestation figures; the amount of funding which has been made available on an annual basis for afforestation since 2012 in view of the fact that planting rates have remained low; the position regarding the funding shortfall year on year; the annual shortfall for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40370/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As of 22 September 2017, my Department has paid grants for the planting of 4,071 ha of forestry under the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme 2014–2020. Furthermore, to the end of August 2017, the Department has processed applications for planting approval for a total of 7,600ha of forests, an increase of 4% over the same period last year.

The amount of funding which has been made available on an annual basis for afforestation from 2012 to 2017 is detailed in the table below. In each particular year this funding covers new afforestation for that year and also the payment of premiums and the second instalment of establishment grants for afforestation in previous years.

The Government has provided sufficient funding in each of these years to pay for all the planting in each year and to cover all premium and grant liabilities from previous years; there has been no funding shortfall.

Funding available for afforestation 2012-2017 (€m)

Year	Budget (€m)
2012	104.55
2013	106.49
2014	105.07
2015	103.57



Year	Budget (€m)
2016	102.30
2017	98.50

### Forestry Sector

416. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide the latest research that has been conducted by the Forest Service into the climate adaptability of commercial and native tree species in view of ongoing climate change threats; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40371/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has provided funding on these issues through a call for research proposals. One project called FORM is concerned with improving productivity and resistance in key native and commercial species. Improved sitka spruce will be developed through a breeding programme and ash with tolerance to ash dieback disease will be investigated by locating tolerant genotypes within existing trials in Europe.

CLIMADAPT is a completed project and involves a web-based decision support system (DSS) based on an ecological site classification model developed specifically for Irish forestry. The objective is to provide a free DSS for forest managers and policy makers, using soil and climatic information that can be used to assess species suitability and yield for individual sites under current and future climate change scenarios.

Finally, through the COFORD Council (2015-2018) a working group on forest genetic resources has also been convened which aims to outline a strategy for the development, conservation, and deployment of forest genetic resource material.

### Forestry Sector

417. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide the information showing the extent of abandoned and failed tree plantations in counties Donegal, Mayo, Sligo, Galway and Clare; if he will provide the latest carbon calculations for the forest estate and the projected carbon figures into 2030; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40372/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The National Forest Inventory which is carried out every 5 years does not collect information on abandoned and failed tree plantations as this information can be difficult to establish in a survey. A forest may look abandoned for example due to an absence of thinning or road construction activity but this may be due to a no thinning policy on that particular site for silvicultural reasons.

Two significant events occurred in recent years which have impacted on forests failing to reach their productive potential; these were ash dieback disease which was first identified in late 2012 and the damage caused by the severe winter storms of 2013/2014. In relation to ash dieback disease a reconstitution scheme was put in place by the Department to fund the removal of infected material and to replant these areas with an alternative species. The total area of sites cleared and funded under this scheme is 1.4 hectares in Donegal, 5.2 hectares in Sligo, 29.9 hectares in Clare, 49.8 hectares in Galway and 10.4 hectares in Mayo.

The 2012 National Forest Inventory calculated that there was a total of 380 million tonnes of carbon in the forest estate. Based on the most recent National Inventory Report reported to the UNFCCC, in 2015 forests and harvested wood products, net of deforestation emissions, resulted in total removals of 4.3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent in that year. Projections up to 2030 of changes in forest carbon stocks were provided as part of Ireland's report on Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Actions as required under EU Decision 529/2013. These indicate that the total removals of carbon dioxide by forests and wood products, net of projected deforestation emissions, will amount to 3.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2030. The projections are currently being updated in light of the most recent Roundwood Production Forecast, more up to date afforestation and deforestation data, and related information.

### **Forestry Grants**

418. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding provided by the Forest Service to a non-governmental organisation (details supplied) since 1996; the criteria which has been used to qualify this funding; if there was an opportunity for other forest NGOs to apply for similar funding; if there was a tender process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40373/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Responsibility for forestry policy was transferred to the Department of Agriculture from 1st January 2004 and since that date has provided funding to the named organisation of €162,500.

Funding was provided under the former grant-in-aid process until 2014 when the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform issued Circular 13/2014 'Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds' under which all funding in the grant and grant-in-aid categories were reclassified as grants only. This circular defines grants as 'a financial provision, originating in a Vote, for a particular activity or service administered or undertaken by an outside body, including agencies, companies, committees, advisory groups, charities or individuals'.

There is no tendering process for such grants and forestry-related NGOs may submit a proposal for funding of relevant projects. Grants are awarded, within the budget available, on the basis of the individual merits of each proposal as presented.

### **Fish Farming**

419. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has satisfied himself that the methods for slaughtering and transporting farmed fish by a company (details supplied) from salmon farms in the south west are in accordance with organic requirements. [40378/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** All organic operators, including the company named, are inspected regularly to ensure compliance with all conditions applying to the production of organic food. This includes organic salmon. No issues have been identified in relation to slaughtering and transportation of farmed fish by the company named, but my Department, in co-operation with the Organic Control Bodies, will continue to ensure that the highest standards are being maintained throughout the sector.

## **Fish Farming**

420. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the inspections which are carried out by his Department into the slaughtering and processing of farmed salmon by all aquaculture operators described by his Department as organic. [40379/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The certification, control and inspection of all organic producers in Ireland, including those engaged in the production of organic farmed salmon, has been delegated in accordance with EU regulations to a number of approved Organic Control Bodies. These bodies carry out their functions under specific contract to my Department. The inspection process for organic producers is extremely detailed and includes adherence to a range of core organic principles, as well as stocking levels, feeding practice, caging standards, traceability and fish-welfare & husbandry amongst other things. Organic aquaculture sites are also subject to the standard inspection regime applying to conventional producers by the Marine Institute and the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority.

## **Fish Farming**

421. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of inspections of salmon farms that were conducted by his Department's marine engineers in 2016 and to date in 2017. [40380/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Department's Marine Engineering Division conducted 41 inspections on Salmon farms in 2016, and to date in 2017, 16 inspections were conducted.

## **Aquaculture Licence Applications**

422. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of aquaculture licences that have been approved and rejected, respectively, by his Department since 2014. [40381/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department's records indicate that, during the period referred to by the Deputy, 252 determinations to grant an aquaculture licence and 16 determinations to refuse an aquaculture licence were made.

## **Aquaculture Licences**

423. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of aquaculture sites (details supplied) being investigated by his Department for breaches of licence conditions. [40382/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department is currently examining possible breaches of licence conditions in respect of three aquaculture licences held by the Company referred to by the Deputy.

## **Origin Green Programme**

424. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if salmon farms are included in the current Origin Green media campaign by Bord Bia; if so, if account has been taken of the overstocking of (details supplied) sites; and his views on whether this undermines the Origin Green claims. [40383/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Origin Green is a national sustainability programme for the Irish food and drink industry. It is unique in operating on a national scale, uniting government, the private sector and food producers through Bord Bia.

The company mentioned by the Deputy is a verified member of Origin Green. That means that it has signed up to the Origin Green Charter and has developed a multi-annual sustainability plan that has been independently assessed and verified by SGS, a recognised global certification company. This plan outlines targets which are relevant to the business in three key areas - raw material sourcing, the manufacturing process, and social sustainability. Origin Green members are also required to be licensed and registered with the relevant competent authority, and must confirm that they are compliant with the key food safety and environmental regulations governing their sector.

Operational matters in relation to Origin Green are a matter for Bord Bia. For further information on Origin Green the Deputy is referred to the agreed Oireachtas contact address *info@BordBia.ie*.

### **Aquaculture Licences**

425. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1713 of 20 June 2017, if he will publish the outcome of his Department's review of compliance by a company (details supplied) with the regulations governing organic requirements. [40384/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** At the request of my Department, the relevant Organic Control Body undertook a comprehensive audit of all sites operated by the company named. I can confirm that the outcome of these audits indicate that the company named is compliant with the rules governing the organic sector. As with the performance of all operators, my Department will be keeping the matter under close review to ensure that the highest standards are maintained.

### **Aquaculture Development**

426. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 1712 of 20 June 2017, if in view of the non-compliance with licence conditions by the country's largest salmon farm operator, his views on whether the time has come to delegate certification of organic operators to a public body such as the Marine Institute or the National Parks and Wildlife Service in order to protect the integrity of the organic label. [40385/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In accordance with the governing EU Regulation, the Department as the Competent Authority has opted to delegate the certification of organic operators to four Organic Control Bodies. This approach is in common with many other Member States.

The Organic Control Bodies concerned are subject to supervision and ongoing monitoring by the Department. Furthermore the Organic Control Bodies must be accredited on an annual basis by the relevant accreditation body. All of these controls are designed to ensure the independence of the certification process, which is also verified by EU audit. I am satisfied therefore that the integrity of the organic label is protected.

### **Aquaculture Regulation**

427. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will accord Inland Fisheries Ireland a formal role in the licensing of salmon farms to ensure a proper balance in the process of decision making following the publication of the review of aquaculture licensing. [40386/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department considers all applications for aquaculture licences in accordance with all applicable national and EU legislation. The licensing process involves consultation with a wide range of scientific and technical advisors as well as various statutory consultees. The legislation also provides for a period of public consultation. In addition, my Department, must adhere to a wide range of regulatory requirements and other legislation which impact on the licensing process.

As a statutory consultee Inland Fisheries Ireland is already accorded a formal role in respect of the licensing process.

### **Aquaculture Regulation**

428. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will accord Inland Fisheries Ireland a formal role in his Department's sea lice control system in view of the damage to wild salmon stocks from sea lice infestation on salmon farms. [40387/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The control of sea lice is managed by the Marine Institute on behalf of the State. These protocols are more advanced than those operated in other jurisdictions for the following reasons:

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

The sea lice monitoring and control programme in Ireland has been acknowledged by the Environment Directorate (DG Environment) of the EU Commission as representing international best practice and, accordingly, changing the current arrangement would not be warranted or appropriate.

### **Aquaculture Regulation**

429. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if hydrogen peroxide has been used in the treatment of farmed fish for sea lice control purposes here; and if those fish have been put into the market as organic. [40388/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Hydrogen

peroxide is authorised for use as a treatment for the control of sea-lice in farmed fish. It can also be used in organic production of farmed fish, under very strict conditions, and does not affect the designation of such product as organic.

### **Flood Relief Schemes**

430. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department will consider allowing for retrospective payments to be made to persons under the flood damage relief measure in respect of applications submitted by farmers that incurred financial losses and damage to property as a result of a major episode of flooding throughout the Finn Valley region of County Donegal in late 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40422/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As you may know, I visited the Inishowen Peninsula with my colleague Minister Joe McHugh following the exceptional rainfall of August 22 last to see at first-hand some of the very significant problems that a number of farmers faced as a result. I committed during my visit to supporting these farmers, and my Department in conjunction with other State Agencies moved swiftly to offer practical solutions to those affected.

In the immediate aftermath of the flood I prioritised the availability of support by means of the Animal Welfare Helpline which gives guidance on protecting animal welfare and safety in addition to responding to urgent requirements for emergency feed provision. Staff from both my own Department as well as Teagasc were in the area; Teagasc provided advice to affected farmers in dealing with the immediate challenges that arose.

From my own experience of visiting Inishowen, together with the findings of my officials and Teagasc, it was clear that the principal and most widespread impacts of the floods on farms in the Inishowen Peninsula centred on damage to land, fencing, fodder and livestock. To address these pressing issues in the most effective manner I introduced a targeted measure of assistance.

Support under this measure will apply to losses of livestock, conserved fodder (hay or silage) and as a contribution towards the clean-up cost of agricultural lands, including repair to fences, damaged by debris washed up by the floods. The measure will be subject to the provisions of EU de minimis state aid rules in the agriculture sector and only losses not covered by insurance will be eligible for consideration.

While it is not possible to address all of the problems the unprecedented rainfall caused on farms in Inishowen, this measure will address the principal impacts on those farmers most affected. This measure was introduced specifically to address damage experienced by farmers from the unprecedented rainfall of 22 August last. Accordingly, claims for damage resulting from any earlier weather event are not eligible for consideration.

Application forms are now available on my Department's website or from the Direct Payments Unit (Flood Damage Relief Measure), Government Offices, Old Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise, Co Laois. There is also a dedicated helpline and email address, (057) 8674456 and [floodreliefscheme@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:floodreliefscheme@agriculture.gov.ie) to support those farmers who wish to make an application. The closing date for applications is Friday 29 September to allow for prompt processing of requests for support.

## Land Reclassification

431. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to provide proper compensation for designated land in relation to which restrictions impact on farm income and development potential; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40429/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** At the outset, I would like to clarify that my Department has no role in the designation of lands. That function is exercised through the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The question of compensation does not arise, therefore, in the context of any schemes or measures introduced by my Department. That said, many of these designations are for species or habitats whose conservation is encouraged under various schemes operated by my Department, such as GLAS, the Burren Programme or some of the newer locally-led schemes being rolled out at present like the Hen Harrier Scheme. Farmers in these areas have an opportunity to avail of a range of support packages under these schemes which can provide an important additional income stream for those affected.

## Agriculture Scheme Payments

432. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will ensure that there are no delays in payments in 2017 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40431/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I am mindful of the significance to all farmers, and the wider rural economy, of the payments that are due to farmers this Autumn under both the Basic Payment Scheme and various Rural Development schemes.

Payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints scheme commenced, on schedule, during the week commencing 18 September with some 75,000 farmers being paid a total of €160 million. This is an increase on the first pay runs issued in 2016 when 65,000 farmers were paid €140 million.

I am also delighted to confirm that the European Commission has agreed to my request that provision be made for an advance payment of 70% under the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme and Greening. This is an increase on the standard 50% rate allowed for under the EU regulations. There will also be an increase permitted to the advance payment rate under a number of Pillar II Rural Development schemes with the rate increased up to a possible 85% for those schemes where advance payments will be made before the end of the year.

My Department continues to work towards processing payments under these schemes as a matter of priority, to ensure that these vital supports are delivered to farmers in the most timely and efficient manner possible.

## GLAS Issues

433. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether flexibility in the operation of GLAS commonage plans is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40433/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The plan for each commonage is drawn up following consultation between the GLAS shareholders and the assigned commonage advisor. As a result each plan is unique, independent of other plans and tailored to suit to the individual commonage.

This ensures that the most appropriate plan is in place on each commonage to ensure the resource is utilised effectively and not under or over grazed.

The Department has published indicative stocking rates for each commonage. Flexibility is permitted to adjust the published recommended stocking rates where justified on scientific grounds by the assigned commonage advisor.

### **Sheep Welfare Scheme**

434. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to provide an increase in the sheep welfare payment in view of the fact it is of vital importance to ensure the viability of sheep farmers incomes into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40434/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Sheep Welfare Scheme was introduced to make a vital contribution to ensuring the continuing viability and sustainability of the sheep sector in Ireland. There are also a variety of other supports available to sheep farmers under schemes such as the Basic Payment Scheme, GLAS, TAMS, Knowledge Transfer and the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme.

The details of the Sheep Welfare Scheme, including the amount of payment to participants, were approved by the European Commission in 2016. The payment rates are based on the agreed costings underlying the actions to be undertaken in the scheme, and an increase in payments would thus require changes to the actions currently being undertaken by farmers. Any such changes to the details of the scheme would require the agreement of the European Commission via the formal Rural Development Programme amendment process. It is not currently anticipated that there will be an increase in the level of payment to participants of the scheme.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments**

435. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether it is of vital importance there is an increase in ANC payments in mountain grazing areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40435/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the EU Rural Development Regulation each Member State may designate areas eligible for payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme. In 2015 the ANC scheme replaced the Disadvantages Areas Scheme (DAS). Payments, based on a range of socio-economic factors, are made on three separate land types and related payment rates as follows:

- Mountain Type Land: Paid at €109.71 on first 10 forage hectares, or part thereof, and €95.99 per hectare on remaining hectares up to a maximum of 34 hectares.

- More Severely Handicapped Lowland: Paid at €95.99 per forage hectare up to a maximum of 30 hectares.

- Less Severely Handicapped Lowland and Coastal Areas with Specific Handicaps: Paid at



€82.27 per forage hectare up to a maximum of 30 hectares.

The Rural Development Regulation also sets out that, in future, all eligible disadvantaged areas must be designated using a set list of bio-physical criteria such as soil moisture, soil drainage, soil texture, slope. My Department has commenced work on this project, and relevant technical experts are currently working on sourcing and analysing the data in relation to the new criteria. This analysis will identify areas deemed to be facing natural constraints, which will in parallel be subjected to a refinement process. The timing for the introduction of this new designation is dependent on the outcome of current discussions at EU level in relation to the ‘Omnibus Proposal.’

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to increase the budget for the Scheme by €25m in Budget 2018. This commitment will be considered via the annual budgetary process. I am committed to ensuring that all available funds under the scheme are targeted in the most effective manner.

### **GLAS Payments**

436. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers awaiting payment under the GLAS scheme for 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40466/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In relation to 2015 there are a small number of GLAS 1 farmers representing 0.5% of all GLAS 1 participants where payment is outstanding.

In relation to 2016 advance payments to GLAS 1 and 2 participants, payments have issued in over 98% of cases. In most of the cases outstanding documentation has been requested from the GLAS participants on a number of occasions but remains outstanding. These cases will be processed for payment as soon as the outstanding replies have been received.

2016 GLAS balancing payments are also issuing on an ongoing basis. The main issue with these payments is the need for a Farm Nutrient Management Plan to be submitted to the dedicated online system on behalf of each participant. There are currently approximately 8,800 Farm Nutrient Management Plans outstanding. All GLAS 1 and 2 participants are urged to ensure the submission of these plans as soon as possible to allow outstanding and future GLAS payments to issue.

### **GLAS Data**

437. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount that is outstanding and due to farmers under the GLAS scheme for 2015 and 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40467/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The information requested by the Deputy is being compiled and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy when it is available.

### **Farm Household Incomes**

438. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on introducing a proposal by an organisation (details supplied); if he has discussed the proposal with the Minister for Finance. [40470/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The pre-budget submission referred to relates mainly to a proposal to address farm income volatility through an income stabilisation measure.

Currently, income volatility for farmers is addressed in the income tax system through “income averaging”. There have been a number of changes made to improve that system in recent years including an adjustment last year, allowing for an opt-out in an exceptional year e.g. in a year of lower commodity prices when cashflow is reduced.

In relation to new proposals in this regard, I make an annual submission to the Minister for Finance on taxation matters relating to agriculture. The views of all stakeholders who engage with me and my Department inform that submission.

### **International Agreements**

439. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the latest Mercosur talks at EU level; the steps he is taking to protect beef farmers by ensuring that beef does not form part of a potential Mercosur deal; the bilateral meetings that he has had with his European counterparts to ensure that beef farmers are not penalised; and if he will ensure that beef does not form part of the final deal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40471/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** A number of EU Member States, led by Ireland and France, have consistently raised concerns with the European Commission about the negative impact that a trade agreement with Mercosur is likely to have on the EU’s agriculture sector, and particularly the beef sector.

Despite this, a draft offer circulated by the Commission to Member States in April 2016 contained a significant tariff rate quota (TRQ) for beef. Ireland worked very closely with other Member States in both Agriculture and Trade committees of the EU, and at Council of Ministers level, seeking to have this TRQ removed and to have a comprehensive assessment of the cumulative impact of all FTAs on the agriculture sector carried out by the Commission before any substantial offer is made. Following this intense lobbying, the Commission decided to exclude a TRQ for beef when it exchanged offers with Mercosur on 11 May 2016.

At the end of 2016, the Commission published its study on the cumulative economic impact of future trade agreements on EU agriculture. The study demonstrated the vulnerability of specific agricultural sectors in the face of growing imports following increased market access, especially beef, rice and, to a lesser extent, poultry and sugar. It confirmed the EU position regarding the sensitive character of these products in trade negotiations, and the particular sensitivity of the beef sector.

There are now firm indications that the Commission intends to exchange offers with Mercosur again very soon, and to include a TRQ for beef. This presents a very significant threat to the Irish and EU beef sectors, and does not take into account either the additional information available since last year in the form of the cumulative impact assessment or the potentially very damaging impact of Brexit on an already delicately balanced EU beef market.

Ireland made a strong intervention to this effect at the Trade Policy Committee meeting in

Brussels on 15 September, and was supported by a number of other member states. We are continuing to work with those member states and Commissioner Hogan to ensure that the interests of Irish and European Beef farmers are safeguarded.

### **TAMS Applications**

440. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to address the signalled difficulties being experienced by poultry farmers regarding TAMS II grant approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40609/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Pigs and Poultry Investment Scheme is one of a suite of seven investment measures available under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II). To date 170 applications have been received under the Pigs and Poultry Investment Scheme. 130 approvals have issued and approvals continue to issue on an on going basis.

There have been no particular difficulties experienced by poultry farmers with the approval process that have been signalled to my Department. However, Department officials are available to discuss any application with a prospective applicant to ensure that there are no difficulties experienced in submitting an application for the broad range of investments available under the Scheme.

### **Fisheries Protection**

441. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made by the Marine Institute on adding sprat to the species covered under the European maritime and fisheries fund marine biodiversity scheme in 2017; when he expects to definitively resolve the issue of pair trawling this species; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40644/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Sprat is a short-lived species and an important prey fish for many marine species thus vital to the ocean food chain.

Sprat in Irish waters is not a species subject to fishing quotas or Total Allowable Catches established under EU regulation. Scientifically, very little is known about the sprat species. The International Council of the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) considers sprat to be a data limited stock which means that more detailed data is required in order to form a full understanding of the state of the stock. In order to address the lack of accurate information in respect of the sprat stocks in the waters around Ireland, a three year research project, partially funded by industry, commenced in October 2014 and is now in its final stage, under the auspices of the Marine Institute in cooperation with the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology.

In addition to this research project, the Marine Institute advise that they will also participate in an observer scheme where they will work closely with Industry to obtain increased observer coverage on any sprat fishery that is taking place. The purpose of the observer scheme is two-fold:

- To obtain biological information on the resource itself and on any other fishery bycatch, ie herring, juvenile mackerel, etc.

- To obtain information on any bycatch this fishery might have of protected, endangered and threatened species, under the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF) marine biodiversity scheme such as marine mammals, seabirds and listed fish species.

This enhanced observer scheme will be co-funded under the EMFF data collection scheme and the EMFF marine biodiversity scheme allowing for more intensive data collection to enhance scientific knowledge and support any future management actions necessary for the stock including the issue of pair trawling.

### **Aquaculture Licence Applications**

442. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision is likely to be made in respect of an application (details supplied) for an aquaculture licence in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40666/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The aquaculture licence application referred to by the Deputy is currently under consideration by my Department under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act and applicable EU legislation.

The legislation provides for a period of public and statutory consultation. In the case of this application the public consultation period is now over. My Department is continuing to examine this application in accordance with the applicable legislation and full account is being taken of the engineering, scientific, environmental, legal and public policy aspects relevant to this application.

As the licence application is under active consideration as part of a statutory process it would not be appropriate to comment further on the matter at this time.

### **GLAS Payments**

443. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40683/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

The 2016 advance payment of 85% has issued to the person named. A Farm Nutrient Management Plan must be submitted on behalf of each GLAS 1 and 2 participant to the dedicated online system before the 15% balancing payment or any future GLAS payment can issue. In this case the 15% balancing payment will be processed for payment as soon as possible.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

444. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if nine houses at Woodpark, Ballyboughal have been left out of the broadband roll-out scheme; and his plans to include them in the scheme to provide access to high speed broadband. [40159/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) will ensure 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 1.5m or 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband and this footprint is expanding.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode.

- The BLUE areas on the Map 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 Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of a procurement process.

The map shows that 100% of the townland of Woodpark, Co Dublin is within the AMBER area and will be covered by the State intervention under the NBP. The eircode of the premise will indicate whether the premise will be covered commercially or be part of the State led Intervention. Individuals can access the High Speed Broadband Map [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie) using their eircode to ascertain the colour code (BLUE or AMBER) status for their premise.

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. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage, with "Detailed Solutions" to be submitted to my Department by bidders today 26th September.

To improve both mobile and broadband services in rural Ireland in advance of the rollout of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area, I established a Taskforce to identify immediate solutions to mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and rollout of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention.

### **Postal Services Provision**

445. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps he is taking to protect the future of post offices nationwide. [40190/17]

448. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures that are being put in place to secure the future of the post office network here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40329/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 445 and 448 together.

As Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, I am responsible for the postal sector, including the governance of An Post to ensure that the company is fully compliant with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State bodies and the governance

functions included in the statutory framework underpinning An Post. Operational matters are matters for the board and management of An Post. As Minister, I do not have a statutory function in respect of such matters.

It is Government policy that An Post remains a strong, viable company in a position to provide a high quality, nationwide postal service and that it maintains a nationwide customer-focused network of post offices in the community. However, the environment in which the post office operates is changing and the network needs to change to thrive particularly with the move to digital transactions. This involves harnessing existing strengths such as its trusted brand and the relationship of postmasters with individual communities to build the network of the future. The post office plays an important role in serving the needs of business and domestic customers alike and this is at the forefront of An Post's mandate. The Government is fully committed to a sustainable post office network which it sees as a key piece of economic and social infrastructure for both urban and rural areas.

The strategic review of An Post, including the post office network, which will identify the strategic changes and restructuring necessary to maintain the company on a sound financial footing is nearing completion. All opportunities are being assessed by An Post in the context of the strategic review.

Until such time as the review is finalised and assessed it will not be possible to comment further. Government will be briefed once a definitive strategy has been agreed.

### **Renewable Energy Projects**

446. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 1034 of 13 July 2017, if there is a policy on the emissions of greenhouse gases from development sites on peatlands, including degraded peatlands to which planning authorities should have regard when assessing proposals for renewable energy or other developments. [40238/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** As I set out in answer to Parliamentary Question No. 1034 of 13 July 2017, it is a matter for planning authorities, taking account of Government policy, and national and EU legislation, to assess the likely impacts of proposed developments on the environment.

The 2015 National Peatlands Strategy, published by my colleague the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, identifies the potential role of peatlands rehabilitation, restoration and enhancement in the context of mitigating Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

As outlined in the National Mitigation Plan, which I published on 19 July 2017, I intend to undertake further work to analyse the feasibility of including wetland draining and re-wetting in the national inventory.

This work will be essential to support the development of an informed policy position on the potential contribution of peatlands management to climate change mitigation. Pending the outcome of this work, the preparation of a specific guidance or policy in relation to emissions of greenhouse gases from development sites on peatlands is not being considered in my Department.

### **National Mitigation Plan**

447. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the projections his Department has made in relation to possible fines Ireland will face for not achieving the 2020 emissions targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40300/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC established binding annual greenhouse gas emission targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 - 2020. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their level in 2005. This will be Ireland's contribution to the overall EU objective to reduce its emissions by the order of 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels. Ireland's target is jointly the most demanding 2020 reduction target allocated to EU Member States under this Decision, which is shared only with Denmark and Luxembourg.

The latest projections of greenhouse gas emissions by the Environmental Protection Agency indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by Ireland's 2020 targets could be between 4% and 6% below 2005 levels by 2020. The projected shortfall to our targets in 2020 reflects both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself. In fact, it is now accepted that Ireland's 2020 target was not consistent with what would be achievable on an EU wide cost-effective basis.

Notwithstanding this projected shortfall, Ireland's first statutory National Mitigation Plan, which I published in July of this year, provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Plan sets out what Ireland is currently doing, and is planning to do, to further the national transition objective as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015. Although this first Plan will not provide a complete roadmap to achieve the national transition objective to 2050, it begins the process of development of medium- to long-term options to ensure that we are well positioned to take the necessary actions in the next and future decades.

The legislative framework governing the EU's 2020 emissions reductions targets includes a number of flexibility mechanisms to enable Member States to meet their annual emissions targets, including provisions to bank any excess allowances to future years and to trade allowances between Member States. Using our banked emissions from the period to 2015, Ireland is projected to comply with its emission reduction targets in each of the years 2013 to 2018. However, our cumulative emissions are expected to exceed targets for 2019 and 2020, which will result in a requirement to purchase additional allowances. While this purchasing requirement is not, at this stage, expected to be significant, further analysis will be required to quantify the likely costs involved, in light of the final amount and price of allowances required.

*Question No. 448 answered with Question No. 445.*

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

449. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of fibre to the premises, FTTP, connections in County Monaghan; the number of new connections that have been made in each of the past four quarters; the average connection cost; the eircodes connected; his plans for FTTP connections in the next four quarters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40337/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis**

**Naughten):** There has been significant progress in relation to broadband rollout so that today, approximately 1.5m or 65% of premises in Ireland can get high speed broadband of a minimum of 30 Megabits per second. The National Broadband Plan has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector, which is continuing to expand this footprint.

On 4 April 2017, I signed a commitment agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide broadband to an additional 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. Eir has committed to doing this work over a 90 week period. The 300,000 figure includes some 4,650 fibre to the home premises in County Monaghan. Progress made on eir's planned rural deployment, on a county by county basis, is available at the following link: <http://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/commercial-investment/Pages/Rural-Deployment-Progress.aspx>

My Department will be monitoring this rollout to ensure that eir meets its obligations under the Agreement. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie). A total of over 80,000 premises has been delivered against eir planned rural deployment as at end of August 2017. Of these, I understand that some 10,000 connections have been made to date. The nature of the retail services, including price, offered by commercial retail operators to customers over this new high speed broadband infrastructure is determined in a liberalised telecoms market that is subject to competition.

There are some 32,800 premises in County Monaghan of which over 17,200 premises including eir's planned rural deployment can now or will be able to access a high speed broadband service through commercial providers by the end of 2018. The remaining 15,600 premises will be covered by the State led Intervention.

My Department is engaged in an on-going procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network for the State led intervention. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage, with "Detailed Solutions" to be submitted to my Department by bidders today 26th September. Further information about the NBP including the interactive map, the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Report, and other initiatives are available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie)

For information ComReg compiles a quarterly report of key data on the Irish Communications Market. The full publication is available at the following link: <https://www.comreg.ie/publications/>.

## Renewable Energy Generation

450. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the direct investment made by the State and public or semi-State bodies via grants or other forms that is directed to solar or wind energy projects for each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [40367/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Renewable Electricity Feed-in Tariff (REFIT) schemes are the principal means of supporting renewable electricity generators for electricity exported to the grid. Renewable technologies supported under the REFIT schemes include Onshore Wind, Hydro, Biomass Landfill Gas, Biomass Combustion, Biomass CHP and Anaerobic Digestion CHP. This is paid for through the Public Service Obligation (PSO) levy which is paid for by all electricity consumers. At present, Solar PV, for electricity generation, is not supported under any of these REFIT schemes. While there are encouraging reports of cost reduction in relation to solar



PV, to date higher costs have been associated with Solar PV in comparison to other renewable electricity technologies.

The PSO Levy has been in place since 2001. The PSO levy facilitates a set of support schemes designed to facilitate the achievement of national electricity policy objectives for renewables and security of supply by using indigenous fuel sources. The PSO has supported the connection of more than 3,000 MW of renewables to the electricity grid. It will continue to support the development of renewable energy to meet the 40% renewable electricity target by 2020.

The total amount and details of the PSO levy for each levy year are calculated and published annually by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER). This material is publicly available at [www.cer.ie](http://www.cer.ie).

The 2016 Programme for Government recognises that Ireland's long-term interests are best supported by further decreasing our dependence on foreign fossil fuels through the continued development of indigenous renewable energy. To support the delivery of this ambition, my Department is developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030.

A public consultation on the design principles of the proposed new RESS was launched on 4 September and submissions are invited from the public. Full details of the consultation are available on my Department's website at: [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie)

Details in relation to direct investment decisions made by State or semi State bodies are matters for the companies themselves and I have no function in relation to such.

### **Renewable Energy Incentives**

451. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the current or planned incentives available for solar or wind energy projects. [40368/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Current financial supports for renewable electricity projects in Ireland are provided via the Renewable Electricity Feed-In-Tariff (REFIT) schemes, which support renewable electricity generated and exported into the national grid. Renewable technologies supported under the REFIT schemes include Onshore Wind, Hydro, Biomass Landfill Gas, Biomass Combustion, Biomass CHP and Anaerobic Digestion CHP. At present, Solar PV, for electricity generation, is not supported under any of these REFIT schemes. This is largely down to the historic higher costs associated with Solar PV in conjunction to other renewable electricity technologies.

However, the 2016 Programme for Government and 2015 Energy White Paper recognise that Solar Photovoltaic (Solar PV) has the potential to provide a community dividend, thereby enhancing citizen participation in Ireland's energy future and that Solar PV has the potential to contribute to meeting Ireland's renewable energy and climate change objectives.

To support the delivery of this ambition, my Department is developing a 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 this new scheme included an extensive economic appraisal. This appraisal compared the cost of supporting Solar PV (both rooftop and ground mounted), Onshore and

Offshore Wind and a range of other commercial renewable technologies, at various scales, 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 included analysis of the optimum financial support mechanisms for renewable technologies, in line with the 2014 EU State Aid Guidelines.

A public consultation on the design principles of the proposed new RESS was launched on 4 September and submissions are invited from the public. All submissions will be considered and following on from this final consultation, a design proposal will be brought to Government for approval. Full details of the consultation are available on my Department's website at: [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie)

Finally, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland currently provides supports for the use of solar thermal heating technology to both large industry and SMEs. Households can also avail of grant support for investment in renewable energy installations, including solar thermal, under the Better Energy Homes Scheme.

### National Broadband Plan Implementation

452. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of plans for broadband implementation at Kenagh, County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40403/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode.

eir signed a agreement with me in April last committing 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. Quarterly updates on progress of the eir 300k rollout are published on my Department's website. The Quarter 2 2017 figures have been verified by my Department and the eir rollout is in line with the Commitment Agreement.

The maps show that 100% of the townland of Keenagh, Co. Longford falls within a LIGHT BLUE area on the Map and is covered by eir's planned rural fibre high speed broadband deployment. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

Customers seeking connectivity to eir's network should, in the first instance, access this website to determine the connectivity availability status for their eircode. The website also provides a list of retail service providers who offer services using high speed fibre network in the area.

### Waste Disposal Charges

453. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if consideration has been given by his Department to the incentive that a for-profit waste collection system creates in that there is no financial gain for waste companies to encour-

age recycling or waste reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40427/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** My role as Minister is to provide a comprehensive legislative and waste policy framework through which the relevant regulatory bodies, such as the local authorities and the Environmental Protection Agency, operate. The waste collection system is subject to a number of regulatory controls, including the Waste Management Act, 1996 as amended and the Waste Management (Collection Permit) Regulations, 2007, S.I. No. 820 of 2007, as amended.

European, national and regional waste policy are all predicated on the management of waste in line with the waste hierarchy, whereby the prevention, preparation for re-use, recycling and other recovery of waste are preferred (in that order) to the disposal of waste. Collectors of waste must conduct their activities in accordance with the relevant legislation and the conditions of their waste collection permits which require that waste is managed in line with the waste hierarchy. Enforcement of waste collection permit conditions is a matter for the relevant local authority.

The Government's policy of increasing the landfill levy to its current level of €75 per tonne has provided a real financial incentive for operators to divert as much material as possible from being disposed of at landfill. The application of this economic instrument has ensured that it is in the financial interest of collectors, who are competing for market share, to encourage effective recycling in an effort to minimise costs for operators and customers alike.

The success of the above policy and legislative measures to encourage waste prevention, preparation for re-use, recycling and other recovery has meant that more waste can be put to environmentally sustainable and productive use as opposed to being buried in the ground. The statistics show that we have come a long way in a relatively short period of time in terms of improving our recycling rates. In this regard, *National Waste Statistics - Reports and Bulletins* are available to download at <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/waste/stats/> including the recently published table on *Progress towards EU waste recycling, recovery and diversion targets*.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

454. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if broadband service will be available to all houses in the Clonlyon, Kilcock County Meath area following upgrade works being carried out in the area. [40548/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area. The Map is searchable by eircode.

- The BLUE areas on the Map 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 Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of a procurement process.

The map shows that the townland of Clonlyon, Co Meath comprises 52 premises and broadband coverage will be realised through a mix of commercial investment and through the State Intervention under the National Broadband Plan (NBP). Of the 52 premises, 31 premises

fall with the State Intervention area while the remaining 21 premises fall within eir's planned rural deployment of 300,000 premises. Therefore, depending on the eircode of the address the constituent may either be in a BLUE or AMBER area of the High Speed Broadband Map.

Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. Individuals can access this website to determine the connectivity availability status for their premise using their eircode. The website also provides a list of retail service providers who offer services using high speed fibre network in the area.

Those premises within the State Intervention area form part of my Department's ongoing procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage, with "Detailed Solutions" to be submitted to my Department by bidders today 26 September.

To improve both mobile and broadband services in rural Ireland in advance of the roll-out of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area, I established a Taskforce to identify immediate solutions to mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and rollout of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention.

## **Waste Management**

455. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has established the pricing watchdog monitoring unit to oversee new pricing structures being introduced by waste management companies; if so, the members of this unit; the numbers of times the unit has met; the findings of this unit to date; the progress being made in establishing a regulator for the waste management industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40660/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** A Household Waste Collection Rate Monitoring Group has been established and the first meeting of the Group was held on 13 September, 2017 and comprised representatives from my Department, the Central Statistics Office, St. Vincent de Paul and a market expertise company. The company has also been appointed to begin the process of monitoring the rates charged by household waste collectors. They will report back to the Group on a monthly basis and the results will be published. The results will be monitored and analysed, and they will provide an evidence base regarding future monitoring or additional regulation of the waste market.

In the interest of encouraging further waste prevention, flat-rate fees for kerbside household waste collection will be phased out over the period autumn 2017 to autumn 2018, as customers contracts come up for renewal. It is worth noting that the measure to phase out flat fees is not 'new' for about half of kerbside household waste customers, who are already on an incentivised usage pricing plan, i.e., a plan which contains a per lift or weight related fee.

To assist householders in managing their waste, the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices commenced a programme of education and awareness funded by my Department earlier this year with radio advertisements encouraging the use of brown bin and focusing on food waste prevention. This was backed up with social media campaigns to further encourage the use of the brown bin. The Regional Waste Management Planning Offices will continue to roll out waste awareness and education initiatives this year, re-focussing on the use of the brown bin, but also concentrating on improving and increasing recycling, waste prevention and the

correct use of the kerbside collection system. My Department is also undertaking an awareness campaign to inform people about the phase out of flat rate fees, which began during the summer and will continue this year.

### **Waste Disposal Charges**

456. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for exemptions for those with medical conditions that require the use of incontinence pads in view of the difficulties those people are now experiencing following the changes being introduced by refuse companies and the pay by weight policy. [40755/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** 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 the disposal of medical incontinence pads. The details and arrangements of this support will be finalised later this year, after further consultation with the stakeholder groups.

The charges applied by waste management companies are matters for those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation.

In the interest of encouraging further waste prevention, the Government decided that flat-rate fees for kerbside household waste collection will be phased out over the period autumn 2017 to autumn 2018 as customers contracts come up for renewal and the necessary regulatory steps are being put in place to give effect to this decision.

As has been long-standing practice, a collection service provider may amend a pricing structure or a contract at any time, as long as the amendments are in accordance with all relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation. It is worth noting that the measure to phase out flat fees is not 'new' for the more than half of kerbside household waste customers who are already on an incentivised pricing plan, i.e., a plan which contains a per lift or weight related fee.

### **Transport Infrastructure Ireland Remit**

457. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which the EU funding criteria attached to motorway infrastructure in respect of the planting of linear native woodlands for buffering alongside new motorways has been applied; the reason there appears to be a completely ad hoc approach to the existing motorway planting; if there are management plans for the existing woodlands as part of an overarching long term management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40374/17]

458. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the plans in place to finish off the native tree planting creating native linear woodlands on land that is readily available in view of the fact that motorway planting does not appear to be coordinated or consistent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40375/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 457 and 458 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementa-

tion of individual road projects (including associated tree planting) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's questions to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

459. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a sports capital grant will be awarded to a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40148/17]

**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. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. The total amount currently available to allocate under this round is €30 million. Accordingly, the allocation of grants will be particularly challenging.

All of the 2,320 applications received are currently being assessed by officials in my Department. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

### **Rail Services**

460. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to reduce the required 24 hours notice that passengers with a disability must give to travel on an Irish Rail service; if so, the amount of time the notice will be reduced to; the timeframe for these changes to come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40158/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for Irish Rail and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Electric Vehicles**

461. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are taxation incentives to encourage companies to get their employees to use electric vehicles as company cars as opposed to petrol or diesel vehicles; if not, if incentives are planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40214/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Tax policy and the availability of incentives are a matter for the Minister for Finance in the first instance. To support the uptake of alternative technologies for Irish businesses, an Accelerated Capital Allowance (ACA) scheme is intended to stimulate businesses to buy more energy efficient products which include electric vehicles and their associated charging infrastructure. Under this scheme a 100% asset write down is permitted in the year of purchase enabling the full value of the tax relief benefit to be received promptly. SEAI currently administer the eligibility criteria for this

scheme.

The Government is very supportive of the transition of the car fleet to zero emissions technology, especially electric vehicles (EVs). The Deputy may be aware that my Department and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, have jointly convened an interdepartmental Low-Emitting Vehicles (LEV) Task Force to consider a full suite of potential measures to expedite the deployment of low carbon technologies under a commitment outlined in the “Programme for a Partnership Government”.

The wide ranging work of the Taskforce has been divided between three working groups addressing: Market Growth Stimuli and Visibility; Infrastructure, Energy Regulation and Pricing; and Planning Legislation, Building Regulations and Public Leadership.

Additional potential policy instruments being considered by the Taskforce include reduced charges or exemptions on toll roads for EVs; availability and focus of company car benefit-in-kind relief; EV public parking charges; the effectiveness of the current incentives in place; and the role of taxation in the accelerated deployment of low emission vehicles.

The Taskforce will also consider potential Government and public body leadership initiatives and opportunities, as means of further demonstrating support for LEV uptake.

An opportunity was provided in July for industry and user stakeholders to contribute their perspectives to the deliberations of the Task Force and further wider consultations will be also be undertaken later this year. Details of the progress of the Taskforce are made available on my Department’s website.

In addition, actions in support of the transition to LEVs were included in the *National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport: 2017-2030*, which I published in May. The *Framework* aims to remove barriers to the uptake of LEVs by addressing such infrastructure requirements as EV charging points. The *Framework* sets an ambitious target that by 2030 all new cars and vans sold in Ireland will be zero emissions (or zero emissions capable), reducing our dependence on the use of conventional fossil fuels for transport.

### **Rail Network Expansion**

462. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has calculated indicative costings for the DART expansion project along lines (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40218/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). The NTA’s Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016-2035 proposes implementation of the overall DART Expansion Programme involving electrification of the Northern line as far as Drogheda, the Kildare Line to Hazelhatch, the Sligo line to Maynooth in the west and to the M3 Parkway and construction of the DART Underground Tunnel. The original cost of the overall DART Expansion Programme (including the tunnel element) was estimated at €4 billion, of which €3 billion was in respect of the tunnel as originally designed.

The Government decided in September 2015 that the original proposal for the tunnel should be redesigned to provide a lower cost solution and work is underway on that at present.

Funding has been provided under the Government’s present Capital Plan for work on the

redesign of the tunnel and other elements of the DART Expansion Programme including for the extension of the DART to Balbriggan and the design and planning of DART services to Maynooth and Hazelhatch.

### **Rail Services**

463. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all procurement of new diesel powered rail rolling stock will be hybrid in line with the vision for the long term electrification of rail services and the policy on reducing urban air pollution. [40239/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As I outlined to the Deputy in my previous reply to Dáil Question No. 1418 on 26 July, this is a matter for Iarnród Éireann.

I understand that Iarnród Éireann has replied directly to the Deputy on this matter and the position is unchanged.

### **Rail Services**

464. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all procurement of new rail rolling stock will provide for increased space for carriage of bicycles in line with the policy as set out in the national cycle policy framework. [40240/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, Iarnród Éireann operates the heavy rail network and is responsible for assessing rolling stock requirements for the heavy rail network in conjunction with the National Transport Authority.

Noting the responsibility of the agencies in this regard, I have referred the Deputy's question to Iarnród Éireann for direct reply on this issue. Please advise my office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

### **Swimming Pool Programme Administration**

465. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he plans to open the local authority swimming pool programme for new applications in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40241/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP) provides grant aid to local authorities towards the capital costs of new swimming pools or the refurbishment of existing pools.

In January of 2016, my Department contacted local authorities and sought expressions of interest in a limited round of swimming pool allocations. There were three expressions of interest received for new pools, two of which were valid and both in Dublin.

There are four projects in the current programme and the priority in 2017 is on progressing these projects.

In relation to the future funding of swimming pools, my Department is currently finalising a



review of national sports policy which includes a specific focus on how Government should fund sports facilities including swimming pools in the years ahead.

### **Road Traffic Offences**

466. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which he plans to enforce the Road Traffic Act 2016 that gives effect to an agreement with the UK on mutual recognition of driver disqualifications which was signed in October 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40283/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The mutual recognition of driving disqualifications between Ireland and the UK came into effect on 1 August 2017. This new measure is underpinned by an International Agreement between Ireland and the UK.

Under the Ireland/UK Agreement, the driving disqualification is, in effect, transferred by the State which imposes it to the licence of the offender's "home" state, so the legal consequence of the offence committed follows the offender home.

In Ireland mutual recognition of driver disqualifications of a person normally resident in Ireland or holding an Irish driving licence who has been disqualified from driving in the UK for one of the very serious offences covered by the Agreement will be pursued by the Road Safety Authority who will apply to the relevant court in Ireland for a court order which will impose the disqualification in Ireland. Similarly the Road Safety Authority will notify the relevant UK authorities of persons normally resident in the UK or holding a UK driving licence who have been disqualified from driving in Ireland, and the relevant UK authorities will similarly pursue the disqualification in the UK.

Mutual recognition of driving disqualifications is an important road safety measure for both Ireland and the UK, and I know you will share my hope that it will be successful in helping to improve driver behaviour and in reducing deaths and injuries on our roads.

### **Penalty Points System**

467. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for North-South harmonisation in relation to penalty points in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40284/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** There is no cross-Border mechanism at present for the mutual recognition of penalty points between Ireland and Northern Ireland or any successful example of or framework for mutual recognition of penalty points between other jurisdictions in Europe.

A considerable amount of work has been done by my Department, involving my officials, the Department of Infrastructure in Northern Ireland, an Garda Síochána, the PSNI, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Justice in Northern Ireland, the Courts Service both here and in Northern Ireland, and the Road Safety Authority.

That work identified a number of major issues which would need to be resolved before a system for the mutual recognition of penalty points could go ahead between Ireland and Northern Ireland, including the standardisation of penalty points awarded for various road traffic offences, resolving issues regarding summons service, and the need to ensure equality of treatment for drivers in both jurisdictions. This work would require primary legislation in both ju-

risdictions, and is currently undergoing legal advice for the best way to overcome the obstacles.

As the mutual recognition of penalty points, when implemented, would be by way of a bi-lateral agreement between the relevant authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland (similar to the recently introduced bilateral Agreement between Ireland and the UK regarding mutual recognition of driving disqualifications), so there will be no impact from Brexit.

### **Sport Ireland**

468. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if assistance will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40326/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** I refer the Deputy to my reply to his previous PQ 32131/17 of 11 July, 2017. The position remains the same, i.e. Sport Ireland, which is funded by my Department, is the statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, increasing participation at all levels and raising standards, including the allocation of funding across its various programmes. Sport Ireland channels funding for sport through the relevant recognised National Governing Bodies of sport. Sport Ireland has no mechanism to allocate funding to organisations outside of this process.

Mountain biking is an off road discipline of Cycling Ireland, the National Governing Body for cycling. It would not be appropriate for me to intervene in a matter that is proper to a National Governing Body.

There is no funding or grant aid available from my Department for the purpose outlined by the Deputy.

### **Traffic Calming Measures**

469. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding traffic calming lights; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40334/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual road projects is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, 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.

### **Greenways Funding**

470. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is

in receipt of an application for funding for the Fingal Coastal Way from Fingal County Council and specifically for the Broadmeadow Way section between Malahide and Donabate; if he will grant the funding required for this coastal greenway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40336/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I understand that no formal application for funding has been submitted by Fingal County Council for either the Fingal Coastal Way or the Broadmeadow Way. My Department is currently developing a Strategy for the Future Development of Greenways that will set out the criteria for awarding funding to projects such as this. I would expect to be in a position to announce a new round of funding once the Strategy has been finalised.

I would urge all local authorities to develop their planning and design of projects as much as possible in advance of a new round of funding, and to consult as widely as possible with all stakeholders including landowners alongside and adjacent to the proposed routes.

### **Bus Services**

471. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the stage Transport Infrastructure Ireland's consideration of the provisions of a turning roundabout at a location (details supplied) is at to facilitate the provision of a bus route extension; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40499/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the administration of the Sustainable Transport Measures Grants (STMG) Programme. This rolling programme of measures facilitates investment in various Quality Bus Corridors, cycling/walking, safety and traffic management projects throughout the seven local authority areas in the Greater Dublin Area.

Noting the NTA's responsibility for the STMG Programme, I have referred the Deputy's question to the Authority for direct reply in relation to this matter. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Light Rail Projects**

472. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to connect the green and red Luas lines on the south of the city; the research which has been carried out on this in the past; if he will recommence the investigation into such a proposal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40506/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority's (NTA) Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2016-2035 provides the overarching framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades.

The strategy includes a number of proposals to further develop the light rail network in the GDA. These include Luas Cross City, which is scheduled to commence passenger services before the end of the year; New Metro North light rail link from the south city centre to Swords, via Dublin Airport; Capacity enhancements and upgrade to the Luas Green Line from the south city centre to Bride's Glen; Extension of the Luas Green Line to Bray; Extension of Luas Cross City to Finglas; Luas to Lucan; and Luas Red Line extension to Poolbeg.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply on the issue raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Public Transport Fares**

473. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost in 2018 if all Irish Rail, Dublin Bus, Bus Éireann and Luas fares were halved. [40514/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) 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.

### **Road Projects Status**

474. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to include the Ballybofey-Stranorlar bypass on the N15 in the new ten year capital plan; the timeframe for delivery of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40598/17]

475. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to include the upgrading of the N14 Lifford to Letterkenny road as part of the new ten-year capital plan; the timeframe for its delivery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40599/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 474 and 475 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects (including the N14 and N15) is a matter for the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, 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 ten working days.

### **Fire Safety**

476. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to undertake a comprehensive fire safety audit of all high risk buildings, including sports campuses, clubhouses, leisure centres, swimming pools and stadia, that are under the remit of his Department. [40603/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Fire Prevention systems are in place in all departmental premises and are maintained in accordance with statutory

requirements under the Fire Services Act 1981 and 2003.

Risk Assessments which include an assessment of fire risk have been completed on all Departmental premises and are continually reviewed in accordance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005.

The accommodation of the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport is provided and controlled in the main by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and is predominantly general office space which would not be considered to be a high risk environment from a fire safety perspective.

In relation to sports facilities, the only such facilities managed by the agencies under the remit of my Department, would be those for which Sport Ireland holds responsibility.

I have forwarded the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland for their direct response. If the Deputy does not receive a reply within ten working days, he should contact my private office.

### **Fire Safety**

477. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to undertake a comprehensive fire safety audit of all high risk buildings, including train stations, bus stations and airports, that fall under the remit of his Department. [40604/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Fire Prevention systems are in place in all Departmental premises and are maintained in accordance with statutory requirements under the Fire Services Act 1981 and 2003.

Risk Assessments which include an assessment of fire risk have been completed on all Departmental premises and are continually reviewed in accordance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005.

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport's accommodation is provided and controlled in the main by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and is predominantly general office space which would not be considered to be a high risk environment from a fire safety perspective.

In relation to train stations, bus stations and airports, fire safety in such locations is managed by the agencies under the remit of my Department who hold responsibility for each of the three transport sectors mentioned.

I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the agencies for their direct response. If the Deputy does not receive a reply within ten working days, he should contact my private office.

### **Bus Services**

478. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the planned bus rapid transit, BRT, scheme for Dublin's north side; when it is expected works will commence on providing the service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40643/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) launched the BusConnects initiative in May which proposes a radical

transformation of the bus system in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

The proposed measures includes the development of a network of ‘next generation’ bus corridors, three bus rapid transit (BRT) routes, and a complete redesign of the network to be accompanied by a network of bus-based park and ride sites at strategic locations. I have sought additional funding for public transport investment in the ongoing mid-term review of the Capital Plan to support this initiative.

Given the NTA’s responsibility in this area, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the NTA for a more detailed reply regarding the planned BRT for Dublin’s north side. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### **Aviation Industry Regulations**

479. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the agreed outcomes of the UN’s International Civil Aviation Organisation’s, ICAO, committee on aviation environmental protection steering group meeting, which took place the week of 11 September 2017 in Montreal, Canada; if Ireland has adopted a position in regard to the possible re-introduction of civil supersonic aircraft; and if Ireland will insist on strict noise and CO2 standards before permitting a reintroduction of such aircraft. [40664/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I understand that the outcomes, if any, of the Steering Group meeting of ICAO’s Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection (CAEP) of 11 September 2017 have yet to be formally communicated. I understand that the timeframes for the finalisation of recommendations by CAEP in relation to supersonic aircraft is 2022. Any proposals arising at that time will need to be submitted to all 191 ICAO member states for their views. Ireland will formulate its position upon consideration of these detailed proposals for noise and any other environmental protection standards once they have been received. The Department is committed to consulting publicly on any such proposals.

I am happy to say that Ireland is fully committed to the development of a sustainable, resource-efficient aviation sector and is engaged in ongoing efforts at both national and international level to address the environmental impact of aviation. For example, Ireland continues to participate in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (EU-ETS), which requires that all airlines operating in Europe must monitor, report and verify their emissions, and surrender allowances against those emissions. In addition, Ireland has volunteered to participate in the pilot phase of ICAO’s Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSA), which aims to maintain the global net CO2 emissions from international aviation at 2020 levels. Finally, officials within my Department have also developed an effective working relationship with their colleagues in the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. Through open and constructive discussions both Departments are working together to formulate an overall Irish approach to environmental sustainability in aviation.

### **School Discipline**

480. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of second level student suspensions nationally during the academic year 2016-17. [40697/17]

481. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of second level student expulsions nationally during the academic year 2016-17. [40698/17]

482. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of second level student suspensions in County Louth during the academic year 2016-17. [40700/17]

483. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of second level student expulsions in County Louth during the academic year 2016-17. [40701/17]

484. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of second level student suspensions in a school (details supplied) during the academic year 2016-17. [40703/17]

485. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of second level student expulsions in a school (details supplied) during the academic year 2016-17. [40704/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 480 to 485, inclusive, together.

I have been advised by TUSLA Education Welfare Service that there were 11,500 second level student suspensions nationally during the academic year 2016/2017.

There were 140 second level student expulsions nationally during the academic year 2016/2017.

I have also been advised that there were 322 second level student suspensions in County Louth during the academic year 2016/2017.

There were 10 second level student expulsions in County Louth during the academic year 2016/2017.

Further to the above request for suspension and expulsion data for a particular school (roll number provided) TUSLA are unable to provide these figures. Providing these figures for an individual school could lead to the potential identification of individual students due to the small number of suspensions and expulsions in individual schools; this would therefore constitute the disclosure of personal information.

### **Child and Family Agency Services**

486. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if approval will be given to an independent mechanism by which members of Dáil and Seanad Éireann can register the complaints or concerns received from persons relative to Tusla; if such a mechanism or process will be empowered to issue an acknowledgement of correspondence received in this regard; if her attention has been drawn to the mounting criticism and complaints from foster care families and others relative to processing of concerns and complaints; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40179/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I want to firstly acknowledge that concerns have been raised with my Department in relation to the processing of complaints by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

Section 64 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 requires Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to establish procedures for dealing with complaints against the Agency or a service provider.

Tusla introduced its complaints policy, “Tell Us: You Say, We Listen” in September 2016. All complaints received by Tusla, from this date, are managed under the “Tell Us” policy. Any individual who wishes to make a complaint about Tusla services can do so through the “Tell Us” complaints process. Contact details and further information are on Tusla’s website [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie). “Tell Us” explains how complaints can be managed or feedback can be provided with a focus on local and speedy resolution. Where informal local resolution is not possible, a Complaints Officer will be appointed to examine the matter. This process takes up to 30 days. If it takes longer, the process provides for regular updates every 20 days. If, after that, a person remains dissatisfied with the recommendations of the investigation, they can either seek a review of their complaint by a Tusla review officer or contact the Ombudsman or Ombudsman for Children’s Office. All complainants are advised of this

Concerns communicated to Tusla by a member of the Oireachtas, through a representation that constitutes a complaint, are referred to the appropriate service within Tusla. A response issues from Tusla confirming that this has been done. An acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint is also issued to the complainant, where identified, within 10 working days. Tusla has established a specific email address ([tuslapad@tusla.ie](mailto:tuslapad@tusla.ie)) in order that Oireachtas members may convey any concerns directly to Tusla. Public representatives may also make a complaint on behalf of a constituent directly to [tellus@tusla.ie](mailto:tellus@tusla.ie).

In order to ensure independence with regard to complaints investigations, “Tell Us “ provides that a complaints officer should not be involved in managing a complaint about a matter in which they have had either a direct or indirect involvement. In such circumstance the complaint must be passed to another complaints officer not linked to the complaint.

The Irish Foster Care Association, through its contact with the Department, has voiced concern with regard to the Tusla management of allegations made in relation to foster carers, while also emphasising the good work that is being carried out. In response to feedback from the Association, and from social work teams and foster carers, Tusla has committed to the development of a National Guidance for Responding to Child Protection and Welfare Concerns in Foster Care. This guidance will be finalised later this year. The voices of foster care families and children in care are valued, and it is important that any concerns raised are responded to promptly and comprehensively.

It should also be emphasised that Tusla follows the Children First National Guidance on the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2011, in responding to all allegations of child protection and welfare concerns. In addition, since its approval in September 2014, a national policy, ‘Policy & Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse & Neglect’, was implemented to ensure a standardised approach in responding to, and assessing, all child protection and welfare concerns relating to children, regardless of their care status.

Tusla has also issued a guidance document to its staff on the Management of Serious Concerns and Allegations, detailing guiding principles, including statutory requirements and a Tusla protocol for the management of serious concerns and allegations against foster carers. This relates to serious concerns or allegations that are raised by children in foster care, birth parents, foster carers, or third parties. Any serious allegation reported to Tusla is taken seriously, and managed appropriately and sensitively.

It is evident from the foregoing that Tusla has developed, and strengthened, its complaints policy framework. This should provide the necessary basis for a more prompt and efficient service for Oireachtas members and for the general public. This is an important matter, acknowledged as such by Tusla, which will be kept under close review by my Department in discharging its oversight function in respect of Tusla.



## Child Care Costs

487. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will implement a system whereby all child care providers in receipt of the new more affordable child care system will be required to place a cap on fees that they charge; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40219/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the Deputy will be aware, the factors impacting on the costs across delivery of services in any sector are complex and multifaceted. The cost to childcare providers is affected by many factors such as rates, rent, labour costs, and insurance amongst other things.

The cost to parents to access that childcare is decided by childcare providers taking account of these overheads.

Notwithstanding this, I am committed to ensuring that childcare is affordable, accessible and of a high quality.

The increase in supports I have provided from this month for the next programme year represents a major step towards accessible affordable quality childcare after decades of neglect and under-investment by successive Governments.

There are two supports being rolled out under the Community Childcare Scheme. These include universal non means tested supports of up to €1,040 per year and enhanced supports of up to €7,500 per year to assist families to return to work, and/or training and education.

I am delighted with the strong response from the sector. The number of providers signing up to deliver the services increases daily.

My Department is monitoring the cost of childcare closely and will continue to do so. Initial research from a sampling of services shows that fee increases for full-term services delivering the Community Childcare Scheme (including CCS Plus) rose by €5.26 on average between this programme year (2017/18) and the previous programme year. By way of comparison the fees across all services delivering full-time childcare rose by €7.26 between 2015/16 and 2016/17 following a number of years of price stagnation. If over the coming weeks or months those percentage increases in fees by service providers were to rise then I will consider whether actions such as regulation or price capping is required for government schemes. Towards meeting some of the administrative overhead, I announced in recent months payments totalling €3.5m towards 'non contact time' for all childcare providers who register for the enhanced childcare measures under the Community Childcare Scheme. This, in addition to €14.5m that has been already paid to childcare services so far in 2017 in recognition of administration associated with ECCE and other schemes, provides for €18m in 'non-contact time' payments this year.

## Community Childcare Subvention Programme

488. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that some parents are choosing to keep their children in the community child care subvention scheme even though they qualify for ECCE in view of the fact that it is more advantageous from a parent's perspective; her plans to address the loss of grant support under ECCE that results to the childcare service; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40309/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am aware of

the situation which the Deputy highlights. Officials in my Department are looking into this issue and will be taking steps to rectify this situation. The precise mechanism for effecting the payment with regard to the grant discrepancy for that small number of service providers who may lose out is under consideration. The steps to be taken will be communicated to all providers in the near future.

I am committed to ensuring that childcare is affordable, accessible and of a high quality. The Higher Capitation rates for providers is a key element of this approach and I will ensure that providers are appropriately recompensed.

### **Child Care Costs**

489. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that child care providers are increasing their fees following the introduction of the new child care support scheme; the steps she is taking to prevent this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40351/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the Deputy will be aware, the factors impacting on the costs across delivery of services in any sector are complex and multifaceted. The cost to childcare providers is affected by many factors such as rates, rent, labour costs, and insurance amongst other things.

The cost to parents to access that childcare is decided by childcare providers taking account of these overheads.

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ministration associated with ECCE and other schemes, provides for €18m in ‘non-contact time’ payments this year.

### **Departmental Staff Recruitment**

490. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when the posts of second secretary and deputy secretary will be filled within her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40632/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department does not have any posts at the grade of Second Secretary or Deputy Secretary and consequently none arise to be filled.

### **Child Care Services**

491. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the supports available in terms of child care in circumstances in which a child is three years of age but not yet able to enter the ECCE scheme; the action she plans to take to ensure adequate supports are provided to families in this position until their child can enter the ECCE scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40663/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The childcare supports available to parents from my Department vary depending on individual circumstance and need. There are a number of programmes available to families with children outside of the ECCE age eligibility range.

These include the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and CCS Plus programmes which provide childcare funding support targeting low income families in community and private childcare services. The CCS Plus programme also includes a universal subsidy (CCSU) available to all families with children not yet eligible for the ECCE scheme and not eligible for the subventions targeted at lower income families. I introduced the universal subsidy for that specific cohort of families which are pre-ECCE as part of a series of measures towards more affordable childcare.

Also of note are the Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) programmes which provide childcare funding support for parents participating in eligible ETB/Solas vocational training courses, Community Employment (CE) programmes or returning to employment.

Further information, concerning childcare supports which are currently available, can be found on [www.affordablechildcare.ie](http://www.affordablechildcare.ie). This website also contains details of the local City/County Childcare Committees to deal with the queries of individual parents and help them identify their eligibility for the available childcare subsidises.

### **Proposed Legislation**

492. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to bring forward legislation on improving the ability of walkers to access private land for recreational walking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40217/17]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Occup-

ers Liability Act 1995 provides significant protection to landowners with regards to recreational users on their land, thereby facilitating access for recreational purposes.

In addition, an insurance policy held by the National Trails Office provides indemnity on way marked ways and walks registered with my Department's Walks Scheme, where inspection and approval has been carried out by that Office.

Nonetheless, my Department is working closely with the State Claims Agency in relation to the development and implementation of a National Indemnity Scheme for landowners to further support the recreational use of Ireland's uplands. Discussions are ongoing and I anticipate that a scheme will be agreed in a number of pilot areas in the coming months.

### **Town and Village Renewal Scheme**

493. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when village schemes will be announced. [40348/17]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 13th April last, with a focus on improving the economic development of our rural towns and villages.

The closing date for applications was 30 June 2017 and there was a high level of interest in the programme.

The assessment process in respect of the scheme is nearing completion and I hope to be in a position to announce the successful projects shortly. The scheme will support up to 300 towns and villages over the next 12 to 15 months.

### **National Way Marked Ways**

494. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will provide an increase to 80 in the number of walks in the walks scheme and an increase in the allocation to €4 million which is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40432/17]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** A key feature of the Walks Scheme is that it involves land-holders as key participants in the provision of high quality walking trails by contracting them to undertake maintenance work on sections of National Way Marked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands. The land-holders receive modest payments for maintenance work undertaken in line with agreed work plans.

A total of 39 trails are currently covered by the scheme and the number of participants on the scheme stands at 1,904. Payments made by my Department in 2017 in respect of the scheme will be in the region of €1.8 million and will be disbursed through the Local Development Company network.

The Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to double the number of walks covered by the Walks Scheme. My officials are working towards this objective. However, as significant consultation will be required, both with land-holders and other stakeholders, it is unlikely that any increase in the number of walks covered by the scheme will be implemented until 2018. The provision of additional funding to support the scheme will be a matter for consideration as part of the annual Estimates process.

**CLÁR Programme**

495. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if CLÁR funding will be granted to a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40145/17]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The CLÁR programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched on 31 March 2017, with a closing date of 5 May 2017.

Over 500 applications were received under the programme and successful projects were announced in May and June, with a total of just under €7 million allocated to approximately 230 projects. Details of the approved projects are available on my Department's website at: <http://drcd.gov.ie/subheader1/clar>.

As I pointed out in reply to Question No. 256 of 12 July 2017 from the Deputy, an application for funding under the CLÁR programme does not appear to have been received from the group referred to by the Deputy.

**Social Insurance Yield**

496. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated increase in revenue that would result from an increase in the existing two bands of PRSI by 2%, discounting employer's PRSI paid from the public purse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40571/17]

497. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated increase in revenue that would result from an increase in the current 8.5% rate of employer's PRSI to 10.5%, an increase of the 10.75% rate to 12.75% and the introduction of a new band for employers hiring employees on more than €100,000 of 19.75%; the further estimated increase in net revenue from this change, discounting employer's PRSI paid from the public purse; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40572/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 496 and 497 together.

The following table sets out the estimated increase in the PRSI yield to the Social Insurance Fund from the measures detailed by the Deputy:

Measure	Yield
Increase in the existing two bands of Class A employer PRSI by 2% by: - increasing the 8.5% rate of employer's PRSI to 10.5% and - increase the 10.75% employer rate to 12.75%	€1,438.9m
Increase 8.5% rate of Class A employer's PRSI to 10.5%, 10.75% rate to 12.75% and the introduction of a 19.75% for those earning over €100,000 (payable on the earnings in excess of €100,000 only)	€1,910.2

Without extensive cross referencing to identify individual employed contributors in the civil and public sector, in the time available it is not possible to identify civil and public sector employees earning in excess of €100,000 to facilitate discounting employer's PRSI paid from the

public purse.

These estimates are based on PRSI Class A contributors. They use the latest available data and reflect macro-economic indicators for 2018. It should be noted that the estimate does not take into account any possible changes in employer behaviour arising from changing rates of contribution.

### **Social Insurance Fund**

498. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the actuarial review of the Social Insurance Fund is due to be published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40138/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 2005, as amended, makes provision for the carrying out of actuarial reviews of the Social Insurance Fund at five yearly intervals. The last actuarial review, as at 31 December 2010, was published in 2012.

The fourth actuarial review, as at 31 December 2015, is currently being undertaken by external consultants. The review will project the income and expenditure of the Fund over a 55 year period, taking into account policy, economic and demographic changes since the previous review was undertaken. In providing an assessment of the financial health of the Fund, the findings of the review will contribute to the development of policy for social insurance benefits generally.

In addition to examining options relating to the State pensions, the review will examine the projected PRSI contribution rates required to provide individual benefits to Class S self-employed contributors on a revenue neutral basis.

The Department is carrying out the review in consultation with a range of other relevant departments and bodies including the Department of Finance, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Central Statistics Office.

The report is in the final stages of preparation and I expect to be in a position to publish the results of the review by mid-October.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

499. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40173/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 19 June 2017.

It is a condition for receipt of carer's allowance in respect of a child who is less than 16 years of age that domiciliary care allowance (DCA) must be in payment in respect of that child.

A DCA application in respect of the child of the person concerned was disallowed and following an appeal, that decision was upheld.

26 September 2017

The person concerned has submitted further evidence which is being reviewed by the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Should this review be successful, their entitlement to Carer's Allowance will be examined and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

500. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if carer's allowance is payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40189/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 12 June 2017. Additional information in relation to the person's application was requested by a deciding officer on 20 September 2017.

Once the information is received, the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Contracts**

501. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the identities of the security companies contracted by her Department and its agencies to provide security services; if all such companies are in compliance with the new employment regulation order rate for the security industry which has been in force since 1 June 2017; the steps her Department has taken to ensure compliance with the new legal hourly rate of pay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40275/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department's security contract is with Secureway at Risk Security (SAR) group. SARs wrote to the Department in July 2017 to advise that they had implemented the Employment Regulation Order (ERO) hourly rate increase from the 1st June 2017.

Only one of the statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department has security contracts. The Citizens Information Board (CIB) directly engage the following security firms:-

- C & C Security Ltd
- AP Systems Ltd
- Synergy Security Solutions
- Orbit Security Ltd.

These firms are all fully compliant with the new employment regulation order and CIB has received written confirmation from each of their compliance.

Please note that this only applies to CIB offices and not the wider network of MABS/CIS's.

## **Carer's Allowance Appeals**

502. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40297/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence including that adduced at the oral hearing, has decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned has been notified of the Appeals Officer's decision.

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

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **JobPath Programme**

503. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person who has been transferred to an organisation (details supplied) can transfer back to the Department placement system in order to pursue a training course relevant to their job prospects; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40310/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Participants with JobPath receive intensive individual support over a period of up to 12 months to help them tackle barriers to employment and to find jobs. As part of the JobPath service each person is assigned a personal advisor who assesses their skills, qualifications and experience with a particular focus on identifying appropriate training and educational interventions in the context of potential employment opportunities

The JobPath providers arrange for the delivery of a broad range of education and training courses with a particular and strong focus on upskilling the long term unemployed. Some of these courses are provided in-house while others are provided by specialist training providers including the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). In addition, JobPath participants may also apply for the Back to Education Allowance Scheme in order to pursue second and third level courses and will be referred back to the Department for that purpose.

In order to support JobPath providers in referring people to training and education, and to allow jobseekers to benefit fully from the JobPath service, the Department will extend the 12 month JobPath referral period by the duration of any externally delivered approved training course. This can be up to an additional 26 weeks. The JobPath companies will continue to provide appropriate support to the person while they are on such courses.

Where a person is approved for a course of training or education which is over 9 months, the referral to the JobPath service will be cancelled to allow the person to focus on their studies.

I trust this clarifies the process for the Deputy.

## **Humanitarian Assistance Scheme**



504. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if families who are homeowners or are renting private accommodation, are affected by the recent flooding in County Donegal and are availing of support from the humanitarian assistance scheme are entitled to the same financial support and compensation as families renting in local authority owned accommodation; and if not, the reason therefor. [40330/17]

508. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department will consider allowing for retrospective payments to be made to persons under the humanitarian assistance scheme in respect of applications submitted by flood victims resident in the Finn Valley region of County Donegal who had properties damaged during a major episode of flooding in the area in late 2015; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40421/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 504 and 508 together.

My Department immediately activated its humanitarian assistance scheme, administered by the local Community Welfare Service (CWS), to assist householders in County Donegal affected by flooding following the recent severe weather conditions.

The purpose of the humanitarian assistance scheme is to prevent hardship by providing income-tested financial support to people whose homes are damaged from flooding and severe weather events and who are not in a position to meet costs for essential needs, replacement of household items and in some instances structural repair. In dealing with emergency events of this nature, the Department generally adopts a three stage approach as follows:

- Stage 1 is to provide emergency income support payments (food, clothing and personal items) in the immediate aftermath of the event. A relatively small amount of financial assistance is generally provided initially.

- Stage 2 generally involves the replacement of white goods, basic furniture items and other essential household items. It is not until the flood water abates and houses dry out that the full extent of the damage to homes will become fully known.

- Stage 3 is to identify what longer term financial support or works are required. It could take some time before this stage of response commences and this involves a cross Departmental/Agency response. Works carried out can include plastering, dry-lining, relaying of floors, electrical re-wiring and painting.

My Department has provided financial support under the scheme to some 140 affected households with further payments under stages 2 and 3 being processed. The Government has not set a limit on the amount that can be paid to an individual household under this scheme. Levels of payment depend on the relative severity of damage experienced and the household's ability to meet these costs ensuring that the funding is appropriately targeted.

Assistance is not provided for losses which are covered by insurance or for commercial and business losses, or generally any loss or damage to private rented accommodation or local authority accommodation. However, my Department's focus is on ensuring that people's immediate needs are met and emergency stage 1 payments can be made to persons irrespective of the nature of their accommodation.

I am advised that Donegal County Council is continuing to provide support and assistance to their tenants who were affected by the flooding under separate arrangements to this Department's humanitarian assistance scheme.

People seeking assistance under the humanitarian assistance scheme should contact their local Intreo Centre where CWS staff are available to offer assistance or contact the Buncrana Intreo Centre on 074 9364600.

In early December 2015, my Department activated the humanitarian assistance scheme to assist householders affected by the severe weather conditions of winter 2015/16. If the Deputy has concerns in respect of a specific household affected by the weather events of that period he should bring the details to the attention of my Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

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

505. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an appeal in respect of a carer's allowance application in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40341/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was referred to an Appeals Officer on 21 September 2017, who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and 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.

### **Departmental Staff Recruitment**

506. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to recruit additional staff to deal with appeals for guardians payments in view of the fact that the current average processing time is approximately 18 weeks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40389/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department, like all Government Departments and agencies, is required to operate within a staff ceiling figure and a commensurate administrative staffing budget, which for this Department has involved reductions in staff.

The staffing needs for all areas within the Department are continuously reviewed, taking account of workloads, management priorities and the ongoing need to respond to new increasing demands in a wide range of services. This is to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

Appeal processing times are kept under constant scrutiny by the Chief Appeals Officer. The Deputy will be aware that significant effort and resources have been devoted in recent years to reducing the length of time taken to finalise an appeal and that as a consequence processing times have improved quite considerably.

The quasi-judicial nature of the appeals system means that there are inevitable time-lags involved. However the system is designed to be flexible and fair and allows for review and submission of further information at all stages. The time taken is proportionate to the complexity of many of the issues under appeal which require a high level of judgement, and the need to ensure due process and natural justice.

The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that appeal processing times will continue to be a priority for her office.

### **Departmental Administrative Arrangements**

507. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress made to date in her Department on consolidating all means testing under a single national body in order that persons will only apply once for services or entitlements across all Government agencies, as committed to in the programme for partnership Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40395/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Programme for Government commitment in this area is to “consolidate all means testing under a single national body ensuring a single application process for services or entitlements across all government agencies”.

This proposal would be a major project across a range of Government departments and agencies that operate schemes and services on a means/income tested basis of which my Department is just one. Significant operational, legislative and technical challenges would be involved.

In relation to my Department, IT developments in recent years have allowed for the capture and storage of means data and the reuse of that data. Amongst the many potential benefits of this reuse are a reduced administrative burden on staff and customers through greater accuracy of information, a reduced need to repeatedly ask for the same information and the ability to make better-informed decisions regarding reviews.

*Question No. 508 answered with Question No. 504.*

### **Pensions Reform**

509. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 149 of 25 May 2017, her plans for the development of an auto-enrolment pension system; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40423/17]

512. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding the action plan for the reform of pensions as mooted by her predecessor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40426/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 509 and 512 together.

Progressive reform of the pension system is a priority of mine and this Government. To this end, I can confirm the Government’s intention to publish, and commence the implementation of, a pensions reform plan before the end of this year.

The plan will include measures relating to the introduction of a ‘Total Contributions Approach’ to the State pension for new pensioners, reform and simplification of the current supplementary pension landscape and measures required to transpose the EU ‘IORP’ Pensions Directive. However, perhaps the most fundamental reform contained within the plan will be a confirmation of the Government’s intention to develop a new automatic enrolment supplementary retirement savings system for employees without pensions coverage.

The rate of supplementary pension coverage in Ireland is 47% of the working population and this reduces to 35% when the private sector is considered in isolation. Whilst the State pension provides a reasonable basic level of income and guards against poverty in retirement, if measures are not taken to address this low rate of supplementary coverage, many future retirees will experience unwanted reductions in living standards when they reach retirement.

This reform, where the saver will maintain the freedom of choice to opt-out, will encourage long term saving and asset accumulation amongst those who may otherwise suffer a reduction in living standards at retirement. It will increase the wellbeing, financial security and independence of future retirees.

A review of international auto enrolment retirement systems has confirmed that success is dependent on well tested design and securing member trust. To this end, further detailed evidence building and consultation will be undertaken to inform fundamental choices which are required regarding the preferred operational structure and organisational governance for a new system as well as many design elements such as contribution levels, financial incentives and target membership. Correctly positioning/designing each of these will be critical to the success of any system.

To this end, it is my intention to undertake an automatic enrolment open consultation process over the coming months. This process will seek to develop consensus around the principles of our approach to system infrastructure, design and implementation. It will build on our previous engagement with sectoral interests including employer and trade union representatives as well as the pensions industry and consumer and advocate groups.

The objective of planned reforms will be to establish a sound and fit for purpose pension system for the coming decades, one that will shape the retirement landscape to the benefit of our retirees for generations to come.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Defined Benefit Pension Schemes**

510. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of her Department’s work to improve the security of investment for those contributing to defined benefit pension funds; her plans to legislate in this area; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40424/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Internationally, as well as in Ireland, Defined Benefit (DB) schemes have been facing increased difficulties over the last two decades. This has been due to volatility in the stock markets, increasing liabilities arising from the demographic pressures of increasing life expectancy, low interest rates and regulatory requirements. Essentially the cost of providing benefits has increased at a rate that has not been covered by the level of the employer and employee contributions to pension schemes and the investment returns earned.

The ongoing decline of defined benefit schemes over the past two decades has seen the number of schemes subject to the funding standard decline from 2,031 in 2000 to approximately 650 such schemes as per figures provided by the Pensions Authority on 1 June 2017. Despite its decline, the DB sector is still a very important sector with assets under management of approximately €62 billion and membership comprised of 100,000 pensioners, 125,000 active members and 435,000 deferred members.

Generally speaking, where schemes have encountered funding difficulties, the process has been managed through dialogue between trustees, employers and members, where efforts are made to reach agreement regarding the steps to be taken. Under Irish law, responsibility rests with the employer and the trustees for ensuring that DB schemes are properly funded and managed.

The Pensions Authority requires that, in setting investment policy, the trustees of a DB scheme must have regard to the need to satisfy at regular intervals the minimum funding standard set down in the Pensions Act.

A number of steps have been taken in recent years to reduce the risks to pension scheme members caused by market volatility. The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2012 require a DB scheme to hold additional funding in the form of a ‘risk reserve’ by 2023. The function of this ‘risk reserve’ is to provide some protection and long term stability for scheme members against future volatility in financial markets. Additionally, and in appropriate circumstances, the regulator may approve scheme funding proposals that provide for the recovery of their schemes funding over longer periods than was previously the case.

In addition, in order to provide increased investment options for pension schemes the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2010 and 2011 introduced the option for trustees to purchase sovereign annuities. Pension schemes that purchase sovereign annuities, or the underlying bonds, benefit from a reduction in their liabilities under the funding standard. Buying sovereign annuities for the pensioners has the effect of reducing pensioner liabilities under the funding standard and provides additional funds for the other members of the scheme.

While noting the steps taken thus far, a key priority for the Government is to provide additional protections for scheme members’ pension benefits. It is essential that any new measures recognise the current pensions landscape in Ireland so that a balanced and proportionate approach is developed.

I intend to introduce a number of amendments to the Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017 at Committee Stage which will, amongst other things, ensure that an employer cannot “walk away” at short notice from the pension scheme it is supporting and will seek to address situations where funding proposals are not agreed and put in place. The amendments will act to support existing provisions in the Pensions Act and will encourage employers to ensure that schemes are well funded and managed.

Finally, many of the provisions contained within the IORP II Directive (Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision) will also support positive reform of the Irish occupational pension sector. The Directive provides for a range of new requirements concerning governance, management standards in schemes, safekeeping of assets, the need for clear and relevant information to members, the removal of obstacles to cross-border provision of pension services and the facilitation of cross border transfer of schemes. There are also provisions that will enhance the powers of the pension regulators for effective supervision of IORP.

Implementation of the Directive will require legislative changes and my officials, together with the Pensions Authority, are working on the transposition process to ensure that any nec-

essary amendments to existing laws, regulations or administrative provisions will be made, or where necessary any new provisions are implemented, to give full effect to the Directive. Standards in relation to occupational pension schemes will be enhanced by the transposition of the IORP II directive.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **State Pensions**

511. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on increasing the age at which a person will become eligible to claim a State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40425/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition) available from 65 for those who satisfied the qualifying conditions, thereby standardising State pension age for all at 66 years, which is the current State pension age. This will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

No further increases are planned at this time. Any need for future increases will depend on a range of factors such as increases in life expectancy, the ratio of working age people to pensioners, employment rates among older workers, pension rates, the prevailing economic environment and the availability of measures and policies to support older workers. Given the timescales involved and the unpredictability of social and economic change in the coming decades, I believe it would be inappropriate for such decisions to be made at this point.

In most cases, it is hoped that workers will continue to work up to the new State pension age. Where this is not possible, and where a person is available for work, there are specific measures which apply to someone claiming Jobseeker's Benefit from a date after their 65th birthday. Where qualified, these recipients may continue to be eligible for that payment until reaching pension age.

In 2013, the cost of the State pension (transition) was €137 million. Its abolition was not expected to save that amount of expenditure in full, as some people who were affected would alternatively claim working age payments such as Jobseeker's Benefit (albeit at a lower rate than the rate of the State pension), or may claim an Increase for a Qualified Adult in respect of their spouse's pension.

However, it is estimated that well over half of that cost has been saved each year as a result of this measure, and this would be expected to increase as (a) the number of 65 year olds increases, (b) the change results in a higher percentage of people working while aged 65, and (c) there have been two Budget increases in the rate of the State pension since then. It is estimated that the net saving in 2018 is likely to be in the region of €84 million, and this is expected to rise to €87 million by 2020. These figures do not include future rate increases.

Reversing this decision would, therefore, significantly increase the annual cost of State pensions, and would reduce the funds available to pay for any future increases in the rates of the payment.

The Deputy should note that 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. While such a contract may originally have been entered into with a retirement date

of 65, in the context of the previous State pension arrangements, there is no legal impediment to the employer and employee agreeing to increase the duration of employment for one or more years, if both parties wish to do so.

In January 2016, an Interdepartmental Group on Fuller Working Lives, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, was established specifically to examine the implications arising from prevailing retirement ages. The final report of the Group made a number of recommendations to support working and retirement practices. This included a request to the Workplace Relations Commission to prepare a Code of Practice under Section 42 of the Industrial Relations Act, 1990 to help manage the engagement between employers and employees regarding retirement issues and longer working. The final report, the recommendations of which were accepted by Government in August 2016, is available on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's website.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 512 answered with Question No. 509.*

### **Public Services Card**

513. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason it is necessary to require a person who has been adopted and who does not hold a valid passport or driving licence to provide a copy of the adoption certificate when applying for a public services card; if her attention has been drawn to the upset that this can cause to persons who may have been adopted many decades previously; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40441/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** To ensure that people's identity is verified to a substantial level of assurance, my Department has implemented an identity registration process called SAFE. That process involves the capture of an individual's photograph and signature and the verification of identity data. Items of the identity dataset that are verified include the date and place of birth as well as the mother's birth surname. This information is taken from the birth registration record, or in the case of adopted persons, from the adoption registration record. A PSC is issued following successful completion of the registration process.

For Irish-born nationals, the SAFE registration officers in my Department have direct electronic access to the birth register and so can usually verify these data items without the need for a person to bring their birth cert.

However, these officers do not have similar access to adoption records. Consequently, adopted persons are asked to bring their adoption certificate with them when they attend for SAFE registration.

Details of the registration process and information on the documents which a person should provide are available on the Department's website at [http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Public-Services-Card\\_holder.aspx](http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Public-Services-Card_holder.aspx).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

514. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for carer's allowance; and when the person can expect a decision. [40497/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 19 April 2017.

The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) on 22 July 2017 to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied. Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **State Pension (Non-Contributory) Eligibility**

515. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated net cost in 2018 if the eligible age for the State pension was reduced from 66 to 65 years of age, taking into account the savings that would be made on jobseeker's allowance or benefit. [40513/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011 provided that State pension age will be increased gradually to 68 years. This began in January 2014 with the abolition of the State pension (transition), which had been available from 65 for those who satisfied the qualifying conditions, thereby standardising State pension age for all at 66 years. This is the current State pension age. It will increase to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

Reversing the abolition of State pension (transition) would have a significant Exchequer cost. In 2013, the cost of the State pension (transition) was €137 million. Its abolition was not expected to save that amount of expenditure in full, as some people who were affected would alternatively claim working age payments such as Jobseeker's Benefit (albeit at a lower rate than the rate of the State pension), or may claim an Increase for a Qualified Adult in respect of their spouse's pension. However, it is estimated that well over half of the gross cost has been saved each year as a result of this measure, and this would be expected to increase as (a) the number of 65 year olds increases, (b) the change results in a higher percentage of people working while aged 65, and (c) there have been two Budget increases in the rate of the State pension since then. It has been estimated that the net saving in 2018 is likely to be in the region of €84 million.

However this would not be the total cost of reducing the State pension age. If the age for the State pension (contributory) was reduced to 65 from 66, rather than the reintroduction of State Pension Transition, there would be an additional cost as the State Pension (contributory) does not have the retirement criterion that the State Pension Transition did. There would, therefore, be an additional cost to the Social Insurance Fund, paid in respect of people who would still work while aged 65, in addition to receiving the State Pension (contributory), payments which did not arise under the State pension (transition). It is unclear what that additional cost would amount to, but it would mean that the cost would be significantly higher than the €84 million estimated for re-introduction of the State pension (transition).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.



### Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

516. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the eligibility for back to education allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40554/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** As part of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) process, each participant is issued with a form at the end of the academic year, this is to confirm the finish date of their course and to determine a participant's intentions for the future academic year. This form issued to the person concerned in April 2017 and was due to be returned before the end of May. To date, no form has been received by the Intreo Centre and it is therefore unable to establish whether or not the person concerned is eligible for a jobseekers payment, an essential qualifying criteria for BTEA. If the person concerned submits the necessary documentation to their local office a decision can then be made on their application.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Community Employment Schemes Data

517. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of community employment scheme supervisors and assistant supervisors employed by sponsor companies operating community employment schemes on behalf of her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40579/17]

518. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons employed on community employment schemes as of 20 September 2017; the cost to her Department for each of these persons; the estimated cost of welfare payments to these persons if they were still in receipt of their qualifying social welfare payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40580/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 517 and 518 together.

Community Employment (CE) schemes provide part-time temporary work in local communities, including opportunities for training and development as a stepping-stone back to employment, for people in receipt of a qualifying of social welfare payments. These schemes help to break the cycle of unemployment and improve a person's chances of returning to the labour market. My Department is also conscious of the valuable contribution the schemes are making in the provision of services to individuals and communities across Ireland.

The table outlines the position in relation to the number of Supervisors and Assistant Supervisors employed on CE schemes at end June 2017 (figures at the end of June are the latest available):

@ end June 17	-
CE Supervisors	1126
CE Assistant Supervisors	254
Total	1380

The total number of CE participants at end June 2017 was 22,053. The average weekly cost for each CE participant is €303.98 and the estimated average weekly payment value for Jobseekers Allowance is €198.94.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Bereavement Grant**

519. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans for reintroducing the bereavement grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40597/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** In recent Budgets my Department has protected primary social welfare rates. Abolishing the bereavement grant provided a significant annual saving and allowed my Department to protect other core social welfare payments such as the State pension.

Any decision to reinstate the Bereavement Grant would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

It is worth noting that there are a range of supports available for people following bereavement which provide more significant support than the grant. These include weekly paid widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's (contributory and non-contributory) pensions, which are based on contributions or a means test, and a once-off widowed or surviving civil partner grant of €6,000 where there is a dependent child. A number of social welfare payments, including State pension, continue in payment for six weeks following a death. In Budget 2016, the Government increased the payment after death period to 12 weeks for carer's allowance. Guardian payments are available where someone cares for an orphaned child. A special funeral grant of €850 is paid where a person dies because of an accident at work or occupational disease.

Additionally, the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme provides assistance to eligible people in the State whose means are insufficient to meet their needs and those of their dependants. Under the SWA scheme, the Department of Social Protection may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet from their weekly income, which may include help with funeral and burial expenses. The Government has provided €31.5 million for exceptional and urgent needs payments in 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

520. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made in respect of a carer's allowance application submitted by a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in making a decision on this application, in view of the fact that the application has been lodged since May 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40618/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I confirm that my department received an application for carer's allowance (CA) from the person concerned on 26 May 2017.

The application was referred to a local social welfare inspector (SWI) to assess the level of care being provided, assess means and confirm that all the conditions for receipt of carer's allowance are satisfied.

Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Overpayments**

521. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1805 of 11 September 2017, if she will clarify that the overpayment occurred as a result of departmental error and, consequently, a person (details supplied) should not be penalised; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [40640/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Following an investigation undertaken by the Special Investigations Unit and based on the information available to the Department, a departmental error is not considered to have occurred in this case. The person concerned has been informed of her right to appeal the decision of the Deciding Officer to the Social Welfare Appeals Office which functions independently of the Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Motor Tax**

522. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a person is liable for a full month's car tax if he or she purchases a car part way through the month; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40169/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Liability for motor tax arises from the first day of the month in which the vehicle is entered in the central vehicle register, the National Vehicle and Driver File. Motor tax is payable annually, half-yearly or quarterly on the basis of whole calendar months.

### **Irish Water Funding**

523. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of subvention to Irish Water in 2017; the estimated subvention for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40311/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning 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 recently approved the recommendations of the Report of the Working Group on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services, which, consistent with the recommendations of report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee, primarily involve, inter alia, all State funding to Irish Water in respect of domestic water services as determined through the regulatory process being channelled in future through my Department's Vote. The future funding of Irish Water in respect of domestic water services will therefore be from general taxation, in the form of a payment for domestic water services, based on the purchase of water covering the entirety of domestic water consumption other than excessive use and a contribution to replace the financ-

ing of the domestic component of capital investment previously funded by debt, and a capital contribution from Central Funds.

The amount of subvention to be provided to Irish Water in 2017 is estimated to be €753 million. Funding of Irish Water in 2018 in respect of domestic water services is being determined as part of the normal budgetary and estimates process.

### **Local Authority Expenditure**

524. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the savings made to the Exchequer each year following the amalgamation of Tipperary north and Tipperary south county councils in 2014, taking into account the abolition of local town councils in the county; the way in which this equates to investment and the provision of funds to Tipperary county council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40557/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The dividend for local authorities, including Tipperary, from the reformed structures introduced in 2014 cannot be measured solely in terms of a reduction of overall expenditure or savings. The reforms have resulted in many non-financial benefits due to the single administrative structure across each county which has reduced duplication with improved services which will bring about cost reduction over time.

In the case of the merged authority in Tipperary, independent review groups identified potential savings of around €6m in addition to the non-financial benefits. Separately, a report prepared by the Institute of Public Administration on the merger of the two councils has indicated that in Tipperary payroll savings alone are already estimated at around €3m per annum.

In 2015, after one full year of the operation of the revised structures, a broadly based Advisory Group was convened to carry out a review of their operation, in conjunction with a Local Government Forum for engagement with the Association of Irish Local Government. The results of the review will be incorporated into a report for Government and the Oireachtas under the Programme for a Partnership Government, which will be completed shortly.

### **Local Authority Housing Funding**

525. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the extent to which his Department can offer further latitude for immediate expenditure by the various local authorities on measures to address the housing crisis by way of direct build; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40742/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** A funding investment of €5.35 billion is being provided over the period 2016-2021 to support the implementation of Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness - Rebuilding Ireland. This comprises some €4.5 billion in capital funding and a further €844 million in support of programmes funded from current expenditure. In addition, €200 million is being provided under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund towards the capital costs of public infrastructure which, when provided, will secure the early delivery of additional housing at a considerable scale.

Rebuilding Ireland aims to deliver 47,000 social housing units over the period 2016 to 2021. Almost €1.7 billion was expended on the implementation of a range of housing programmes over the period 2015-2016, with €0.935 billion being expended in 2016 alone - this facilitated

the delivery of some 13,400 social housing units in 2015 and over 19,000 units in 2016.

In Budget 2017, an increased investment of €1.3 billion was provided for housing, which is supporting the delivery of over 21,000 social housing solutions this year. This level of national funding provision to implement Rebuilding Ireland's targets means that funding is available to be drawn down as it is required by local authorities. Indeed the evidence this year is of a much accelerated level of funding draw down by the local authorities, reflecting an acceleration in the scale and rate of construction and in other means of housing delivery. Capital funding to date in 2017 from my Department in respect of housing programmes amounts to €432.66m, compared with the same point last year when the capital spend level was €130.25m.

My Department now publishes, on a quarterly basis, a comprehensive status report of all social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas showing details such as their locations, a range of information relating to their advancement, including those delivered and those progressing through planning, design and construction. The most recent of these reports covers the period up to the end of Quarter 1 of 2017 and lists circa 600 approved social housing construction schemes, delivering over 10,000 units. The report can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>. Details in respect of Quarter 2 of 2017 will be published shortly.

These projects are funded under a range of different initiatives such as local authority construction, turnkey developments, rapid delivery, regeneration programmes and construction and turnkey developments by approved housing bodies. The precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects, including completion dates and tenanting, is a matter for the relevant local authorities and approved housing body concerned, in the first instance.

Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as they are developed by local authorities and approved housing bodies. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard. Indeed, I announced recently that the available funding for social housing is to be reorientated further towards direct build projects. In 2018 alone, this will see the target of 3,000 newly build social housing units increase by almost 30% to 3,800 and this reorientation will continue over the life of Rebuilding Ireland to end 2021.

### **Local Authority Funding**

526. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocated to local authorities for the mobility scheme for council tenants in 2017 in tabular form; his plans to increase funding in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40151/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Disabled Persons Grant Scheme provides funding for adaptations to existing social housing stock such as grab rails, disabled access ramps, wet rooms, etc. The Scheme also provides for extensions in cases of overcrowding. On top of the exchequer funding amounts, the local authority makes a further 10% contribution in respect of these grants. The detailed administration of these grants, including the assessment, approval and prioritisation of applications is the responsibility of the local authorities.

In order to ensure that there were no delays for priority and urgent cases, all local authorities were advised on 24 March 2017 that they could undertake works of up to 65% of their 2016 allocation in advance of the full 2017 allocation being determined. This was to allow local

authorities to plan and progress works under the scheme and allow for the maximum use of the 2017 allocation throughout the year. My Department recently advised local authorities of their full 2017 DPG allocations, which are set out in the Table.

I am conscious of the social benefit accruing from the Scheme and consideration will be given to the level of funding in 2018 in the context of budgetary provision in due course.

Table: 2017 DPG Allocations

Local Authority	Department Contribution 90% €	Local Authority Contribution 10% €	Total (Department and LA contribution) €
Carlow County Council	265,707	29,523	295,230
Cavan County Council	318,338	35,371	353,709
Clare County Council	274,702	30,522	305,224
Cork City Council	613,296	68,144	681,440
Cork County	811,365	90,152	901,517
Donegal County Council	304,047	33,783	337,830
Dublin City Council	1,405,175	156,131	1,561,306
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council	327,488	36,388	363,876
Fingal County Council	374,218	41,580	415,798
Galway City	271,108	30,123	301,231
Galway County Council	313,776	34,864	348,640
Kerry County Council	255,299	28,367	283,666
Kildare County Council	394,879	43,875	438,754
Kilkenny County Council	304,047	33,783	337,830
Laois County Council	218,405	24,267	242,672
Leitrim County Council	207,992	23,110	231,102
Limerick City and County Council	567,547	63,061	630,608
Longford County Council	244,317	27,146	271,463
Louth County Council	453,985	50,443	504,428
Mayo County Council	261,011	29,001	290,012
Meath County Council	385,664	42,852	428,516
Monaghan County Council	158,269	17,585	175,854
Offaly County Council	280,519	31,169	311,688
Roscommon County Council	141,671	15,741	157,412
Sligo County Council	376,212	41,801	418,013
Sth Dublin County Council	533,685	59,298	592,983
Tipperary County Council	411,695	45,744	457,439
Waterford City and County Council	285,756	31,751	317,507
Westmeath County Council	242,884	26,987	269,871
Wexford County Council	354,467	39,385	393,852
Wicklow County Council	642,476	71,386	713,862
Total	12,000,000	1,333,333	13,333,333

### Local Authority Funding

527. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to reintroduce the improvement works loan scheme in lieu of rehous-

ing; the timeframe for the scheme to start; the amount of funding that will be provided for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40168/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Improvement Works in lieu of Local Authority Housing (IWIL's) scheme provides funding to local authorities to improve or extend privately-owned accommodation, which is occupied or intended to be occupied by an applicant approved for social housing, as an alternative to the provision of social housing.

Funding for IWIL's has not been discontinued and is available to all local authorities. IWIL's are administered under the Disabled Persons Grant scheme and it is a matter for each local authority to prioritise their spending in this regard.

My Department advised all local authorities of the full 2017 DPG allocations on 12 September 2017. €12m has been provided for the scheme in 2017, with a further €1.33m provided by the local authorities.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Funding**

528. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number and cash value of new CALF loans provided to approved housing bodies in each of the years from 2000 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [40193/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Capital Advance Leasing Facility, CALF, introduced in 2011, is a facility which is exclusively available to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to assist them in accessing private or Housing Finance Agency (HFA) finance for the purchase, construction or refurbishment of units that will then be made available for social housing purposes under the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP). Essentially, the facility works by providing AHBs (where approved) with a small capital advance in the form of a loan, limited to 30%, that will be made available by the Department through local authorities to AHBs.

The facility is only available as part of a project where the AHB makes units available under a payment and availability (P&A) agreement to nominees of the housing authority for a set period of time. Repayments on the loan (capital advance) are not required during the term of the P&A agreement but the amount will remain outstanding at the end of the agreement. The purpose of this, and indeed the whole facility, is that the capital advance should assist AHBs in securing finance to purchase/construct units and make projects more viable for AHBs from a liquidity or cash flow perspective, particularly in the initial years.

The table sets out the number of CALF proposals and units approved by year since 2011 in addition to corresponding CALF funding approved. The table does not include proposals which were approved and subsequently withdrawn or CALF proposals under the Mortgage to Rent scheme.

Loans are provided to Approved Housing Bodies by Local Authorities and subsequently recouped from my Department. Unit delivery and drawdown may occur in a different year to approval, and may be drawn in phases depending on the structure of the scheme. To date almost €94m has been drawn down by AHBs from Local Authorities.

Year	No. of CALF proposals approved	No of CALF units approved	CALF amount approved
2011	5	59	€3,366,418
2012	18	327	€10,945,407
2013	17	274	€5,151,394
2014	17	274	€6,479,142
2015	71	863	€39,005,585
2016	102	1624	€84,509,339
2017 (to date)	160	2271	€131,680,289
Total	390	5692	€281,137,574

### Housing Assistance Payment Administration

529. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a landlord is permitted to refuse to sign a housing assistance payment form for an existing tenant who started out the tenancy without rental support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40199/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently more than 27,000 households being supported by HAP across the State, involving more than 20,000 separate landlords and agents. These numbers indicate that the Rebuilding Ireland target of 15,000 households to be supported by the scheme in 2017 will be met. On average in 2017, more than 340 new households are being supported by the scheme each week and are having their housing need met by sourcing private rental accommodation with agreement of landlords and agents.

HAP addresses many long standing issues raised by landlord groups in relation to the operation of Rent Supplement. The HAP payment is made directly to the landlord on the tenant's behalf and all payments are made electronically directly to the landlord - the landlord does not have to collect the rent. The scheme has a 99% differential rent collection rate, with minimal arrears arising for tenants or local authorities, and a 99% rent payment rate with minimal difficulties arising for landlords. Furthermore, any household assessed as eligible for social housing is immediately eligible for housing support through the HAP scheme. HAP recipients can avail of full-time work and retain their housing support, with an adjustment in their differential rent; under Rent Supplement, these households would lose their housing support payment.

In order to provide access to information on the scheme to interested parties, a new HAP website, [www.hap.ie](http://www.hap.ie), was launched earlier this year and provides prospective HAP tenants and landlords with the information that they need to understand how the HAP scheme works. Local authorities are also promoting the scheme locally, and engaging with letting agents and landlords who might be interested in entering into a HAP tenancy. HAP provides landlords with many advantages including that the landlord does not have to collect the rent; payments are made electronically directly to the landlord on the tenant's behalf; landlords who rent to tenants in receipt of HAP may avail of increased tax relief; and changes in a tenant's employment circumstances do not affect the rental payments made to the landlord.

A landlord or an agent acting on behalf of a landlord is not legally obliged to enter into a tenancy agreement with a HAP recipient. However, since 1 January 2016, a person cannot be



discriminated against when renting because they are in receipt of certain payments, including HAP. If a person feels that they have been discriminated against by a landlord or their agent, they can make a complaint under the Equal Status Acts to the Workplace Relations Commission. Further information is available on the Commission's website, <https://www.workplacere-lations.ie>.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. In general, I am satisfied with the operation of HAP and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme outlined under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

### **Housing Assistance Payment Eligibility**

530. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the income limit in the housing assistance payment includes all employment related income, such as commission, bonus and so on; the legal obligations facing the tenant and landlord in the event that the tenant's income exceeds the HAP threshold while the tenant is renting under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40200/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** HAP is an immediate and flexible form of housing support available to the approx. 91,000 households with a long-term housing need, including those already in receipt of Rent Supplement (as per the 2016 National Social Housing Assessment). One of the key objectives of the HAP scheme is to facilitate the removal of barriers to return to work for persons who are reliant on Rent Supplement for their long-term housing needs.

Any household assessed as eligible for social housing is immediately eligible for housing support through the HAP scheme. Once in receipt of a social housing support, like HAP, the eligibility of households is not reassessed. HAP recipients can avail of full-time work and retain their housing support, with an adjustment in their differential rent; under Rent Supplement, these households would lose their housing related support payment. As the tenant's income increases, their rent contribution to the local authority will also increase. Tenants must notify the local authority of any changes in their income. This occurs in the same way all social housing supports, including local authority owned properties. There is no statutory obligation for a landlord in receipt of a HAP payment on behalf of their tenant to inform a local authority if there is a change in a tenant's income; the HAP payment to the landlord will not change and the tenant's rent contribution to the local authority will be amended.

The making and amending of rent schemes is the responsibility of local authorities, as an integral part of their housing management functions, subject to broad principles laid down by my Department in Circular letter HRT 3/2002 of 6 March 2002. It is a matter for local authorities, when assessing individual households, to consider whether rents payable are in accordance with the authority's rent scheme. Therefore, decisions on whether or not to disregard either a proportion of income or particular sources of income for the purposes of calculating rents are matters for each individual local authority to consider in accordance with their own rent scheme.

The HAP scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies. In 2016, the scheme had a 99% differential rent collection rate, with minimal arrears arising for tenants or local authorities and circa €21.7M was collected in differential rent from HAP supported households.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. In gen-

eral, I am satisfied with the operation of HAP and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme outlined under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

### **Local Elections**

531. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the local election boundary commission will be formed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40210/17]

532. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to alter the terms of reference for the new local election boundary commission with regard to the number of councillors to be elected per ward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40211/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 531 and 532 together.

The most recent review of local electoral areas was carried out from November 2012 to May 2013 by a Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee established under the Local Government Act 1991.

The Programme for a Partnership Government sets out a number of commitments in relation to local government reform to ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy into the future. In particular, the Programme includes a commitment to consider reducing the size of local electoral areas.

The preparatory work in support of a review of local electoral area boundaries is being advanced in my Department. It is intended that the review will be initiated shortly and will be completed in good time before the 2019 local elections.

### **Constituency Commission**

533. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the recommendations of the Constituency Commission will be legislated for; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40212/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** 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. 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, the preparation of an Electoral (Amendment) (Dáil Constituencies) Bill is included in the Autumn 2017 legislative programme.

### **Expert Panel on Concrete Blocks**

534. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the plans implemented by his Department to help home owners affected by the

mica issue; his plans to set up a redress scheme; if so, the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40251/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The Expert Panel on concrete blocks was established by my Department in 2016, to investigate problems that have emerged in the concrete blockwork of certain dwellings in Counties Donegal and Mayo.

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 NSAI Technical Committee, established to scope and fast track the development of a standardised protocol, held its inaugural meeting on 11 September 2017 and has scheduled several further meetings for the coming weeks.

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.

On 19 July 2017, I visited Donegal and met with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, the elected members of Donegal County Council, local authority officials, and other interested parties on the issue of the publication of the Report of the Expert Group on Concrete Blocks.

On 27 July 2017, I visited Mayo and held similar meetings with key stakeholders, including affected homeowners, some elected members of Mayo County Council, and other interested parties on the issue of the publication of the Report of the Expert Group on Concrete Blocks.

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.

### **Planning Issues**

535. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government

the body with which a person can lodge a complaint against a local authority that is acting in breach of planning permission on a building in its ownership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40439/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** If any person considers that they have been adversely affected by a planning authority's action, or lack of action, which he or she considers was unlawful, unfair or unreasonable, or considers that he or she has received an inadequate service from the authority, it is open to him/her to make a complaint to the Ombudsman, provided that he or she has complained to the planning authority in the first instance. The Ombudsman's role in planning matters is confined to the examination of the administration of the planning process by planning authorities and to their enforcement of the planning laws in instances where planning breaches arise.

Under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case, including an enforcement issue, with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned.

### **Water Services Provision**

536. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding Irish Water's preferred model for the future delivery of water services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40490/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning 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. The Water Services Strategic Plan - A Plan for the Future of Water Services (WSSP), which was published in October 2015, set out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services for 25 years up to 2040. The WSSP committed to the preparation of Business Plans by Irish Water to set out targets for delivery of efficiencies in operational and capital expenditure and performance targets consistent with the delivery of the objectives of the WSSP.

The Irish Water Business Plan - Transforming Water Services in Ireland to 2021 was published in late 2015. It set the priorities for the utility to 2021 and underpins the transformation plan for the water sector to a single utility model. The plan was considered by Government and was approved subject to budgetary and regulatory review. The Water Services Bill 2017 was published last week and it contains provisions for the establishment of a Water Advisory Body (WAB). The WAB is being established to advise on measures needed to improve the transparency and accountability of Irish Water. The body will report on a quarterly basis to an Oireachtas Committee on the performance of Irish Water on the implementation of its business plan.

The Confidence and Supply Arrangement in support of the minority Government has confirmed the retention of Irish Water as a single national utility in public ownership responsible for the delivery of water and waste water services.

Since 2013, working through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the Local Authorities, Irish Water has made significant progress in establishing the utility capability, which has included investing over €2 billion in the system to date. Over the past year, significant design phase work has been undertaken on the development of a transformation plan, in line with the Business Plan objectives. Flowing from this, I have been informed by Ervia (which has responsibility for Irish Water), that they consider that the public water system will benefit significantly by greater integration of operations into the single utility. Consequently, the Ervia Board has

agreed in principle not to renew the SLAs beyond 2025 when they are due to end, and to move to a full integrated public utility operations model. The Water Services Acts already provide the necessary protections for terms and conditions, and pensions of local authority staff working under the SLAs in such circumstances. It is the intention of Ervia to work with local authorities to manage this change within the life of the current Business Plan (i.e. by end of 2021).

A process of engagement with local authorities on the proposed next steps on the transformation plan has now commenced. The current SLAs remain in place until such time as an alternative is agreed.

### **Water Charges Refunds**

537. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the reimbursement of water charges will come entirely out of 2017 expenditure; and if part of the reimbursement comes out of 2018 expenditure, the amount of same. [40512/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** It is anticipated that funding to refund water charges will be provided by the Exchequer through Voted expenditure in 2017. The cost of issuing refunds to domestic customers in respect of domestic water charges paid is estimated to be approximately €179 million, including administration costs.

### **Public Sector Pay**

538. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the cost liability of public sector pay restoration, as provided for under the gradual unwinding of the FEMPI measures, with respect to local authority staff, for 2017 and 2018 for each local authority, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40552/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** A provision of €20.3 million to assist local authorities in meeting the costs associated with the unwinding of the FEMPI legislation was made for 2017. The final outturn for 2017 is not yet known, either at a sectoral level or in respect of individual local authorities. My Department is in discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in respect of the costs for 2018 in the context of the ongoing annual estimates process.

### **Tenant Purchase Scheme Data**

539. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the local authorities that have sold houses under the tenant purchase scheme; the number of houses sold by each local authority since the scheme was introduced; the number of applications received by each local authority that were refused; the reason for refusal in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40581/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme for existing local authority houses came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. This includes data on sales and applications to purchase during the calendar year 2016. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect that definitive proposals will be submitted to me very shortly.

Relevant data for 2017 is not yet available. However, information on sale of local authority houses in previous years can be found on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/social-and-affordable/other-local-authority-housing-scheme-statistics>.

### **Tenant Purchase Scheme Review**

540. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the report on the review of the tenant (incremental) purchase scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40583/17]

543. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the review of the new tenant purchase scheme has been completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40639/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 540 and 543 together.

The new Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme for existing local authority houses came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum, have been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year and have been allocated a house under a local authority allocation scheme.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. Following consultation with relevant Departments on implementation arrangements, I expect that definitive proposals will be submitted to me very shortly.

### **Tenant Purchase Scheme**

541. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment when the requirement to have paid water charges will be removed from the tenant (incremental) purchase scheme criteria in view of the fact that water charges have been suspended and refunds will be issued to Irish Water customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40584/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):**

The current position is that, pending any legislative change, arrears of water charges incurred by households remain to be discharged before the sale of a dwelling. Under Section 3(A)(9) of the Water Services Act 2014 (inserted by Section 48 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2015) a person who is a tenant of a dwelling let to him under the Housing Acts 1966 to 2014 and who proposes to purchase the dwelling shall before completion of the sale provide the local authority concerned with a certificate of discharge from Irish Water confirming that any charge under section 21 of the No. 2 Act 2013 in respect of the dwelling owed to Irish Water has been paid. The sale of the dwelling cannot proceed until a certificate of discharge in respect of the dwelling has been received from Irish Water.

In line with the Water Services (Amendment) Act 2016, domestic water charges are suspended from 1 July 2016 to the end of 2017. However, Irish Water domestic customers remain liable for any water charges (and late payment charges) in respect of the period prior to this suspension, i.e. from 1 January 2015 to the 30 June 2016.

Following approval by the Government, the Water Services Bill 2017 was published on 22 September 2017. The Bill reflects the recommendations of the report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services. This report, published on 12 April 2017, was approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Bill provides for the discontinuance of domestic water charges for dwellings as set out in the Water Services Act 2014, including the repeal of section 3(A) of that Act. Pending the passage of the Bill, the current legislative framework remains in place and tenants who propose to purchase a property under the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme must provide a certificate of discharge from Irish Water confirming charges up to 30 June 2016 have been paid.

## **Irish Water**

542. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the projects (details supplied) that Irish Water has contracted out; and the costs of each project. [40614/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning 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. Projects undertaken by Irish Water are a matter for the utility and I have no function in the matter.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at [oireachtasmembers@water.ie](mailto:oireachtasmembers@water.ie) or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

*Question No. 543 answered with Question No. 540.*

## **Housing Data**

544. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Govern-

ment the progress of each of the 3,322 housing units that were approved for construction in 2015 and 2016 as listed in appendix 2 of his Department's housing action report of April 2016, by local authority, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40671/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Since the publication in April 2016 of the Housing Action Report Laying the Foundations referred to in the question, the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, Rebuilding Ireland has further enhanced the funding resources to accelerate the delivery of social housing for all local authorities. Critically, €5.35 billion in Exchequer investment has been made available to support its implementation and to deliver 47,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisitions and leasing, over the period to 2021.

This level of national funding to implement Rebuilding Ireland's targets means that funding is available to all local authorities to advance their social housing construction programme, including projects detailed in appendix 2 of the April 2016 report. Substantial numbers of additional construction projects have been added to the social housing delivery programme since then and we are now publishing, on a quarterly basis, a comprehensive status report of all social housing construction schemes for all local authority areas. These reports show details such as the project locations and a range of information relating to their advancement, including those delivered and those progressing through planning, design and construction.

The most recent of these reports covers the period up to the end of Quarter 1 of 2017 and lists circa 600 approved social housing construction schemes, delivering over 10,000 units. The report can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>. Details in respect of Quarter 2 of 2017 will be published shortly.

These projects are funded under a range of different initiatives such as local authority construction, turnkey developments, rapid delivery, regeneration programmes and construction and turnkey developments by approved housing bodies. The precise timing for the advancement of each of these projects, including completion dates and tenanting, is a matter for the relevant local authorities and approved housing body concerned, in the first instance.

Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as they are developed by local authorities and approved housing bodies. I am keen that all local authorities advance their social housing projects as speedily as possible and I have assured them that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

### Defence Forces Recruitment

545. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of recruits that joined all branches of the Defence Forces in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and the numbers of those that are still serving in the Defence Forces. [40338/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As of 26 September, 2017, the information requested by the Deputy is set out in a table:

YEAR	Enlisted Recruits	Enlisted Recruits Still in Service
2013	419	283
2014	461	303
2015	362	276



YEAR	Enlisted Recruits	Enlisted Recruits Still in Service
2016	589	422
2017	335	276

When assessing the number of personnel who are no longer in service, cognisance must be made of the fact that a significant number of recruits depart from the Defence Forces during the training phase.

The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with operational requirements. As there is significant turnover of personnel in the Permanent Defence Force targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place so as to maintain the agreed strength levels. In 2017, the Defence Forces have been targeting an increase in the level of recruitment across the range of recruitment streams. The 2017 Cadet Competition was launched on 22 March 2017. A total of 99 Cadets were inducted on Monday, 25 September, 2017 (of which, just over 20% were female).

General Service recruitment campaigns for both the Army and Naval Service were launched earlier this year. The competitions have now progressed and general service recruitment has commenced from these campaigns. It is also planned to launch another general service recruitment campaign this week.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, the Government is committed to retaining the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and overseas.

### Defence Forces Recruitment

546. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the current waiting times to hear confirmation after the medical and interview section of the application to join the Army is completed; and when a person (details supplied) can expect to hear if they have been successful or not. [40396/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** There are a number of stages to the process for induction as a General Service Recruit to the Permanent Defence Force. It is not possible for the Defence Forces to provide certainty of the timeframe for this process, although every effort is made to reduce such timeframes. The Defence Forces has introduced initiatives to speed up the recruitment process.

Once individuals have been approved for recruitment they must then wait for a position on the next planned recruit platoon based on their expressed preferences at the time of application.

The individual named, remains a live candidate on the system and it is anticipated that the Defence Forces Recruitment and Competitions Section will be in contact with him to update him on his application.

### Defence Forces Reports

547. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will waive legal privilege and publish the Chemical Exposure Report 1994-2005 in the public interest and in the interest of transparency. [40484/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The report referenced by the Deputy was prepared in the context of ongoing legal proceedings. As the release of the report could adversely impact on those proceedings, I will not be releasing the report.

### **Protected Disclosures**

548. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he has acted on the information relayed to him by a whistleblower that specifically named the Defence Forces official who allegedly ordered the destruction of health and safety documents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [40485/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As I have previously indicated to the House, this matter was raised with me in correspondence where certain allegations were made that the documents had been destroyed. The correspondence in question was also addressed to the Chief of Staff and to the Deputy. I requested a report from the Chief of Staff on the actions taken on foot of the accusation.

He has informed me that the officer named met with the General Officer Commanding the Air Corps. The officer concerned has refuted the allegations made and it should further be noted that documents referred to were not military documents, nor did they carry any military security classification.

### **Fire Safety**

549. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to undertake a comprehensive fire safety audit of all high-risk buildings, including Army barracks. [40605/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I wish to assure the Deputy that the health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces is a key priority for me and for the Military Authorities.

I have been advised by the Military Authorities that the Defence Forces has numerous measures in place aimed at reducing fire risk within Defence Forces installations. A requirement exists for every military installation to have a comprehensive set of fire orders as set down in Defence Forces Regulations.

Periodic fire audits are conducted, and will continue to be conducted, on buildings within Defence Forces Installations.

A formal Fire Safety Register has been in operation in the Defence Forces for all buildings/structures since 1999. The Fire Safety Registers are audited during inspections by Defence Forces Engineering Branch personnel undertaken on behalf of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Support.

In addition, all building works carried out on Defence Forces installations are required to conform to the Building Regulations (including Part B Fire Safety).